

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 – Give Thanks – Whatever the Circumstance!

Last month we celebrated Thanksgiving, and it may be that this will be one of the strangest Thanksgivings that any of us have experienced. New restrictions have been put in place, and mand to cancel their celebration with extended family. Since then we have seen lockdowns take place across the world.

- We don't know where this is going to end. We are facing some very uncertain days ahead.

I think we are all tired of this new reality that we are living in aren't we? Yet as we gather together as a church today, God calls us to be THANKFUL. Our passage in I Thessalonians says that in *"ALL circumstances give thanks – for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus – FOR YOU."*

- That doesn't mean that we are to paint a smile on our faces. That we pretend that everything is OK.
- That we deny the reality that we are living in & hope that things get better- "fake it till me make it"
- What it does mean is that no matter what the circumstance – whether in times of difficulty or blessing - God calls us to a life of heartfelt gratitude.

If you remember the context of this book, the church in Thessalonica was going through some very deep waters. The apostle Paul had warned them about tough times ahead. At the time that Paul wrote to the church they were facing internal problems in the church and external attacks by those opposed to the gospel.

Yet even though this was the case – throughout this final section - Paul has been encouraging the church to remain faithful through a number of commands. He had just spoken about Christ's coming back again. For the need to be ready because at any time Christ could return.

It's in this context that we have these three verses - this 3 – FOLD command

1) Always be joyful 2) Pray without ceasing 3) In all circumstances – give thanks

- In the X life these are the THREE things that we should always be doing.
- This seems like a pretty tall order. Really – humanely speaking – impossible.
- Even when things are going really well in our life – we often are ungrateful to God.
- But especially when times are tough – when our faith is stretched – when we are forced to walk by faith and not by sight → the sin of ingratitude finds fertile ground.

Today as we consider these three verses together, and we are going to see:

→What does Christian thankfulness look like & how prayer and joy are an essential part of our thanks to God.

Our theme is Give thanks to God – No Matter the Circumstance!

Thankfulness is not a character trait that is unique to Christians is it? All of Canada is celebrating thanksgiving this weekend right? Even with those who may deny there is a God there is a certain level of gratitude.

Maybe it would be expressed this way:

- that they are thankful for the good fortune of having a job.....for their family and friends.....for their good health perhaps.
- IT isn't expressed to anyone in particular – it is just feeling of well-being that they have.
- For many – when life is difficult – that sense of well-being usually is replaced with anger or bitterness or despair. (there is no one to cry out to)
- Romans 1 says of the unbeliever: For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." (Because they don't have a relationship with God....)

The Christian's thankfulness is very different isn't it?

- We give thanks – NOT to an unknown entity..... but a GOD who has revealed himself to us. To an all knowing, all-seeing, sovereign & eternal God. Who has reached out with his love and grace.
- **James 1: 17** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*
 - This is what we understand right?
 - We know that when we are blessed we are called

Verse 18 says "*in all circumstances give thanks – for this is the will of God – in Christ Jesus.*"

Those last three words are important. Our thankfulness is grounded in that fundamental truth. That because of Jesus Christ and his work on the cross, He has redeemed us out of sin, & deathdarkness & despair. He has paid the price for our sins. He has given us new life in him.

- Colossians 2:6 As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude,"
- Colossians 3: 15-17 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. **And be thankful.** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **with thankfulness** in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him.

So we need to understand that thankfulness is impossible without a right relationship with God. (It is not a feeling we can come up with on our own.)

- It is only when we know that we belong to Him – that our sins have been forgiven. That we have a close relationship with the Lord.
- This idea of growing up "grounded and rooted in the Lord" is important. EG/ Planted trees..... they need a good root system....if they are going to survive

The same is true for us.....we need to be rooted and grounded in Him.

This is why Paul mentions here unceasing prayer.....

- What does it mean to pray this way?
 - there is a connectedness that we need to have with God.....
 - in order for our relationship with the Lord to be strong....constant communication is necessary
 - That should be happening all the time.....
 - when we have been blessed.
 - when we have a need
 -

EG/ George Mueller – 1800's - 10,000 orphans, READ THIS

- A man who believed in the power of prayer –that when we call out to God, HE WILL respond. Many amazing stories.
- “The Lord not only gives as much as is absolutely necessary for his work, but he gives abundantly. This blessing filled me with inexplicable delight. He had given me the full answer to my thousands of prayers.”

This is something we need to learn as a church.

- Without prayer we are weak – cut off from God.
- Even though God know exactly what we need (more than we do), he wants to hear us call out to him. To rely on Him.

This is so necessary – especially during times of difficulty and persecution.

- This is something that God calls the Christian to EXPECT. It is not the exception....it is the NORM. Even though it is something we don't like, it is the best thing for us. It is necessary for our faith to be tried.
- You may ask the question – Why is that? The answer is this →Because we are forced to TRULY WALK BY FAITH.
 - In our own minds we want to have our lives in control.
 - To know where our next meal is coming from.
 - To know the house we are going live in (and how it is going to be paid off). To have healthy strong bodies.
 - We like having our ducks in a row.
- When the storms of life come and beat on you house --- on who is the foundation of your life built? When your props in life get taken away – that is when you see where your trust is.
- Can you still give thanks to the Lord, THEN?? Can you receive that plate of difficulty and suffering that GOD has served you and still say “thank you” to him? Will you trust the Lord in those time – knowing that he is working all things to your good?
(Remember that from the eternal vantage point that God has!)

→READ Luke 21:16-19

- not a hair is going to fall from you head, BUT you might lose your life
- “in patient suffering you will possess your souls”
- god is using that in your life.....to refine you –EVEN to save your soul.

“If you don’t suffer trials and let it drive you to Christ. You will never be able to handle trouble. The ironic things is that if god were able to keep you completely safe from trouble, you would be shallow, you would be breakable you would be entitled.”

That is why the apostle Paul says to the church to give thanks in all circumstance – because it is God’s will for you.

- when we go through hard things, we know that God has a purpose for them.
 - to cause our faith to grow strong.
 - EG/ muscle

We have to be willing to say to the Lord – YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING!

- I’m going to thank you for those things that you are doing in my life – even for the things that I don’t understand.
- I’m going to trust in you to take care of the details and let YOU work.

EG/ Pastor Yuan---22 years in prison – suffered greatly – many months in Solitary.

- lived to be in his 90s.
- rejoicing in what god had done and what he was doing in his life.

This is what living a thankful life – a prayer filled life produces right? JOY. True, lasting JOY.

- When we have this kind of communication with God.
- This kind of trust in him.

It is not to say in the JOY there won’t be tears, or worries or concerns in our life. There will be.

- It doesn’t mean that it is going to be all smooth sailing.
- But God will bring you through those times – more mature.
- Maybe you’ve had opportunity to sit down with mature saints.....
- take that time to do so.

Romans 12:12 - Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

As we close → Is this is a description of you.....of your life? This thanksgiving weekend are you truly thankful? Is this the kind of thankfulness you see in your life?

Maybe you have come to this service today – not feeling this way. Maybe it is the opposite.

- Maybe that is because you don’t have a relationship with the Lord.
- Maybe God is using the trials in your life to drive you to him.
- Scripture tells us that “Today is the day of salvation”

Maybe you are a Christian, but you have grown separate from the Lord.

- Your prayer life has grown cold. You lack an intimacy with God.
- Maybe you are focusing on what you don't have instead of all that you have received in Christ.
- If that is the case → Cry out to Jesus! He knows us. He knows our weakness. What we are going through. Remember that you a child of God!

1 Peter 1: 6-9 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.