

Sunday, December 4th sermon: "Thanksgiving: Warning and Wonder - In Everything Give Thanks! (Part 2)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
by John Pittman Hey

Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 25:37-40

Paul instructed us to give thanks in everything.

But this is hard when things seem to go bad for us.

Jesus gave thanks for the food, even though He created it all!

Jesus gave thanks because the Father chose to reveal the Gospel only to babes, and not to the wise and prudent! Praise God, He can convert the most hardened sinner into a little child, so that we might trust in Jesus.

Jesus gave thanks that His Father heard His prayer to raise Lazarus from the dead!

Most importantly, Jesus gave thanks at the Lord's Table for His coming death! He gave thanks for the symbols He was then ordaining to represent His dead body and His shed blood! Jesus was thankful that He would shortly redeem His loved ones by His dying in our place on the cross.

In Psalm 22, Jesus exults and worships God for His promised vindication and resurrection! He gave praise that His sacrifice would be accepted by God, no matter how horrible it would be to endure.

So too, we ought to give thanks to God constantly for all things – common and extraordinary, good and "bad."

But there is a warning: we must not give thanks for what we have done. The Pharisee gave thanks for being so good, and obeying God's law, though actually, he didn't keep it at all.

There must be no hint of thanksgiving for our self-righteousness!

Rather, we ought to give thanks that God has wrought in us a miracle of change and conversion and regeneration!

In reality, the Gospel makes it clear: Christ's people disclaim their own good works, and lay hold only upon His righteousness!

Paul taught us that there are no good works in us at all, but rather, that by grace God makes us His Work Product, He works in us unto good works! God had already ordained beforehand that we should walk in the obedient works He works in us Himself!

Herein is another evil of libertarian free will, which says "I decided!" "I chose!" God stood back and let me make up my own mind to believe on Jesus!

Soon after we think those dreadful thoughts, the question will pop up, why did I believe while most others do not? There must be something better in me by nature!

And so, pride wells up in us, because we think we were the cause of our choosing, rather than God choosing us.

In this false doctrine of free will, we've removed the deliberate, loving work of God to change our hearts, to cause us to believe, to change our sinful wills, to take away our stony hearts.

To ignorant men, everything seems like total free will, because we don't know how morally broken we are in our sins, and we pretend we can choose God by ourselves, and choose to believe on Jesus by ourselves.

But God's Word tells us we are UNABLE to choose God!

We must first be born again, something must be done TO US, without our consent!

For those who understand these things, it will result in our thanksgiving for our salvation being directed all toward God, and in spite of ourselves!

Isaac Watts put it well:

"Why was I made to hear His voice, and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice, and rather starve than come?"

"'Twas the same love that spread the feast, that sweetly forced us in,
else we had still refused to taste, and perished in our sin!"

That's the warning.

But what about the wonder?

Right after Jesus taught His disciples about His glorious rule to come, in which His people are sent to glory, while the wicked are consigned to Hell, He then told them that two days later, He would be betrayed and put to death at the Passover.

It must have been impossible for His disciples to be happy, much less thankful!

There was, they must have known, NO WAY this can turn out good.

What if we had been transported back to that time, with all we know? Could we have been thankful, or would that seem selfish to us. Or would

the sorrow and regret and terror have overcome us, even with the knowledge we now have?

Jesus is about to redeem all His loved ones, and yet it is the most horrible thing ever done to anyone in the history of the world.

A perfect, innocent, righteous, harmless man with power to raise the dead and heal every sickness, is about to be cruelly murdered by wicked men, right before our very eyes, men that He Himself created.

And yet, all of that evil will result in eternal salvation for the Lord's people, the exaltation of Jesus to the heights of glory, power, and splendor, unceasing praise and thanksgiving from angels and the host of the redeemed, the heights of glory to God the Father, and our everlasting happiness, joy, and rejoicing!

This is why we must give thanks in everything!

God works His wonderful purposes in this way, and only He knows the end of it all, not us.

It is part of our faith to trust Him without reservation, or doubt, or delay, because we believe that He knows best for us in everything!

The premier example of this truth in action, is the putting to death of our dear Lord Jesus.

Recall, that His disciples observed the very first Lord's Table in confusion and despair and denial.

But ever since, we celebrate it in joy, knowledge, and anticipation of what more is to come – the redemption of our very bodies, at the resurrection that Christ has promised to us!

We could never be raised to life with Jesus, had He not offered up Himself as God's Lamb to take away our sin.

So no matter how wrong it seemed at the time, now we understand why thanksgiving should be made in all things – and was made by Jesus at the very first Lord's Table!

No matter how wrong anything seems to us in this life, we must give thanks to God, for we know that He works all things together for good to them that love Him!

No doubt, for all eternity, the saints will cry out in song, "Christ Jesus has done all things well!"