

## The sermon

### Intro

Every fourth Thursday of November we have a holiday called Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving to who? My neighbor? My employer? My wife? My kids?

Thanksgiving for what? A paid day off? Turkey? Football? Family? Black Friday shopping?

The holiday originally stemmed from 1621. Puritans in England had fled the country to find religious freedom from the corrupt Church of England. They wanted to be able to follow God fully. After some time in Holland, they made their way to America. In 1621, they celebrated God's providential provision. In other words, God had graciously provided for their needs. So they gave thanks.

Thanksgiving finds its meaning in God. The fact that God "*works all things according to the counsel of his will*" (Eph 1:11). The fact that "*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*" (Jas 1:17).

Thanksgiving. Is once a year enough? What does it look like in our lives? How do we move from blind to blessings to thankful? From entitled complainer to thankful?

This morning we turn to Paul for guidance on thanksgiving.

### READ PASSAGE

### Body

#### Passage Focus

We'll examine Colossians 3:16-17; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

#### Point 1: Give thanks in song (3:16)

*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.* – 3:16

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly"* = command; = in abundance, large amount.

*"word of Christ"* = the word about Jesus = the gospel, the good news of salvation from the penalty and power of sin. And Scripture in general. *"you"* is plural meaning the whole Palermo Christian Church, all its people, must be indwelt by the gospel in large measure.

#### But how does the gospel indwell the whole community abundantly?

First, by church people *"teaching and admonishing"* other church people in a wise manner. Teaching and admonishing here is the work of Christians in general, not the preacher. Teaching meaning positive instruction. Telling your fellow believer who God is and what he commands of us. Admonishing meaning correction. Challenging your fellow believer when you see them going in a direction contrary to Scripture.

The Bible got into their hearts because their words were rich in biblical content.

When believers are speaking Scripture to one another, we have a church indwelt by the word of God.

Second, by “*singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*” When the believers gathered together, they sang Psalms (likely Old Testament Psalms), hymns (likely songs of praise), and spiritual songs (songs of a spiritual nature inspired by the Holy Spirit).

The Bible got into their hearts because they sang songs rich in biblical content.

When believers are singing songs rich in Bible together, we have a church indwelt by the word of God.

Note these were people without a printing press. No personal Bibles in the home for the most part. The only way the Bible could dwell in them throughout the week was if they memorized Scripture readings, preaching content, and song lyrics. Having memorized Bible content, they meditated on Scripture throughout the day. The word of Christ was in them richly!

**“with thankfulness in your hearts to God”**

Singing was the overflow of gratitude towards God.

Singing isn’t dull ritual. Singing isn’t something to endure. Singing is opportunity to release the gratitude welling up within! As we sing about every spiritual blessing we have in Christ, we have opportunity to release our thanksgiving.

If thanksgiving doesn’t accompany your singing, you need to think about why that is the case. Share your struggle with God. God, my heart isn’t overflowing with gratitude when I sing on Sunday morning. Why is this so? God, open my heart to see the blessings I have in Christ. Let me not take them for granted. Let me not treat them as common. Awaken a heart of gratitude within.

### **The place of music in the Christian life**

A few thoughts on the place of music in the Christian life. Christian music outside the Sunday morning service is a great opportunity to stimulate thankfulness. As you listen to songs steeped in biblical content, you’re reminded of the blessings you have in Christ. You’re confronted with reasons why you should be thankful.

I don’t want to be a legalist who says you’re only allowed to listen to Christian music. Just like most of you wouldn’t tell the person next to you that they’re only allowed to watch Christian movies. But consider the value of saturating your heart with biblical lyrics throughout the week. Maybe you have a commute to work or the doctor. Maybe you listen to music when working out. Will listening to sports radio or Guns n’ Roses stimulate affection for God? Probably not. Will listening to Getty hymns stimulate affection for God? If you’re listening, probably yes. When I’m working out with my boys I’m listening to AI heavy metal versions of classic hymns. And occasionally a Rocky song.

What renewal of the mind are you missing out on by forsaking songs steeped in Scripture? Is it wise to listen to music steeped in Scripture?

If we want to have hearts richly indwelt by Scripture, singing along to lyrics steeped in Scripture is a good place to start. The goal is getting truth into your heart through memory. When truth is memorized, you can meditate on it wherever you are. When truth goes with you wherever you go, you’re confronted with reasons to thank God all day long.

Consider the value of singing songs steeped in Scripture.

**Practical question:** how am I using music to stimulate thankfulness to God?

### **Point 2: Give thanks in word and deed (3:17)**

***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.*** – 3:17

Whatever we do, everything we do should be done ***“in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*** Meaning everything we do should be done with Jesus in mind. In the name of Jesus doesn't mean speaking Jesus out loud repeatedly while I'm playing basketball. It means playing in a way that respects Jesus' authority, his teachings. Not violent. Not dangerous. Not cheating. Not selfish.

So, **first**, whatever we're doing, we do it with Jesus in mind.

**Second**, whatever we're doing, we giving thanks while we're doing it.

***“to God the Father through him”*** = we thank the Father through the Son. Meaning we approach the Father with thankful hearts knowing we have access to the Father because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross (Heb 4:16).

What I'm highlighting here is giving thanks to God. Whatever we're doing, we give thanks to the Father while we're doing it.

### **Application**

We can give thanks with our mouths (*“in word”*). Singing songs. Telling others what God has done. Thanking God in prayer.

But what about our deeds? The idea is while I'm reading my Bible, while I'm writing a sermon, while I'm driving my car, while I'm changing a diaper, cleaning a toilet, while I'm shoveling the driveway, while I'm taking out the trash, I should be thanking God. ***“whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything”*** is absolutely everything. No activity is exempt!

If I'm thanking God for what I have in Christ while I'm doing the dishes, I'll be more inclined to act in a way that reflects a concern for Jesus' commands, right?

Yes, this is counterintuitive. Our flesh is wired to complain and despair and rage. But what Paul's saying is we confront *“what is earthly in you”* (Col 3:5) by thanking God. How do I fight sexual immorality? By thanking God. How do I fight covetousness? By thanking God. How do I fight anger? By thanking God.

Have you ever thought of giving thanks as the pathway to obedience? I believe that's what Paul's teaching us here. Giving thanks is one of the ways we put to death what is earthly within us (Col 3:5)!

**Practical question:** how will giving thanks in every activity help me be faithful to Jesus?

### **Point 3: Give thanks in prayer (Philippians 4:6-7)**

*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7*

Recently we've discussed peace in Sunday school. Peace comes to our troubled souls when we pray to God. Partially because when we pour out our hearts to God (Ps 62:8) we release our pain. We don't hold it in. We stop pretending it isn't there. We face our pain with spiritual resources. Partially because, when we pray, we're reminded of who we're praying to: the God with unhindered ability to accomplish all that he wills. We're reminded that we're praying to a big God who can grant our request if he desires to do so. Partially because we're reminded of a God who cares for us. We're reminded that God cares about our pain and comes to our aid in one way or another.

## Thanksgiving

What I want to focus on here is the thanksgiving. Peace comes to our troubled souls when our prayer is accompanied with thanksgiving.

Note ***“in everything.”*** Whatever the anxiety-causing situation is, it should be met with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the solution to each and every anxiety!

What does thanksgiving have to do with anxiety? Thanksgiving sees the good. Thanksgiving sees God. Thanksgiving sees a good God who acts in us and for us. When there’s no thanksgiving it’s all doom and gloom. Thanksgiving keeps us grounded. We’re reminded that the God who’s already done so much for us, the God who’s going to do great things for us in the future, this same God is with us today.

## Application

So I’m anxious about dental bills. I tell God my fears. As I pray for God’s provision, I thank God for present employment. I thank God for the resources that are sufficient if I wisely exercise restraint. I thank God that today I have plenty of food and warmth and clothing and a wonderful home. I thank God for past employment. I thank God for past provision when things were uncertain. I thank God for the promise that he will take care of these things as I seek first his righteousness (Matt 6:33). I thank God that his steadfast love follows me every day of my life (Ps 23:6).

My point? Giving thanks to God forces us to meditate on God. And meditating on God brings peace to our hearts. As we meditate on God, we see reasons to be thankful. We see the good. Despair fades. Thanksgiving gives perspective.

**Practical question:** is thanksgiving a regular element in my prayers?

## Point 4: Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

*Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Paul issues three commands with one explanation.

Command one: ***“Rejoice always.”*** When is joy appropriate? Always.

Not that I rejoice because bad things happen. I don’t rejoice because my wife discovers mice living in our van. I get angry. You don’t rejoice because you discover your loved one has a serious medical condition. You grieve.

It’s joy in the midst of hardship, not joy because of hardship. Obeying the next two commands enables us to rejoice always.

Command two: ***“pray without ceasing.”*** The idea is praying throughout the day not praying for eight hours straight.

Command three: ***“give thanks in all circumstances.”*** When is thanks appropriate? In all circumstances. When everything is running smoothly. When you’re getting hammered in multiple directions. I don’t give thanks because my wife discovered mice living in our van. You don’t give thanks because a loved one has a distressing medical condition. But we give thanks in the midst of annoying, distressing, life-impacting circumstances.

Thanks that I have a van. Thanks that I’ve had decades with this person. Thanking God for other things (e.g., blessings in Christ) while going about life.

Reason: ***“for this is the will of God in Christ for you.”*** Always, in all circumstances, our response should be joy, prayer, giving thanks. This is God’s revealed will. We don’t have to guess. We know what God’s will is in all circumstances.

### **What does this look like?**

As I'm going about my day, whether writing a sermon or visiting a nursing home or having dinner or lifting weights, I'm praying. I'm giving thanks. And, bringing Colossians 3:16-17 into the picture, I'm meditating on God's word. As a result, I'm joyful.

Not joy in the Patriots or Doritos or Legos, no, joy in God. It's okay to find enjoyment in these things. But joy in all circumstances isn't enabled by the Patriots or Doritos or Legos. That's not how the human heart works. God's word, prayer, giving thanks, these stimulate joy in all circumstances.

As we meditate on God's word, hope, perspective, and praise emerge, not complaint.

As we pray, confidence in God's ability and care emerge, not complaint.

As we give thanks, we remember God and we see the good. We fight complaining.

So, to sum up this message, if you want to be a joyful and obedient Christian, you need to be thinking about God's word throughout the day. You need to be praying throughout the day. You need to be giving thanks throughout the day. And you need to be around Christians who are getting God's word into your head ("*teaching and admonishing one another*").

To some of you this is reminder. I can be a joyful, thankful Christian right now. To some of you this is new. I need to get God's word into my mind. I need to be praying and giving thanks throughout the day.

**Practical question:** do I give thanks when things are good? When things are bad?

### **Conclusion**

Why are we Christians thankful to God? Because we've experienced salvation in Jesus Christ.

Confronted by God's word, we understand there's something wrong with us.

We were created to know and love and serve God. But the first man, Adam, rejected God's rule. As a result, sin and death came into God's very good earth. As a result we sin. We chose to do life our own way.

God holds us accountable for our rebellion. Those who persist in rebellion will go to a place called hell where weeping and gnashing of teeth happens.

In his great love, God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross as a substitute. That whoever believes in Jesus would not face judgment but instead experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life. On the cross God treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful life. If we trust in Jesus, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' perfect, sinless life.

On the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead, vindicating his claims.

There's two ways to live. We can go on rejecting God and living our own way. Or we can joyfully submit to God's rule by humbling ourselves. By asking for forgiveness and trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Because we've experienced God's mercy in Christ, we're thankful people. We encourage you to do the same. Tell us if you believe.

Christian, as you're going about your day, remember to meditate on God's word. Remember to pray. Remember to thank God. And Christian, teach and admonish your fellow believers.