

ThanksGiving Service

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Well, friends, as I mentioned earlier, today's a little bit of a different day, and we're going to have some time of sharing testimonies.

You know, testimony is something that the Christian church throughout the ages has done, going all the way back to as Jesus ascended into heaven at the beginning of the book of Acts. He told His disciples that they would be witnesses, that they would bear witness to Him and to His work in the world and in their lives. And this is what the Christian church has done throughout the ages, is to bear witness to what God has done in our lives in various ways. And so, this morning, the elders have asked a handful of congregants to come and share, share their testimonies of thanksgiving. Thanks for what God has done in their lives. Thanks for how they have seen God at work in their lives. And our prayer and hope is that it will be an encouragement.

For those of you who came in late with children, we will dismiss the children after the first two testimonies. But the first two are John and Slavik are going to share. So, John, Katie's going to give you a microphone. And why don't we go ahead and...

Well, good morning, Trinity. What a joy it is to come and celebrate the Lord Jesus with all of you. One of the... It is the high point, I think, of our week. And thank you for allowing me to share.

Over the past years, I have learned a lot from God, particularly as he led me through some challenging losses. These were caused by what has been diagnosed as a progressive neurologic condition.

[2 : 02] It started six or seven years ago with difficulty placing my feet and has slowly progressed to where I had a series of falls. Now, in the past year, I had to stop driving, get around mostly by wheelchair or walker.

And... Excuse me. One of the really difficult losses was...

Not being able to pick up those two little guys who were...

Thanks, Mel. Those two little guys who were trying to greet me. Here. These have all been difficult adjustments, but God has proven faithful. He has been molding my character and teaching me long overdue lessons in humility. He has allowed me to appreciate Dorothy's loving care more than ever before. But most of all, God has taught me more about himself.

Two passages I would like to share. First, from Habakkuk 3, 17 to 18. Should be familiar with all who have been with us at Trinity over the fall. But here, the prophet writes, Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit beyond the vines. The produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food. The flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls.

[4 : 09] Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. My joy and satisfaction do not depend on my abilities to accomplish things.

I do not need to lead seminars, write books, or practice medicine. But I, like Habakkuk, can rejoice in the Lord. The next passage is Psalm 73, 25 to 26.

God speaks to the questioning Esau, who looks at his life and asks, Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire beside you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Therefore, my thanksgiving testimony is simply that God is enough. I don't need anything else.

[5 : 25] No matter what challenges or losses I or you are facing, I trust you will find true joy and fulfillment in Him. He is truly enough and all you need.

applause applause applause applause Good morning, everyone.

My name is Slavik Litvinenko, and I'm here with my wife, Oksana. We came to New Haven last March, and I work here as a visiting scholar at Yale University.

For the last 12 years, our home has been in Prague, Czech Republic, but we are Ukrainians by nationality, and so during the last two years, almost two years, we have experienced both difficult times and the times of thanks and appreciation.

Of course, the war in Ukraine has been a real tragedy for us. We lost several of our family members.

[7 : 01] A lot of us are scattered in different countries today. Our home church back in Ukraine is half ruined. So is the school where I studied, and the university where I used to teach in East Ukraine is turned into a military base.

So as the war goes on, we constantly hear all kinds of appalling statistics. Here are the figures that I found.

More than 8,000 people have been killed. Over 5. million Ukrainians are internally displaced. Missile strikes damaged about 50% of Ukrainian power grid, and 16 million people are without access to clean water.

But what am I thankful for in the midst of all that trouble? Well, a couple of things. First, I'm thankful for the major thing that I've learned, and that is that despite all the trouble, God is in control even when it seems like he isn't.

He helped us when we were evacuating family and friends, and he took care of things that are just too numerous to count.

[8 : 38] The scripture verse that has really helped me this year is Psalm 46.1. God is a refuge in strength.

He is a very present help in trouble. I like the way it sounds in English. Another thing I'm thankful for is that despite all the devastating trouble, the churches in Ukraine are booming.

In fact, we have never seen a bigger thirst for God than right now. Nor have we seen churches being as full as they are today.

A friend of mine who is a dean of a seminary in Lviv, western Ukraine, told me that they had 300 students in 2021, just before the war began in Ukraine.

And right now they have 1,200 students. So we're thankful. And one last thing I'm thankful for is actually you are our new family church, and I should hurry and add that we didn't spend much time finding this church because we happened to meet this man, John Hinkson, who I figured everyone knows here.

[10 : 16] And we met him at the gym and sauna. But that's a separate story for which I'm thankful for.

And if you want to know about it, ask me or my wife and we'll tell you. Thank you. Yet another fruit of the John Hinkson sauna ministry.

I started recycling with another man last fall who was similarly touched by John. So I just want to pray for a minute in response.

Will you pray with me? Lord Jesus, we come and we thank you for these men. Lord, we thank you that in the midst of the trials that they have faced, the difficulties and the hardships that they not only have faced but are walking in even now.

Lord, thank you. Thank you for the ways that you have enabled them to say thanks. Where they have seen your faithfulness. Where they have seen your character at work.

[11 : 29] Lord, where they have seen you doing things that are beyond what might be imaginable.

Lord, in the midst of hardship, you often show the power and glory of your work even more brightly. Lord, we do also want to pray particularly for Ukraine this morning.

Lord, we pray for the end of the war for a restoration of justice and peace. We pray for the church in Ukraine and in Russia.

That the church would glorify Jesus Christ. And that through the church you would bring renewal and draw many to yourself through Jesus.

Lord, have mercy, we pray. And you would pray for the Lord. Lord, have mercy, we pray for the Lord. And that through the church, we pray for the Lord.

[12 : 25] As we've already seen, Thanksgiving is something that we're able to give in all circumstances. And in just a minute, I'm going to invite Bonnie to come up and share a little bit of her story.

And after her, Ruth and then Luke will come. But before I invite up Bonnie to share, she's going to share some about God's meeting her and Alex through her pregnancy.

And God's work in preserving and delivering Ruthie to them in a lovely way. And so we want to rejoice and give thanks. But we also want to acknowledge that we have another couple, sorry, in our midst who is right in the middle.

Landon and Kayla's baby Evangeline was born at the end of last week. And no, beginning of this week. Beginning of, it's been a long week.

And ended up having to have emergency heart surgery. And she is in critical condition still in the hospital. And so we had asked Bonnie to share weeks before.

[13:34] We knew this would be part of our church family life right now. And we still want to hear her story of God's goodness to them. But we want to acknowledge that God's goodness doesn't always look the same in every circumstance.

And so before we invite Bonnie up to share, I want to pray for the butler. So we pray with me. Lord, our hearts are heavy this morning for the trial that Landon and Kayla, Beth and Evie are going through.

Lord, we bring them to you this morning. Lord, we pray that you will heal Evie. Whether by medicine or by the work of your spirit, that you will strengthen her heart. Will you establish her bodily systems so that they become strong and self-sufficient.

Lord, we pray for the doctors and nurses who are caring for her. That you will give them wisdom and skill and insight as they treat and care for her. And for Landon and Kayla, Beth, oh Lord, may they know your presence and comfort to be with them.

Be for them a refuge and a strong tower. Help them to know that you are God who weeps with them in sorrow and comforts them in hope.

[14:45] A loving Heavenly Father who knows the pain of seeing even his very own son suffer and die. Lord, we pray this would not be the outcome for Evie. But Lord, may they know fellowship with you in the midst of this.

We lift them up to you in Jesus name. Amen. All right, Bonnie, come and share. Good morning, church.

A year ago on Thanksgiving, my husband Alex and I found out that we were expecting. It was our first child. We were very thrilled to be on this journey of parenthood.

And on March 1st, we had our anatomy scan, sort of the big ultrasound. We were excited mainly to find out if we were having a boy or a girl. And we didn't know what to expect, so the first half went well.

But then the doctor came in and told us that our daughter was severely anemic, which was restricting oxygen to her brain. And she had a severe case of what's called fetal high drops.

[15:52] So it's where fluid builds up in the abdomen and it's very, very serious. And so they sent us to the hospital immediately for more tests. And we were given the news that there would be no chance that our baby would survive.

That if by some miracle she were born alive, that it would be a very short and painful life. And so they recommended then that we terminate the pregnancy.

And as you can imagine, we were devastated. We decided to just continue and let nature take its course. So they scheduled us for two ultrasounds a week.

So just so we could get to see the baby more and monitor her heart as we just waited for it to stop beating so we could deliver. And those moments were really agonizing, just not knowing if she was okay, not knowing what we were going to learn at each ultrasound.

And that was definitely a season of mourning for us where it was very difficult to be comforted. But the one thing that brought both my husband and I a lot of comfort in this time was scripture.

[17:02] And one of the scriptures that comforted me was Psalm 23. It's a classic if you're familiar with it. Begins, the Lord is my shepherd and ends with, surely his goodness and love follows me all the days of my life.

And this has been a psalm that I've returned to over and over again throughout my 20s and now in my 30s. And in various seasons, I found it really difficult to believe that these words could be true for me in the moment.

And so I developed this practice of reading this psalm in past tense. So kind of imagining myself towards the end of my life, removed from whatever difficulty I'm struggling with at the moment, and recognizing, ah, yes, all of these words were true.

So let me read it really quick in past tense. This is a Bonnie paraphrase. But it says, The Lord has been my shepherd. I have never lacked anything.

He has made me lie down in green pastures. He has led me besides quiet waters. He's restored my soul. He's guided me along the right path. And even though I've walked through many darkest valleys, I had nothing to fear for he was always with me.

[18:20] His rod and his staff comforted me. He prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies. He anointed me, and my cup has always overflowed.

His goodness and love has surely followed me all the days of my life. And now I will dwell with him forever. So that line in verse 6, knowing that I would be able to say, even though I couldn't see it in the moment, that surely his goodness and love has followed me all the days of my life, really sustained me in those weeks that we were just waiting, waiting for her to pass.

And then three weeks later, we had our normally scheduled ultrasound, and the doctors were shocked to discover that the anemia and the high drops was completely gone.

They had no words for it in our medical records. It's listed as a spontaneous resolution of unknown origin. Which I was going to chuckle at.

Some of the doctors called it a miracle. And, you know, to be honest, neither my husband or I were quick to believe in the past that, like, oh, yes, Jesus can bring about healing.

[19:34] And that also wasn't what we were personally praying for. Honestly, we were praying that she would be able to pass before she felt any pain. But even before we knew that she was going to be better, we had decided to name her Ruth, after Ruth in Scripture, just a vulnerable girl for whom the Lord would provide a redeemer for.

And, like I said, we named her that before we knew how true that would be. And so I want to encourage us today, the Lord is steadfast.

I am not. So, to be honest, even though the Lord has done this amazing miracle in our life, I still have to really fight anxious thoughts that the other shoe is going to drop.

That maybe she's not perfectly healthy. Maybe something's going to happen. Maybe this is too good to be true. And so I have to return to this psalm regularly and believe its words are true all over again.

So I just want to encourage you, if you're here today, and you're not sure if you believe that these words are true, I get that, and I've been there. But I want to remind you that in every circumstance that you could face, the Lord's goodness and love follows you.

[20:51] When you're in your 20s and maybe you're single and lonely, the Lord's goodness and love follows you. When you're in the doctor's office and you're getting some of the worst news that you've gotten, the Lord's goodness and love follows you there.

When your life feels unmanageable, the Lord's goodness and love follows you. And also when you're nearing the end of your race, the Lord's goodness and love is with you there.

And you will dwell in his presence forever. So thank you. And also just thank you during that season for praying for us and praying for things that we weren't even brave enough to pray for ourselves.

So thank you, church. Good morning, church family.

My name is Ruth. I've been attending Trinity for two years, and I've experienced God's love and transformative measures during my time in New Haven. Born into strong Hindu families in India, my parents were first generation Christians, and my dad was disowned by his family for his faith.

[22:01] My parents served in pastoral ministry, and they raised my brother and I with strong Christian values and beliefs. Growing up, I was showered with love by my family, friends, relatives, and church members.

I was an active member in the church, and I always believed that I'm a Christian who loves God. However, in October 2020, my dad had a heart attack that completely shattered my belief system. I didn't want to live in a world where there is no dad. Slowly, he recovered, but his health was never the same. And due to family circumstances, I made the difficult decision to pursue a master's in the U.S.

I did not want to leave. I come from a culture where people live and die in the same place where family relations mean everything. Wrestling with my decision, I found peace reading the word of God, and I continued reading for the next several months.

For the first time, I saw the person in the Bible who stood right with all God's standards, Jesus, who revealed how broken, fake, and self-righteous I was.

[23 : 14] All my life, I looked at my Hindu friends and said, oh, they need Christ, and she needs Christ. Now I realized that I am no different. I'm a sinner who desperately needs Christ.

All this time, my motivation behind my moralistic Christian life was devotion to my parents and the presumption that I could earn a peaceful and successful life.

But it was never the love of Christ. I realized that I had idolized my parents and many good things. I never had the desire for God. I was in need of a savior.

When I meditated on the cross, I understood the love of Christ and the freedom that comes through the cross. In those eight months of reading the Bible, God changed my heart to the point that I could live in any part of the world just with him.

I knew no one in the United States, and I didn't know why I was going, but I believed Christ prepared me for this journey. From that day forth, Christ became my everything.

[24 : 15] I moved to New Haven from India in August 2021. On my first Sunday here while walking to Elm City Market, I saw Trinity Baptist Church and just walked in.

So much was new. A new country, a new school, new people. During my first semester, I battled loneliness and wrestled with all the change. I had a clear struggle for joy, but God was teaching me to be content just in him.

Since I had just two classes in a week and I was not authorized to work, I had a lot of free time, which made me feel even more lonely. The mornings were the hardest, but my Lord didn't leave me there alone.

He spoke to me through different verses. I slowly started my day waiting for him to meet me and speak to me. I clearly remember how when Hannah cries for a baby in 1 Samuel, how her husband Elkanah asked her, Am I not more to you than ten sons?

It encouraged me to ponder and proclaim how Christ is worth more than ten times of anything I am yearning for. He quiets my heart with his love.

[25 : 26] Sometimes it's a verse. Sometimes it's a song. Sometimes it's a word of encouragement from a friend. Sometimes it's a Sunday sermon. Sometimes it's a hug of a kid.

Sometimes it's a dinner with the church family. Oh, how my Lord took care of me. As a student, even financially, I was struggling without work. But God graciously provided.

As Hagar in the wilderness says, you are a God of seeing. Truly, I have seen him who looks after me. Truly, I have seen him and grown to know him.

Coming from a predominantly Hindu country, I didn't have many mature believers who I could look to. After coming here, I saw God's loving hand in bringing people into my life who really know the worth of Christ and live out their faith, who stir me to run the race with endurance.

As a new Christian, I had so much of pride thinking that I chose Christ while many of my people didn't make a wise decision. When I met people during Bible studies and fellowship time, their humility exposed my pride to me.

[26 : 34] I felt like I was missing a major piece of the gospel. Hearing the gospel day in and day out through the body of Christ, I encountered the truth of salvation by grace alone.

I started wrestling with this truth as I couldn't accept that I didn't contribute anything to my salvation and that God owes mercy to none. When the truth came home to me, it was the sweetest and most joyous moment.

When there was all the reason for my Lord to pass by, He chose to stay. And He has provided for my needs. After my graduation, due to my visa situation, I either needed to find a job within three months or go back to India.

I also needed a new place to live. After one month of praying, waiting, and applying, I got a job as an information processor at Cornel Scott Community Health Center.

I struggled with the job initially as I couldn't use any of the public health knowledge that I gained through my master's program. But I could sense God humbling me and teaching me to find my identity in Him and utterly in Him.

[27 : 44] After three months of working, I was promoted to a higher position during my probationary period. It was such an encouragement to experience God's love and favor through the love and appreciation my coworkers showed to me.

Even with the housing situation, a sister from church and I found a house and were looking for a third roommate for one month. And the third roommate showed up on the day of signing lease from Arkansas.

I was stunned to see God's timing and His provision. Where would I be without you, Lord? You are my home. This summer, I was wrestling with the word home, reading through the book of John. In John chapter 14, verses 1 to 3, Christ encourages His disciples before heading to the crucifixion. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God.

Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am.

[28 : 50] You may be also. Home is where Christ dwells. He promised I will take you to myself. My Lord didn't just rescue me from hell, but He made me His own daughter.

And He said not to be troubled and to trust in His word that one day He will come. My Lord will come and take me home. Last and not least, my name is Luke Batty.

My wife and I moved to New Haven in 2017 so I could attend graduate school. And our life was pretty great. My wife was pregnant with our first child. I was back in classes and I was excited to start my research.

And for a few years, this was unequivocally true. In the middle of 2019, however, graduate school and life became very tough. After being scooped in my project, contaminated, shut down due to the pandemic, I found myself a crusty old fifth year whose project was still in its infancy.

During the first year of the pandemic, my wife lost her job and our second child was born. On top of all that, I was diagnosed with a heart defect that required surgery in October 2021 while my wife was fit to birth with our third child in November.

[30 : 20] All that to say, I was incredibly stressed. But it wasn't a stress I had ever encountered before. This was existential stress. Who was I going to be? What was my life going to look like?

Would I be able to provide for my family? Would I even graduate? For the first time in my life, I could actually identify with the psalmist when he wrote in Psalm 69, Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with crying out. My throat is parched.

My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. In my weakness, I returned to an old sin that I thought I had overcome. I began to view pornography again.

You see, I was exposed to it when I was very young. And by the time I hit adolescence, I was an unwilling addict. I had been brought up in a good Christian home. I knew that viewing pornography was wrong.

[31 : 20] But despite my heartfelt attempts to avoid it, limit it, punish myself, or just be a better person, I failed. In my youth, it was this experience of depravity that taught me viscerally of my need for the grace of God.

When I met my wife, I was able to reject porn for five years with only one lapse. However, the stress of graduate school brought that progress crumbling down. Eventually, the Holy Spirit convicted me to the point of desperation.

My conscience was so burdened by my sin that I could hardly look at my wife. For over two years in our marriage, we had shared unbroken honesty and intimacy. And somehow, in another two years, I had built a wedge of sin to keep us apart.

It had been over two months since my last relapse, and I desired more than anything to just have honesty with my wife. I tried to split the baby. I told her that I would appreciate prayer because the desire to view porn was still with me, and I didn't think it was ever going to go away.

For some reason, it didn't occur to me that she would immediately follow up that declaration with an obvious question. Had I given in? Sometimes the Spirit works through stupidity.

[32 : 29] At that moment, I had the opportunity to choose lies and comfort or honesty and destruction. Like I was watching from the outside, I saw myself choose destruction.

And it was destruction. I saw the entire history of our marriage crumble in my wife's eyes. It was completely unfair. I had the assuaged conscience of finally being honest, like a suffocating blanket had been taken off and I could breathe fresh air again.

But my wife was now choking. That was probably the hardest few months of my life, but it was definitely the hardest of my wife's. We celebrated our ninth dating anniversary a few weeks later, and it was like trying to drive a car with four flat tires.

What could I do? All I could do was commit to being perfectly honest with my wife and to take the consequences. We did marriage counseling, regular counseling, and nightly discussions. And over time, I started to see my wife again through the tears. Through a miracle of the Holy Spirit, God repaired my marriage. In our restoration and recovery, I came to a greater understanding of myself as a porn addict, as a man, as a husband, and as a believer.

[33 : 40] I could now pray to God knowing exactly who I was and in every day mourning his grace. By God's providence, around this time, a recovery group opened in my church, the Freedom Group.

This is a place where I can meet with other members of Trinity and learn strategies for recovery, the process of deconstructing porn addiction. I'm learning to bear another's burden and to allow my burden to be carried by others.

If you're sitting here today, harboring porn addiction or some other sexual sin and desire to have relief, please don't allow another week to pass before reaching out to me, Steve, or Corbin.

Trinity has a resource for you in the Freedom Group. You can experience relief and freedom.

Following these events, God decided to put my newfound commitment to recovery to the test.

Only a few days before my final committee meeting, where they would decide whether I could graduate, I had a stroke that left me paralyzed on the right side of my body for a minute. For 60 seconds, I believed that I would be partially paralyzed for the rest of my life.

[34 : 42] Graciously, God granted me mercy that day, and the effects of the stroke quickly subsided. The next 10 weeks were spent constantly writing and working to prepare for my dissertation.

However, the week that my thesis was due for submission, I suffered a second stroke. I feverishly attempted to finish my dissertation in my hospital gown and turned in my finished thesis only hours before the deadline.

Is this a Thanksgiving testimony? How can I give thanks to God throughout these trials? It is true that God deserves the glory in all things, in good times and bad, but isn't it also true that God is especially loud in our times of trial and tribulation?

C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* comments that we can ignore pleasure, but pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.

It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. God was graciously shouting to me in these trials. He taught me through my difficult years in graduate school to rely on Him.

[35 : 49] I had to return to porn and almost ruin my marriage before I was willing to see that I didn't trust God with my circumstances. But in His mercy, He resurrected my marriage to where it is stronger than it ever was.

He taught me to trust Him to provide for my needs through my health problems, both surgery and strokes. I learned firsthand what it meant to be weak and needy and what it meant to suffer.

But the reliance He engendered in me and my family is a lesson worth any cost, and through it He gave me and my family an appreciation for health and blood thinners.

And finally, He exposed me to the sweet aroma of unmerited love. He did this through the everyday acts of kindness from this church, the meals and the childcare, through the fellowship I found in the Freedom Group where we can work through the difficulties in our lives without resorting to a vicious crutch, and through the opportunities you've all provided to receive our service in turn.

For all these things and more, I am thankful. I mentioned the psalmist's lament in Psalm 69. I can now also honestly proclaim the word that end that psalm.

[36 : 59] I will praise the name of God with a song. I will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. When the humble see it, they will be glad.

You who seek God, let your hearts revive. For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise His own people who are prisoners. Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them.

Thank you. I hope you know one of the greatest privileges it is as a pastor is to look out and see faces and to know stories.

I want you to know I didn't know all the details that were shared when we asked the five of you to share.

And I look around and I think there are so many others who we could have asked instead, but it is a privilege. What I'd like to do now is go to prayer. So will you join me in prayer?

[38 : 10] Oh Lord Jesus, we thank you. Lord, that through the various trials that these brothers and sisters and many others among us have faced various shapes, various forms.

Lord, you have not abandoned us, but you have drawn us near to you. And Lord, we confess that there are times that we doubt that you are near.

There are times when we don't feel your presence. Lord, we thank you for the enduring testimony. Lord, the testimony of your people.

Lord, that you are God, that you are real, that you are with us. And we give thanks to you. Lord, we give thanks for your sovereign power, that there is nothing, nothing that is outside of your control. That there is nothing that stands against us that you are not able to work on and to accomplish your will. Lord, we give you thanks for your power, that you are always working for the good of those who love you.

[39 : 29] We thank you for your holiness. Lord, that you hate what is evil and love what is good. Lord, we thank you for your mercy and grace that you do not treat us as our sins deserve, but you have forgiven us in Jesus.

We thank you for your provision. That you are a heavenly father who knows what we need even before we ask and that you delight to provide for us.

Lord, we thank you for trials and hardships. For the ways that you teach us. Lord, we thank you for your spirit.

That you have come and dwelt within us. Lord, to seal us for the day of redemption. To empower us to walk by faith and not by sight.

To remind us of the truth when we have lost sight of it. To fill our hearts with joy and thanksgiving even through tears. Thank you, Lord, for your spirit.

[40 : 34] And Lord, we thank you for our church. For the work that you have done among us. For their faithfulness that you have shown year after year in so many different circumstances.

Oh, Lord, may we be a church that gives praise and thanks to you. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

It wouldn't be a Trinity service if we didn't open the Bible and look at it for a few minutes. So, we're going to do that now. But before I do that, not before that. As an introduction, I want to say that this week has not been what I expected it to be.

And the message that I bring comes from my heart. And one of the things that has struck me is that with Christmas around the corner, I think of the words of John that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

And one of the patterns that seems to be true in Scripture and in God's sovereign overseeing of the world is that his goodness, his faithfulness, and his work often shines more brightly in the midst of trial and hardship.

[41 : 46] And I also want to make sure that we acknowledge that as we think about the theme of thanksgiving and giving thanks to God for what he's done, God doesn't always deliver us.

God doesn't always restore our marriage. Sometimes he sustains us through the broken wreckage of a marriage that won't be restored. He doesn't always heal us of disease.

He doesn't always renew relationships that have been broken. There are times when we will see the consequences of sin and fallenness in the world and know that the hope and the ultimate resolution of those things will not be in this life, but will be in eternity.

And when Jesus comes to make all things new. This is what Paul reminds us when he talks about when he says something in Romans 5 about this.

He says, not only this, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that sufferings produce endurance and endurance produce character and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

[43 : 00] You see, the sufferings that we endure, the greatest thing we want from God to do is to resolve them. But sometimes God is doing other things in the midst of them.

But having said that, it is also important for us as a people to give thanks to God. So, my text this morning is from the beginning of the book of Romans, chapter 1, verses 8 through 12.

And I'm just going to make two. This is not truly expositional. I'm going to make two observations about Thanksgiving briefly. This is what Paul writes when he writes to the church in Rome. He says, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

[44 : 17] Now, there's a lot in this passage. It's a beautiful passage. But I want to make two observations about Thanksgiving this morning. The first one is that when he says, I give thanks, it is not to the ether.

It is not to nobody. It has a direction. I thank God. I thank God for all the things I see that are good in the world.

And particularly here, he says, I thank God because of you, because your faith is being proclaimed everywhere. For all the things that he could have praised God for, for all the ways that he's seen God provide, rescue, deliver from hardships and trials, what Paul was most especially thankful for in this passage is, I thank God for you because of your faith. And so, thanksgiving for a Christian needs to start here with a recognition that everything we have is from God, and most importantly, what we have is the faith to know him, because in that faith we have salvation and eternal life and hope that is indestructible and love that is unshakable. And this is the great joy. And it's remarkable that he says this because he could have said other things. He could have said things like, and this might happen in our culture today, I'm thankful that you are so wise that you chose the right God to believe in, and that you found it reasonable enough for you to think that maybe Jesus was worth your time and your energy. But he doesn't say that. He doesn't say, I'm thankful that you're such wonderful people. He says, I thank God because you have faith in Jesus and because God has worked that in you. And that is the focus of Paul's thanksgiving is to look to God. And so, as we go into this season where our culture celebrates thanksgiving, we have all the more reason to be thankful, but particularly we have a reason to be thankful in a direction, thankful to God for all of these things. The second thing that I see in this passage regarding thanksgiving is what we see in verses 11 and 12. Paul's saying, what I really long to see happen, what I'm really, what I've been praying for is that God would allow me to be with you so that we might be mutually encouraged by one another's faith. And it strikes me that this is what we do when we gather as believers, whether it's on Sunday morning or in small groups or over text messages or coffee in the morning or whatever it is, the ways when we gather together, God has a purpose that's related to thanksgiving. Because Paul has just said, I'm thankful for your faith. And then he says, what I long for is so that we might be together so that we can together give thanks for what God has done in our lives. We can share, bear testimony to what God has done in each other's lives so that we might give thanks and be strengthened in our faith.

So striking, Paul says, that we may be mutually encouraged by our faith, yours and mine. We always think of Paul as some super saint, right, who didn't need that. And yet he's writing to this church that surely has young believers who barely know anything, but once I was blind and now I'm seeing, now I can see. And he says, I'm so thankful because I long to see you so that we may be mutually encouraged. And from that then, we're about to go and have a meal together.

And I want to give you an application. As we sit around our tables, as we talk, you don't have to talk about this the whole time, but what a great question it would be to say, hey, what are you thankful for? What have you seen God doing in your life? So that we might be mutually encouraged in our faith and give thanks to God, not only for what we see in our lives, but what we see in each other's lives. And so that together we may be strengthened in our walk with him.

[49 : 11] And at the end of the day, the one thing you may be here this morning and feel like, I have very little to be thankful for. My life is falling apart. I have nothing.

But remember, Paul started by saying, I give thanks to God for you because your faith is real. And this is the thing we can always give thanks to God for, that Jesus Christ came and in love. He offered himself up for us to die on the cross for our sins, to rise from the dead, the good news of the gospel, and that this is ours. And friends, if we have nothing else to thank God for today, we have that. And let us give thanks for that this morning. Let's pray.

Lord, we do give you thanks and praise for your goodness. And thank you for this time when we've been able to listen to our brothers and sisters share and be strengthened by their testimony, be encouraged by what you have done in their lives. Lord, we give you thanks because we know that you are the one in whom all things hold together. Lord, in you we live and move and have our being. Lord, from you, every good and perfect gift in heaven comes. Oh, Lord, we pray you would make us thankful people, not only thankful, but thankful most of all for the gospel and for Jesus.