

## Thankful

### Ephesians 5:18b-20

Be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.

**20 And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

#### -PRAYER-

I have been reading the first 4 ½ chapters of Ephesians in preparation for today, and I am SO stoked to be back in Ephesians!

- If it's been awhile since you've read it through I URGE you to go do that today!!
  - The first chapters tell us about the great things that God has done for us in Jesus.
    - The love of God compelled Jesus to come to earth and exchange His perfect life for our personal train-wrecks.
    - We are SO LOVED by God—We are well-loved kids adopted by God—KINGDOM KIDS!
  - Paul explains how God brings each of us together into the family of God.
    - We are the Kingdom Family of God!
    - We have the love of God IN US and get to experience that love flow OUT of us!
  - Now Paul is describing what this new Spirit-filled Family-life together looks like.

**Because of the truth and reality of all that Jesus has done for us, we now live differently than we once lived."**

- We LOVE God and we love one another!
- We pursue wisdom.
- We ENCOURAGE one another in the Lord.
- We WORSHIP together!!

**And today we see that as we live this new life together, Gratitude fills our hearts.**

- And this gratitude is what overflows to God for all He has done—**THIS is Worship!**

**This new life we now live is marked by continually thankfulness & worship toward God.**

- Continually having our hearts to overflow with gratitude...

**Gratitude is our response to all that we have learned up to this point in Ephesians.**

- This is what Paul is talking about in our text:

### Ephesians 5:20

... give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He says nearly the same thing in his letter to the Thessalonian church:

### 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

This thankfulness is **continuous**—regardless of circumstance or season.

- This word translated thankfulness is the Greek *eucharisteō*—to acknowledge your thankfulness.
- We are *thankful* and *acknowledge our thankfulness to God*— **all the time**

Now, it is not difficult for us to be thankful in happy times—when life is full of blessing.

- And we don't usually have to try to be thankful when things are good.

**But in difficult or painful seasons, thankfulness can seem far away...**

**Paul's encouragement in our text today is to be thankful in ALL circumstances:**

- *good and bad...thick and thin...sickness and in health... times of plenty and in times of great loss.*

Today we will examine how we find gratitude when life is crazy, complicated or painful.

**For centuries philosophers have attempted to rationalize painful, hard seasons.**

*One area of philosophy called Stoicism teaches hardship is the means by which we are made better.*

- 2nd century philosopher—Roman Emperor—*Marcus Aurelius* noticed that the obstacles in his life had produced in him a deep thankfulness for life and relationships.
- Marcus Aurelius was Emperor 100 years after the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome.
- Maybe influenced by Paul's letters as Christianity had grown in popularity in Rome.
- He'd learned to be thankful for his hardships & saw hardship as a way for him to grow.
  - Rome was invaded, but Marcus' army quickly pushed the invaders back
  - Pursued the army, destroying them in Mesopotamia.
- Returning troops were sick & dying, & reaching Rome, Marcus' Army had been decimated.
- He brought back Antonine Plague—pandemic lasting 7 years, killing more than 5mil— $\frac{1}{3}$  of pop.
- So Marcus Aurelius was no stranger to hardship. Reflecting, he wrote in his journal one night:

"The impediment to action advances action." — Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (Build a list with the next quotes)

"That which does not kill us makes us stronger." — Friedrich Nietzsche

"The obstacle is the way" — Hipster Philosophy Professor's Classroom Coffee Mug

"Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you ..." — Apostle Paul, 1 Thes 5:18

- Paul would agree that life's obstacles are not to be avoided but but faced head-on.
  - For it is through hardship that we grow the most.

But Stoicism breaks down when we ask **HOW am I supposed to be thankful in hard times?**

- Is this a "pull yourself up by the bootstraps sort-of thing?"

**NO! In Ephesians we see true gratitude is not tied to events or circumstances or possessions.**

- True gratitude is tied to Jesus!
- Because this gratitude doesn't change, it cannot be tied to the ever-changing events, circumstances or possessions that come and go in life.

**Unchanging gratitude must be based on something that is unchanging.**

- And the character of God is the only thing we can know in this life that never changes.

**This is what stoics and ALL secular philosophers have been missing throughout all of history!**

Good philosophy without a good God will only bring self-righteous frustration and disappointment.

**A life of gratitude is lived in RESPONSE to an unchanging, sovereign, good and loving God.**

- In our passage today Paul is getting us to look BEYOND life's circumstances & look at Jesus.

Let's look at 4 aspects of this gratitude Paul is talking about:

### 1. Gratitude is a response to God's **sovereignty**

What is God's sovereignty and why is it important?

Colossians 1:16-17

for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

**Jesus made it all, He is OVER all, He is in it all and He holds it all together!**

- This is GOOD NEWS!! God is over ALL things—good and bad.

- This means that God uses EVERYTHING—good and bad— to grow our faith and develop our character and produce the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.
- I never could figure out what motivated Marcus Aurelius to find gratitude for the hardship in his life when he did not know of God's sovereignty.
  - **I just can't psyche my self up that much when things are difficult and hard!**
- God's presence is The ONLY reason for gratitude in hard times!.
- **If God wasn't in control I would have no reason to find gratitude in hardship.**

**Because God is sovereign He is able to use both pleasant and hard circumstances in our life.**

- Paul is being realistic in assuming we WILL face hardships—**Hardship is a part of life.**
  - But notice he is not asking us to fake thankfulness FOR horrible things.
  - **He is saying to be thankful TO GOD EVEN IN HARD TIMES.**

**When things are hard, I am STILL grateful for God's sovereignty, and am thankful in hardship.**

- True gratitude in the midst of hardship is not possible without faith in someone outside of ourself who is *powerful* and *present*...
  - Someone who cares enough about us to stick with us when we have nothing to offer in return.
  - Who gives HOPE and MEANING and PURPOSE when life seems impossible.

**Having true gratitude in EVERY SEASON of life requires faith in a God who walks through life with us and gives us hope, strength and the promise of a future.**

Therefore, true gratitude means we must first know that God is sovereign.

- I must believe that God is OVER every circumstance & ABLE to lead me through every situation.
  - **God is in control of all things and nothing happens except the things God allows to happen.**
- Gratitude is a response to God's sovereignty...*

## **2. Gratitude is a response to God's Goodness**

God is not just sovereign—He is also GOOD!

- We must know that God is both sovereign and good— willing and able.
- Because God is **sovereign** and **good**, God has a plan and purpose for us—even when life is hard.
  - This gives us hope and allows us to trust that God is leading and growing us in hardship.

I'll confess that sometimes life's circumstances seem to indicate that God does NOT love me.

- From my perspective sometimes life seems tragic and tiresome...
  - BUT when I reach out to God...when I cry out to him...
  - When I remember and rehearse His attributes...
  - When I open my aching, tired heart to the love of God, God meets me and gives me hope.
  - And in that moment I REMEMBER God's GOODNESS—His love!
- In those moments of sincere despair, God meets us and comforts us and even in the darkness, we can know that God is OVER it all and IN it all and that God is GOOD!

**God is not good because God gives me the things I want... NO!**

- Our desires don't determine God's goodness.
- Life's circumstances don't determine God's goodness...

**God is good because God is always with me and He never changes!!**

**God's character never fails us:**

- He promises to never leave us or abandon us or let us down!

**How do we know God is good? — We know God is good because we know Jesus!!**

### **3. Gratitude is a response to the work of Jesus**

In the 2nd part of our passage today Paul tells us HOW this expression of thanks is made:

**Ephesians 5:20**

**And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

- We give our thanks TO God, and we offer this thanks IN THE NAME of Jesus.

This is significant—Our thanks is offered to TO God in the same way that we are instructed to ASK FROM God.

Jesus teaches us how to ASK for things from God in the Gospel of John:

**John 16:23-24**

**Truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.**

- We are encouraged to make requests of the Father in Jesus name —AND—
- we are instructed to give thanks to the Father in Jesus name.

**Church, Jesus is always the CENTER—FOCUS—PLUMB LINE—CORNERSTONE...**

Why?

Because Jesus IS our Reality—that's how we got our name—***our reality IS Jesus!***

- Jesus IS the reason that our relationship with the Father is a reality for us.
- Jesus is the mediator for us to know and have relationship with God.
- Jesus is the sacrifice that makes us right with God.
- Jesus is the POWER that breaks the death-sentence of sin and hopelessness for us.
- Jesus is the WAY for us. He is the TRUTH for us. He is LIFE for us.
- Jesus is the name that brings salvation and healing and deliverance and LIFE!

Paul is TRIPPIN OUT on Jesus when he tells us:

**Philippians 2:9-11**

**The Father elevated him [JESUS] to the place of highest honor and gave him [JESUS] the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

We ask the Father in **Jesus'** name, and we give thanks in **Jesus'** name.

**Our heavenly Father works in us THROUGH Jesus!**

- Jesus has forgiven us of our sins, removing the debt of sin we once carried.
- Jesus has given us a new identity—we were sinners, but we are now SONS & DAUGHTERS
- Jesus has given us a new life and a new power in order to live this new life.
- Jesus has filled our hearts with love and joy and given us a reason and desire to WORSHIP.
- Jesus has made us GRATEFUL—THANKFUL people

The work of Jesus to save us causes a response of gratitude!

- Our response to Jesus is THANKFULNESS!

We can be thankful for Jesus regardless of the season we are in.

**Finally...**

#### 4. Gratitude requires Faith

A life of gratitude is lived in relationship with God—we KNOW Him.

- We are intimately acquainted with Jesus—we KNOW God's character.
- We KNOW that God's sovereignty and God's goodness NEVER change.

**If I know God, and know He is over and in all things and that He is good THEN I have Faith.**

• **FAITH is necessary to cultivate in me a heart of gratitude—regardless of life's season.**

- A life of gratitude is a life lived by faith in the unchanging character of God.

But it sure is easy to fall into negative or critical patterns of thinking, isn't it? This affects our faith!

- Think about roses—we all know how beautiful they are and how wonderful they smell:

*We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses*  
—Abraham Lincoln

- On our own we don't always focus on the roses God is blooming in our life.
- On our own we don't see the big picture that God sees—our perception can become skewed.

**We must walk by faith.**

- We see just a part—and it's a small part of an ENORMOUS picture called life.

And our faith in God's character enables us to trust God and:

- Remain thankful to God for His presence AND
- Walk in the things that we see and things that we don't see.

Job had this faith in God's character—he had suffered the loss of EVERYTHING in his life...

- He lost his family, lost everything he owned, lost his good reputation—EVERYTHING!

Job 1:21

*"I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had, and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!"*

- What an incredible picture of his faith in God's character carrying him through the darkest seasons

**Church, God is using EVERYTHING in your life to work out His good plan in you.**

- God loves you and cares about the details of your life & He's is working in the events of your life...
- He is working to shower you with love and approval and produce THANKFULNESS.
- **He is working this out in us through EVERY SEASON!!**

This means the hard seasons we might normally complain about now stir hope in us!

- We trust that even difficult situations and undesirable situations are the very things that God is using to bring about His good will in our life.
- **This stirs up GRATITUDE!**
- **As we trust the Lord through every season of life we remain THANKFUL!**
  - This gratitude is more than just a sigh of relief when the storms of hard times settle.
- True gratitude is a response to the presence of God working out His good plan in us.

**The response of gratitude for the presence and the plans of God that we see and experience...**

- This is WORSHIP!
- We WORSHIP God with hearts that are full of gratitude!

**God is sovereign and good—He knows what you are going through and is willing to meet you right where you are!**

- TURN to God today—consider the SOVERIGNTY and GOODNESS of God!
- He is RIGHT THERE pursuing you—CRY OUT to Jesus!
- He wants to remove the burdens that are weighing you down and He wants to fill your heart with peace.

**\*\*Prayer & Care Link\*\***

Today maybe you need someone to pray with you— please click the link.

- You can ask someone to contact you and pray WITH you...
- OR you can leave your prayer request and the prayer team will pray FOR you.
- You can also request to have someone help you learn more about Jesus and the Bible.

**—Closing Prayer—**