

Giving thanks always

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[0 : 00] The assembly of no men I hate, to sit with such I shun. And so on to the end of verse 8, Judge me, O Lord.

Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity.
I trust that also in the Lord's life, the portion of the night.
Examine me and do me proof, dry heart and brains, O God.
For thy love is before my eyes, thy truth of sight of truth.

[1 : 23] With persons made I have not sat, nor with disciples gone.

The assembly of no men I hate, to sit with such I shun.
Mine hands in innocence, O Lord, thy woe shall purify.
So to thy glory altar go, and on the set will die.
But I, with voice of thanksgiving, may publish and declare.

[2 : 47] And tell of all thy mighty words, the great and wondrous hour.

The habitation of thy house, Lord, I have loved it well.
In that place I do delight, where God thine honor dwell.
For a minute or two, I would like us to consider words we read there in our second reading.
Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Reading at verse 15. Say then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

[4 : 10] Reading in the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as the Lord would enable us, I'd like us to think of these words. Particularly of verse 20.

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Coming to the end of a communion season will have two effects upon us.

A lot will of course depend on how we have viewed the whole communion season. What was our own preparation for that communion season? What did we benefit from as a result of being throughout the whole of the communion season?

[5 : 26] Under the word and under the testimony of that word and the sacrament itself. And of course too in that, there is this one aspect which is terribly important.

Because a lot will depend on where we were at there at the communion season. And what benefits we had as to whether or not we are going to find ourselves giving thanks to God.

And of course that's the kind of people we are. We tend to depend more on situational experience. Rather than the reality of what God is saying in his word.

For the Apostle Paul, life was for him. An experience in which he felt it was necessary to give thanks to God. Not just for the momentary things.

Not even just for the blessings of a communion season. But for everything of every day. Whatever that might be. Whether it might be even good.

[6 : 27] Or difficult or hard or problematic. It is as the Apostle himself experienced. That it doesn't matter in whatever state he was to be found. He was content.

And what was that contentment? The contentment was based upon not how necessarily he was feeling. At any one given time. But more especially on what the word of promise had given to him.

And the assurance of the word of Christ. For Christ has said to all of us, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. So that whatever we go through in life's journey.

Even in that experience that the psalmist speaks of in Psalm 23. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. For thou art with me.

Thy rod and thy staff. They comfort me. And the whole principle of giving thanks to God, as I said. It's not a thankfulness to God just for a moment's event in our life.

[7 : 28] It is the whole of our life. Even long before we ever came to faith in Christ. Is it not something to be thankful for?

That God looked upon us away back in those days. Even as the psalmist would say, Behold, I iniquity was formed the womb within.

My mother also me conceived in guiltiness and sin. Away back there. God said to Israel, Look down the valley from whence you have come.

And no matter what we can see in that valley, we might want to shut out some things in that valley, in that experience. But remember, as the apostle would say elsewhere, everything is working together for our good.

It may not be in our appreciation of it that we'll all depend on what we see of God's hand in providence. But one thing is sure, from God's perspective, everything that happens to us through his providential deeds with us is for our good.

[8 : 36] So, when we come to this theme, and I just want to look at some of the things that the apostle draws our attention to with regard to this whole spirit of thankfulness. It's not just a one-off event.

It's just not only occasions. We can go out for church every Sabbath morning or night and be thankful that we were here. But when we get up on a Monday morning, how do we feel? Do we still feel thankful? Or when trouble arises? For the apostle Paul, I want to go back to Romans chapter 7 for a moment or two.

And that passage which I had mentioned over the evening. And that is, when he talks there about his own particular situation, he said, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

And then he said, I thank God through Jesus Christ. It's that victorious shout that was not just a momentary thing that happened to him.

[9 : 37] It was something that I'm sure was in his breath every single day. He was always reiterating that. I don't necessarily mean vociferously, but certainly it was in his mind, it was in his heart.

He was thankful to God for that day that he met him at the road to Damascus. That day in which he delivered him, not only from the activities about which he was about, the activities of trying to destroy the church of Christ, but the deliverance that he had experienced in his own heart and soul. No longer was he one given over to the kind of reprobate mind, but here he was, a man upon whom a great change had taken place.

That's why he comes out with this great victorious shout. When did you, even in your own heart, find yourself bursting with excitement, with enthusiasm?

Let me go for a moment or two through the road to Emmaus. That very familiar story. A story again in which we can all find ourselves walking. We have all been in that kind of road of unbelief as a believer.

[10 : 52] It seems a contradiction, but it's not. Often this life that we have lived has been times when we have shown unbelief. And these two men on that road to Emmaus found themselves troubled in the heart.

Jesus said that to them. Why? Why are you troubled? Why do thoughts, negative thoughts, arise in your heart? There should be nothing of negativity in the heart and the soul of the believer.

Not at all, because after all, we do believe that Christ has done everything for us. And as he spoke to them, it was very interesting that how things developed in their own heart, they didn't recognize, of course, to begin with, that this was the Lord Jesus that was speaking to them.

But eventually, they realized. And the conclusion of it all was, did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way and while he opened us to us the scriptures?

That's the important part. You and I can live in dependence, maybe, of preachers of the gospel to satisfy and satiate our souls.

[12 : 12] But that ought not to be the case. The word of life should always be, to us, something that we just long for. We hunger and thirst, says Jesus, concerning the blessed believer.

The blessed believer is the one who hungers and thirsts after truth and after righteousness. Is that not true? For these two disciples, they were full of it.

Their whole hearts were on fire because Christ came into their position, the risen Christ. There were two souls desperately in need of help and I'm sure some of us have been there before when we have needed that the Lord would come aside with us and help us through a difficult time.

That is true. For the apostle Paul, there was the triumph in his voice. For these men, the triumph was in their voice as well because Christ came and he spoke to them.

I'm saying, don't depend only on the preacher of the gospel to come and bring you a crumb from the master's table. don't depend on him to satisfy your soul when your soul is feeling sort of dry and arid.

[13 : 30] But seek the Lord all the time. Let the word of God dwell in you richly. Let it dwell to that extent that you find your soul burning because Christ is speaking to me.

And after all, as these two soldiers that we mentioned yesterday morning said, no man has ever spoken like this man. But it's not just the fact that the apostle Paul had for himself this great victorious shout of what Christ had done for him.

Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? No mere man could change this life of mine. That's what Paul was saying.

It's because of that that then he was able to go forward and to speak and to encourage and to present to people of all different types of classes and creeds and he could proclaim without any equivocation the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He wasn't afraid of it. And that's what he wanted to do and that's what he wanted to get over to the various churches to whom he was writing. Let me take this for a moment or two again in Romans in chapter 1 and verse 8 because what the apostle says there with regard to the Christians at Rome was this.

[14 : 52] He said, I thank God, he says, that your faith is proclaimed. We don't go around, we're not called upon to go around in a secret service type of thing.

There might be situations in the Christian church where because of the enemy of our souls many have to as it were worship in private and secret.

But what the Lord wants us to do is not to hide that light under a bushel but to proclaim the word of Christ to the world around us.

And it was the case for the church at Rome. Whatever problems the church at Rome had, and there were many, one thing Paul knew was that this church was a church that was proclaiming its faith.

It wasn't afraid to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, how is the gospel going to be presented? How is it going to get to a world that is living in darkness?

[15 : 58] Faith in God proclaims itself. And you as believers, having sat at the Lord's table, will find yourselves what you could be, as we mentioned on Friday evening, Friday afternoon, sorry, I'm getting the days wrong, Saturday, what you could be.

We all admit, I'm sure, that we are not what we could be. That we don't do what Christ wants us to do, at least not maybe in the way that he wants us to do or with the zeal that he would want us to do.

Yet, our faith is something that shows itself. I was relating a story yesterday, the man who was in the congregation I was in.

Prior to that, of course, he wasn't going to church, not at all. He'd been brought up in the free church, but his life went into a deep dive, and his life was really rough, even by the local community of farmers, of which he was one of them.

he found the farmers used to, who were themselves maybe a bit rough, they found his roughness was more than they could bear. But one day, he was sitting in his armchair at home.

[17 : 14] I'm not going to be able to tell you the whole story, it took up too much time. But he was sitting there, never reading the word of God, never intending to have anything to do with it, and all of a sudden, the spirit of God came upon him.

his heart was changed. The thing was, he didn't want to necessarily, because of that, go out and be a preacher of the gospel.

But his whole life in the community, amongst those with whom he had all his dealings with as a farmer, it changed. His life was a testimony to the grace of God, and what a testimony it was. Is it the case that your life and mine is seen as those who have been with Jesus? Does the world see that we have been with Jesus?

Or does all the world have as far as an opinion is concerned? And I know that sometimes this can be taken the wrong way, but is it all that the world sees of us, that we live in our holy hadils, and nothing more than that?

[18 : 20] Well, if you want to make your thankfulness to God a real expression, then do what the church at Rome did. As Paul says there, I thank God, I thank God that your faith is proclaimed.

It's not hidden, it's expressed, it is shown. And the other thing, and I want to turn to 1 Corinthians for this, 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 4, that here the apostle Paul is drawing attention to obviously what is happening to these people at the Corinth.

Now again, we can talk about or we can talk negatively about the problems that were involved in the church at Corinth, but that's not my intent at this moment in time, because what Paul says there, I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.

Only the grace of God could have done what was experienced by these people. They were everything but saintly beforehand. That's something that's always a reminder to us all.

But God thanked, Paul thanked God for the grace that was given to them. We'll come back to it in a moment or two, but that's something that any pastor of any congregation loves to see, and that is the grace of God working in any heart and any soul.

[19 : 50] It is one of the great evidences of a soul showing that they are new creatures in Christ Jesus. Paul thanked God for that grace that was shown by these people.

And even if I want to take that a little bit further, you know when Paul was writing to the church at Philippi, he says this with them, he says, I thank God for your fellowship in the gospel.

I want to say something here because as a denomination, I'm sure, as individual congregations, when we think of evangelism, we tend to think first and foremost as that activity in which we're reaching out to those people that are uncharged.

That is a big aspect of it, don't get me wrong, I don't want anyone to go away with some kind of idea that I don't believe in evangelising the unchurched and the unbelieving, far from it. But it starts here. That's where it starts. For me, it seems, and it seems for the Apostle Paul, the evangelistic church is the church that is always looking after itself.

[21 : 03] We labour a labour of love one to the other. The saints at Philippi knew the concern of heaven for men of earth, and so as men of heaven.

On earth they worked in God's working to save men from hell. The important thing was that they were together, their evangelism was, as it were, towards themselves, reaching out to one another with that same gospel.

When you go to the epistle to Philemon, the Apostle stays there and draws attention to the fact that he is making mention of them in his prayers.

Why was that? Well, I said a moment or two ago that there is nothing that pleases a pastor more than to see the grace of God working in the hearts of those who are in his congregation.

He has been set to be a leader of a congregation, spiritual leader, and there is nothing that will rejoice his heart more than to see the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ being used.

[22 : 10] I thank my God always, making mention of thee in my prayers, hearing of thy love and of thy faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus Christ and toward all saints.

It's twofold, it has to be. No point in me saying, in all my expressions of appreciation of Christ in my life, if that is not towards Christ and towards his church, Jesus said, if you love me, he says, keep my commandments.

And so we have it in John. This is not the case too. Those who love God will love the brethren. If we do not have love one for the other, then we are in a bad state.

We will never be evangelists if we are not evangelists within the church that we are part of. When Paul was put into the ministry, I think he sort of felt to himself like what many people do when they are in the church of Christ, that, well, I don't mind demonstrating my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by becoming a member.

But I don't want to be too much part of any activity or get too involved. For the apostle Paul, he was thankful to God as he says to Timothy, and here he is telling Timothy a tremendous thing when you

think about it, this old man of faith, giving instruction to a younger man in the faith.

[23 : 55] And he speaks there of how God has put him into the ministry and how thankful he was for it. That was not because of any pride within himself. In fact, it would be the case, as you look upon the apostle Paul, that you would see that he thought himself and he believed himself to be the greatest of all sinners, that he was so unworthy.

And again, that was not a phraseology that he would use in some kind of glib way. He knew that he was unworthy, but he thanked God for putting him into the ministry.

For what purpose? For what purpose has God called you out of darkness into his light, his marvellous light? For what purpose? To be witnesses and to testify.

And if you want to show your thankfulness to God, not just for a communion season, but your thankfulness to God for him being to you everything that you are, knowing that without him you have nothing.

If you want to demonstrate your thankfulness to God, then be a faithful witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what you're called upon to do, to be a servant.

[25 : 13] And be thankful to God that not only has he given you faith to believe in the blood of the Lamb, but that he has given you a faith by which you can go forward and tell this world that there is a saviour, there is a redeemer, for whom you and I ought to be so thankful.

When Paul was writing to the church at Philippi, and with this I want to conclude, you know how that when he was at Philippi, when he was writing to Philippians, he was in prison.

And do you remember on that occasion when he was in prison? He received a gift from the church at Philippi. And that gift came to him, and he appreciated it very much, and I'm sure he did.

Maybe some people might have thought he was a bit offhand with the statement that he made, but this is what he says. He said, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at the last your care of me have fludded again, within you were all so careful, but you lacked opportunity.

Not that I speak in respect of want, but I learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound.

[26 : 35] Everywhere and in all things I'm instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Notwithstanding, you have well done that you did communicate with my affliction. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but you only.

And in that the apostle Paul was so thankful that their outward demonstration of their love for a fellow believer in the Lord Jesus was so that while he was in prison, that gift came to him.

But what really is the beautiful thing that Paul addresses here, this is what he says, not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

The apostle Paul was so thankful that the Philippian church responded in this way, not to, as it were, furnish him with a beautiful fragrance.

[27 : 48] that itself, and the act was a beautiful thing as well as the thing itself. But it was what was effected upon that church itself towards God.

How God was going to view that church, that people, in what they had done. In other words, what I'm trying to say is, Jesus would say, you know, not to let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.

What you do, you do for the Lord's people, for the Lord's cause. You do it not for self-glory, not for the praise of men, but in order that through you God might be glorified.

We are so inclined, are we not, that when we do something, we want to have some kind of reward. I'm not saying a gift in return, but we are rather like the praise of men if we do something.

I wonder, can we be like the Apostle Paul, having received as he did here, appreciate not just the gift itself, but the givers, in order that God might be glorified.

[29 : 04] Paul is a tremendous example to us surely, of an appreciative people, appreciative of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. And if through the whole of this communion season, from the start, on Thursday, and even before us, and all the preparation for it, and all that you have been blessed with throughout this communion, if it causes you to say to yourself, I thank God for everything, not just for some things, but for everything.

And when you go out of here, back into the everyday duties, however much they may be, and the first difficulty you face, ask yourself, can you thank God for it?

Can you? We have lots to give thanks for, even the good things, the easy things, but like the Apostle Paul, it is good that even when we are in prison, so to speak, we can find ourselves saying, it was good for me, that I've been afflicted, I've been tried, and I've been tested.

That's what Peter says, does he not? That great epistle, that man, that follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who loved the Saviour, and yet had great problems and difficulties of exercising his own faith as he should have done, but then when he comes to write his epistle, having learnt at the feet of Jesus, as we all must learn, he comes to this conclusion, does he not?

what? He says, in that great epistle, with regard to his sure hope, let me read these words, and I'll return to it in case I quote them wrongly, but he talks about the trial of our faith will be tried with fire, may be found, and to praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 25] So let us from this communion go forward, yes, as he would say, with lively stones, built up a spiritual house, and I hope from communion season, from Sabbath to Sabbath, weekday to weekday, every day of our lives, we can say, I thank my God.

Shall we pray? O Lord, our gracious God, it is good for us to know that we have that appreciation of the hand of God upon our lives, and whatever our experiences are, it is good for us to be able to say, who is a God like unto thee, who passes by the transgression of the remnant of thine heritage. O Lord, we pray thy blessing upon thy people here. We pray that they might be an enriched people. We pray, O Lord, that they would know that underneath are the everlasting arms of Christ. We pray, O Lord, that thou would show to them continually the way, the truth, and the life. We pray for any, O Lord, who were maybe not able to be with us over this weekend.

Maybe some because of old age and sickness. But Lord, we do thank thee for each one of thy saints in Christ Jesus. And we pray that we would never lose sight of that one thing, that Jesus came, he suffered, he died in a room instead, and he rose victorious over the grave.

[33 : 06] O Lord, what we did yesterday was a reminder to us that he is coming again. And Lord, we pray that thou wouldst give us a spirit of thanksgiving until he comes.

Take away all offence, lovingness in him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen.