

## A Spirit of Thanksgiving

Gratitude and thankfulness. These are fast becoming pleasant fictions in a culture defined by rights and expectancy. Yet the Apostle Paul, under inspiration from the Holy Ghost directs us to give thanks in everything, and so here is the great war we Christian soldiers are unknowingly engaged in within our modern world. We are called to give thanks in everything, for this is the will of God but we live in a world where thanksgiving is a rare thing and it's replacement 'expectancy' has an extremely powerful intoxicating effect on all who even but sip on its poisonous fruits.

Our text for today is 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, three clear directives from the Lord via the Apostle Paul to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing and to give thanks in everything. Spurgeon once wrote, "When joy and prayer are married their firstborn child is gratitude." These words from the Prince of Preachers identifies the wondrous fruit that is thanksgiving and gratitude when a heart of joy is united with consistent prayer unto the Lord God. This fruit is akin to the incredible blessing of a new life being brought into the world, a dear little one whose gentle smile and trusting embrace is a tender glimpse into the innocence that was lost when Adam Fell in the Garden of Eden. This child of joy and prayer should be strong, and a source of life and strength to those who brought it's life into the world as a real child, when blessed of God is a source of strength and provision for its parents when they are frail. So too it is with the child of joy and prayer that is gratitude, it is the strength to the bones of the believer when times of testing and trial have come down upon them.

Though this directive is given in the New Testament, it's application has been evident since the Book of Genesis and throughout the Old Testament. Let us turn now to Genesis 8:20 and see how Noah, on leaving the Ark after a year being sheltered from world wide destruction, immediately sets out to give thanks unto God. Given the enormity of the events that had transpired and the task that laid before Noah and his family of repopulating the earth, caring for the surviving creatures and restoring teaching and Godly knowledge to mankind, it would've been understandable on a human level, for Noah to become sidetracked and even overwhelmed. Yet we read in Genesis 8:20 that, "Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar."

Noah, on leaving the ark with his family, immediately sets out to thank the LORD for His wondrous and miraculous provision. Doubtless Noah had been in fervent prayer throughout that year on the ark, praying for deliverance from the terrors of judgement being unfurled on a wicked world; praying for the health and strength to care for his family and the animals on board the ark; praying for a restoration of the world so that they might emerge from the bowels of that great wooden structure and into the warmth of the sun once more.

After much prayer, the explosion of joy on setting foot on dry land after so long and after such world wide devastation would've been staggering. Surely Noah and his family would've leaped and sung great songs of praise in much rejoicing that the Flood was over and peace was restored by the grace and mercy of God. In this marriage of joy and prayer, gratitude and thanksgiving is born in the heart of Noah leading him to build the first altar recorded in the Bible. Such is the enormity of gratitude that Noah feels towards God for His miraculous

provision, he sacrifices one of every clean animal and bird unto God. Given the scarcity of life that remained at this point, wilfully giving up healthy animals on such a scale would be decried as lunacy by worldly men. But Noah understood that God provided this sacrifice in His directive to bring seven of every clean animal and bird into the ark, thus preparing a spare animal for sacrifice after the safe passage of the ark, long in advance of its need. Noah trusted in the provision of the Lord and so happily gave back to God what He had already set aside. God always provides an offering worthy of His acceptance, and when we live in rejoicing and prayer, we are blessed with the eyes of heaven to see the provision.

Thus in this awareness of God's goodness we are to give back to Him in all thankfulness and without restraint, no matter how mighty the cost, for it is of the Lord's doing and it always was His. In His magisterial wisdom He affords us such tremendous provisions daily and watches as to how we deploy these abundant gifts. Whether we use them for ourselves or whether we return them to God, the giver of all good gifts as we are told in James 1:17. So Noah offered up the blood of life unto God in thanks, all but a foreshadowing of the blood of eternal life that was offered up by Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of repentant man. Our own lives are but gifts from God, and those who are His were called to be so by His will, purchased by the blood of Christ and so we are to return this gift of life back to God in faithful service, for it is His anyway. He has blessed us with life and watches to see what we do with it. Do we live for Him, or do we squander it on ourselves? Give it to Him and He shall seal it in the Book of Life and give it life abundantly for all eternity, for in His grace He has deemed it good that a humble heart is grateful for its existence and joyful in its returning unto Him.

So you see how vital a spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude is to the child of God? Yet let us further the cause by looking at another hero of the faith, Gideon, who in Judges 7 took a mere 300 unarmed men to defeat the wicked Midianites by the strength of God. Gideon, though a timid soul, was faithful in his service to God. In this humble servitude, God was tender to Gideon's fears and assured him constantly that He was with him throughout all. At each instance when Our Lord assures Gideon that victory will be His, Gideon does as Noah did and straightway worships God in fullness of thanksgiving. Note in Judges 7:15, that after Gideon had heard an enemy soldier speak of a dream that Israel would defeat Midian even though his force was completely outnumbered (God had told Gideon to go and spy on the Midian camp if he was still afraid, this led to Gideon overhearing the dream interpretation), Gideon returned to camp and immediately worshipped God. Now what is worship but a great sense of praise of the glory of God and thanksgiving for His mercy and grace towards sinful but repentant souls. Following this Gideon led those 300 unarmed men in total victory against the Midianites in what was a tremendous foreshadowing of the victory that Christ will have in the great battle of Armageddon.

Have you noticed friend that when a spirit of thanksgiving is thriving and strong, the heart is clear in its actions and deliberate in its path and deployment. Much like the energetic and thriving child who sets off to create a joyful world of adventure and triumph, so too does thanksgiving lend the often timid heart a strength that is usually unknown to it. Could this be why so many of us stumble in confusion on so many aspects of our daily lives, unsure as to the will of God in any given number of areas, whether it be work, family, health, etc? I fear it to be so. Why do I fear it to be so? Because friend I am the chief of this great sin; one

who has neglected rejoicing in the abundance of daily blessings from a gracious God; one who has often forgotten and shunned the power of prayer. So when I have declined the wonders of rejoicing and prayer why am I surprised that a spirit of thanksgiving is reluctant to sit with me? Why then when I have dismissed this happy child from my midst, am I surprised that I struggle to discern the will of God? You see when you are ungrateful for what you have been blessed with, you grasp at anything in the hope that it will soothe this wound that is ingratitude. Yet the tragedy is that nothing will soothe it, for ingratitude of God's goodness and His gracious provisions where His mercies are new every morning led even Adam to seek after more and doubt the goodness of God's provision in a perfect creation.

So while ingratitude is spiritual death by a thousand cuts, it's bleeding wounds driving the desperate heart to another round of sinful indulgence in the hope that this might numb the pain for a while; thankfulness is life by a thousand songs, a thousand songs of praise that Christ Jesus will reign in power and glory for a thousand years from the throne of David before all is made new and perfect, and that we shall be with Him to see and enjoy it all.

This is fruit of thanksgiving and gratitude, it opens the eyes to glory of eternity and the hope of what is to come by the grace and glory of Christ Jesus. This is the certainty of hope that the Apostle Paul speaks of in 1 Thessalonians 5, the chapter of our main text today. Paul speaks of the terrible day of the Lord and the judgement that awaits the unredeemed. Yet his words close in hope and assurance that all who are in Christ shall be spared this destruction and shall be safe with Him, sharing in His glory as we meet those who have gone before us in perfect bodies in the twinkling of an eye in the air. This is our comfort in times of mourning or sadness, for these times do come and they do bring the heart low. Yet friend here is the joy, that through Christ Jesus we shall join them in the air when He comes for us, if we still are alive at that glorious hour. It is through thanksgiving therefore, a thankfulness unto God for the provision of His only Son, that the sting of loss is brief and fleeting, whereas the strength of God leads us on ever forwards in joyful hope of that glorious day!

God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son Issac, instead He provided the offering in the form of the ram stuck in the thicket. Be eternally thankful that God did not stop the offering of His only begotten Son, instead providing Him as a perfect sacrifice so that all who believe on Him should know the assurance of the love of God. Thankfulness you see calms the heart, whether in times of blessing or loss; it is a sure path that leads to life eternal through faith in Christ Jesus and because of Christ Jesus, we shall be with those who have gone on before us and so we can rest in joy and thanksgiving, knowing our future, untroubled by the temporary and assured of our place in the heart of God by the blood of Christ. Amen