

The Root and Fruit of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Day – 11/27/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Colossians 1:9-14 Pastor Keith Besel

vv.11-12, [Paul prays for the saints in Colossae,] **“May you be strengthened with all power, according to [Christ’s] glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”**

Introduction

- ✘ There is so much to like about Thanksgiving Day: the inspirational background of pilgrim history; the hymns that we all love to sing; the lavish spread of food shared with family or good friends ... to say nothing about the opportunity we have right now and throughout the day to give thanks to God for His countless, undeserved and over-the-top blessings.

I. We forget to be thankful to God

- ✘ But there is a danger connected to this holiday as well – that we may praise God with our words and appetites today but then we entirely brush Him off with our thoughts and actions tomorrow ... and the day after that ... and for the rest of the year.
 - ➔ It’s like the story of Craig and Vance, who ran into each other unexpectedly at the airport. Craig completely ignored Vance until Vance said, “Hey Craig, it’s me, don’t you recognize me?”
 - “Of course I do,” was Craig’s cold reply. “So, aren’t you even going to say ‘hello’?”
 - “Hello,” said Craig indifferently. “Aren’t you being a bit ungrateful, Craig?” Vance asked. “Did you forget when you were so sick two years ago? Who it is that paid your doctor bills?”
 - “You did.” “And this summer,” continued Vance, “Who saved you from drowning when you got that cramp out on the lake?”
 - “You did,” said Craig once more. “And now, you just pass me by without even a word?” “Well, sure,” said Craig. “What have you done for me in the past three months?”
- ✘ I know that example is a bit over the top, because I doubt that anyone here has ever been as blatantly ungrateful as Craig.
 - ➔ But it does shine a light at the contradiction in every one of our lives; how one moment, perhaps it’s right after a moment of crisis or on a day like today where someone reminds us to be thankful, that we can seemingly overflow with gratitude, but then so quickly return to an utter forgetful and self-absorbed life; entirely clueless as to how ungrateful we are in our everyday lives both toward God and those around us.
- ✘ As Christians though; as God’s redeemed children, that is not His desire for us in this life. In fact, He speaks to us today about a continuous mindset of thanksgiving; about thanksgiving as way of life; or as St. Paul might have said it if he were with us today, “The Root and the Fruit of Thanksgiving.”

II. The Root of Thanksgiving – Knowledge of God

- ✘ I know it’s fall, but think about the seeds that we sow in spring. They will not produce healthy plants if the root is too shallow or diseased. Similarly, living our lives of thanksgiving will be weak and short-lived if the root is weak or missing; if we are thankful only once a year in a huge emotional spasm but no more after that.
 - ➔ No, the root of thanksgiving must go deep. According to Paul in verse nine of our text, the real root of gratitude toward God is a matter of being “filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Paul says that is his prayer for us.

✧ But what does that really mean? Well, he tells us that spiritual knowledge and understanding and wisdom are all linked together. As you and I grow in our knowledge of God by reading and hearing His Word, and as we pay attention to His activity in history, in nature, and in our personal lives, it's then that we comprehend Him to the max.

➔ And as we understand God better, then we become wiser in our attitudes toward life and toward Him.

➔ And as we become wiser, we can't help but become more thankful toward God. You see, the greater our awareness of God is, the more it makes us appreciative His love for the world and us. That friends, is the thanksgiving root that nourishes the thanksgiving plant within our hearts and souls that in turn produces the thanksgiving fruit!

✧ I said that spiritual wisdom sees God's loving activity as He cares for and protects His people throughout history.

➔ Consider the example of the two very different ships that left distant shores on a pilgrimage. They left 100 years apart from each other. The first left the Caribbean island of Hispaniola in 1519, filled with soldiers. Their search was for wealth, fame, and fortune. They arrived on the Yucatan Peninsula in the southern part of Mexico. Their leader, Hernando Cortez, claimed all the land that he saw, and captured all of its people in the name of the Queen of Spain and the Roman Catholic Church. As Cortez marched on to Mexico City he left behind him a bloody trail of conquest. With just over five hundred men, he conquered millions of Native Americans and enslaved them for centuries to follow.

➔ The other ship left England in 1620 and landed at Plymouth in what is now Massachusetts. This vessel held Puritans who were fleeing from religious oppression; searching for a land where they could freely worship God. They were not soldiers, but families. They carried no swords, but Bibles instead. Their intent was not to gain land and wealth, but to establish a home where they could serve God as their hearts dictated.

✧ So, what if God had permitted a hurricane, let's say – so common in the Gulf of Mexico – to blow Cortez and his men to the shores of what we now call the United States of America? What kind of freedom; what kind of thanksgiving would we be enjoying today – if any?

✧ Or consider another what if: What if things had gone differently in the Revolutionary War 150 years later and the Brits won that war instead? Would our religious freedom be different? Would we all be part of the Anglican Church; the established church of England, and have the King/Queen of England as the Supreme Governor of our church?

➔ Few people know that our National Anthem, the Star Spangled Banner, as Francis Scott Key wrote it during the Revolutionary War has four verses. And that final verse expresses a clear word of faith and gratitude toward God as the founding of our nation was played out. (printed on back of today's bulletin) It says,

O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand
Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation!
Blest with vict'ry and peace may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto - "In God is our trust."
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

✧ When we possess true Spiritual knowledge, then we know how truly dependent we are in this life.

- ➔ But because we live in what we celebrate as a “free country” it’s easy for us to think that we are fully independent instead. Historically, our country has enjoyed national, physical, medical, and psychological security, leading us to conclude that we are a pretty self-sufficient people and therefore have no need for God.
- ➔ But the truth is we are not nearly as independent today as those first Pilgrims. They cut their own wood, made their own candles, cured their own meat, raised their own food, and wove their own clothes. And even then they still received help from the Native Americans at the start.
- ➔ Compared to that though most of us today couldn’t survive. Just think of what a national strike by farmers, police, fire, or transportation workers would do, or an oil embargo or a complete shutdown of the military. We depend upon so many other people and institutions – all coordinated; all provided by our God, in whom we ultimately all depend.
- ➔ Add to that, the things that none of us can control – yet we would die without: air to breath, the atmosphere to keep that oxygen close to the earth and regulate the temperature for us, the sun for light, warmth and to grow our crops, the moon that controls the tides and keeps our ocean healthy, soil, and this body with all of its perfectly engineered systems working together. And the one thing that science still has no clue about – the actual beginning source of life itself that comes only by the very breath of God.
- ✕ We are all dependent upon God, not only for these physical needs, but also for our spiritual needs, because by nature we are selfish, sinful human beings with no way to escape the punishment that we deserve. Without God we have no peace of conscience; no assurance of a happy eternity.
- ➔ It is only because God still loves us enough to grant us His forgiveness through the death of Jesus as our substitute, that we now have spiritual peace and security. His Spirit calls us to believe in that truth, and He works within us to keep us in that faith. All of this knowledge and understanding – this is the deep root of thanksgiving.
- ✕ And yet one more section of that root of thanksgiving, according to Paul, is the wisdom that shows us that simple knowledge and understanding is not enough. That’s why God has given us His Word to guide us in how to use and how to apply that knowledge and understanding.
- ➔ For example, God leads us to see the reality that we are simply God’s stewards; His caretakers of all that exists here in His Creation.

III. The Fruit of Thanksgiving from Faith

- ✕ Paul then tells us how all of this works together for our benefit in verses 12-14, where he directs us to give “thanks to the Father, who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
- ✕ Paul describes there the three different fruits that grow out of this deep root of thanksgiving that we’ve just described; fruits that we actually bear and share and enjoy today in our Christian lives.
- ➔ The first is that we share in the inheritance of the saints already basking in the light of the Father’s heavenly glory. Yes, we continue to struggle here in this sin-corrupted life, but we are still all one in Christ. 1 Peter 2:9 assures us that even now we Christians have the privilege to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
- ➔ Second, verse 13 says that the Father “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” Jesus is our King now and forever – not the devil; not the world; not our sinful, rebellious selves.

➔ And third, verse 14: “We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” In Jesus, you and I, my friends are right with God. Our relationship has been repaired; we’re at peace with Him in Jesus’ blood. And He enables us to live with thanksgiving; to lead a life, as verses 10-11 say, “worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work.” Paul continues then in prayer, “May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.”

- ✕ That’s right, this thankful Christian life is the forgiven life; the God-pleasing life; the fruitful life; the serving life; the joyful life, because it is rooted in Christ and it bears the spiritual fruit of gratitude and praise to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.