

Be Filled with the Spirit, Part 4: Spirit-Filled Thanksgiving

Scripture: Ephesians 5:20

Code: 1942

Let's look again at Ephesians chapter 5 and verses 18 to 21. This is our seventh lesson in this tremendous text as we slowly move --through the Book of Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 5 verses 18 through 21. And time is a little shorter this morning so we want to get right at it and see what the Lord has for us. Let me read this text to you again, beginning in verse 18 of Ephesians 5, "And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

Now as I say we have spent seven lessons or this is our seventh lesson on this tremendous text. You might think that such a brief text could be covered in less time than say five or six hours or whatever that total time would be. But the fact is that we haven't even come close to exhausting the rich content that's here. I find, and I'm sure you do too that the Word of God is kind of like a limitless well, the harder you pump the richer and clearer and fuller the flow becomes. The more I study the Bible the more inexhaustible it becomes, the deeper I dig the wider the expanse of treasure that appears before my eyes, it's inexhaustible. It's one of the incredible experiences of the ministry to dig deeper and deeper and to find that the deeper you go the bigger the subject becomes. And you know ignorance is bliss in a sense, you think you've got it at first and then you more ... the more you study it the wider and wider it becomes and, and so we haven't even begun to exhaust the tremendous depth of meaning that is here, even though we've spent six and now a seventh lesson looking at it. But the major truth of the passage is easy to identify, the major truth of this brief passage is that all our Christian living, all this issue of living the Christian life, walking the worthy walk, the whole idea of the Christian's experience is based upon the concept of being filled with the Spirit.

At the end of verse 18 you have the statement, "but be filled with the Spirit." Or be being continuously kept filled with the Spirit, and that becomes the heart of the issue in the Christian life. Only as we are filled with the Spirit of God, that is as we are controlled by the Spirit, moved along by the Spirit, yielded to the Spirit, directed by the Holy Spirit, only as our lives are functioning in response to the Spirit of God do we really know the power of God in our lives. You cannot experience the power of God or move in the will of God or know the fulfillment and the blessing of God unless you are filled with His Spirit. In Galatians chapter 3 the Apostle Paul said to the Galatians in verse 3, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh?" In other words you know you were born again of the Spirit, you know you were saved by the Spirit, you know you were entered

into the body by the Spirit, do you think that having begun in the Spirit you could be perfected in your flesh? And the answer obviously is of course not. We were redeemed by the Spirit of God, we were born again by the Spirit of God, we were implanted with an eternal incorruptible seed by the Spirit of God, Peter says. And having begun in the Spirit we will be made perfect only in the Spirit.

In other words as we ascend the scale of maturity we grow only insofar as we're filled with the Spirit, when we are not filled or controlled by the Spirit we flatten out and there's no progress at all. The growing times of our life are the times when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, then and only then does the flow of the power of God function within us. Now every believer possesses the Spirit and needs at each moment in life to be yielded to the Spirit of God. That's the key to this passage, and we've been looking at that. I might just expand your understanding of that by pointing this out to you, that all of the key leaders in the New Testament are characterized specifically as people filled with the Spirit.

For example it says of Jesus Christ Himself in Luke chapter 4 verse 1, "And Jesus being full of the Spirit." And in John 3:34 it says that "God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him." In other words He didn't measure out some dose of the Spirit but rather gave unto Him the fullness of the Spirit. Jesus even said, "The things I do, I do by the power of the Spirit of God." He was full of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest man who would ever live up until his time of him it is said in Luke 1, "And he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb." And his mother, Elisabeth and his father, Zacharias both of them were also filled with the Holy Spirit.

As you move further along in the New Testament you find for example, in Acts chapter 4 that Peter, the great apostle is filled with the Spirit of God. We know he was filled with the Spirit along with everybody else on the day of Pentecost but in chapter 4 and verse 8 it specifically says, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them." Peter, filled with the Spirit. Further we move into chapter 6 of the Book of Acts and we find the first officials selected for the early church and it says of these individuals that, "They should be men full of the Holy Spirit." And verse 5 says, "They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch." In other words those who were given to the leadership of the early church apart from the apostles, those who were to serve the people were those who were filled with the Spirit.

Stephen of course is one of them filled with the Spirit. Later on in chapter 7 verse 55 when Stephen was being stoned, "But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly to heaven."

Later on we meet another wonderful individual who takes up practically all the rest of the New Testament, a man by the name of Saul who becomes Paul, and to him Ananias says that he would receive his sight and in Acts 9:17, "Be filled with the Holy Spirit." So the Apostle Paul knew what it

was to be filled with the Spirit. In Acts 13:9 it says, "Then Saul (who is called Paul), filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on him, And said."

There was a wonderful man who was in the company of the Apostle Paul, a man that we know as the one who was a comforter, his name is Barnabas and it is said of Barnabas in verse 24 of Acts 11, "He was a righteous man, and full of the Holy Spirit."

You see all the way from John the Baptist and Jesus and the Gospels to the key people in the Book of Acts to those who become really the writers of the New Testament in, in part the, the concept of the filling of the Spirit of God is central. There's no way that an individual believer can function in the power of God apart from the control of the Spirit of God. And so this becomes the bottom line, people, this becomes standard number one. We go back to the place where we yield the control of our lives to the Spirit of God. And of course what happened was people who were filled with the Spirit of God were able to function with such power that it was said of them, "They have turned the world upside down." The reality of yielding to the Holy Spirit releases the divine power to enable us to do the things that only God can do. If you're ever going to do greater things than these, as Jesus said, if you're ever going to know what it is, "to do exceedingly abundantly above all you can ask or think, according to the power that works in you." You'll only know it as you're filled with the Spirit, and we saw that that means to be controlled by the Spirit or yielded to His power. That is self has died, self-will has died, sin is confessed and removed from your life and you're obedient to the Spirit of God.

You know it always amazes me that, that people are on a sort of a search to try to, to try to reproduce today the early church. I guess this is part of what's going on in my lifetime, I can't speak for the generations before but immediately in the generation before I'm not sure that it was intense as it is today, but there, there has been since I was a seminary student, a few years back, a tremendous effort to recapture the meaning of the early church, and I guess I've been apart of that effort myself to redefine how did the early church do it? How did they do it in the Book of Acts? How did they structure themselves? What was the r M.O., you know, modus operandi? What were their methods? What were their functionings? How were the structured leadership wise? How did the laity respond? How did they work with people they sent out to mission fields? How did they commission and ordain and how did they work with discipline in the church, and how did they reach their world, and how did they evangelize and how did they edify?

We always are after recapturing the early church. And we hear a lot about renewal of the church, and the regeneration of the first century church. And you know I think in, in many ways we've made it much more complicated that it is. You see the key to reproducing the power of the early church is not the modus operandi of the early church; it's the same Holy Spirit who was in the early church, that's all. And when the church in the 20th century is indwelt by the Spirit of God as it is and when it becomes filled with the Spirit of God as God wants it to be then it will be the 20th century church under the divine definition. It is not a matter of recapturing methodology it is a matter of being filled with the Spirit of God, then we'll turn the 20th century world upside down. Perhaps we should be less

concerned with the academics of a restructured church and more concerned with the inspiration of a Spirit filled life, because that's bottom line.

So Paul says here in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18 be being kept filled with the Spirit. In other words everything I've said in the Book of Ephesians, all your position in Christ in chapters 1 to 3, all your practice in chapters 4 to 6, all of it involves being filled with the Spirit of God or it ... it can't come to pass, it can't really work out.

Now if you'll remember we talked about three points in this text, the contrast, the command and the consequences. The contrast in verse 18, don't be drunk with wine, in which is excess, or asotia, dissipation, disease leading to death but be filled with the Spirit. In other words don't do it like the pagans do it, don't try to induce some kind of communion with pagan gods by drunkenness, we commune with our God, we experience His power through the filling of the Spirit, that's the contrast. The command, be being kept continuously filled with the Spirit, it's a continual thing people.

You know this may shock you a little bit but God is not interested in your future, did you know that? In one cent. You say, wait a minute, I'm big on the future, I, I, I'm big on prophecy and all that. Well that's fine. But God is not specifically concerned about your future for this reason; you'll never live in it. Have you noticed that? Have you noticed that you've never gotten to the future? Every time you talk you're around to hear yourself. It's true. We like to think about the past, nostalgia, old furniture and stuff, we like to go backwards, dressing like the '20's again and all, we love the past and then on the other hand we love the future you know, space ships and Star Wars and, and all that kind of stuff and weird creatures and Ray Bradberry and Science Fiction, we love the future because the future we haven't blown yet. And we love the past because we can only remember the good, it's the present we're trying to get out of, but we never succeed, you've got to make it right here. And I guess that's the way it is in life, if you're going to be filled with the Spirit it isn't something you promise God you're going to do it's something you are or you aren't.

I always kind of relate it to my marriage, when ah, Patricia decided to say yes to me after I chased her around and kind of forced the issue, and she said all right, I don't know any other option so I'll marry you. Uhm, we decided to get married, I knew what my father would say to me, held say to me uhm, do you promise to love this woman till death do you part? Because he always says that. Do you promise to love this woman till death do you part? Well I mean you know that's a tough question to answer, right? I mean I really love her now, but I'm not sure what the future's going to hold, depends on how she handles herself, ha, ha. You know? I mean, I'm young, I don't know what to expect, but I'll love her now. So I remember I was just kind of anticipating this and at the wedding I was ... I want to be honest about this deal, I promise to love you till death do us part, you know that's hard to say because you don't know what the future may bring, so I covenant right in my heart that I just love her now, and I wouldn't worry about the future. And you know what? I'm still in that same now and I still love her. And you know she doesn't care about the future at all. I mean if she, if she comes to me and

says, honey do you love me? She doesn't want to hear, check back in a couple of months and I'll let you know how I feel. Well ... or ah, or she doesn't want to hear, you know I'm planning on that, that's definitely in the plan, I, I am going to love you, it's, it's down there I can see it's coming. And God doesn't want to be treated the same way either.

God is not interested in your future commitments and God is not interested in your future love, God is only interested in your yieldedness to the Spirit of God now because this is the only time you'll ever live. Be being kept continually filled, that's the command. Then the consequences were third, remember? And we said there were three categories of consequence, first to ourselves, second toward God, and third toward others. Toward ourselves, singing, toward God, saying thanks, and toward others, what? Submitting.

And there was even a fourth, serving. We can talk about that if we have time this morning. But the point is this, when you live a Spirit filled life the overall consequence is blessing, compartmentalize first there's a personal consequence, singing. And what is this saying? A Spirit filled person has a heart filled with joy, right? And we've talked about that now for a couple of weeks. A Spirit filled person's heart literally overflows with a song. That's what happens inside of us, and he gets into all the details of that wonderful reality.

But let's go to the second category of consequence, toward God. A Spirit filled person is rightly related to himself, boy he's a whole, healthy, together person. I mean he can sing and rejoice and his heart is filled with song and it bursts out of him, why? Because he's controlled by the Spirit of God and he loses all of those things that tear up human personality, he's okay, he's together, he's got it made, he's right with God and, and that means he's right inside. But there's a second element and that's toward God, there's not only this tremendous sense of joy and rightness with self but a Spirit filled person turns toward God and inevitably the thing that happens is he says thanks, verse 20, this is the second consequence, "Giving thanks always for all things, unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Listen beloved, a Spirit filled, Christ conscious, Word filled, obedient faithful Christian gives thanks to God for everything. We started our service this morning, I read for you Psalm 100, "Enter into his gates with (what?) thanksgiving," why? Because that's the way you always enter God's presence. That's the way you always enter God's presence with thanksgiving. William Hendriksen says, "When a person prays without thanksgiving he has clipped the wings of prayer so that it cannot rise." We enter His gates with thanksgiving, "we enter his courts with praise. O be thankful unto him and bless his name."

Listen, I believe that a Spirit filled person is going to be one who says thanks to God. Now let me say something you maybe never thought of in this way, I'm convinced that the single greatest act of personal worship that you can render to God is to be thankful. That's right. That to me is the epitome

of worship, not stained glass windows and organ music as nice as that is. Not sitting in church and singing great hymns. But the single most magnanimous, the highest and the best and the ultimate in worship is to have a thankful heart. That's the key. Because thanks ultimately crucifies self, thanks ultimately recognizes God as the source of everything, thanks always is able to say in the midst of anything, good or, or even difficult, God be praised, God be praised. Thanks sees beyond the circumstance to the plan of God, it sees beyond the pain to the sovereignty of God, it sees Romans 8:28, it sees "that all things work together for good to them that love God, and are called according to his purposes." It sees the hand of God in everything, the good and the difficult. And thanks is the ultimate act of praise because it says, God I thank You even for the hard times, I thank You even for those that die, I thank You even for a difficult marriage, I thank You even for a job that's unfulfilling, I, I thank You for everything because I know that it can be used for my good and its intention can be to conform me to Jesus Christ. Job said, "Naked came I into the world, and naked shall I leave." And that's okay, because "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;" then what did he say? "Blessed be the name of the Lord." I thank You God when You give and I thank You God when you take, see?

Now that's maturity, that's a Spirit filled person. In Second Corinthians chapter 4 in verse 15 Paul says this, "For all things are for your sakes," in other words everything that God does is for you, sometimes it's a blessing and sometimes it's a trial blessing. But everything is for you, why? "That the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God."

In other words, now watch this, the ultimate goal is the glory of God, the means to the glory of God is thanksgiving, the means to thanksgiving are all things that God does in your life. For all things are for your sakes that you might be thankful to God so that He might be glorified. You glorify God by being thankful. You say, God this is to Your glory no matter how much it hurts, no matter what the pain or what the problem. And later on in Second Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 11, "Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness," why? Why does God enrich us, why is God bountiful to us, why? "Which causes through us thanksgiving to God." That's why. You see the ultimate expression of response to what God has done is thanksgiving. If you're a thankless person you've missed the point. The whole of our Christian life is to finally come to the place of thanksgiving. In verse 12 he even calls it, "abundant by many thanksgivings unto God." And then he closes the chapter by saying, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Listen, God has done all that God has done that we might be thankful to Him because when we thank God that gives Him glory because it recognizes Him as the source and sovereign of everything. And when you do that you're really giving Him glory, because He is.

Now, let's look at the text and see some questions that we can answer from this verse. What kind of thanksgiving is Paul after? First of all when are we to be thankful? Verse 20, "Giving thanks," what's the next word? "Always." When are we to be thankful then? Always. You say, you don't know my problem, it still says always. You don't know my wife, it still says always. You don't know my

teenagers, it still says always. You don't know the lousy job I have, you don't know the dirty deal I get, you don't know what they did to me at that place, always, always, always, always. Why? Because this recognizes that God is in control of your life and that God is trying to conform you to the image of Christ with all the things that occur, and in all of those things you redound to God's glory in thanksgiving. And so it says, watch in First Thessalonians 5:18, a great statement, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." If you don't know what God's will is try that for a starter. Give thanks, give thanks, give thanks. This is the will of God.

Now go back to Ephesians 5:17, "Be not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Verse 20, "Giving thanks always." It's the same idea; God's will is that we be thankful. Shakespeare said, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child. Ingratitude thou marble hearted fiend." Even Shakespeare recognized what it is to have ingratitude, think how God must feel. When God brings difficulties into our lives, when God brings trials into our lives and we gripe and complain and we don't understand the meaning of James 1 which says, when trials come into your life count it all joy because out of that trial God is going to bring a perfection and a maturing, see? You see we want to second guess God and we want to complain and we want to, we want to sort of grumble, and all the Bible asks of us is to be thankful so that God can do His perfect work. This is the will of God.

Now there are three categories of thankful people, and I'm going to see which one you fit in, okay? You give yourself this test. Number one, this is the easy part; there are those who are thankful after the blessing, right? You say, I'm one of those. That's the easy part, right? Sure. After God has just blessed you you're thankful. Oh, you know I was ill and the Lord touched my body now I'm well, I'm so thankful. Or you know we didn't know what we were going to do and then the Lord gave us a new home. Or well we lost a job and the Lord gave us ... After the blessing, there's always the people thankful after the blessing, that's the easy part, right? God has just unloaded on you and you say, oh thank You Lord. Easy part.

It's Biblical though, look at Exodus chapter 14, it's all right, God expects you to be thankful after the blessing, it would be terrible if you weren't. Do you remember that here are the children of Israel and they come to the Red Sea and Moses lifts up his staff and he goes like this over the Red Sea and the waters part and they walk across. Pharaoh says, well if they can do it we can do it, only they couldn't do it. Pharaoh marched the entire Egyptian Army into that thing and the walls closed down and drowned them all. Verse 28 of Exodus 14, "The waters returned, covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked on dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right side, and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore." The bodies all washed up. "Israel saw that great work which the Lord God did on the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and his servant Moses." And do you know what they did?

First of all they had a tremendous eternal joy and so it says in verse 1 of chapter 15, "Then sang." Right? They sang, "Moses and the children of Israel," and this was the song, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host has he cast into the sea;" and the song goes on and on and on all the way down to verse 19. This is singing after the blessing, oh thank You Lord, thank You for what You've done. Verse 11, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Verse 18, "The Lord shall reign forever and ever."

You see this is this is thanks after the blessing. You find it in Revelation chapter 15 and it's a wonderful picture, how the Lord comes in mighty judgment upon the earth that has been bathed in the blood bath known as the tribulation and the seven plagues are spewed out on the earth and there are some people in verse 2 who get the victory over the beast. There will be some people that the Antichrist will not destroy, "And they sing the song of Moses, the song of the Lamb, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." See? They sing after the victory is over, after the battle is won, after the conquering has been done.

Now listen people, this is a time for giving thanks, there are always some victories won, there are always some wars that have already been past, there are always some conquerings that have already been accomplished, there is always something which God has done, and we ought to say thanks after the blessing, but it's easy then, isn't it?

Let's go to - step two. This is the ability to give thanks before the battle begins, for the victory that you know is going to come, all right? First is after the fact, second is in anticipation of the fact.

Now this is where the people of faith come in. These are the people who believe God before anything happens; these are the people who are celebrating before the war. These are the people saying, Lord I see a problem coming, how wonderful. I'm going to believe You for victory in the midst of this, before it even gets there. This is Jesus, this is Jesus in John chapter 11 as He stands by the tomb of Lazarus, everybody around Him is crying, they're all weeping, He says, remove that stone, and Martha gets all upset about doing that. Verse 41, "Then they took the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." Thank You Lord for what You are going to do.

Now that's faith, isn't it? And then He said, "Lazarus, come out." And he came out. Thanks in advance. Now people that's another level of spiritual maturity, that's the ability to say thanks before the thing really even unfolds. Are you one of those people who says thanks in advance? You see something coming and you can believe God for the victory before it even arrives? Can you say thanks

like Jesus did in anticipation of death? Can you say I, I see a death in my family, I see a death of someone I love, thank You Lord, thank You that I know what's going to happen, he's going to come through in resurrection life. Can you be thankful in the face of death? I'll give you another one, look at this this is fabulous, Second Chronicles chapter 20, that's the Old Testament.

Second Chronicles chapter 20, this is really great. Now, God's people, Judah are about to have a war with a couple of real strong enemies, Ammon and Moab, the Ammonites and the Moabites. And they're getting ready for a wholesale war here, but Jehoshaphat is a pretty, pretty faithful man of prayer so he goes to the Lord and he just tells the Lord all about it. He says, Lord this is going to be Your battle, I mean I just can't handle this thing, we can't do it on our own, he bowed before God and he pours out his heart, and he says, Lord, You're going to have to do with these people, just what You did-when You drown the Egyptians, You're going to have to do some wondrous miracle, You're going to have to take care of this deal Lord, I can't handle this problem, I can see it coming, I can't handle it. And he got all done with his prayer and then he decided it's time to thank the Lord, and somebody might have said, well you're pretty ah, presumptuous there Jehoshaphat because we haven't had the battle yet. You're going to praise the Lord first? Yes, we're going to praise the Lord first in fact the first thing we're going to do is in verse 20, "And they rose early in the morning, and went forth to the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem. Believe in the Lord your God." All right, let's trust God from the very start. "So shall you be established; believe his prophets, so shall you prosper." All right? We're going to believe God for a victory we haven't even seen.

Now here's the first thing, "And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers to the Lord, who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out in front of the army, to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth forever."

Listen, in Israel the Marines didn't land first the choir did. They came first because praise preceded the army, do you see? Lord how marvelous You are, we're going to win. I mean can you imagine those guys who spent all their life learning music and when it gets ready for the big war the first thing they hear is choir fall out, you're in front. Incredible, but that's exactly what happened. "And they began to sing, "maybe a little wobbly at first but they got it going, "They began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the children of Ammon, (Ammon and) Moab, and Mount Seir, who were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, everyone helped to destroy another."

Do you want to know something? This is, this is Jonestown they all killed each other, amazing. "And when Judah came toward the watchtower in the wilderness," that's ... that would be their camp, "they looked into the multitude, and, behold, there were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped." They came upon a whole pile of dead bodies. "And when Jehoshaphat and his people

came to take away the spoil from them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days in gathering the spoil, it was so much. And God had promised them the spoil of the land, so it was theirs by right. But don't you see what happened? They didn't even have to fight the war, they believed God and they gave God thanks and before the battle even started and the battle was theirs, do you see?

Now this is harder than after the fact, but God wants this too. God wants your thanksgiving before the battle even begins, and this is tough, this is the test of your spiritual maturity. When you crack up and fall apart in anticipation of the problem then you haven't reached this level yet. Thank God after the blessing, that's easy, thank God before the battle begins, that's harder, but the hardest of all, are you ready for the third one?

The hardest of all is to thank God in the midst of the battle, when it look like you're losing. That's tough. You can do it after the fact and you can do it in anticipation of, but can you do it right in the middle of it? Well, God's choice people have. The king set out a decree in the day of Daniel that nobody else should be worshiped or prayed to but him, didn't bother Daniel, it says in Daniel chapter 6 and verse 1 Daniel went into his room as his custom was and threw open the doors as they always were open toward Jerusalem and three times a day he bowed down and gave thanks unto the Lord his God. And he knew what it would cost, and they took him and threw him in the lion's den but that was all right. He was going to give thanks to God in the midst of the trouble, You know it says about Jonah, what a fantastic thing, can you imagine if you were in Jonah's situation, I mean you hear it as a Bible story but try to imagine what it would be like to be swallowed by a huge fish, floating around in the acid of his stomach. And worse than that to be alive and awake, floating around in there. And Jonah in chapter 2 kind of gets his act together and this is what he says, this is amazing, "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple." And what was your prayer Jonah? Well, "I will offer the sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." Here is Jonah in the middle of an acid filled stomach of some giant monster of the sea saying, thank You Lord. You say he's ... that's not faith that's stupidity. No. Thank You Lord, thank You. And you know something? God liked that prayer so much He poked that big fish and it vomited out Jonah, and it didn't just vomit - vomit him out it vomited him on the place he was supposed to be. Here was a man who thanked God in the midst of the belly of a great sea monster, incredible. God honored him. Now you never had it that way, did you? You read Hebrews chapter 11 about all those people who thanked God in the midst of those terrible trials, and then you hear the writer of Hebrews say, you haven't had it so bad, you haven't suffered unto blood yet, have you?

In Acts chapter 5 the early church is being terribly persecuted and it says in Acts 5:40, they took them and they beat them and they beat them, and after they had beaten them, they said, don't preach anymore, and they went out of there and they thanked God that they were counted worthy to suffer

for His name. They were thankful right in the middle of the beatings. And then you find Paul and Silas in the 16th chapter of Acts and their feet are stretched as far as they could be and locked in stocks and the muscles are taunt and they're in unbelievable pain and what are they doing? Singing thanks and praise to God.

You come to Philippians 1 and people are persecuting Paul and he's a prisoner and he looks to the time when he's going to die and his heart is just filled with thanksgiving.

Listen, it's indicative of your character how you give thanks, because you worship God in connection with your heart. And if the only time you can worship God and thank God is after the blessing then you're down on the first level. If however you can move a little bit higher and you can ... you can thank God before the battle even begins in anticipation of the victory He's going to give that's better. But if you can thank God in the of the pain and the midst of the trial then you've reached the level of maturity that very few Christians really know.

Joni Erickson, who's been coming to our church for the last eight months or so, who's written a wonderful book that tells about her life and her accident which paralyzed her body makes the statement, "Giving thank is not a matter of feeling thankful, it's a matter of obedience." Do you see? You don't always have to feel thankful, but it's a matter of thanksgiving, it's recognition that my life and my circumstances and my destiny is in God's sovereign hand, do you see? And that everything that happens is working to the purpose of conforming me to Jesus Christ. And it'll have a profound affect on your attitude do you want to know something? It'll have a profound affect on you attitude.

So you give thanks? Always. For what? For what? Giving thanks always for what? All things. You say, for all things, you mean for everything? Even stuff that's troublesome and difficult? Sure, count it all joy when you fall into diverse trials, why? Because that's the way God perfects you. I'm not going to give you a big long list but I have one written down here, I won't take the time to do it, but I listed about forty things that the Bible specifically says you're to be thankful for. And they're not just individual things; they're categories in which you could be thankful for a hundred different things within that category. We're to be thankful for everything, for everything, fox everything. There's no limit to it. Just the fullness of all the things that God has done for us, all of His attributes re-listed, all of the things He's done. We're to be thankful ... do you know the Bible tells us to be thankful for all men? For all people. It tells us to be thankful for all things, to be thankful to God for Christ, for our salvation, for the Holy Spirit, for everything we have, to be thankful in the midst of difficulty as well as in the midst of prosperity. To be thankful for all things.

Now let me tell you something, there's only one kind of person who can be thankful for everything, and that's a humble person. That's right, that's a humble person. Well you say, what do you mean by that? Just this listen, a humble person knows he doesn't deserve anything, right? So the smallest thing for him is a cause of thanksgiving. If you have a problem in your life being thankful the problem

is not a lack of thanksgiving, that's the symptom the problem is pride. You're saying, God I just can't be thankful because I think I'm not getting what I deserve, see. But if you know you deserve nothing, if you see yourself as a sinner for whom nothing is really deserved then for anything that God would give you there could be nothing but thanks, see. It's really a pride problem.

A thankful person always has a humble heart. And by the way people you see humility is part of being filled with the Spirit, because you're only filled with the Spirit when you deny yourself, right? When you die to self, when you crucify self, when you set self aside and you respond to the Spirit, it is an act of humility that makes you filled with the Spirit, therefore it is an act of humility that causes the thanksgiving which proceeds from that filling.

We come right back to the first sin of all sins which corrupts the whole system and that is the sin of pride, right? That's what Satan started it all with, right? He looked around heaven and he said, uh-ha, God shouldn't have all of this, I should have it so he said, I will do this and I will exalt myself and I will so forth, so forth, so ... it was I, I, I, I. And even Eve in the garden, she knew that she could be like God, I, I, I. It's always that way. Pride is the key to sin. So if you aren't thankful it isn't really a ... that you need to sort of, sort of stir up thanksgiving, it's that you need to experience humility, and humility backs you up to the concept of being filled with the Spirit, because it's only as you crucify self and deny self and yield to the Spirit that humility can be a reality. But if you're a humble person then you'll be thankful for everything, everything. You say well ... some people say, well boy, my husband isn't perfect, how did I get stuck with him? And the husband says, my wife is ... doesn't make it she's ... gosh there must be other women in the world that people are really happy with, how did I ever get into this? People say, well my job isn't what it ought to be, they don't treat me the way they ought to treat me. My family doesn't treat me the way they ought to treat me, people don't understand me, they're unkind to me and...They get a bitter, sour, gripey kind of approach to life and you know why? Because they think they deserve better, right? Boy, I should have a perfect person, I should have a perfect job, I should have everybody treat me just the way I ought to be treated.

You see it's all pride, you see, and as long as we're proud we'll never be thankful. And you break the back of your pride and it grumbles in the dirt then you can experience what it is to be thankful, for everything, everything.

So when are we to be thankful? Always. For what are we to be thankful? A 1 things. How? Look at this, fabulous statement, how are we to be thankful? Look at it in verse 20 again; it says this, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father," here it comes, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Oh this is so fantastic.

Listen, it simply means in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ means consistent with who He is, consistent with what He has done. In other words no matter what happens to me I can give thanks because of who Christ is and what He has done, no matter what happens in my life it'll turn to my

good and to His glory, right? That's the fabulous truth of it all. Remember what I told you before? When we sing it is Christ singing through us, remember that? And when we say thanks it is Christ saying thanks to the Father through us.

Listen, I couldn't be thankful for everything if it weren't for Christ, but because of Christ the good things and even the bad things in my life all have a part in conforming me to the image that God wants me to bear, the image of His Son. You see I can't just say, give thanks for everything, period. If you're not a Christian and you're not in Christ and you don't have Christ interceding at the right hand of God on your behalf, and you don't have Christ indwelling in your life, and you don't have the Sonship and the joint heirship that He promised, if you don't have that then you can't give thanks for everything because what you're going to get you don't need to be thankful for. But on the other hand if my life is in the control of Christ and I am His son and I am His child and I am a joint heir with Him in His Kingdom and if He intercedes for me at the right hand of the Father and if He keeps on cleansing me from all sin and if He is conforming me to His own image, if, all of that's going on all the time then I have cause to be thankful to God for everything.

You know we're by nature so self-seeking, because we think so highly of ourselves and if we don't get it the way we want to get it then we get upset about it and we get unthankful. But Christ wasn't that way, oh listen, we are to give thanks this verse is saying also the way Christ gave thanks. If it's Him giving thanks through us it'll be the way His thanks was given. Did you know He was thankful to God? Matthew 11:25 He says, "I thank thee, O Father." John 6:11, "I thank thee John 6:23, "I thank thee." John 11:41, "I thank thee." He was thankful all through His life, and you look at His life and you've got to wonder why, right? I mean He who had everything in glory came to this earth and humbled Himself, became a servant, was spit on and scorned and despised and rejected and crucified and He didn't deserve any of it and yet He was thankful, thankful.

Listen to this, though He deserved glory He got humility, though He deserved love He received hate, and though He deserved worship He received rejection, though He deserved praise He got scorn, though He deserved riches He was poor, and though He deserved holiness He received sin. And so it went and in the middle of it all He never lost sight of thankfulness to God. Because He could see the end in view, it was the joy that was set before Him that allowed Him to endure the cross. And look at us, huh? We deserve humility and we receive glory, we deserve hate and we receive divine love, we deserve rejection but God gives us sonship, we deserve scorn but we receive affection, we deserve poverty and He gives us riches and we deserve sin's curse and He gives us His righteousness, and then if everything doesn't go right in our lives we gripe, see? It doesn't make any sense, does it?

According to a medieval legend two angels were sent to earth, one had the task from the Lord of gathering together all the petitions and the other had the task of gathering the thanksgiving. The angel who went to gather the petitions couldn't carry the load back. The angel that went to get the, the thanksgivings came back with a few in his hand. Well that's a legend and legends can be far fetched

and fantastic but I'm afraid that one's not too far fetched at all. We're so long on requests, aren't we? Which is like signing your name, your self-indulgent servant, John. And we're very short on thanks. Maybe that's the most common sin of all the saints. When do we give thanks? Always. For what do we give thanks? All things. How do we give thanks? In Christ's name.

Finally to whom do we give thanks? God the Father, verse 20 again, "unto God and the Father." And I love the fact that he uses the word Father because it's the benevolent attitude of God that is being seen here. It is God in His Fatherliness as He bestows upon us the gifts of His love. God the Father emphasizes the loving beneficence of God to His children. He is always, always giving us gifts. "He is the Father of lights, in whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. From whom every good and perfect gift descends." Everything comes from Him, even the things that comes through ... come through other people to you come from Him, as He works through other people It's Christ singing through us, Christ thanking God through us and Christ giving through us.

I had occasion recently uh, to give something to someone, they had a need and I had the wonderful joy of giving something to meet that need, and I always like to see the response when you do that and how people respond and I received a lovely note, and it was most interesting to me that the entire note simply thanked God, just was refreshing. All through the note it thanked the Lord, never said anything about me just thanked the Lord. And you see there is the person recognizing God as the source of all things. When we start to thank each other it kind of borders on flattery a little bit. But when we see God as the source of everything we have the perspective of .

Listen, if you're filled with the Spirit, toward yourself you' 1 sing, toward God you'll say thanks. Oh listen, the Old Testament calls on this over and over again, Psalm 30, Psalm 50, Psalm 69, Psalm 92, 95, 100, 105, 116 and more, it just calls us to thank God and thank God and thank God. It says in Romans 1:21 that the heathen ate characterized this way, "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." Do you see that? That is a characteristic of an unregenerate world, thanklessness. God wants His people to be thankful. Paul says to the Philippians, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication make your requests known unto God, with thanksgiving." With thanksgiving. Colossians 2:7 tells us to be thankful to God. Hebrews 13:15 says, lift up your lips and with your lips utter to God the praise that comes through thanksgiving. In the Old Testament certain orders of the Levitical priests had no other job than to lead the people in thanksgiving.

Do you know that all of the feasts and festivals of Israel were set for thanksgiving? The whole purpose of every commemorative feast, the Feast of Weeks and Tabernacles and Trumpets and Pentecost and Passover, all they were were great national acts of thanksgiving, to a God who had served His people so lovingly and graciously.

Now listen, I'm going to close this point by saying this, you have three possible ways to respond. There are three kinds of people when it comes to thanksgiving we can look at in closing, and I want you to look at the Book of Luke to see them, chapter 12, Luke chapter 12. First some people never give thanks, this, this is the category of people who never thank God for anything. They think they've done it all themselves, they think they've made their own hay. Luke 12:16, "He spoke a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no place to bestow my crops? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my crops and my goods." Boy, look what I've done, I've grown this tremendous crop, isn't it wonderful? I'm going to just store it all up. "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease. Eat, drink, and be merry. Just take the rest of your life to consume all the stuff you've got. "God said unto him, You fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." You say, what's the point? This is the point, he didn't think he owed God anything because he didn't think God was the source of anything, you see? He thought he did it all himself, look what I've done, I'll spend the rest of my life consuming my own accomplishment, and He said, you're going to die tonight, you're going to die tonight because you didn't recognize that nothing grows anywhere unless God makes it grow, there's no ground and there's no grain unless God makes it, and you have not been rich toward God, you have not recognized God as the source of everything, therefore you lose it all, see? These are people who aren't thankful for anything, they just think they did it, they earned their own fortune, they made their own way in life, they grabbed their own gusto, they did their own thing, God isn't even involved. That's one option; you can just be one of those people who never give thanks.

And then there are others who give thanks but it is hypocritical, look at chapter 18 of Luke. This is the hypocritical thanks, Luke 18 verse 9, and here's another parable given to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, these are the self-righteous. "Two men went into the temple to pray; one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself," notice he's talking to himself, and he says, "God," he worships himself see, he's really identifying himself, "I thank thee," now listen this guy hasn't got an ounce of thanksgiving in his heart, he's not thanking anybody but himself, he's saying, I'm so thankful to me for what I have accomplished, you see. But he - he sort of tries to make it appear as if this is worship of God, "I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector." Oh, I'm so thankful I'm so wonderful, you see.

And the other man, "tax collector, standing afar off, wouldn't lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote on his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. Jesus said, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." You see there are some people who never give thanks at all then there are other people who just go around thanking themselves under the guise that they're thanking

God, they're self-righteous, that's hypocritical.

There's a third category in Luke 17, the truly thankful, this is a beautiful story, I'm going to read it very rapidly. Verse 11 of Luke 17, "And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them," how many? One of them, only one out of ten? "when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks;" I mean only one is thankful out of ten? "and he was a Samaritan." A half-breed, an outcast. "And Jesus, answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, except this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee." I think it's saying, in other words the ten got healing but only one got salvation.

Listen, that's true thanks, that's true thanks. The rest got what they wanted, and what they wanted was their selfishness fulfilled, they wanted to get rid of their disease that made them a social outcast. The other one, the magnificent minority gave Christ what Christ wanted, glory. Do you see the difference? Some of us are satisfied to get what we want and we don't even think about Christ, others are concerned with the glory that He wants and deserves. Gratitude beloved is man at his best, ingratitude is man at his worst.

David said, "Thus I will publish with a voice of thanksgiving, and tell all thy wondrous works." We of all people should be thankful you know, if we never had anything but Jesus Christ we should be thankful, right? Because in having Christ we have everything for eternity.

A city missionary in London was called to an old tenement building, a lady was dying and in the last stages of disease the room was tiny and cold and the woman was lying on the floor. This missionary tried to help this lady and asked if there was anything she wanted and this is what she said, I have all I really need, I have Jesus Christ. Well the man never forgot it, and he went out of there and he wrote these words, "In the heart of London City mid the dwellings of the poor these bright golden words were uttered, I have Christ, what want I more? Spoken by a lonely woman dying on a garret floor having not one earthly comfort, I have Christ, what want I more? He who heard them ran to fetch her something from the world's great store, it was needless, died she saying, I have Christ, what want I more? Oh my dear, my fellow sinner high or low or rich or poor can you say with deep thanksgiving, I have Christ, what want I more?"

Let's bow in prayer.

Father thank You that we have Christ, and most of us have much, much more from Your gracious hand. Make us ever grateful, ever thankful as it springs from hearts that are humble, made humble by the filling of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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