

**TRINITY
GIVE THANKS
Ephesians 5:15-20
NOVEMBER 23, 2014**

GOOD EVENING, TRINITY CHURCH! I AM TRULY THANKFUL TO BE HERE TONIGHT TO REMEMBER OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, CHRIST JESUS! AND I PRAY THAT YOUR THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION WILL BE A BLESSING FOR YOU AND YOURS AND WILL BRING GLORY TO GOD, ALMIGHTY.

WITHOUT QUESTION, AS WE GROW OLDER, WE EXPERIENCE INCREASING FORGETFULNESS. WE FORGET WHERE WE PUT OUR KEYS OR OUR GLASSES AND SOMETIMES WE EVEN FORGET WHERE WE ARE! AND IT SEEMS THAT SHORTLY AFTER A TIME OF REMEMBRANCE, WE FORGET WHAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO REMEMBER. AND OFTEN TIMES, WE FORGET TO BE THANKFUL FOR WHAT OUR LORD AND SAVIOR HAS DONE AND IS DOING IN OUR LIVES.

THE GREAT AUTHOR, ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON ONCE STATED: "THE MAN WHO HAS FORGOTTEN TO BE THANKFUL HAS FALLEN ASLEEP IN LIFE."

TONIGHT, WE ARE GOING TO FOCUS ON THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL, WHO NEVER ALLOWED THIS TO HAPPEN TO HIM. HE WAS NOT ONLY A PRAYERFUL PRISONER, BUT HE WAS A PRAISEFUL PRISONER. HE WAS FIRST IN LINE TO OFFER HIS GRATITUDE TO GOD.

YOU KNOW THAT IT'S EASY TO CELEBRATE THANKSGIVING WHEN YOUR FAMILY IS HEALTHY, YOUR INCOME IS AMPLE, YOUR STOCKS ARE ASCENDING, YOUR FAVORITE TEAM IS VICTORIOUS, YOUR SINUSES HAVE DRIED-UP AND YOUR ACHES AND PAINS ARE MINIMAL. BUT THAT KIND OF THANKSGIVING CAN BE VERY SUPERFICIAL.

GOD IS SOMETIMES FORGOTTEN IN SUCH A CELEBRATION. IT'S OFTEN JUST A MATTER OF CONGRATULATING OURSELVES ON HOW WELL WE HAVE DONE.

BUT REAL THANKSGIVING, A BIBLICAL THANKSGIVING, IS MUCH GREATER AND DEEPER THAN THAT. IT IS NOT BASED ON OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT ON GOD'S SUFFICIENCY — NOT ON OUR PRODUCTION, BUT ON GOD'S PROVISION — NOT ON OUR PERFORMANCE, BUT ON GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

PAUL DESCRIBES GENUINE THANKSGIVING WITH THIS ADMONITION FROM EPHESIANS 5:15-20:

“BE VERY CAREFUL, THEN, HOW YOU LIVE—NOT AS UNWISE BUT AS WISE, MAKING THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL. THEREFORE DO NOT BE FOOLISH, BUT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LORD’S WILL IS. DO NOT GET DRUNK ON WINE, WHICH LEADS TO DEBAUCHERY. INSTEAD, BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT, SPEAKING TO ONE ANOTHER WITH PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SONGS FROM THE SPIRIT. SING AND MAKE MUSIC FROM YOUR HEART TO THE LORD, ALWAYS GIVING THANKS TO GOD THE FATHER FOR EVERYTHING, IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.” NOTICE THAT PAUL COMMANDS US TO **“GIVE THANKS FOR EVERYTHING”**.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND HOWEVER, THAT ONE’S ACT OF BEING THANKFUL MUST BE HEARTFELT, NOT MERELY WORDS FROM OUR LIPS! PROVERBS 27:19 REMINDS US THAT, **“AS WATER REFLECTS THE FACE, SO ONE’S LIFE REFLECTS THE HEART.”**

LISTEN, WE ARE WHAT WE THINK. IF IN MY HEART I AM ANGRY, I WILL BE ANGRY TOWARDS THOSE AROUND ME. IF IN MY HEART I AM WORRIED, I WILL BE WORRIED ABOUT EVERYTHING. IF IN MY HEART I AM THANKFUL, I CAN BE THANKFUL FOR EVERYTHING — EVEN MY TROUBLES. HAVING A HEART FULL OF THANKFULNESS MEANS THAT IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL MY ANXIETY AND WORRY, MY SWEATING AND FAINTING AND WRINGING OF HANDS, I AM THANKING GOD.

YOU SEE, HE IS ALREADY IN THE PROCESS OF GUARDING MY LIFE AND COMING TO ME WITH AN ANSWER—BUT IN HIS TIME, NOT NECESSARILY MINE.

GIVING THANKS IN PRAYER FOR ALL OUR TROUBLES SHOWS GREAT FAITH BECAUSE WE ARE SAYING, GOD, YOU ARE WAY AHEAD OF US ON THIS. WE CAN JUST LEAVE THE DETAILS TO YOU. SO, SHOW US YOUR GLORY IN HOW YOU CHOOSE TO HANDLE THIS.

PAUL ENCAPSULATES HIS POSITION ON THANKFULNESS IN HIS EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS WITH THESE WORDS: **“REJOICE ALWAYS; PRAY WITHOUT CEASING; IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS; FOR THIS IS GOD’S WILL FOR YOU IN CHRIST JESUS.”** AND THIS WAS PAUL’S WAY OF LIFE! IS IT YOUR WAY OF LIFE? I PRAY THAT IT IS!

ONE COMMENTATOR DESCRIBES PAUL THIS WAY. **“PAUL IS DRESSED IN THE GARMENT OF PRAISE. HE WORE GRATITUDE AS A MAN WEARS A SUIT. THE GRACES OF PRAISE AND GRATITUDE WERE WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF HIS LIFE.”** WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DESCRIPTION OF THE LIFE OF PAUL, ISN’T IT? HE WAS INDEED A PRAISEFUL AND THANKFUL CHRISTIAN. AGAIN, I ASK, ARE YOU?

IF YOU ARE NOT ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT YOU ARE **“A PAUL”**, CONSIDER THAT THERE ARE STILL FOUR DAYS BEFORE YOUR THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION TO RECTIFY THIS AND CONFORM YOUR HEART TO BE LIKE PAUL’S.

YOU AND I NEED TO BE CLOTHED WITH THE GRACE OF GIVING THANKS. WE MUST EXHIBIT IT BEFORE OTHERS. FOR MOST OF US ARE LONG ON OUR COMPLAINTS AND SHORT ON OUR PRAISES. IF WE REALLY WANT TO TRULY TRANSFORM OUR HEARTS THIS SEASON, THE FIRST STEP MAY BE TO GO TO THAT PERSON YOU HAVE BEEN COMPLAINING ABOUT AND PRAISE THEM FOR SOMETHING THEY HAVE DONE. LET THEM KNOW HOW MUCH YOU APPRECIATE WHAT THEY ARE DOING FOR CHRIST. AND LET THEM KNOW YOU WILL BE PRAYING FOR THEM.

LET US NOW CONSIDER WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR US TO BE THANKFUL.

I AM CERTAIN THAT YOU WILL AGREE THAT SOME BELIEVERS TREAT THIS MATTER OF GRATITUDE VERY LIGHTLY. YET AGAIN, NOTICE THE COMMANDING WORDS OF PAUL: "GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES". MY FRIENDS, THIS IS GOD'S WILL FOR EACH ONE OF US.

IF THIS BE THE CASE, AND IT IS, THEN I ASK: "WHY HAVE SOME PEOPLE, WHOM GOD HAS PROSPERED, PUSHED HIM ASIDE WITH AN UNGRATEFUL SPIRIT AND FEEL NO OBLIGATION WHATSOEVER, TO OFFER THANKS TO HIM?" LISTEN, MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WILL SIT DOWN THIS THANKSGIVING FOR A DELICIOUS MEAL, WITHOUT BOWING THEIR HEADS TO OFFER THANKS TO OUR SOVEREIGN GOD. AND THAT IS TO OUR DISGRACE!

BUT PLEASE NOTE THAT PAUL PUTS THIS GRACE OF THANKSGIVING AMONG THOSE REQUIRED GRACES THAT MAKE FOR AN ATTRACTIVE LIFE. LET ME READ WHAT PAUL SAID JUST PRIOR TO HIS COMMANDMENT TO "GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES". HE WRITES IN VERSES 14-17: "AND WE URGE YOU, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WARN THOSE WHO ARE IDLE AND DISRUPTIVE, ENCOURAGE THE DISHEARTENED, HELP THE WEAK, BE PATIENT WITH EVERYONE. MAKE SURE THAT NOBODY PAYS BACK WRONG FOR WRONG, BUT ALWAYS STRIVE TO DO WHAT IS GOOD FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR EVERYONE ELSE. REJOICE ALWAYS, PRAY CONTINUALLY."

THIS IS AN ONGOING, NEVER ENDING, EXHORTATION AND COMMANDMENT FOR US TO NOT DWELL ON THE ADVERSITY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCE, BUT TO LOOK TO SEE HOW GOD IS WORKING IN OUR LIFE AND THANK HIM FOR HIS GRACE AND LOVE.

PAUL IS NOT TEACHING THAT WE, AS BELIEVERS, SHOULD BE GRATEFUL TO GOD FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS TO US!

WHY? BECAUSE EVIL, SICKNESS, DISEASE AND DEATH ALL CAME INTO THE WORLD BECAUSE OF SIN — THEY DID NOT COME FROM GOD. BUT GOD CAN USE THEM.

WHEN THESE THINGS STRIKE US WE CAN STILL BE THANKFUL TO GOD BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT HE WILL USE OUR SITUATION FOR HIS GLORY. REMEMBER PAUL'S PROMISE FROM ROMANS 8:28: "AND WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE."

I WOULD SUSPECT THAT PAUL'S COMMITMENT TO "ALWAYS GIVING THANKS" WAS, IN-PART, A RESULT OF HIS UNDERSTANDING OF JEWISH TEACHING — HE KNEW THE ANCIENT WRITINGS, THAT WHICH WE CALL THE OLD TESTAMENT.

REMEMBER THAT PAUL STUDIED UNDER ONE OF THE GREATEST PHARISAICAL RABBI'S, GAMALIEL AND WAS, IN FACT, A SON OF A PHARISEE AND A PHARISEE, HIMSELF. SURELY HE KNEW THE PSALMS AND THEIR RECOGNITION FOR THE NEED TO ALWAYS GIVE THANKS TO GOD.

DAVID WROTE IN PSALM 30 AND VERSES 10-12: "HEAR, O LORD, AND BE MERCIFUL TO ME; O LORD, BE MY HELP. YOU TURNED MY WAILING INTO DANCING; YOU REMOVED MY SACKCLOTH AND CLOTHED ME WITH JOY, THAT MY HEART MAY SING TO YOU AND NOT BE SILENT. O LORD MY GOD, I WILL GIVE YOU THANKS FOREVER."

THEN IN PSALM 118:28-29 WE READ: "YOU ARE MY GOD, AND I WILL GIVE YOU THANKS; YOU ARE MY GOD, AND I WILL EXALT YOU. GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD; HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER."

AND IN PSALM 75, VERSE 1: "WE GIVE THANKS TO YOU, O GOD, WE GIVE THANKS, FOR YOUR NAME IS NEAR; MEN TELL OF YOUR WONDERFUL DEEDS."

THE COMPELLING IDEA HERE IS THAT THE HEART IS TO OVERFLOW IN GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR EVERYTHING HE BRINGS INTO OUR LIVES.

THIS IS THE RANGE OF OUR THANKSGIVING. PAUL KNEW NOTHING OF AN UNGRATEFUL AND BITTER SPIRIT. NOW WHAT WAS THE SECRET THAT ENABLED PAUL TO MAKE SUCH A STATEMENT? WE FIND IT IN THE LATTER PART OF 1 THESSALONIANS 5:18: "FOR THIS IS GOD'S WILL FOR YOU IN CHRIST JESUS." THERE YOU HAVE HIS SECRET: "IN CHRIST JESUS."

WE KNOW THIS TO BE TRUE AS JESUS, HIMSELF, REMINDS US IN JOHN, CHAPTER 5 AND VERSE 15: "I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. IF A MAN REMAINS IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT; APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING."

LISTEN, MY FRIENDS, GOD'S WILL IS ONLY MADE REAL IN CHRIST! AND IT IS ONLY IN CHRIST THAT BELIEVERS ARE GIVEN THE DYNAMIC THAT ENABLES THEM TO CARRY OUT GOD'S DIVINE WILL. FOR IT IS ONLY IN JESUS CHRIST, THE ONE WHO FORMED AND FASHIONED HIS OWN LIFE WITH A SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING, THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO THANK GOD FOR ALL THINGS.

IN JUST A FEW MINUTES, WE WILL INVITE YOU TO COME TO THE COMMUNION TABLE TO GIVE OUR HEARTFELT THANKS TO OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, CHRIST JESUS. AND TO SHARE, IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIM, BY SYMBOLICALLY PARTAKING IN HIS BODY AND BLOOD!

BROTHERS AND SISTERS LET ME CLOSE WITH THIS THOUGHT — ON THIS DAY, WE NEED TO REALIZE, AS NEVER BEFORE, THAT WE ARE OBLIGATED TO BE THANKFUL. WE OWE IT TO GOD TO BE GRATEFUL FOR ALL OF THE BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS OF THIS LIFE, LET ALONE OUR FUTURE LIFE IN GLORY.

MAY GOD HELP US TO SEE THE DUTY OF HAVING A THANKFUL HEART AND GRATEFUL SPIRIT! WHEN WE FULLY REALIZE EXACTLY WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US, THE DUTY TO GIVE THANKS WILL BECOME A JOY AND DELIGHT.

AMEN AND AMEN!