

Thankful Hearts

1 Thessalonians 5:18

November 22, 2020 pm

HDBC

Thanksgiving is past, and most of us are quickly turning our attention to Christmas. But there is a sense in which Thanksgiving sort of gets a raw deal falling so close to Christmas.

Thanksgiving was only eight days away. Teacher of kids class at church decided to ask preschoolers about Thanksgiving. She wanted to see if they could playfully correct some wrong ideas about it.

Now let me see . . . Thanksgiving is the day we think about all the stuff we have and how we want more stuff so we can have more than anyone else, and how we only care about ourselves and not about other people.

***NO!**, the kids shouted. Then one little guy said, *That's not Thanksgiving, that's Christmas!**

I hope that is not Thanksgiving or Christmas. Before we completely dive into Christmas, I want us to consider Thanksgiving one more time. It is not only a **holiday to observe** but a **discipline to cultivate**.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Notice three things about Thanksgiving in this verse.

1. **The Right Thing**

Being thankful is absolutely the right thing for us to do. It is always appropriate. What does it mean to be thankful? Two important things should be present for there to be true thanksgiving.

A. Attitude

It starts with being thankful on the inside, an attitude of gratitude. In other words it starts with one's view of life. How you view the things that are happening around you. Do you view life through the eyes of one who

thinks everything is just happening by chance—the luck of the draw? Do you think that you are the product only of your own energy, focus and effort? That attitude does not lend itself to a thankful heart.

We like the thought that we are self-made. That we have controlled our own destiny. That whatever good has come to us, has come from our own hard work and industry. Like Charlie Anderson, in the classic western, Shenandoah. About a Virginia farmer trying to keep his family out of the Civil War. They were at the dinner table. This is his prayer before the meal.

Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it, and harvest it. We cook the harvest. It wouldn't be here and we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you Lord just the same for the food we're about to eat, amen.

Or, do you see life through eyes of faith, knowing that there is a God who is watching, caring and intervening? Not only that, but you realize that other people have invested in your life and blessed you in ways far beyond what you might be able to imagine. Too often we fail to realize just how much we have received from God and from others.

Alex Haley, the author of "Roots," had an unusual picture hanging on his office wall. It was a picture of a turtle on top of a fence post. When asked,

Why is that there? Alex Haley answered,

Every time I write something significant, every time I read my words & think that they are wonderful, & begin to feel proud of myself, I look at the turtle on top of the fence post & remember that he didn't get there on his own. He had help.

I thank God often for the people who have influenced my life. **Picturing** that turtle on top of that fencepost would be a great way to remember to be thankful.

B. Expression

Having the right attitude is not the only thing. If I am grateful on the inside, but do not express it on the outside, then my gratitude has done little good. **Card, text, note, phone call, etc.**

I wonder how God must feel when He witnesses day after day our lack of gratitude. I wonder if there is a pain in His heart. I wonder how it makes Him feel when we fail to thank Him for the great sacrifice that he made to save us from a sea of sin.

Remember the 10 men Jesus healed of leprosy? Only one returned to thank Jesus. Remember Jesus' question to him? *Where are the other nine?* Jesus notices our lack of thankfulness.

2. The Right Time

When are we to be thankful? Great question. Conventional wisdom says we are to be thankful when something good happens, or when someone does something nice for us. We teach our children to say "thank-you" after someone gives them something. But do we teach them to be thankful when something bad happens? Not really. So, our normal practice is to be thankful when things are positive. But is that what the Bible says? No.

We are to be thankful at all times. On the surface this may seem like no big deal. However, when we take a closer look, it becomes clear that this is a pretty tall order. Think about the kinds of circumstances in which we would not normally be thankful. **Sickness or injury. Death of a friend or relative. Loss of job. Divorce. House destroyed by tornado. Car breaks down at the wrong time. (Is there ever a right time?). Covid-19 exposure or positive test?**

That is what God declares. You may be thinking that this is impossible. It is not. Listen further.

3. The Right Reason

What is our motivation for being thankful? As we have learned, we tend to be motivated by the good things around us. When we recognize that we are truly blessed, it motivates us to be thankful.

But remember that we are called to be thankful in the midst of every situation. How can we do that? What will motivate us? Our text gives the answer. We are to be thankful not because of the circumstances, but because **it is the will of God.**

In every situation in which you find yourself, there is a particular and specific will of God for you, in that circumstance. **Facing job situation. Purchase house. Interacting with a difficult person. Meeting a non-believer. How to invest money.** Incorporated into His will in every circumstance is a thankful heart. God wants us to be thankful.

Notice he does not instruct us to thank him **for** everything. It is **in** everything that we are to give thanks. We can do that because we know that **in the midst of every situation**, God is working for our good. Remember Romans 8:28?

We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

That is how we do it. We recognize that in spite of the difficulty which we might be facing, we can see his handiwork. We can know for sure that we have not been abandoned and that somehow, He is going to bring good out of it.

Remember the words of Job? Job 1:20-22

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, " Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. "Blessed be the name of the LORD."

God knows that a *thankful heart is a sensitive heart.* When we are thanking Him, we are yielding to His will and trusting in His goodness. Thanking God during difficult time is one of the great acts of faith in the goodness of God. When we do, we are able to see God in a new and more meaningful light.

An unknown confederate soldier penned the following words:

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I asked God for strength that I might achieve,
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked God for health that I might do greater things.
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy.
I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness that I might feel the need for God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for—
But everything I had hoped for . . .

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among all men most richly blessed.

I am thankful for . . .

Jesus, and the salvation He has given to me.

My families—parents, siblings, wife, daughters, grandchildren.

Health, home, stuff, day-to-day little things, watching grands play, feeling breeze.

Pecan pie, juicy hamburgers, fried catfish, thin-crust pizza, Chinese buffets.

Freedom, to worship, to speak, to think, to make decisions, to live without fear.

Struggles, difficult days, defeats, limitations. God uses them to grow me.

House. Trees. Birds. Squirrels. Wind.

Music. Ability to sing praise to God and to just lift my spirits.

Heaven. Each year more of my friends and family go there. Mostly Jesus is there.

Grace, mercy, second chances. Forgiveness, redemption, new beginnings.

Privilege to be a pastor, of this church. Staff, deacons, members/attenders, you!