

Giving Thanks to the Father

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Date: 21 October 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, given today, I thought I'd ask with the question, what is it that you are thankful for? To find out, I took to the streets of HGD last week and asked some of our younger members, and here's what they had to say.

Have a look at the video. For dancing. Basketball. I'm thankful for church and my children. I'm thankful that I have a loving family and I can sing in a big choir.

I'm thankful for that we've got money to go to school, and that we get to go to church, and that we have Jesus and God. I'm thankful for my friends and my family.

Thankful for. What's all? My parents, my dog. I'm thankful for all the leaders in Sunday school which teach us about God every day. Hello, daughter.

Hello, father. What are you thankful for? My dad. Shh, don't tell anyone. I'm thankful for friends and family from both church and school.

[1 : 08] I'm thankful for friend leaders here and probably fish. Thankful for food. Um, more food.

What are you thankful for? I'm thankful for Jesus dying on the cross for me. There are lots of things we can be thankful for, aren't there?

But sometimes it is hard to be thankful. Uh, when we are suffering or lonely or when things go wrong despite us working so hard that they go right, it's hard to be thankful.

Or when the world and particularly TV commercials keep reminding us about everything we don't have, it's hard to remember what we do have and be thankful for that and instead complain about what we don't have.

Well, Paul's letter to us today is what I want us to look at so that we might be reminded about all we do have in Christ that we might keep giving thanks to our heavenly father. And that's how Paul begins his letter proper, which is point one in the outline and verse one to three in your Bibles.

[2 : 10] So verse one, Paul begins in his usual manner, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother. And to God's holy people, that is to the Christians in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God, our father.

And then he says, we always thank God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. See that in verse three, he begins his letter proper by saying that whenever he prays for the Christians at Colossae, that he always thanks God, not just thanks God, but always thanks God. Why? Well, verse four, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all God's people. Paul thanks God always because of their faith and love.

That is their faith in Christ, which is shown genuine by their love for one another. But why thank God for their faith and love? I mean, we hear so much about faith and love at church and so on.

Aren't these just normal things? Actually, no, they're not. I mean, is it normal in our world, in our society for a diverse group of people like this to come to church Sunday by Sunday and love one another, greet one another, serve, even forgive and bear with one another?

[3 : 33] Or is it normal in our society for people to believe in a man who died on a cross 2,000 years ago, was raised again? If you're not sure, then ask your work colleagues or your neighbors and ask them if they think you're normal.

They might not think you're normal for other reasons, but you get the point. You see, our faith in Christ and our love for one another is not normal. It ought to be. It's how God created us to be, but it's not.

Because human nature is dead in sin. And so now it's not normal to believe in Jesus and it's not normal to love others more than ourselves.

This means then that the only way people can come to faith in Christ and love one another like these Colossians were is by God working in us first. It's by God sending his spirit to breathe new

spiritual life into us, enabling us to have faith in Jesus and loving one another. In other words, without God's work in us, we would not have faith and love like these Colossians. And I wonder if we sometimes forget that.

[4 : 45] I do. I wonder if we forget that our faith and love or that of our family and friends is only because of God's work in us first. Rather, I tend to take it all for granted.

But Paul doesn't, does he? Instead, he always thanks God every time he prays for them, for the way that God has worked in their lives to produce faith and love.

But that's not all God has done for us or the Colossians. He's also given us a secure hope. Verse five, he says the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven.

You see, God has given us a hope and this hope, it says in verse five, is stored up for us in heaven. In other words, it is secure, ready and waiting for us.

What is this hope then? Well, in verse 12, it's called an inheritance. And we'll unpack more of what that means when we get to verse 12 later. But notice for the moment, though, here that this future hope is so great.

[5 : 50] This inheritance is so rich that it drives them to keep having faith in Christ and to keep loving one another. Do you see verse five again? How he says the faith and love that spring from that driven by, if you like, this hope stored up for them in heaven.

You see, knowing what they will receive in the future helps them to keep trusting Christ in the present. For whatever they miss out on in this life or whatever they suffer for following Christ in this life, we're more than made up for in the next life.

Last month, there was an article, which is on the next slide, about some Hindu radicals persecuting Christians. And yet the Christians refusing to deny Christ. This is September 16th or 18th, I think it was, last month.

And one of the reasons why these Christians were refusing to deny Christ while they were faithfully following Christ was because of what Jesus said in Matthew.

And the article went on to quote this. Notice the last line of this quote from Jesus. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven. You see, for these Christians, their future hope, their inheritance, their reward bolsters their present trust in Christ, helps them, drives them to keep trusting Christ.

[7 : 11] Well, so too for the Colossians. What's more, knowing that they will receive what they will receive in the future, help the Colossians not only trust in Christ, but also keep loving one another.

Whether it was by serving one another or caring for one another. Why? Well, because whatever resources they use to serve and love others, whether it's time or money, they will more than get back with their inheritance.

I mean, how much time are we going to get back in eternal life? Quite a bit, isn't it? I know someone at our church who doesn't have a whole lot and yet they're very generous.

In fact, a few years ago, they wanted to give money for a ministry at church. I think it was when we were raising money for our Bibles for the persecuted and knowing their situation when they came to me, I said, oh, look, it's all right.

I know you've got other expenses. Don't worry about it. And they said, Andrew, treasure in heaven. Oh, OK. I was rebuked. Rightly so.

[8 : 12] You see, we need to be wise with our money. Yes, we need to make sure we're not a burden on others. Yes. But you see, this hope that this person had drove them to keep loving others, in this case, by being generous.

This is what the hope was doing for the Colossians, what it ought to do for us. And so Paul gives thanks then for the Colossians' faith in Christ and love for one another. And I suspect behind that is also the hope they have in heaven.

But God only gives this hope or inheritance through the gospel. So have a look at the rest of verse five to eight. So the faith and love that spring from driven by the hopes thought up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the message, in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love in the spirit.

[9 : 22] So here in verses five and six, the Colossians first heard of their hope through the gospel. When this man called Epaphras preached it to them. Epaphras was actually one of them.

He went to another city, heard Paul preaching, became a Christian, went back home and then started preaching the gospels. And so the church started in Colossae. Now, many of you know that the gospel is the news or good news about Jesus Christ.

For we have all ignored God and his word in our lives. And so we all face judgment. And yet the good news is that God's grace gave God's son, Jesus, who willingly went to the cross to take our judgment in our place.

And therefore, whoever believes in Jesus, God will give life eternal. And that's new spiritual eternal life. Now that starts the moment we believe where we're right with God, we're given his spirit.

And then you physical eternal life later when we enjoy our inheritance in full. This is the good news of Jesus. This is the gospel. And in verse six, it's this gospel that God uses and is continuing to use to make people all around the world become Christian and grow as Christians.

[10 : 40] Or in the words of our mission statement, which is always on the bottom right hand side of the screen. It's the gospel that God uses to gather and grow people in Christ. And we've seen it here at Holy Trinity this year, actually.

We've seen people from China come to the Chinese evangelism courses. And just this year, the Chinese congregations have seen more than 20 become Christians. Last night, they had two evangelistic courses running.

And I usually stick my head in and there's over 40 non-Christians attending. We've had some Christians among the English congregations, sorry, non-Christians become Christians amongst the English congregations, including a young Muslim man, even though he knew it would cost him in terms of his family relationships, turning from Islam to Christ.

Last Sunday at 5 p.m., we had two baptisms of people who became Christians. We've been praying for the parents of one guy in my Bible study group to become Christians.

And earlier this year, the father found out he had a brain tumor and had an opportunity. The son had an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to his father.

[11 : 51] And last month, he became a Christian. And he was genuine about it. He wanted to make sure people knew it was genuine. And so even while he was still in hospital, he got baptized while in hospital.

And sadly, he passed away. But we know where he is because of the gospel. So you see, the gospel is growing as it converts more and more people around the world.

And even here in Melbourne, just as it did back in Paul's day. And the point is, the gospel still works. And not just to save people, but to mature people.

I mean, if you look back at verse 6, this gospel message of Jesus is not only growing as it makes more people Christians, it is also bearing fruit in the lives of those who are Christians. So it has been bearing the fruit of love in the lives of the Colossians, verse 3.

Or verse 10, it bears fruit in good works. You see, the gospel is not just for non-Christians. It's also for us Christians. Because as we hear of God's generosity in the gospel, it encourages us to be generous to others.

[12 : 57] As we hear of God's forgiveness in the gospel, it encourages us to be forgiving to others and so on. You see, God continues to use the gospel to gather and grow people in Christ.

Their gospel still works. And I need to say this because it seems so many churches have forgotten it. I mean, I was at Synod this week and there's lots of red tape to get through, which is normal.

But the gospel is hardly mentioned. Or I remember someone from our church going to a class at one of our local Bible colleges, a church planning class, and the lecturer told them that they should make social justice the center of their church plant ministry and not the gospel.

Because the gospel talks about sin and judgment, being saved from that. And people don't want to hear about that. Now, social justice is important. We do it here at Holy Trinity. But it's not evangelism.

It's not what God uses to convert and grow Christians. And so as we plant new congregations at St. John's next year, then we must keep the gospel central.

[14 : 08] And we at Holy Trinity must never think we ought to graduate from the gospel under some other kind of tricky mechanism to make people Christians. For it's this message about Jesus that God uses to gather and grow people in Christ.

And so Paul thanks God for their faith, their love, which is a work of God. And included in his thanks, I think, is the hope that they have, but also the gospel through which God has given it. So already, I suspect there are a number of things we can give thanks to God for, aren't there? Our faith, which we often take for granted, our ability to love others, our hope, and the gospel. So Paul now moves from thanksgiving, thanking God, to praying to God. Have a look at verse 9. He says, Here, Paul prays that God might fill them with the knowledge of his will. In other words, that they might know this better, the Bible. That's where we find God's will. And he prays this so that, verse 10, they might live a life worthy of the Lord Jesus. [15:50] And in the rest of verse 10 and 11, if you look there, Paul unpacks what a life worthy of Jesus looks like. We don't have time to unpack each part now.

I've listed them for you on your outlines. But very briefly, it means pleasing him, bearing fruit for him, growing in knowledge of him, relying on strength from him, so that we might have great endurance to keep following him.

But there is one other thing that living a life worthy of Jesus includes, and it's there in verse 12. Have a look at verse 12. This is what I want to focus on, given today's topic. Verse 12, he says, Do you see that?

Living a life worthy of Jesus includes giving thanks to the Father. And not just giving thanks, did you notice, but giving joyful thanks. Why?

Because God has qualified us to share in this inheritance through Christ. So what is this inheritance then? This hope that verse 5 is stored up for us in heaven that motivates us to keep having faith and love.

[17:20] Well, it's actually Christ's inheritance that we share in as co-heirs. So on the next slide, the Apostle Paul puts it like this. If we are God's children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ.

And so amazingly, everything that Christ inherits, we inherit with him. It's extraordinary. We are co-inheritors. We will inherit his glory with him.

Now, I realise this is hard for us to understand how extraordinary this is. So let me tell you something that I think you will realise is extraordinary. This is some years ago now when I was still in Sydney.

There was an article in the Sydney Morning Herald paper. It's on the next slide, actually.

Outrageous fortune. Painless cave dwellers suddenly \$7 billion richer.

And the story is about two brothers who were homeless living in Budapest. And they got news that a long-lost grandmother who was a billionaire had died.

[18:20] Their parents had already died. And they were set to inherit the \$7 billion inheritance. How's that for extraordinary? You can understand how extraordinary that is, can't you?

I mean, so much so that I bet you're all thinking, I wish I had a long loss. But let me tell you, in Christ, our inheritance stored in heaven is actually worth much more than that.

For Christ inherits the universe. And as co-inheritors, so too will we. So with Christ, we will share a perfect new creation and rule over it just as God created Adam and Eve to do.

There will be no more accidents or disasters like the recent tsunami in Indonesia. Instead, it will be paradise. And with Christ, we will also have a perfect new body to enjoy every physical blessing.

So no more disability or disease or death. And like Christ, we'll be perfect people in perfect relationship with one another and God.

[19:26] So no more loneliness or fighting or relationship issues. No more having to tell the kids to clean their rooms. It will be bliss. In other words, with Christ, we'll inherit the earth, as Jesus says, to live forever with perfect bodies in perfect relationships and perfect contentment.

Let me tell you, the world spends more than \$7 billion every year trying to get those very things. whether it's buying health products or paying for medical procedures or gym memberships or whatever it is to have a better body or live longer.

Or spending time reading books or how-to guys to have the perfect relationship, usually by making the other person better because it's never our fault. Or taking out massive mortgages to get just a little piece of the earth to rule over.

You see, the world spends trillions trying to get something that doesn't even come close to our inheritance and yet God has bought it all for us.

It's extraordinary. And this is even more extraordinary when we realise where we were and what it costs God to qualify us for it. I mean, those brothers who were living in Budapest, they lived in a dark cave and had a little hope.

[20 : 43] In fact, on the next slide, one of the brothers, Giza, said, if this works out, it will certainly make up for the life we've had until now. All we really had was each other. No women would look at us living in a cave.

You can understand why, I guess. And all they had to do to qualify for this inheritance was find their mother's death certificate, which proves she was the daughter of this billionaire grandmother who was actually in Germany.

And for when they did, this death certificate, this piece of paper, would rescue them from their dark cave and give them hope. But you see, we were in a darker place. Do you notice what it says in verse 13 where we were?

We were in the dominion of darkness. We were under the rule of sin and death. We served, whether you realise it or not, we served Satan and were headed for hell.

That's where we were. And for us, rather, to qualify for our inheritance, we couldn't do anything. We couldn't get ourselves out of the dominion of darkness. But God did everything.

[21 : 45] And it was much more than finding a piece of paper, a certificate of death. It was giving his son and watching others put him to death. His only son, who, verse 13, he loves.

So that, verse 14, we might be redeemed from darkness and our sins forgiven. You see, our rescue and inheritance is extraordinary.

And if we realise how extraordinary all this is, then it ought to drive us to do three things. First, to keep trusting in Christ. Whatever we suffer, so whatever we suffer in life for him.

Because if we suffer or miss out on things for following Christ, it will be more than made up for in the life to come. Like those persecuted Christians in India. Second, it ought to drive us to keep loving one another.

Whether it's by filling in those green sheets to serve on Sundays or doing ministry during the week or by praying for others or visiting others or giving money for the sake of others so they can hear the gospel.

[22 : 50] We can keep loving others knowing that whatever time or money we give will more than get back in our inheritance later. Like that guy I mentioned from our church who said, Andrew, treasure in heaven.

And thirdly, if we realise how extraordinary our rescue and inheritance are, then it will move us, I think, to keep giving thanks to the Father joyfully.

Even when life is hard, even when we don't have all that we'd like to have. On our last slide, Joyce, aged eight, wrote, Dear God, thank you for a baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy.

At least she still thanks God. There are lots of things worth giving thanks for in life, food and more food or a baby brother, but when life is hard or we keep thinking about what we don't have, then we're to come back to the cross of Christ and remember all we do have in Him.

We are to do what Paul did. I mean, did you realise as Paul pens this letter, he's actually in prison and yet Paul can still say, give joyful thanks to the Father.

[24 : 04] Why? Because he remembers what he does have, faith, love, rescue and inheritance all through Christ. And so do remember the immense worth of what we do have so that with Paul, we might always give joyful thanks to our Father.

Let's do that now. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do give you thanks for all you have given us through Christ. Christ. And we're so grateful for bringing us to faith in Him, for growing us in Christ such that we can love one another and for our inheritance stored up for us in heaven.

Father, help us to remember all you have given us in Christ that we might always and joyfully give thanks to you. for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.