

A Tale of Two Pastors

I recall a sermon given this time of year by the pastor of my home congregation when I was in my teens, who began his “Thanksgiving” message by saying he had “nothing to be thankful for.” That got everybody’s attention, and I sat in stunned silence, waiting for him to correct his statement or explain it in some scriptural way. Instead, he only went on to delineate all that was wrong in the world. Contrast that example with another pastor I just read about. In 17th century Germany, Martin Rinkart lived and served through a very dark period known as the Thirty Years’ War. His city (Eilenburg) was long ravaged by battle, pestilence, and famine. As the only surviving pastor in the area, Rinkart was called on to conduct over 4000 funerals in 1637, including that of his wife. And yet, along with many other hymns, he wrote this as a table grace for his children:

*Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices:
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices.
Who, from our mothers’ arms, has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

Which of these two pastors had the right perspective for a man of God? – the one who could not be grateful in the midst of health and comfort, or the one who gave God thanks even through overwhelming suffering? What Rinkart remembered (and my old pastor apparently forgot) was to keep his focus on our loving, eternal God instead of the sorrows of this fallen world. Yes, we grieve the pain and evil around us, but we still have hope, knowing our ultimate future is secure. Our eyes are set on the prize that awaits us in the next life because of the salvation we have in Jesus. For that assurance and for every other blessing, we can and should be genuinely grateful, always. Accordingly, may this be our Thanksgiving prayer:

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... And be **thankful**. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with **gratitude** in your hearts. And 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. (Colossians 3:15-17, emphasis added)*

S. Johnson