

Giving Thanks

Colossians 1:12-14

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⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Did you know that the first thanksgiving was actually not in New England but in a place that is called Florida today?

Yes. It is said that the first Thanksgiving service or Thanksgiving day was actually held on June 30, 1564 in a place Fort Caroline. This fort place still exists and is near Jacksonville, Florida.

But all the Thanksgiving traditions point to New England. And it was in 1863 that Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation of Thanksgiving. Congress later passed the proclamation. Since 1863, that proclamation was repeated by every president for the following 75 years. Theodore Roosevelt issued this statement about Thanksgiving “*No people on earth have more cause to be thankful than ours, and this is said reverently, in no spirit of boastfulness in our own strength, but with the gratitude to the Giver of good who has blessed us.*”

The apostle Paul began many of his letters by giving thanks.

For example in his letter to the Romans, this is how Paul writes “*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world*” Romans 1:8

To the Corinthian church, hear what Paul says, “*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus*” 1 Corinthians 1:4

To the Ephesian church, Paul said this, “*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers*” Ephesians 1:16

To the Philippian church, “*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you*”. Philippians 1:3

To the Colossians, *“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you”*.
Colossians 1:3

Listen to how Paul introduces in his letter to the Thessalonians, *“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers”*. 1 Thessalonians 1:2

To Philemon, Paul thanks God for him, *“I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers”*
Philemon 1:4

So you see Paul’s heart is full of thankfulness. Always thankful. Constantly thanking God for the churches, for the people God has given him to minister to.

And in some of his letters, Paul instructs why we as believers ought to give thanks to God as well. And the passage you heard me read in the beginning is where Paul instructs the church in Colossae to give thanks. And Paul doesn’t say give thanks once a year or once in a while but constantly. Paul uses a participle. Continuous action.

We’ll focus on verses 12 through 14 for this morning.

To give you a brief history and context about the city of Colossae. Colossae was a town about 100 miles east of Ephesus. The church there was most likely founded by Epaphras, Paul’s fellow worker. It is said the people of Colossae’s day were afraid of spiritual forces like magic spells, astral bodies, the underworld, ancestral curses and things like these. The Roman-Greco world believed that their lives were controlled by the sun, moon and planets and the signs in the sky. Not too very different from our world where people believe in astrology, zodiac signs and the like.

*Many years ago I knew someone who believed in palmistry. It’s a practice where someone looks at your palms and supposedly tells you the future. And this man I knew was approached by many for advice about their life. They would ask to examine the lines on the palm of their hands. And one day, I remember so clearly, when this colleague had job interview, and, he looked at his own hand and determined that he would **not** get the job because the planets were not aligned for his success. Very similar to what the people of Colossae believed in.*

To counter this kind of fear, there were some people promoting a false sense of religion under the guise of Christianity. They were saying that Christians should practice rituals like asceticism in order to counter the dark spiritual forces. One way we could describe the issues the Colossians were facing was syncretism. It’s like mixing astrology, magic with Christian teachings.

Hopefully, some day we will go through this letter but here Paul is writing to these believers to instruct and remind them that God has ultimate power and Christ is supreme. And what God has done is incredibly powerful and permanent.

I have two main observations as to why they should be giving thanks to God.

Thank God because God had qualified you.

Have you seen an employment posting or job description that said something like this – “Required qualifications - competence, skill, knowledge and experience required in the following areas”. If it is music, you will need training and skill in reading the notes, the charts. If it is computer programming, you will need competency in understanding and writing computer code. If it is a teaching position you will need expertise in the area that you will be teaching in. If you are a craftsman like a plumber, mason, electrician, carpenter or anything like that you will have to be competent whatever area you are. Every trade, job or employment has some skill necessary for making it into the team. However, when you see God’s way. Your skill or merit or competence cannot make you right before God. Matter of fact, no amount of goodness or righteousness we have can stand before the perfect righteousness of God. The only way you are qualified is to be unqualified first.

And look at what Paul says about the believers in Colossae – “*giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light*”. First of all, God qualified you, enabled you, made you adequate, made you right, reconciled you with himself. When? When you were not yet competent for eternal life.

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:11-12, 23

So if all have sinned, if no one is righteous before God, how did the Colossians become qualified to be called saints? How did **you** become qualified to be called a saint? And, yes, believers are called “saints”. What a privilege! You are forgiven sinners but you are also called saints. We saw in verse 12 that God qualified you but how?

Look at the previous verses in this chapter. Paul’s answer is wonderful and yet stunning. Verses three through six.

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to

you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.

Colossians 1:3-6

Let me try and break it down in **three** sub-observations:

1. Hearing the Gospel
2. Understanding the Gospel
3. Putting faith in Jesus Christ

Paul is saying that the Colossians heard the Gospel, understood the Gospel and as a result put their faith in Jesus Christ. This is how you became qualified to be a saint as well. Just as Epaphras preached the Gospel to the Colossians, someone preached the Gospel to you **and** you understood that without Jesus you are lost. You realized that without Jesus you would have been in darkness forever and be cast into the outer darkness one day. But when you realized that Jesus is the light **and** put your faith in Jesus Christ, you received a new inheritance. Jesus himself said in the Gospel of Matthew that, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*”. Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are the competent, blessed are the meritorious, blessed are the skillful” **So the only qualification to become a saint is that you should have been a sinner prior and should have repented.** Jesus said, “*I did not come to call the righteous but to call sinners to repentance*”. The only ones who they are righteous are self-righteous ones before God. And those who repent are the ones who find favor with God.

And when Paul says “saint in light”, he means that you join all the believers who have gone before us, the heroes of the faith, the people who paid with their lives to spread the gospel, you have joined their heritage. And “light” is referring to the realm of God where God Himself exists. “*God is Light, in Him there is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5). What a wonderful inheritance you have!

Thank God for he had qualified you.

Second observation:

Thank God because God has rescued you.

Verses 13 and 14.

¹³ *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,* ¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

The main **two** verbs in these two verses are the words “*delivered*” and “*transferred*”.

When Paul says God delivered or rescued you, it is in past tense. Paul means that God orchestrated the whole thing. You hearing the Gospel, you understanding the Gospel and the faith he gave for you to believe in Jesus Christ. This is all God's doing.

And this word "deliver" or "rescue" is a **powerful** word.

- In one sense, this is rescue is final. God sent His Son into a world already condemned in order to save those who trust in Him. So in that sense God permanently delivered us. *There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Romans 8:1
- In another sense, you may go through life's trials and temptations. And when we need a rescue, God knows how to rescue us as well. *"the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials"* 2 Peter 2:9 . So we continue to depend on God when we face trials as he knows our weaknessness.
- Thirdly, in a final sense, God will ultimately rescue us from the wrath to come. *"Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"* 1 Thessalonians 1:10

Not only did God rescue you. God also transferred into a realm that has end, into a kingdom that is forever.

¹³ *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,* ¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

You see the contrast. This is a world of darkness. A world of dark deeds. But Jesus's kingdom is a kingdom of light. A kingdom of truth. A kingdom of truth. A kingdom of life.

How did this transfer from darkness to light happen? Yes, you heard the Gospel, you understood the Gospel and you put your faith in Jesus Christ. But what happened behind the scenes?

Jesus delivered himself over to pay the penalty for sin and sinners so that you would not be delivered over to the penalty that God demands for sin.

When Jesus was on the cross, there is a time when the mocking began. You see a description in Mathew chapter twenty seven.

"And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the

Son of God.””⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.”
Matthew 27: 39-44

You see those who passed by mocked him, the chief priests mocked him, the scribes mocked him, even the robbers who were crucified mocked him. And they all said the same kind of thing “Let your God deliver you”. The religious people even said, “we’ll believe you if you escape our pitiful helpless condition”. You see this attitude even today. We’ll believe in Jesus **if** I have this or this happens. Gos is not so impressed with our conditions. What they didn’t realize that Jesus volunteered to go to the cross and had power to escape the cross at anytime.

“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” John 10:18

But more importantly they did not understand why he was on the cross. In verse 14, Paul says *“in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins”*.

All those people could not see this truth. That understanding was not given.

Except for one thief who changed his mind from mockery to humility. The Gospel of Matthew does not record it but the Gospel of Luke does.

This is how this one robber found redemption.

“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”⁴² And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.””

Of all the people who mocked, ridiculed and taunted Jesus, this one man saw why Jesus was being crucified. He saw that Jesus was paying the price of his redemption. He saw his need for forgiveness of his sins. And you have the same redemption that this man was offered.

If there is anyone who never heard this Gospel and understood this truth, its never too late.

Perhaps, one of the best statements about Thanksgiving is by Abraham Lincoln. Here are is his statement *“...It is announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord....It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people.”*