

Whatever you do ...

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Date: 15 October 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning, as you know, is our Thanksgiving Sunday, and so the Bible talk will be a bit more topical, and all the verses will be on the screen. For those who are visiting, we normally just work our way through passages so we can see the context in which they were given.

But as I mentioned, today is a little bit different. Let me begin with a question. I wonder how you would finish this sentence, whatever you do, dot, dot, dot.

How would you finish that sentence? Whatever you do, dot, dot, dot. Would it be, whatever you do, be happy? That's Julia Delitz's book and solution.

Or would it be, whatever you do in life, don't give up your own dreams from that wise sage, Nicole Kidman. What if your dream is to have a body that never ages?

Do we need a new dream then? I don't know how that works. Or would it be like Derek Chen who says, whatever you do, eat dumplings. And then he's really enjoying them right there.

[1 : 07] How would you finish that sentence? We've already heard this morning how God finishes it in our second reading, and it included giving thanks. But before we get to that, I want us to realise that the fundamental reason for thanksgiving is that it's part of worshipping God in life.

So point one in your outlines. You see, worship is more than just singing. It's living for God in all of life, which includes thanksgiving.

And so in Revelation chapter four, for example, when the living creatures worship God, they give God glory, honour, and thanks to him who sits on the throne.

Even the angels, as they fall down and worship God, they praise glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and so on. Thanksgiving is part of worshipping God.

And so as we heard in our first reading from the 100th Psalm, as Estelle said, the psalmist encouraged Israel to go to the temple, to enter the temple gates of God with thanksgiving, his temple courts with praise, to give thanks to him and to praise his name.

[2 : 23] Do you notice giving thanks goes hand in hand with praising God, doesn't it? It's part of worshipping God. Why? Well, because it rightly acknowledges God as the source of all goodness, the source of every good thing we enjoy.

And so in verse five, the psalmist gives the reason for giving thanks. He says for or because God is good. And he shows that goodness in that his love endures forever or his faithfulness goes throughout every generation.

But he also shows that goodness in terms of giving us every good gift, like James chapter one, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father.

When you thank people for giving you something nice, you're not just showing your gratitude, you're also acknowledging that they are the ones who gave it, aren't you?

Or so too with God. Giving God thanks rightly acknowledges that he is good. He is the good God who created every good thing we enjoy in this world.

[3 : 36] And so as one Christian writer put it, when giving thanks, God the creator is acknowledged to be the source of all goodness. Which is why if we don't give thanks, we are actually denying that truth.

We're denying that God is good and the source of all goodness, which is pretty shameful, really. I mean, even non-Christians understand that being ungrateful is shameful.

I don't know if you heard the story of a Melbourne couple this past week who won a house worth \$4 million, \$4.2 million, I think it was. The house was one of those ones that they did on that TV series, The Block, I think it was last season.

But they won this \$4 million house, but as they walked through it, they complained that the paintwork wasn't perfect. And some of the items, like the wine fridge, I think, was taken out of it.

And there was this huge backlash on the media. And so here's a headline from one newspaper, Backlash erupts after a strain, couples ungrateful reaction to winning \$4 million house.

[4 : 52] Even non-Christians know being ungrateful for such good gifts is shameful. Or how much more so when it comes to God, who gave us every good thing we enjoy in this world, from family to friends to food to fun, to even a nice cup of tea or coffee, or even the variety of food we enjoy in this world.

Can you imagine if all we had to eat for breakfast was porridge? I mean, I know porridge is pretty good, you know, but we've got such variety to choose from, don't we?

That's God's generosity towards us. In fact, being ungrateful is not just shameful, it's actually sinful. And so in 2 Timothy, Paul describes people who are sinful, and notice he lists being ungrateful right next to unholy. Because it denies that truth, that God is the source of every good thing we enjoy. And so not to give him thanks, to be ungrateful towards him, is not just shameful, it's sinful. And like all sin, in the end, it's not good for us to be ungrateful.

[6 : 14] I mean, being ungrateful, it just makes us grumpy, doesn't it? Our problem is, we often focus on what God has not given us, and so often forget what he has given us, don't we?

Or is that just me? The point is, thanksgiving is part of worshipping God rightly in life, for it acknowledges he is the source of every good thing we enjoy in this world.

And since thanksgiving is part of worshipping God in life, then it ought to be part of our church life. Point two. Now this brings us to our second reading, verses 15 to 16, where the focus seems to be of the church gathering.

So you've got the idea of one body in verse 15, you've also got the idea of teaching and singing to one another in verse 16. And so what seems to be on view in these two verses in particular, is a church meeting.

And as we gather for church, verse 15 says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace, and be thankful.

[7 : 27] Now before we get to the be thankful part, given the need for peace at the moment in our world, let's spend a moment thinking about this idea at the first part of verse 15.

Now the peace of Christ here is the peace that Christ has given us, both with God and with one another. So as you know, our sin alienated us from God.

The Bible actually says it made us enemies with God. But Christ took the punishment for our sin in our place, peace in terms of peace.

So that we who believe in Jesus are not just forgiven, but also given peace with God. Peace in terms of relationship.

Not just a stopping of war, but a giving of loving relationship. Plus Christ brought us together as members of his body, as God's family, and in so doing gave us peace with one another, relationship with one another.

[8 : 37] A few verses earlier, in verse 11 of the same chapter of Colossians, Paul says, In Christ there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all.

He's the primary identity, and he's in all. In other words, being brought together in Christ means our old identities that divided us are now superseded by a new identity that unites us, Christ.

He is the one identity that rules them all, to misquote Lord of the Rings. Christ is all and in all, which brings us peace.

Before you see, we were divided by our different cultures, our different interests, even the different football teams we barracked for, our different jobs, even our different genders, and so we may never have spoken to each other, or cared for one another, or worked with each other, but by bringing us together in Christ, he's created peace, relationship with one another.

So now we do talk to each other. We talk to each other, right? We do. We care for one another. We work together for God's glory now. We have peace. We have peace with one another, you see.

[10 : 06] This is why more than anything, right now, Palestine and Israel need Jesus. I will pray for them later on in the service, but he alone brings true peace, not just in terms of stopping the war, but more bringing together in right relationship, loving relationship.

Can you imagine a Hamas and Israeli soldier, not just putting down their guns, but then sitting down together to enjoy a meal, talk and laugh?

It's almost impossible to imagine right at the moment, isn't it? But the peace of Christ can do that. It has already done that before.

This is the peace of Christ. This is what we need to pray for in Israel and Palestine and other parts of our world.

And it's this peace that we're to let rule in our hearts, says verse 15. We're to let the peace direct our hearts so that we ourselves always seek to maintain it with one another.

[11 : 17] In fact, the word rule here has the idea of being an umpire or a referee. In a game, the umpire makes a call when there's a dispute, you know, whether it's a foul or not, or whether it's in or out.

Well, when there's a dispute in the church, we're to let the peace of Christ umpire our hearts with a call for peace so that we always seek it.

If someone sits in your seat, we're to let the peace of Christ umpire our hearts so that we seek peace by not telling them to move and just finding another seat.

Or more seriously, if someone says something hurtful, we're to let the peace of Christ umpire our hearts so that we'll seek peace, not by holding a grudge, but by forgiving and forbearing.

If someone voted differently to you yesterday, we're to let the peace of Christ umpire our hearts so that we seek peace by not being judgmental of them, but acknowledging on this issue we have freedom to choose how to vote.

[12 : 29] Of course, it's not peace at the expense of truth. We're to uphold the truth of God's word. But when there are disputes because of personality differences or conscience issues, or even because of our sinful natures, we're to let the peace of Christ rule or umpire our heart so that we seek peace by forbearing or forgiving.

For this is what Christ has already called us to, says the verse. He's already given us peace with one another. And so we're to let it govern how we relate to each other.

But then Paul adds, and be thankful. I'm thankful for all things, I take it. But in this context, I wonder especially this thing called peace, which Christ has given us.

I mean, how good is peace compared to war? How good are loving relationships compared to hatred? Have not the images from Israel and Gaza reminded us of this this week?

We often forget how good peace is until we see how bad war is, don't we? And so we're to be thankful for it, along with everything else God gives us.

[13 : 50] This idea of thankfulness, again, is seen in verse 16. This time, where we're not just to let the peace of Christ rule our hearts, but we're to let the word of Christ dwell richly amongst us.

How? Well, it says, as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. But notice, it's through singing hymns, or psalms, hymns, and songs from the spirit, or spiritual songs.

This is how the word of Christ dwells richly amongst us, as we sing his word through hymns.

Because we're actually not just singing to God, we're singing in earshot of each other, aren't we?

And so we're not just praising God, we're letting the word of Christ dwell amongst us, and teaching one another as we sing his word.

Which is why Paul lists the types of songs that have his word, like psalms, hymns, and songs from the spirit, or spiritual songs.

[15 : 00] Because there are lots of songs in the world that are not really from the spirit, that are not spiritual, are there? There's loads of songs out there in the world. One of my kids' songs that they've ingrained in my head, because they sang it so often when it was quite popular, was Taylor Swift's, Shake It Off, Shake It Off.

Have you heard that one? No. Anyway, it's a modern one. It's pretty catchy. It's stuck in there now. But it's not spiritual, is it? It doesn't have the word of Christ in it. And in fact, sadly, there's even some church songs that don't really have Christ's word in it.

are like the song Champion from Bethel Music. It says, When I open up my mouth, miracles start breaking out. I have the authority Jesus has given me.

That's not quite right, is it? But verse 16, songs that are full of Christ's word, like psalms, hymns, and songs from the spirit, is one way we let the word dwell richly amongst us and teach and admonish one another.

So, thank you to those who choose our hymns and those who help us sing them. It's great. But notice how we're to sing, right at the end of the verse.

[16:16] Notice, it does not say we're to sing well, which is a great relief for me, but it does say we're to sing with gratitude, with thankful hearts.

As we sing, for example, before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea, a great high priest, whose name is love, and who ever lives and pleads for me.

How can you not sing that with a sense of gratitude in our hearts, that Jesus continues to live, plead, and pray for you and me?

Isn't that terrific? Isn't that worth giving thanks for? I saw this website this week. It said, 24 signs of church health, and then after the 24th sign, it even gave a bonus sign of a super healthy church, which they said was honest self-assessment.

I don't know what you think about that. In the 24th, 24, it did include letting the word of Christ dwell richly among us, not in those particular words. It also included letting the peace of Christ rule our hearts, but again, not in those exact words.

[17:34] But out of the whole 25, not one of them mentioned being thankful. And yet, it's pretty high on God's agenda here, isn't it?

According to God, it is a sign of a healthy church, because Thanksgiving is part of worship. God in life. And so it ought to be part of our church life, oughtn't it?

And part of our own life, point three, verse 17. Here's where God finishes that sentence I started with. Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Whatever you do, whether word or deed, deed, which means everything, doesn't it? Word or deed, everything you do, we had to do it firstly in the name of the Lord Jesus.

What does that mean, doing it in the name of the Lord Jesus? Well, our name represents us, doesn't it? Who we are, our character. And so you've heard that expression, to drag someone's name through the mud means to drag their character through the mud.

[18:48] On the flip side, to praise someone's name is to praise their character. You know, we can say, Ricky rocks. I mean, that's, you know, that's a bit of a modern one.

But, you know, that's to praise his name, is to praise his character. I use that example because last Sunday at 10.30 he was actually playing the electric guitar. So he was rocking very appropriately. So doing everything in the name of Jesus means doing everything in his character, his likeness. That's what it's talking about. In other words, the verse is saying, whatever you do in everything, be like Christ.

After all, if we are all part of Christ's body, then should we not all reflect Christ's character? But notice again, Paul adds at the end, giving thanks to God, the Father.

Out of all the things that Paul could have added that we should do in all of life, he adds giving thanks. That's how important it is.

[19:56] In fact, in these three verses, it's mentioned three times, isn't it? That's how important it is. It's on the same level as doing everything like Christ.

That's how important thanksgiving is. And so, we are to give thanks in whatever we do in life, not just in the good times when we enjoy good gifts from God, but also in the bad times when we struggle to trust God.

because even then we have reason to thank God. So, for example, in Colossians chapter 1, we are to give thanks to the Father because he has qualified us through Christ's death, which brought us forgiveness.

We are now qualified to share in the inheritance of the world to come. He's made that possible for us and that's worth giving thanks for. Or just before our passage in Colossians 3 verse 12, notice how we are described as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

That's worth giving thanks for. And so, verse 17, whatever you do, whether word or deed, when good times or bad times, we're to do it.

[21:14] We're to be like Christ with thankfulness because we still have reason to give thanks. Now, this past week, I must admit, I've found it hard to feel thankful given what's happened in our world, particularly in Israel and Gaza with the response.

And especially as we hear the horror stories of what Hamas did to women and children and even babies. I mean, that's not how you try and reclaim land, is it?

Regardless of who's right. You don't do that. And yet, as my anger rose at this evil, I became even more thankful that God will one day hold them all accountable.

And that one day, there will be justice and a world with no more evil. How good will that be? And so, even as we're angered and lament and grieve and pray for peace, we still have reason to give thanks.

Or take a lady I was visiting in hospital a couple of weeks ago. She was told that she didn't have long to live. She wanted to live. Her daughters wanted her to live.

[22 : 35] And so, we prayed that God would enable her to live. But after we prayed a prayer and not knowing what would happen, she said, thanks be to God because he will either heal me or take me home is what she meant.

I think I might have mentioned her name a couple of weeks ago. And then she added, the Lord's will be done. Here is someone who in whatever she did, she did like Christ who said, not my will but yours be done and giving thanks to God the Father even despite this awful situation.

Or take another church member and she had \$20,000 stolen from her through a banking scam. The bank claimed it was not their fault of course and yet despite not being rich herself, do you know what she said?

She said to me, Andrew, I'm still thankful because it has really taught me it's all God's money. And so I'm not worried.

Nonetheless, we were praying about it and with the persistent help of another church member, several months later the bank amazingly reimbursed her. But then she said, I'm so thankful for the good lesson God taught me, I want to give it all to God's work and she gave all \$20,000 away.

[24 : 05] The point is, here are people who not only acted like Christ but were still thankful even despite awful situations.

Derek Chen may say, whatever you do, eat dumplings. Dumplings are nice, aren't they? But for us Christians, God says, whatever you do, be like Christ with thanksgiving.

So let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this reminder this morning that whatever we do, we are to be like Christ with thanksgiving.

Help us to do this, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.