

Giving Thanks to the Father

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[0 : 00] Well, as you know, today is Thanksgiving Sunday. It's the one day a year where we particularly, I mean, as Deb said before, we always give thanks, but we particularly thank God and focus on that for our day.

And there's a chance to thank God openly, as Deb said as well, but also financially, which Marcus mentioned before. So given the topic for today, I thought I'd start with a pretty obvious question. What is it that you are thankful for?

To get some answers, I took to the streets of HCD and asked some of our younger members, put it together on video, take a look. To get some answers, I'm thankful for my friends and my family.

Thankful for? Puttles. 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. Don't tell anyone. I'm thankful for friends and family from both church and our school.

[1 : 27] I'm thankful for friend leaders here and probably fish. Thankful for food. More food.

What are you thankful for? I'm thankful for Jesus dying on the cross for me. Well, as you can see, there are lots of things to be thankful for, but sometimes it's hard to be thankful, isn't it?

When we are suffering or when we are lonely or when things go wrong despite our every effort to make them go right, it's hard to be thankful. Or when we listen to the world and particularly TV commercials that keep telling us how much we don't have, it's hard to be thankful for what we do have rather than complain about what we don't have.

And so tonight I want us to look at the beginning of Paul's letter to the Colossians where he reminds us what we have in Christ that we might continue to be thankful to our father. And he begins his letter really by giving thanks.

So point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles. Have a look there. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother. To God's holy people, that's Christians in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

[2 : 42] Grace and peace to you from God, our father. And then he begins his letter proper by saying, we always thank God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.

Do you see that there in verse three? After his usual greeting in verses one and two, Paul begins by thanking God. He says, whenever we pray for you, we always thank God.

Actually, why? Well, verse four, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all God's people. And so Paul always thanks God because he has heard of their faith and love.

And that is their faith in Christ, which I take it is shown genuine by their love for one another. But why thank God for faith and love?

I mean, we hear about faith and love so much, don't we? I mean, aren't they just normal? Well, actually, no, they're not. After all, is it normal in our society for a diverse group of people like we have here at Holy Trinity to come to church Sunday by Sunday and to care for one another, to work together, to sell cupcakes or even to bear with one another, to forgive one another?

[3 : 57] And is it normal in our society for us to have a faith in a person who died on a cross 2000 years ago and rose again?

If you're not sure if it's normal, then ask your friends at school or your colleagues at work. Ask them if you're normal and see what they say. Actually, they might say you're not normal for other reasons, but you get the point, don't you?

You see, our faith in Christ and our love for each other is not normal in our world. It ought to be. That's how God created us to be. But it's not. Because human nature is dead in sin.

And so what is unfortunately now normal is not to believe in Jesus and not to love others more than yourself. This means the only way people can come to faith in Christ and love one another like the Colossians were is by a work of God in our lives first.

It's by God sending his spirit to breathe new spiritual life into us, enabling us to believe in Jesus. And to love others better than ourselves.

[5 : 13] In other words, without God's work in us, we would not have faith in Christ nor love one another like this here in this reading. And I wonder I wonder if we forget that.

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 our lives first. If you're anything like me, I often take it for granted.

But Paul doesn't, does he? He begins his letter, verse three, always thanking God for their faith and love because he knows it's a work from God.

Well, that's not all God has done for us and the Colossians. He's also given us a secure hope. Have a look at verse five. He says the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.

You see, God has given us a hope. And he says this hope is stored up for them in heaven and us in heaven. In other words, it's secure, ready and waiting for us.

[6 : 22] So what is this hope? Well, verse 12 calls it an inheritance. And we'll unpack more about what that might mean when we get to verse 12. But notice here that this future hope is so great, this inheritance so rich that it drives them to keep having faith in Christ and to keep loving one another.

Now, so verse five, he says the faith and love that spring from or are driven by this hope. You see, knowing what they will receive in the future helps them in the present.

It helps them to keep trusting in Christ for whatever they miss out on this life for following Christ, whatever they suffer in this life for following Christ. Their future inheritance will more than make up for it in the next life.

Last month, there was an article which is on the next slide, I think. Hindu radicals persecuting Christians in India.

I think it was 16th of September or something or other. And yet they refuse to deny Christ, these Christians. The article quotes one reason for why they are standing firm.

[7 : 34] And it quotes Jesus's words from Matthew, which is on the next slide. And this is from the article from Jesus's words on the Sermon on the Mount. And notice the last line there. Jesus said, rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven.

You see, for these Christians, their future hope, their inheritance, their reward helps them with their present trust in Christ. It drives them. It springs from their hope in the future.

Well, so too for these Colossians here. And what's more, knowing that they will receive what they receive in the future also helps the Colossians not just trust Christ, but keep loving one another too in the present.

Whether it's by serving one another or caring for one another. For whatever resources they use to love, whether it's time or money, they know they will more than get back with their inheritance later. In fact, I know someone from our church. They don't have a lot. And yet I remember one time they were wanting to give. I think it was Bibles for the Persecute. I can't exactly remember what ministry thing it was.

[8 : 37] But I remember them wanting to give a generous amount. And me knowing their circumstances, I just said, look, it's all right. I know you've got other expenses. And he said to me, Andrew, I have treasure in heaven.

And I felt rebuked. You see, he knew what his hope was. And it drove him to still love others by giving money so that others could have Bibles.

That's what Paul is talking about here. And so Paul gives thanks for the Colossians' faith in Christ and love for one another. That comes from the hope they have in heaven. But God only gives this hope through the gospel.

Have a look at verse 5 again. He said, the hope you've already heard about 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's 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. You see, the Colossians first heard about this

hope through the gospel, which a man called Epaphras preached to them.

[9 : 53] And Epaphras, from what we understand, was actually a member of the city of Colossae, and he went off and heard Paul preach the gospel, became a Christian, went back home and started preaching the gospel, and boom, the church started.

Now, as many of you know, the gospel is the news or good news about Jesus. For we have all ignored God and his word in our lives, haven't we?

And so we all face judgment, yet the good news is that God's grace gave God's Son, who willingly went to the cross to take our judgment in our place.

And then Jesus Christ rose again as Lord of all, so that whoever believes in him, God will graciously give life eternal. That is, new spiritual eternal life that starts now.

You've already begun your spiritual eternal life. You realise that? The moment you believe, you started your eternal life spiritually. Right with God, given God's Spirit to help us in life now.

[10 : 58] And then new physical eternal life later, when we enjoy our inheritance in full. This is the good news of Christ. This is the gospel. And in verse 6, it's this gospel that God is using to make people all around the world become Christian and grow as Christians.

Or in the words of our mission statement, which is on the bottom right-hand corner of every slide these days, it's the gospel that God uses to gather and grow people in Christ. And we've seen it here at HCD this year, haven't we?

We've had people from China come to the Chinese evangelism courses. And this year, I think they've seen more than 20 become Christians. Last night, I was wandering through as they were having their courses again.

They've got two groups. And in total, there was just over 41 non-Christians attending. In our own English congregations, we've seen people become Christians as well, even at 5 o'clock.

I mean, it's great to see those two baptisms of Felix and Helen last week. There's also a young Muslim man who became a Christian through Christianity Explored. Or in our morning services, one of our 9am members has been visiting a nursing home.

[12 : 10] It's a very stubborn man in particular, sharing the gospel with him this year. And two weeks ago, he became a Christian. His wife has been praying for him for more than 60 years. It's fantastic.

Or even my Bible study group, we've been praying for the parents of one of my members for a number of years. And this year, his father was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

And so this guy in my Bible study group went up to Sydney, and we were praying for him. And he got an opportunity to share the gospel, and his father became a Christian. And it wasn't just because he was facing death.

He said, look, I'm real about this. I want to get baptised as well. So he got baptised in the hospital while he was there. And then a few weeks ago, he just passed away. But the guy in my Bible study knows exactly where he is now.

See, the gospel is growing as it converts more and more people around the world and around Melbourne, even through our church, just as it did back in Paul's day. The point is, the gospel still works.

[13 : 14] And not just to save people, but also 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 Christian, it's also bearing fruit in the lives of those who are Christians.

Do you notice that? And so it's been bearing fruit of love in the Colossians ever since they heard the gospel. Verse 6. Or verse 10, it bears the fruit of, bearing fruit in every good work in the lives of Christians.

You see, the gospel is not just for non-Christians, it's for us Christians too. It's what God uses to grow us, to make us fruitful. And so, as we reflect on God's generosity to us in the gospel, we are encouraged to be generous.

As we reflect on God's forgiveness in the gospel, we are encouraged to be forgiving. And so on. As I said, the point is, the gospel still works to both gather and grow people in Christ.

And I need to say this because so many churches seem to have forgotten it. I mean, I was at Synod this past week, which is the Anglican government, and there was lots of business that we had to do and it was right that we did it, but the gospel hardly rated a mention.

[14 : 21] Or take another guy who used to come to our church, he's gone to a different church now, moved away, but he was studying at one of our Bible colleges and doing a church planting class. And the lecturer, I think it was a guest lecturer, to be fair, the lecturer said, for church planting, you want to make social justice at the centre of your ministry, not the gospel.

Because the gospel mentions sin and judgment. It's extraordinary, isn't it? Now, don't mishear me, social justice is important. We do it here at HTD. We do it at 5pm through Caracal.

Mark and I met with Doncare recently to try and help them out. Now, it's important, but it's not evangelism and it's not the gospel. It's not what God uses to grow people or convert people.

And so as we plant new congregations at St. John's next year or Adam's Cross and Crown, we and he must keep the gospel central. As a church, we must never think we ought to graduate from the gospel onto some sort of new and trendy way of converting people or growing people.

For it's this message that God uses to gather and grow us in Christ. Well, Paul thanks God for their faith in Christ and their love for one another, which is a great work of God.

[15 : 40] And included in his thanks, or in the background at least, I think, is the hope we have and the gospel through which God gives it. And so already there's a number of things we can be thankful for, aren't there?

Our faith, our love, our hope and the gospel. But Paul now moves from thanking God to praying to God. So verse 9. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the spirit gives so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience. Here, Paul prays that God might fill them with a knowledge of his will. For us, it means getting to know this better, the Bible, because this is where we find God's will.

And he prays this, verse 10, do you see? So that they might live a life worthy of the Lord Jesus. And in the rest of verses 10 to 11, Paul unpacks what a life worthy of Christ looks like.

[16 : 58] We don't have time to unpack each part now. I've listed them for you on your outlines. But roughly, 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 living a life worthy of Christ includes. And given today's topic, that's what I want us to focus on now.

It's there in verse 12. Have a look there at verse 12. He says, And so living a life worthy of the Lord Jesus here includes giving thanks to the Father.

And not just giving thanks, did you notice, but giving joyful thanks. Do you see that? Why? Well, because God has qualified us to share in this inheritance through Christ.

So what is this inheritance then? That back in verse 5 is called their hope stored in heaven that motivates us and the Colossians to keep having faith in Christ and loving one another.

[18 : 22] Well, it's actually Christ's inheritance that we share in as co-heirs with Christ. That's how Paul puts it on the next slide from Romans chapter 8 there.

Do you notice how he calls us co-heirs with Christ? And so amazingly, everything that Christ inherits, like his glory, we inherit too with him.

We are co-inheritors. Now, I realise it's hard to understand just how extraordinary this is. So let me put it in a different kind of way that you might understand and grasp the extraordinary nature of it.

Some years ago, I was still in Sydney and there was this article in the Sydney Morning Herald on the next slide. It says, And the story is about two brothers who were living in Budapest, flat broke in a cave, but their mother was from a very wealthy family in Germany.

And the parents had both since passed away. But the grandmother, the rich grandmother, died. And German law says the inheritance goes to the next of kin, which were these two brothers living in a cave in Budapest.

[19 : 40] Seven billion dollar inheritance. You can grasp how extraordinary that is, can't you? So much so that I bet you're all now wishing you had a long lost being only a grandmother, aren't you?

But here's the point. In Christ, our inheritance stored in heaven is actually worth much, much more. For in Christ, well, for starters, Christ inherits the universe.

And as co-inheritors, so do we. So with Christ, we'll share a perfect new creation and rule over it, just as God created Adam and Eve to do. There'll be no more accidents or disasters like the recent tsunami in Indonesia.

Instead, it will be paradise. And with Christ, we'll also have a new perfect body to enjoy every physical blessing. So no more disability or disease or death.

And like Christ, we will be perfect people in perfect relationships with each other and with God. So no more loneliness, no more fighting, no more relationship breakups and all the like.

[20 : 48] And no more for me having to tell the kids to clean their rooms. It will be bliss. You see, in other words, with Christ, we'll inherit the earth, as Jesus said, to live forever in perfect relationships, in perfect contentment with God himself.

And the world spends not billions, but trillions of dollars every year trying to get these very things. I mean, people spend loads of money buying health products, having medical procedures, or going to the doctors, getting gym memberships that they hardly ever use, or to be healthier, live longer. Or people spend time reading books on how to, and have the perfect relationship and the like. Or do courses, or whatever it is. And it's usually telling us to, it's about making the other person better, because it's never our fault.

Or taking out massive mortgages to get a little piece of the earth to rule over. Or buying the latest car, or phone, or holiday in search of contentment. You add all this up, it's trillions of dollars.

You see, the world spends all this money trying to get something like our inheritance, but God has bought it all for us. Stored it in heaven, ready and waiting for us who believe.

[22 : 08] And this is even more extraordinary when we realise where we were, and what it cost God to qualify us for this amazing inheritance. I mean, those brothers in Budapest, who inherited the seven billion, they lived in a dark cave, and had little hope in life.

In fact, one brother said on the next slide, he 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.

I guess you can understand why. They were in a dark place. But all they had to do to qualify for this billion dollar inheritance was find their mother's death certificate to prove that she was the daughter of this rich grandmother.

For when they did, this death certificate, this piece of paper, would rescue them from their dark place and give them hope. But here's the thing, we were actually in an even darker place.

For, verse 13, we lived in the dominion of darkness. That's where we were. And that means that we were ruled by sin.

[23 : 11] And we served, whether you realize it or not, we served Satan. And we were headed for hell. That's where we were. And can I say, if you're here tonight and you are not a Christian, the Bible says that's where you still are.

And to qualify for this inheritance, we couldn't do anything. We were stuck there. But the great news is God did everything for us. And it was much more than finding a piece of paper, a certificate of death.

It involved giving up his son and watching him be put to death. His only son, verse 13, who he loves. So that, verse 14, we might be redeemed from darkness and our sins forgiven.

And if we realize how extraordinary all this is, then it ought to drive us to do three things. At first, to keep trusting in Christ.

Knowing whatever we suffer in this life for him will be more than made up for in the next life. I like those Christians being persecuted in India. Second, it ought to drive us to keep loving one another.

[24 : 22] Whether it's by serving here on Sundays or doing ministry during the week, which I know many of you do, or by praying for one another, or even giving money for the sake of others so that they can hear the gospel too.

We can keep loving others, knowing that whatever time or money we spend will more than get back with our inheritance, which lasts for eternity. I mean, any time we spend in ministry, we're going to get it back, isn't it?

Because eternity, how long does that go for? Well, eternal. Yeah, a long time, isn't it? We're going to get it back. And thirdly, if we realize how extraordinary our rescue and inheritance are, then we'll keep giving thanks to the Father joyfully.

Even when life is hard, even when we don't have all 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 said thanks for something. Now, there are lots of things in life we can give thanks for, like food or more food, or a baby brother. But when life is hard and we are reminded of what we don't have, then we're to go back to Jesus and remember what we do have in him.

[25 : 36] That's what Paul did. I mean, did you realize as Paul writes this, he's actually in prison. All you have to do is see the last verse of the letter to see him say, Remember my chains.

And yet he can still write, Give joyful thanks. Why? Because he remembers what he does have in Christ. Faith, love, rescue, inheritance, all through Christ.

So remember the immense worth of what we do have, so that with Paul we might always and joyfully give thanks to our Father. Let's pray.

Our gracious and loving Father, we do humbly and joyfully thank you for your grace towards us in the Lord Jesus. I thank you that through him you have brought us to faith, you've enabled us by your spirit to love others more than ourselves, you've given us a hope or inheritance stored in heaven, all through the gospel of your Son.

Father, help us to remember all you've done for us in Christ, not to take it for granted, but to always and joyfully give thanks. We ask it in Jesus' name.

[26 : 48] Amen. Amen.