

**Ephesians 5: 20; “Giving Thanks Always for Everything”, A Thanksgiving Sermon,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 19th, 2017,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

As we approach another National Thanksgiving Day, it gladdens my heart that this particular holiday gives us a real opportunity to speak to others around us of what we are thankful for, and whom we are thankful to, for all that He has given to us. It is good when we can link our thankfulness to our God, from whom all blessings flow. The only thing which Thanksgiving represents, when it is truly celebrated; is that we are a thankful people for all that God has given to us; all that He has done for us as a nation and as a people. Thanksgiving has been celebrated as a day of thankful remembrance, for the United States of America, as early as 1620, in the Plymouth Colony. It is with a thankful heart that we as Christians remember the Puritan Pilgrims who first came over from Delph Haven in Holland in the year 1620. They had fled persecution from their native England, not too long before, and now they were launching out to search for a place where they could worship God with freedom of conscience.

I think that it is peculiarly fitting that we pause this morning and remember, that what we have come to know as Thanksgiving began with Christian people experiencing trials and testings to their faith. And yet they were a thankful people. “The Puritans were men of prayer,” Joseph Banvard says. “In all undertakings of importance, they were accustomed to seek direction from their heavenly Father, and implore His blessing.” “Accordingly, on Saturday, November 11th, 1620, religious services were held on board of the Mayflower.” “They fell on their knees, rendered thanks to God for His kind protection of them during their dangerous voyage across the ocean, and they implored His favor to rest upon them amid the toils, trials, and temptations upon which they were now to enter.”

This is the kind of people that you and I who are Christians hope to be, in our trials and difficulties on our journey through this life to heaven. We are like Pilgrim in Pilgrim’s Progress. We have set out on a journey from this life to the next, and we would be a thankful people, not only on this upcoming day of Thanksgiving, but as our text says, “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” So what I would like to do this morning is to 1st of all, share with you the beauty of Christian thanksgiving. Then 2nd – I would like to tell you of the duration of Christian thanksgiving. And then finally I would like to set before you the all-inclusive nature of Christian thanksgiving. Let us give our hearts and our minds at this hour to receive this teaching so that we might learn more of how it is glorifying to God and strengthening to our own souls, to give thanks always for all things to God.

1st of all – The Beauty of Christian Thanksgiving.

What is thanksgiving anyway? The Dictionary says, “It is the act of giving thanks; a grateful acknowledgement of benefits or favors; especially the act of giving thanks to God.” This is a good definition. It is an act that begins in the heart and it comes out on the lips. You may be a thankful person this morning. You may be thankful to be alive, thankful that you have a house to live in and a family to live there with you. You may be thankful for your daily bread and thankful for good health, and thankful for the many possessions that you have; but do you give thanks to God for all that you are, and all that you have? Everything that is good that is in you is from God’s goodness; His having placed it there or His having worked it into your heart by the Holy Spirit. All that you have is from His bountiful hand. Truly you have much to be thankful for.

Many unbelieving people do not give thanks to God at all, but all of us should understand this morning that God is a God of great goodness and it is a good and beautiful thing to give Him thanks. God has expected this of His highest created creature upon this earth; to give Him

thanks, since the creation of the World. Turn with me to Romans 1: 20. Here Paul is showing the guiltiness of men after the fall, a guiltiness which continues in fallen man to this very day. "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened." Men used to know much about God in the beginning of the world. The creation itself declared it most clearly, and it spoke with a loud voice, of God's goodness. Everything that God made was very good. "For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies; for the love which from our birth, over and around us lies; Christ of all to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise." We so little think of these things apart from grace. But if we understand that sin has entered the world through the one man Adam's sin, and death through sin, we can understand why men do not see God and His goodness much in the creation. We understand why they have become futile in their speculations and think that all of mankind have evolved from apes.

Their foolish hearts are darkened because they have sin in their nature. Their minds have been blinded to the truth of God's word. They do not glorify God by believing that He created this amazing world. They do not think about how He speaks to them in and through His blessed Word. And it tells us here what is a great grief this is to God; "They were not thankful", and they are not thankful today, unless grace changes their hearts. This is one of the main things that characterizes unbelievers; they are unthankful for the goodness of God which He has so richly and freely bestowed upon them. They will not tell Him that they are thankful for all that He has done for them. Psalm 107, verses 8 and 9 say – "Oh that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" "For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness."

Notice here that it is the soul of the one who is hungry that is satisfied; not just the body. You may have much reason, humanly speaking to give thanks for all that the Lord has given to you to satisfy your body with, here in this life. Do you give Him thanks for it? But even more, oh so much more, are the satisfactions of the soul to be given thanks for! "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." If this is what God the Father has given to you through the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord Jesus has died so that these things might be brought to your soul as realities, then will you not give Him thanks today, for all that He has given to you, all through your life?

Turn with me to Psalm 92 and I will speak to you a little about the acts of thanksgiving. Listen to what it says here. "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night." These are the acts of thanksgiving to God; to declare His lovingkindness in the morning, and His faithfulness every night. Oh, what a great privilege this is; to give thanks to God in the morning and the night, each and every day of our lives. It is good to have personal and private devotions of thanksgiving in the morning, and more of the same in the night. If this seems legalistic to you, you have not really understood true devotion to God, and you have not yet come to the place where you have a very thankful heart. This is an attitude which you should repent of, for if you do not have a thankful heart, you will most probably have a complaining heart. Think of it this way: The whole earth is full of the goodness of the Lord and you cannot stop to thank him once every morning for His lovingkindness and once every evening for His faithfulness? I think that God must wonder at us sometimes, that we have so little love for Him; so little love for what He does, in our minds or in our heart, that we cannot with joyful lips

declare twice a day His lovingkindness and His faithfulness? Surely, if you are a Christian, God has given you grace not only to praise Him and thank Him twice in a day, but even more times during the day? This is something which I believe that we should resolve to do; that we will learn to do if we are not doing it now.

Turn with me over to Daniel chapter 6, verse 1. “It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss.” himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.” “The governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.” “Then these men said, ‘We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.’”

Sometimes people will conspire against you if you are a godly man in your work. So these men went to the king and in verse 7 we find that they asked him to prohibit prayer to any god for thirty days, except prayer to Darius. And the king, like a dummy, signs the written decree. What does Daniel do? It says in chapter 6, verse 10, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home.” “And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before His God, as was his custom since early days.” Now this is an example for all Christians to take notice of. This had been his custom to give thanks 3 times a day before his God since his youth. And he is not going to stop giving thanks now. It was this giving thanks in the middle of the day that got him in trouble here. He went home for a short time to give thanks and to lay the case of these men’s dishonoring plans and conduct before God. While men would scheme evil against him, he would worship. He would even give thanks. He saw it evidently, as something essential to his worship of God, and his worship was not going to stop for any man or any man’s decree. He did believe that God would work all these things together for his good. How is it with you? Do you consider the giving of thanks to God in prayer a part of your worship to Him? Are you so in the habit of giving thanks to God that if a law was passed in this country saying that you could not give thanks, that you would disobey it immediately, as Daniel did? I hope that as a Christian that you would. Giving thanks to God is that important.

2nd – I want to tell you of the duration of Christian thanksgiving.

Our text says, “giving thanks always”.... Now this goes a step beyond a certain number of times of giving thanks in the day. It means that thanksgiving to God should fill our heart at all times. We are here being exhorted to be a thankful people always. How can this be?, you say? It sounds quite impossible. Well it is quite impossible apart from grace, even as all of the commands of holiness are quite impossible apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice,” it says in Philippians 4: 4. It is the same kind of command as this. It requires that the focus of your faith will be upon what God the Father has given to you in the person and work of Christ, and His having given to you the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Without thinking and meditating on these facts, keeping the commandment is quite impossible.

But if you will think with me for a moment about verses 18 and 19 of Chapter 5 of Ephesians, the verses right before our text, you can see how a believer who is always to give thanks can begin to do so. “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always....” That is the context. A Christian being drunk with wine is something that is a grief to the Spirit of God. You must remember that the Holy Spirit is a person of the Godhead; He is that Holy Person who was given to you when you

first believed in Jesus Christ. He was given to you forever. He was given to you to be with you always. He is not simply an influence in your life. He not like liquid poured into your soul. He is a person who is with you and who is intimately involved in your life. He is "Christ in you". To be drunk with wine as a Christian means you have forgotten this blessed truth, that the Holy Spirit has come to live in you and abide in you. When you come to think upon this a little bit, dear believer, you will find that you will be caught up in this relationship of meditating upon Christ and Biblical truth and by means of His gracious influences. Beginning by taking a step at a time, you will live that truth out.

Devotion to our God and to our Christ in your thoughts is where you begin. This cannot come through an excess of wine. When you pursue an earthly high like wine or drugs you are saying that you need to add to your sensory perception something more than what God has given to you naturally in your body. And what is even worse, you think that you have to add to what God has given to you spiritually in Christ and His Word. No, if you are thinking correctly you need nothing else, and no one else except Christ, but you may need to learn to pursue holiness more in your everyday life, in some very practical ways. Verse 19 is saying that you may need to think more of how you can encourage other believers around you by speaking to them of the things which you are learning in your own private devotion in the Word. It is saying that you may even need to learn sing to Lord and with others the great songs of the faith. This would come by learning to make melody in your heart unto the Lord. This is giving thanks always, when you show your thankfulness to God for the spiritual things which He has given to you. This sense of thankfulness comes by meditating the words of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and really sharing them with others. It is not easy to fight off the tendency to only say, and to speak, and to sing, things that are worldly things. To pursue spiritual things is something which the Spirit teaches, and you will either learn the way of the Lord or you will backslide. Which will it be for you O Christian? Giving thanks always is a very real component in the equation of holiness. Are you learning it?

Psalm 34: 1 is a good parallel passage to our text. "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and glad." "Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." In Psalm 69: 30, it says: "I will magnify the Lord with thanksgiving." In Psalm 95: 2 it says: "I will come before His presence with thanksgiving." In Psalm 100: 4 it says: "I will enter into His gates with thanksgiving." In Psalm 116: 17 it says: "I will offer to God sacrifices of thanksgiving." When you resolve to live out these truths by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be rooted and built up in Christ and established in your faith, even as you have been taught, and you will be "abounding in it with thanksgiving". (Colossians 2: 7) You will greatly desire to give thanks for what Christ has done for you as long as you live; and forever and ever. You will look forward to that time when you will sing in heaven with the angels who stand around the throne, and with all of the Elders and leaders and pastors of the Church. And you will be looking forward, even to that time when you will die, for then you will be able to say: "Amen!" "Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever." Why not learn to be thankful now, if the duration of your thanksgiving to God and to Christ is to last forever. By the grace of God you can.

Then 3rd – I would like to set before you the all-inclusive nature of Christian thanksgiving.

"Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The duration of thanksgiving is not only always, but my friends, its nature is to give thanks always for all things as well. Well, this does seem to be the most impossible part of thanksgiving yet. Who can do such a thing? A Christian learns to do this in the name of their Lord Jesus. The Christian who is walking in the Spirit is trying to walk in obedience. They are trying to be

holy even as God is holy, and therefore they will learn to do this very thing. “Do all things without murmuring and complaining,” Paul says in Philippians 2: 14. “How”, you say to me? Through a prayerful, Biblical consideration of what God might want to teach you so that you would be like Jesus Christ. Think of this verse in Philippians 4: 10 and following. “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.” “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.” “Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Now notice that Paul says that this is something that he learned; to be content in whatever state he was. It did not come automatically; he had to learn and grow in this being content. I would insist that a great part of his contentment consisted of his learning to give thanks. A person, who is thankful at all times for everything, cannot be much discontented. They realize that what God has done for them through Jesus Christ is enough; whether their earthly estate grows or shrinks; whether they abound, or they are abased. They are rejoicing greatly when they are helped and cared for by God through other people’s giving to help them in their need. If that is the means through which God would provide for them, they rejoice in it. But even if that care of men is not always there at the time when it is most needed, still they know that God will undertake on their behalf to provide for them.

A thankful person will still pray and cast all of their cares upon God and His promise. They will trust upon the bare arm of God alone, for everything that they need. Verse 19 says, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” In verse 14 Paul says, “Nevertheless you have done well that you shared with me in my distress.” God does use means. Paul knew how greatly he had been helped by the Philippians. Verse 15 says, “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.” “For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.” “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.” Paul is teaching the believers at Thessalonica the greatness of giving to the needs of the saints. He sought the fruit that would abound to their account if they gave to support him in the ministry; furthering the Lord's cause, His work, and His kingdom. It is more blessed to give than to receive. This comes from a thankful heart, in both cases.

It takes a thankful heart to give; knowing that you do not have to hoard everything you have, to yourself. It takes a thankful heart to receive from others, realizing that God would not have you be so strong and independent of others that you cannot receive their help. At times you really will need them. God would have you to need them to accomplish all that He would have you to do, whether it is in the ministry, or in your ordinary everyday life. We never want to be a burden to others or to the church. “Let every person bear their own load.” But a thankful heart is a generous and giving heart. It is not stingy and unwilling. It wants others to have enough, and even to abound, when it does not. How can that be? It can be, when Christ is enough and you come to see Christ as your all-in-all. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Christ is greater riches to me than all the world.

We have a great need in the sight of God today to be thankful for all that the Lord has done for us as a church and as a nation. He has blessed us with much, and we should acknowledge it. He has been merciful, and we should acknowledge it. “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” It is God’s will that you be thankful, and so will you be often discontent, often downcast, often unhappy, even though God has given you so much in Christ? Will you not thank Him for personal peace and prosperity, and realize that not one of us of us deserves it? May it not be the case, that any of us falls short of what God would have us to be and to do; to be thankful and to give thanks to Him. Listen to Abraham Lincoln writing the

proclamation of Thanksgiving on October 3rd, 1863, in the middle of the Civil War. “The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies.” “To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God.”

“In the midst of a Civil War of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theater of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.” “Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense, have not arrested the plough or the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore.” “Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.”

“No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things.” “They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.” “It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people.” “I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent father who dwelleth in the Heavens.” “And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purpose to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and Union.”

So said Abraham Lincoln, who was thankful during the darkest days of the Civil War. This is when Thanksgiving Day for our nation was formally instituted. The Bible everywhere says that it is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord. As we go to the homes of our relatives and friends on this Thanksgiving Day 2017, let us remember that there are many reasons to thank and praise our God. Remember that the greatest of these is that God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son. Rejoice, and give thanks, if you have believed in Jesus Christ for your salvation that you have been set free from the law of sin and death, through His perfect obedience and His sinless sacrifice. Rejoice and give thanks that He is always with you in the Person of His Holy Spirit. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He always lives to make intercession for you. Nothing can separate you from His love. You can be thankful now, and for all the days of your life, that someday He will return for His own and you will be among them.