In Everything Give Thanks
1 Thessalonians 5:18
80-267

Well, as I said this morning, and as you know, if you were here with us, this is Thanksgiving weekend and we decided to take a little bit of a break from our normal study in the gospel of Luke and the epistle of 1 John to talk about the matter of thanksgiving. And if you'll turn again in your Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we're looking at just a couple of commands that are given to us in this very practical section. This morning we considered 1 Thessalonians 5:16, rejoice always. Just two words and if you consider the Greek letters, it's the shortest verse in the Bible. But it's a far-reaching command and we talked a little bit about that this morning.

And there is another command in verse 18 that I want to address and it ties in wonderfully with the one we looked at this morning. "In everything give thanks." In everything give thanks. "Rejoice always." "In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

This morning we talked about the duty of rejoicing and now we want to talk about the duty of giving thanks. This is a responsibility to which we are all duty bound. It comes to us in the form of a command. And, in fact, people who reject God are described in Romans 1:21 as those who did not honor Him as God, or give thanks.

One of the characteristics of the unregenerate is that they fail to be thankful to God. They are like those lepers who are described in the seventeenth chapter of Luke, having been healed by Jesus. You remember there were ten of them but only one returned to give thanks and he was the one who received not just a physical healing, but the salvation of his soul. The unregenerate people are like the nine thankless lepers who receive anything and everything good from God but render Him absolutely no thanks. On the other hand, we are commanded to thank Him in everything. It's that same kind of consummate thanks that defines our joy. We are to at all times be rejoicing and in everything giving thanks.

In the Old Testament sacrificial system there were, as you might remember, sin offerings. Sin offerings were designed to be brought by the people as constant reminders of their sinfulness, constant reminders of the ongoing need for forgiveness, the ongoing need for atonement, the ongoing need for cleansing, the ongoing need for penitence, the ongoing need for righteousness. Every time they brought a sin offering, and they did it often throughout the year, they were reminded of how sinful they were and how desperately they needed to be made fully and completely righteous.

But the Old Testament ceremonial system included not only sacrificial offerings that were meant to remind people of their sins, but also what were called thank offerings, or peace offerings. They're described in the seventh chapter of Leviticus. And they were reminders that the people continually needed to be thankful to God for all His merciful and gracious provisions for their spiritual and physical needs, but they were to come and, as it were by manifest gratitude to God, maintain a right

relationship with Him.

Now as Christians, we don't have a sacrificial system anymore and we don't have any thank offerings or sometimes called peace offerings so that we are celebrating the goodness of God toward us because we have a relationship with Him, peace. We don't have those kinds of offerings anymore. We basically have only one ceremony, only one sacrament that relates to this apart from the one-time baptism, we only have one ongoing ceremony and that is the Lord's table. But I believe the Lord's table as a way of combining both of those elements of the Old Testament system, the Lord's table is a reminder of our sin. You cannot remember the Lord's death without remembering your sin. We don't have ongoing sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice, continually pointing to our sinfulness and our need for a Savior. The one sacrifice of Christ eliminated the need for any other sacrifices. But we do need the constant reminder of our sinfulness and we need to address that sinfulness and we need to be brought to penitence and confession of that sinfulness. We don't do that by more sacrifices, we do that by remembering the one sacrifice. So every time we come to the Lord's table we are thrown back, as it were, on the sacrifice of Christ and reminded again of how desperate our sinful condition is and how glorious was the sacrifice of Christ to provide the sacrifice that satisfied the wrath of God regarding our sin. Therefore that very same Lord's table becomes for us a celebration of gratitude. As we come to that table, it's a Eucharist, it is a giving of thanks, it is not just a remembrance, it is a time of thanksgiving. Remembering how sinful we are causes us to offer up thanks to God. And so, the Lord's table is for us the focal point both of the remembrance of our sin, and the expression of thanks.

In everything, verse 18 says, give thanks, in everything. It's in the Greek *en panti,*it has the idea of in connection with every thing that comes along in life. It's just very, very broad. It has no limits. It has no confines. No matter what it might be, *eucharisteo*applies, that is the giving of thanks. Anything that isn't sin...obviously sin falls outside the purview of that command as it does in rejoicing, we certainly always rejoice wouldn't rejoice in sin and in everything giving thanks wouldn't give thanks for sin. But apart from that, everything else should precipitate an attitude and an expression of thanks to God. As we saw in Romans 1:21 thanklessness is a characteristic of people who are outside the Kingdom of God. In fact, in 2 Timothy chapter 3, you probably should add this expression of man's fallenness, they are, according to verse 2, lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, etc., etc., treacherous, reckless. In all of the litany of what defines unregenerate people, right in the middle is thanklessness. The unsaved man goes through life complaining, going through life bitter, angry. His life moves along a path of trying to manipulate the world around him to satisfy, as we said, the matrix of his own passions and whenever he can do that he has something to be happy about, whenever he can't, he is entrenched in bitterness and disappointment, sadness. He thinks that some things are a matter of luck, some things are a matter of manipulation so he works any combination of those things he can trying to force into reality the things that he wants. There's a driving foolish philosophy today, you hear people say it all the time, you can be anything you want to be, you can do anything you really want to do. Which isn't, of course, true at all. But this sort of garrisons man's mind against fatalism which is the idea that the reality is you can't do anything you want to do, you can't have anything you want to have, you can't achieve anything you want to achieve. It's not the way life works. But rather than deal with that kind of fatalism, we believe a lie and launch off into a fantasy world believing what down in our hearts we know is not true. Trying to do whatever we can, manipulating people and events to put us in a position where we get what we want. And if that moment ever comes, then there may be manifestly a moment of gratitude. It's like joy. If we get what we long for, if we get the pleasures we chase, then we rejoice and then we're thankful. If we don't, we don't rejoice and we aren't thankful.

But as we saw this morning, the believer operates in a completely different world, a completely different realm. We can rejoice always because of what we know to be true about God and His plan for us and we can be thankful for everything for the very same reasons. So the message tonight really builds on what we said this morning. Since we know that all things are being worked together by God for our eternal good, we can be thankful for everything. There is nothing outside the all things that are working together for good because God is making that happen. There's nothing outside those "all things." Because God is working all things for our good, there is cause for joy. In the end there is the same cause for gratitude.

The early church made thanksgiving an essential part of their fellowship. It wasn't something that just came along seasonally. And I think for any mature Christians, any obedient Christians, any Christians who have a grip on spiritual blessing, they would understand this. First Corinthians 14:16, "Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted...listen...say the 'amen' at your giving of thanks?" Without going into all the details of that verse, Paul is describing a church service in the early church and he's describing some of the things that ought to go on and some of the things that ought not to go on, but among those things he defines a time in the service when you give thanks. In verse 17 he adds, "For you are giving thanks well enough but because of other things you're doing, you're not edifying." So he affirms that part of the early church service was the giving of thanks and this was a good thing to do. The church engaged itself in being thankful and it should be so since it is part and parcel of what it means to have a proper and appropriate response to the goodness of God.

In 2 Corinthians 4:15, just building on this command, "For all things are for your sakes." That's quite an amazing statement. God has in mind everything He does for your sakes, everything, "That the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God." Paul says, "Everything I do in my ministry as a representative of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, everything that God has me do, every ministry that I have, every time I teach and preach and every time I counsel and every time I bring the truth of God to you, every promise that I bring you, every measured truth that I bring you is from God, an element of grace spreading for the purpose of causing gratitude...gratitude that abounds to the honor and the glory of God who is the giver. So you could say that in everything you give thanks because everything that comes into our lives fits into God's purpose to spread grace to us in a richer and richer way.

Second Corinthians 9:11 is a promise, and actually starts in verse 10, "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will multiply...supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." The same God who causes crops to grow and produce seed so that seed can be planted and more crops can grow, the same God who takes care of the food supply also takes care of the righteousness supply. He's the same God who multiples your seed for sowing and increases the harvest of your righteousness. And then verse 11, "You will be enriched in everything." God is going to give you everything you need, He's going to enrich you in everything and He's going to do it liberally so that you can be liberal as you share and dispense these spiritual blessings. Why? Which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. God blesses us in order that it might redound to His glory and His honor, in order that it might produce thanksgiving.

Again, in Ephesians 5 we find similar instruction. We are called upon to obey, verse 3, "Do not let immorality or any impurity of greed even be named among you as is proper among saints." In other words, you ought to live a saintly, godly life, free from immorality, that's *porneia*, fornication and

impurity which is a generic word meaning every other kind of sexual sin, or greed. Let none of that be named among you because it isn't fitting for saints. "And there must be no filthiness or silly talk, or coarse jesting, that's obscenity, which are not fitting but rather giving of thanks." That seems like a strange contrast, doesn't it? You should never be engaged in immorality, any kind of sexual impurity, any kind of greed. There should never be any filthiness or silly talk, actually the word can mean dirty talk, or obscenity. That's not fitting. You be characterized as being thankful. It's almost as if he sums up a righteous life as characterized by gratitude. To live a righteous life, and I think that's really a very important principle. If you get a hold of this, it's very practical and applicable. To live a righteous life means to be characterized by incessant gratitude because incessant gratitude means that you have a grip on the goodness of God in your life, that you're literally swept up in what God is doing in your life. You have a God-ward focus, and that's the essence of righteous living, that's the essence of godliness. That's what it means to be filled with the Spirit. God down in that same chapter, Ephesians 5 to verse 18, don't get drunk with wine. Here's another one of these contrasts. "Don't get drunk with wine, that's dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." There were people in the ancient Greek world who believed that the way to ascend into the transcendent realm of religious experience, the way to commune with deities, the way to escape the low-level of the world and ascend to the higher knowledge was through drunkenness. As you became more inebriated, you sort of, in their view, escaped the mundane and you were lifted to loftier concepts. He says if you want to be elevated to the presence of God, if you want to commune with the true Spirit of God, don't get drunk with wine, just be filled with the Spirit. Just, as Colossians puts it, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, just be under the control of the truth and the Spirit of truth. And when that happens, you'll speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

You know what happens at an orgy when you get completely drunk? You might sing but it isn't going to be hymns and songs that exalt God. But when you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you truly are communing with God, you'll speak to one another in psalms and hymns, spiritual songs, you'll sing, make melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God even the Father. Characteristic of a Spirit-filled person, characteristic of a Spirit-controlled person is incessant thanks...incessant gratitude. That means you're under Holy Spirit control.

So all these verses essentially are saying the same thing really. It is normal for us...back in chapter 5 verse 4, it is normal for us to give thanks, that's...that's how you sum up the holy life as in contrast to all those sins. A Spirit-filled life is characterized by incessant thanks. And then verse 21 says, "And be subject to one another and wives...so this...and husbands...do this...and children...do this...and parents...do this...and servants...do this...and masters...do this," and he goes through that whole section. But the first response is joy, speaking to one another, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord. When you get your spiritual life right, when you're under the control of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, when they dominate your thinking and your life, the first thing that happens is joy that comes out in praise and then it's followed by and companion to gratitude. So you will always give thanks for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to God even the Father, you'll be thankful for everything. That's how Spirit-filled people function.

Actually, you could sort of sum up a godly person's life by saying they're full of joy and gratitude...full of joy and gratitude. That's not a stretch because if you ask...what are we going to be like when we're perfect?...what are we going to be like when we're in heaven?...what are we going to be doing when we're in heaven? Well, we could sum it up with the same reality, when we get to heaven we're going

to spend all eternity expressing joy and gratitude. Is that not true? The purest joy and the purest unending gratitude. That is, in a sense, the summation of spirituality, it is a person who cannot be overcome by circumstances, cannot be overcome by disappointment in this world because they're so filled with the Spirit, controlled by the truth as to be incessantly thankful.

In Philippians 4:6 somebody might say, "Well what about when trouble comes? What about when bad times come?" Well he says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." You've got some problems that could create anxiety for you, don't be anxious about it, just start praying, start supplicating before God but be thankful in the process. In the midst of that thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Spirit-filled people, Spirit-controlled people, godly people are marked out as thankful.

Turn to Colossians 2, I think it's a highpoint of these verses, verse 6 of Colossians 2 is a wonderful verse. "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in Him." What it means is, walk means your daily life, your daily conduct. So now that you have received Christ Jesus as the Lord, pattern your life after Him. Verse 7 then says, "Having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him," you were rooted in Him at the point of your salvation, now you're being built up, you're being edified, you're being sanctified, you're being established in your faith, "just as you were instructed and overflowing with gratitude." This is a command again. You're in Christ, you're growing in your faith just as you were instructed. In other words, you grow in faith as you receive instruction about divine truth. And be characterized as literally overflowing with gratitude. Again as we saw this morning, the kind of joy that we're to have is the kind of joy that is causing us to leap for joy, it's the kind of joy that makes us glad. It's the kind of joy that we don't have enough outlets to express. It's that surpassing joy, it's that over the top kind of joy. And the same is true with gratitude. Our gratitude is to be, as indicated here, an overflowing, gushing kind of gratitude. This is characteristic of one who is spiritually mature.

Turn to Colossians chapter 4. "Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven." And then there's an end to the paragraph, and he starts into the exhortation section with this, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it, with thanksgiving," the Greek says, "with thanksgiving...with thanksgiving." I don't know why the NAS translators put an attitude of thanksgiving, I don't think it's limited to an attitude. I think it could be an expression as well. It's why would you limit it to an attitude? "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving."

So here you are in the direness situation, here you are with the greatest need to pray, here you are distraught with whatever's going on in life and you're taking your supplication to the Lord and you're praying and you're alert, that is you're watching so you know what to pray for, but never are you forgetting that you are in everything to be thankful so that in the middle of all of your prayers in the times of your struggle comes thanksgiving. Your attitude just flows from the Spirit-filled person, the person who has dominated by divine truth, that person knows what it is to life with a grateful heart.

An illustration of this is Paul and Silas in Acts 16 in the Philippian jail. They were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. That's...that's the gratitude pouring out of them, the joy pouring out of them in the midst of frankly the worst imaginable suffering. And it always sort of surprises me a little bit to read how Paul began his letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthians just shattered his heart time and time and time again. If there was a church for which Paul would not have been thankful, it would have been that one and yet he begins the letter, 1 Corinthians 1:4, "I thank my God always

concerning you." He was able to rise above the pain that they inflicted upon him. They were the most heartbreaking bunch in the whole New Testament.

So we're talking here about this constant attitude of gratitude and this constant expression of thanks. If we have received Jesus as Lord, we ought to walk the way He walked...we read. And perhaps then we should turn to an illustration of the gratitude of Jesus Himself. Jesus was grateful for what God gave to Him, grateful for God's blessing given to Him. He accepted whatever it was that God gave Him with a grateful heart. He says in verse 26 of Matthew 11, "Yes, Father, for thus it was well pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Just reminding you that everything that Jesus had, everything that came His way good and bad, even including the cross was from the Father, was well-pleasing in the Father's sight. Because of that Jesus embraced it all and actually did so with a measure of gratitude, no matter how difficult, how painful it was. When He prays to the Father in John 17, the tone is a tone of sorrow and yet a tone of trust. He has accomplished His task gladly, willingly and even thankfully and is ready to go back to the Father.

One verse kind of sums that attitude up. John 11:41, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me and I knew that Thou heardest Me always because of the people standing around I said it that they may believe that Thou didst send Me. I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me, that always You hear Me." That was at the grave of Lazarus, as you remember. Jesus was thankful that the Father always heard His prayers. Jesus was thankful whatever the Father gave Him to do, even if it was to die on a cross He said, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." When He was in the Upper Room at that last supper when He established the communion service, He took some bread and after He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them and said, "This is My body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of Me." There He was thanking God for the bread which essentially was thanks to God for the privilege of suffering in the plan of God for sinners.

And so it is then in going back to our text, and we don't need to spend a lot of time on this because it's so clear, enough to simply point you in the direction of its intentions. Going back to our text, "In everything give thanks." Paul then adds, "For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Now that likely refers back to all three of the commands. The one in verse 16, "Rejoice always." The one in verse 17, "Pray without ceasing," which I'll comment on at the end. And, "In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." God wants you always joyful, always prayerful and always thankful. This is the will of God for those who are in Christ, those who belong to the Lord.

This is a very clear directive...unmistakable. If you're battling with this, let me do what I did this morning, just some practical thoughts. What hinders a thankful heart? And I'm going to go back over things that you heard this morning because they're so tied together.

What hinders a thankful heart? Number one, doubt about God...doubt about God. Doubt about God's wisdom. Doubt about God's love. Doubt about God's Word. Doubt about God's immutability, or changelessness. Doubt about God's power. You're not thankful because you don't believe God can overrule the problems that you have to bring about His glory and your good. Wherever there is ingratitude in your life, no matter what's going on, wherever there's a failure to thank God for His purpose unfolding in the situation, whatever it might be, there is a serious sin taking place because to doubt God is, in a sense, to say that you can't trust what He says about Himself. And that borders on

blasphemy.

A second thing that hinders gratitude is selfishness. It's the inability to say, "Nevertheless, Your will be done." It's not being able to say what Jesus said, "Father, if there is any way to get out of this, if there's any way that this cup can pass from Me, I would like that, nevertheless Your will be done." Selfishness says, "I really don't care what Your will is, this is what I want." It's really a kind of God complex. I want to be God and I want to call the shots. I want to make the choice. That will hinder your gratitude. Self-will, if it dominates you, is more important to you than God's will. What you want is far more important than God wants, even though you have no clue as to what is best. You have no right to define for Him what is best for Him or what is best for Him.

I think another thing that hinders thankfulness is worldliness. And it's kind of what we talked about this morning, it's getting caught up in the pleasures and the people and the places and the possessions and the pursuits and the popularity and prestige that define human life. God and Christ don't fill your vision. It's not like David in Psalm 16, "I've set the Lord always before me, therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices." I mean...he means by that his voice. As long as I set the Lord before me, I have constant joy and constant gratitude. As long as I have my focus on Him, as long as I set my affections on things above and as long as I have...you know what the old theologians used to call "the beatific vision," as long as Christ is the object of everything, I'm going to...I'm going to be thankful. But when I get my eyes on the world and I begin to measure out my life in terms of what in the world I get or don't get, my gratitude disappears.

Another thing, and I think it's obvious, is a critical spirit...a critical spirit. If you are a negative person, if you're a bitter person, if you have a sour...generally a sour attitude in life, if it's unchecked, it will destroy a thankful heart. It will blind your vision. It will destroy your relationships. It will make you really an ugly person to be with and you'll become useless to people and useless to God. A critical attitude, a judgmental attitude, a condemning attitude corrodes spirituality, to say nothing of destroying love...and I don't care what you say, or what you do, if you have no love you're...what?...you're nothing, you're a banging gong and clanging cymbal. Critical attitude, judgmental attitude steals gratitude.

And another thing too that will rob you of gratitude is impatience...impatience. People don't give thanks because their perception is that God is not operating on their Daytimer schedule. They've got it down for Thursday, but Thursday's come and gone. Come on, God, I don't have time to be dallying here, move. They want everything on their schedule, on their timetable. People do silly things like this. You know, "Lord, show me by next Tuesday and if I don't get a no by Tuesday, I'm going." They want everything fixed in their time frame.

You know, the opposite of all these things ought to be obvious. What engenders a thankful heart is trust in God, not doubt. A servant attitude, unselfishness...absolute abdication of all your rights so that God's will is all that matters. A focus on Jesus Christ, being consumed with Him rather than the world. A loving attitude, forgiving, gracious, kind tender heartedness. And gratitude wells up in a heart that is marked by great patience.

I think there are just a couple of other practical things I could mention. Coldness, coldness or sort of spiritual lethargy, or spiritual indifference really does kill gratitude, where your love for God grows cold like the first love in the church at Ephesus, where there's a lack of zeal in service. Some of you people come to church and that's good, you come, you come, you come. You don't serve, you don't

give your life away. You don't spend your life on the Kingdom of God. You fiddle around with your life here and there on things that are trivial and passing. You don't have a passion for the service of Christ. Lack of diligence in the study of Scripture. Lack of passion and worship, neglect of the Bible, waste of time, leaving you really so caught up in the temporal that you have no cognizance of what's going on in the spiritual realm. Now one of the contributors to my own joy obviously is that I'm so engulfed and engaged in ministry that there's no end to the things that make me joyful, that make me thankful.

And then I suppose we could say that another hindrance to gratitude is rebellion, just outright rebellion. You just do not like your lot in life. You're just plain angry with God at the way things have gone.

Now all this is sin, all this is defying the Spirit's command. Even though things are bad, it is not outside the plan of God, not outside the discipline of God, the perfecting of your life through difficulty and trial and suffering, as we saw today.

We said this morning there were certain hindrances to joy and that pretty much the same to gratitude, let's flip it around and this morning we talked about motives for joy and rejoicing. What are the motives for gratitude? Well, they're really the same. God's character, God is almighty, He's working everything to your good. God is holy. He is perfect. He never makes a mistake. There is no capability for God to err in what He thinks about something, the way He assesses something. That's why Psalm 30:4, Psalm 30 verse 4 says, "Give thanks to His holy name." He's so holy He can't make a mistake, He can't make a misjudgment. He can't wrongly assess something. He can't interpret things inaccurately, absolute perfection exists in His holy nature. Every determination is accurate. Every assessment is accurate...every decision, every choice, every move, every word. So again, "Be glad in the Lord," Psalm 97 verse 12, "you righteous ones, and give thanks to His holy name." We're reminded to give thanks to the One whose name is holy, flawless judgment.

And, of course, another motive to our gratitude is God's goodness and mercy. He's so merciful toward us and so gracious toward us and so good to us that we have every reason to believe that even in our pain and our suffering He has good intentions. Listen to Psalm 106 verse 1, "Praise the Lord, O give thanks to the Lord for He is good and His loving kindness," that's His mercy, His grace, "is everlasting." You can give thanks to the Lord because He's good and that means everything He does is for our good, back to Romans 8:28. Psalm 107 verse 1 says the same thing, "O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His loving kindness is everlasting." He will be no other than the God who is good to His people. Again Psalm 136 repeats the same thing over and over about giving thanks to God. We can certainly give thanks again, 2 Corinthians 9:15, for the unspeakable gift of Christ. So we're thankful for God, for His character, for Christ. We're thankful for all the good gifts that the Lord gives us, and again we're reciting things that we talked about this morning. But listen to 1 Timothy 4:4, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude for it is sanctified by means of the Word of God and prayer." That is referring even to our food, everything comes down from a good God as a gift to His people. His mercies are new to us every morning, great is His faithfulness.

And, of course, the Bible goes on to be thankful for divine guidance, to be thankful for victory over sin, to be thankful for victory over death, to be thankful, as Philippians 4 says, that my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus, to be thankful for the power of the Word of God. First Thessalonians, might read that, 2:13, "For this reason we also constantly thank

God that when you received from us the Word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God." How thankful we should be for the teaching of the Word of God. So it goes on and on and on and on.

And when we thank God consistently, faithfully, constantly in every situation, we're manifesting a Spirit-controlled life. God is glorified. We're blessed. The church is built up. And lost people are being reached. Nothing more wonderful than to maintain a joyful, grateful attitude so that the people can see that God has truly transformed our lives.

Well, that's just a summary. Go back for a final thought to 1 Thessalonians 5, I don't want to keep you, I know it's been a long week, and we'll end up in a minute or two, but just go back to the text. Thrown in the middle of these verses, just a comment about this, is this statement, "Pray without ceasing." And it strikes me as so characteristic of the amazing balance that you find in the Word of God. "Rejoice always," why? Because everything is under the control of God. "In everything give thanks," why? Because everything is under God's control, everything is worked out, it's all working together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose, because we have a sovereign God, because we have a sovereign Lord, because we have a sufficient Christ, because we have a powerful resident Holy Spirit, because we have all things that pertain to life and godliness, all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, and on and on. Because we have received from Him justification, sanctification, the promise of glorification, because everything we need in this life is ours and all that He has promised us in the life to come we will receive. We have an unassailable promise, we have an inheritance that is laid up for us that is incorruptible that fadeth not away, and some day we will receive. Everything is planned. Everything is settled. We have nothing to worry about, nothing to be anxious about. In everything we give thanks.

And right in the middle of that he says, and it almost seems completely out of place, "Pray without ceasing." And your immediate response is, "For what?" I mean, the assumption here is that the reason we rejoice all the time and give thanks all the time is because all the bases are covered. What are we praying about here?

That's that marvelous balance again. We're rejoicing all the time because God is in control of it all. We're giving thanks all the time because He's in control of it all. And yet we relentlessly, unceasingly come before Him to pour out the petitions that are driving in our hearts. Why? That too is a command.

Well how do our prayers fit into God's plan? I mean, if He's already sovereign and it's all...how do they fit? I can't answer the question, I just know that God works His plan through the prayers of His people. I just finished going over this in writing a little book on prayer, it will be out about half way through next year, kind of emphasizing the intimate personal aspects of prayer. And pouring back over these things in my mind, looking for some kind of sort of resolution to that that I could fit perfectly into my little sort of analytical mind, just exactly the slot that unceasing prayer fits into the sovereign plan of God and it's elusive, I can't find it. All I know is this, that God is in absolute control of everything so that my joy is unhindered. God is in control of everything so that my gratitude never ceases. And at the same time, prayer rises and pours out of my heart all the time and there's no schizophrenia there because God effects His purposes through the prayers of His people. You can't be saved without believing, even though God is the one who saves. Sinners can't be saved unless they hear the truth. They can't hear the truth unless they have a preacher, right? So God has an eternal plan to save a redeemed humanity but the plan works through the faithful preachers, through

the witnesses. That's why we're told to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And James says the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man effects much, produces much. I can't answer how God does anything, I only know what He does and what He tells us to do. But just as God saves but not apart from a human instrument to give the message, and God saves but not apart from a human repenting and believing, so God works His consummate plan but not apart from the intercession of His people. So just as He has determined that His eternal saving plan would be worked to its perfection through His beloved people taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, so His purpose also unfolds through the prayers, the intercessions, the relentless petitions of His own beloved people. So I would suggest to you that you pray without ceasing, that you respond to the promptings of the Spirit of God. And if you have some kind of theology that stops your prayer life, you've got a bad theology. It's...it's incomplete.

We have reason for unceasing joy, unceasing gratitude and unceasing prayer. All three are God's will in Christ Jesus.

Well, Father, thank You for these wonderful days which began on Wednesday night with a great time of celebration and praise and worship, expressing our gratitude to You in communion service which, as I said in the beginning, is where the remembrance of our sin as well as our gratitude for salvation come together. We've gone through the days since expressing in many ways our thanks to You for all Your goodness and we come to this day and it culminates in the commands that lay out for us our spiritual duty. And, Lord, I know it's always helpful to me if I can find something that is manageable, something that is able to be grasped in my hand to understand the heart and soul of true spirituality. And we have found tonight that true spirituality is manifest joy, manifest gratitude. That sums up what it is to be filled with the Spirit. That sums up what it is to be dominated by divine truth. So make us people of joy, make us people of gratitude, not unsympathetic, not insensitive, not lacking compassion, always laughing with those that laugh and weeping with those that weep, understanding the toil and the tears of human life, but down below, underneath all of that, people who know that because You are our sovereign God, all wise, all loving, all powerful, there's constant joy and gratitude as a reasonable response to everything that goes on in our lives. And yet at the same time may we be characterized by unceasing prayer not only for the intimate joy of communion with You, but knowing that You work Your will through our effectual, fervent petitions. And if we do those things, we will do Your will in Christ Jesus. That's our desire, we pray in His name. Amen.

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