

*November 23, 2014
Sunday Evening Service
Thanksgiving
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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**THANKS BE TO GOD!
Colossians 3:15-17**

Long ago and far away in a land much unlike our own in many ways, and yet among a people similar to us, a baby boy was born. At first sight one would suspect that this little fellow was not unique or special in any way. In face and form he appeared to be quite like all the other boys and girls who were born year after year in the land. But this boy was destined for a very special future.

He was born to rather ordinary parents in a kingdom that most people would consider to be typical. No, more than typical. This kingdom was like the only kind of kingdom normal people ever experienced or even imagined. The castle rose against the horizon bounded by large walls and impressive spires. Outside the castle was a bustling village, or one might even call it a city. Beyond the city as far as the eye could see lay lush forests and farm lands. Across the river, rolling hills made up the horizon.

“Jim” his parents named him. It was a family name. More accurately his name was James IV, but he would be known as little Jimmy for more years than he cared to recall. Jimmy’s parents were solid members of the community. They both worked regular jobs at which they had been employed for several years. Being solid citizens, they didn’t move around much. Mom shopped at the same super-market for years, Dad frequented the same barber shop and mechanic’s garage, and everyone went to the same church. Granted, their somewhat irregular meetings at the popular house of religion were more like social events, but at least they attended occasionally. That was more than could be said about most of the townspeople.

As Jimmy grew up, he enjoyed the kind of hobbies, games, and chores that any normal child experienced. He and his friends attended

the same classes where they were educated in the necessary things like language, math, and the history of their kingdom. In that respect, Jimmy’s unique character began to reveal itself. Unlike most children his age, he was very curious about who he was, where he came from, and where everyone was going.

Being inquisitive to a fault, Jimmy investigated, queried, and bugged adults for answers to the point that they sometimes chided him not to pursue that line of questioning any further. “Why do we never see the king from the castle?” the boy asked his father. “He is very important and powerful,” was the stock answer. “When did he build the castle?” “No one really knows.” “Has he always lived there?” “Of course,” the adults answered unconvincingly.

Another thing that nagged at Jimmy’s conscience was the attitude of all the citizens. Everyone seemed to be satisfied to live life on the surface, to interact with only shallow relationships. In fact, it seemed to him that people tried to be content with make-believe; but in reality, they weren’t satisfied with anything. Throughout life, everyone seemed to move from one stage to the next, acting as though the next stage would bring satisfaction. But it never did. As a result, it seemed like everyone was on edge and no one was truly happy.

Jimmy watched and listened and the questions piled up during his young life. Before long it was obvious that Jimmy had fully become James IV. By now he was convinced that something was wrong with life in the kingdom. It was too obvious that people were dishonest. Theft flourished in the most creative ways, and anger was the normal response for everyone who didn’t get his or her way.

One day while he was hiking near the river, James climbed to the top of a hill. Far in the distance he was sure he saw something shimmering in the sunlight. He shaded his eyes from the sun and squinted, willing his eyes to see further. Was that another castle way over there beyond the hills? What was it? To whom did it belong? Questions flooded the young man’s mind. James quickly made his way back into town where he found a teacher from his past. He asked about the distant castle. “I don’t know what you are talking about,” the teacher grunted. Quite sure that the teacher knew something, but was unwilling to tell, James pressed him vigorously. Finally the old teacher broke. “Son, you just need to leave well enough alone. No

one knows for certain all that goes on in that kingdom. But we do hear rumors that the king over there is a tyrant. He rules with an iron fist, holding his subjects to the most impossible laws. No, you would not be wise to pursue what you have seen any further.”

Of course the old teacher’s answer was not sufficient for James. He pondered, and thought, and tried to imagine what went on around that other castle. What was life like in that kingdom? But each time he broached the topic, James received the same gruff answers and warnings to stop thinking about it.

One day after a long day’s work, James sat alone with his thoughts on the bank of the river. The stranger surprised him when he said, “Hello,” shaking James out of his daydreams. “You seem to be deep in thought young man.” “Oh, yeah, I guess so.” “Do you mind if I ask what you were thinking about so seriously?” “No . . . or . . . actually, you don’t want to know. If I did tell you, you would just tell me to quit thinking about.” “Well, why don’t you give me a try,” the stranger offered.

James sized the man up and down. He obviously wasn’t from around those parts. It was not that the fellow dressed oddly or spoke with an unfamiliar accent. It just seemed like he was different in a kind of hard-to-explain way. He wasn’t sad or angry like the people in James’ kingdom. He didn’t even appear to be dishonest.

James decided that it wouldn’t hurt to share his innermost thoughts one more time. He looked the stranger in the eye and, pointing off into the distance, said, “Sir, there is a castle over there beyond the mountains. I’m sure I saw it some time ago. But no one in these parts knows anything about it or, if they do, they sure aren’t willing to tell me anything.”

“Oh, the castle in the Kingdom of Light,” mused the stranger. “You know about it?” exclaimed James barely able to contain his excitement. “Yes, yes I do.” “Tell me,” James begged. “Where is the place? What is the Kingdom of Light? Who is the king? What are the people like?” The questions flooded the stranger like a tsunami. So many questions that had festered in a dissatisfied heart for so long.

“Slow down young fellow, and I’ll tell you what I have heard. As I understand it, that castle and the kingdom that castle represents was built by the same king who built the castle and the kingdom where you live. It seems that one time long ago, one of the king’s

servants rebelled against him. He acted deceptively and, by telling many lies to the citizens of the kingdom, he overthrew the king, ran him out his own kingdom, and took over his castle. Ever since that day, folks in your kingdom have acted more and more like the wicked servant who made himself king.”

“Oh course,” shouted James. “That is why people are dissatisfied, dishonest, and always searching but never finding truth. I even find myself becoming just like the other people – and I don’t like what I am becoming. I must go to the Kingdom of Light and learn more about that king and his kingdom.”

“Whoa! Hold your horses,” the stranger said to James. “Let me save you a long, hard journey over there. If you were able to get to the edge of the kingdom, you won’t get in.” Why not?” James asked. “Well, as I understand it, the entire kingdom is kept secure behind massive walls guarded by some kind of supernatural beings. No one gets into that place without an invitation.”

A few more questions from James and similar, somewhat curt replies, and the stranger was on his way. Now James was more curious than ever. Surely he could get to that kingdom. Surely someone would be there on the wall or near a gate who could at least tell him something about the place. He thought about it for a couple of days and then decided, with all the determination of a young and vigorous man, that he would go to the kingdom.

The next week, James started out. The stranger had been right. It was a long, arduous, and dangerous trek through terrain like James had never seen. To say he was often fearful would be a gross understatement. Indeed, James wondered if he would even be able to survive a return trip through these swamps, forests, brambles, and pits. He was quite sure on several occasions that maybe a lion or some other dangerous beast stalked him.

In time, James broke out of the forest and, true to the stranger’s description, before him stood the most gigantic, massive wall he had ever seen. How disappointing! There was no way for James to scale the wall and climb over. And it was anyone’s guess how far and which way he needed to go to find a gate.

Suddenly, one of those odd looking guards the stranger had warned about appeared at the top of the wall. “Who goes there?” shouted the guard in a voice that would have thoroughly frightened

a less brave man. “I am James, sir” “From where did you come?” “I have traveled long and far from the Kingdom of Darkness, sir.” “Well, turn around and go back because you won’t be able to come in here. Only family is allowed behind these walls. And no family members come from the Kingdom of Darkness!”

It would have been impossible for James to feel more discouraged and downhearted than he felt now. He slumped down resting his back against the wall. The guard on the wall soon moved away leaving James alone with his thoughts. He sat in that gloom and despair for a long time when his thoughts were interrupted by a kindly man who approached him. The older man had a long gray beard, wore a slouch hat to shield his parched face from the sun, and had a satchel slung over one shoulder.

This somewhat odd but obviously very friendly and congenial man sat down beside James. “Nice day, isn’t it?” he said striking up a conversation. “Yeah, sure,” James muttered. “Well, my name is Hugh, Hugh Angle.” “What’s yours?” “I’m James,” he replied, extending his hand to shake. “So what’s troubling you young fellow?” James poured out the whole story, how he had seen the castle, heard all about the kingdom, made his way through the dangerous forest only to arrive at an impenetrable wall just as he had been warned.

“So do you want to get into the kingdom?” the man asked. “Get into the kingdom? More than you can imagine, sir! But I was told that because I am not family I can’t get in.” “Well, why don’t you become part of the family?” Hugh asked. “How can I do that?” “Just accept the invitation the king of the kingdom has offered.” “I don’t know anything about an invitation.” “Oh,” Hugh said as if he had had this same conversation many times before. “If you have a minute, let me tell you all about this wonderful invitation.” “Well, I’m not planning on leaving anytime soon,” James replied.

With that Hugh reached into the satchel lying beside him and pulled out a book. “In this book, we read about the wonderful plan the king has made so that people can move from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light, simply by becoming part of the king’s family.” “That sounds impossible,” James huffed. “It is impossible for you or anyone else to accomplish on their own. But

the king has done something very unusual that allows him to offer this wonderful invitation.”

By this time James was all ears. Hugh explained. “You are familiar with the Kingdom of Darkness and how the wicked servant stole that kingdom from the rightful king, right?” “Of course! I live there.” “Well,” Hugh said, “Because you are a citizen of that kingdom, you are very offensive to our king.” “Our king?” James asked. “Are you a member of the family, a citizen of the Kingdom of Light?” “I am indeed.” “Wait a minute! How did you get into the kingdom?” “That’s what I’m trying to tell you,” Hugh replied.

“In order for you to become a member of the king’s family, you have to admit that you have offended the king by being a citizen of the Kingdom of Darkness.” “But I don’t even know the king!” James protested. “No, but he knows you, and he knows exactly how and how often you have offended him. Nevertheless, because the king is so kindly disposed to the citizens of the kingdom that is rightly his, he paid a ransom so that anyone who desires to move from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light can become one of the king’s very own children.”

This all seemed so bazaar, so unbelievable to James. “How much was the ransom?” he asked. “The king allowed the people of the Kingdom of Darkness to kill his own son, and, when his blood was shed, the king counted that to be the sufficient cost to pay the ransom.” “How can I have that price applied in my case?” James wondered. “All you need to do is admit that the king of the Kingdom of Light is right to keep you out of his kingdom because of your offense, ask him to apply the price of his son’s sacrifice to pay for your offense, and trust him to do what he said.”

James was baffled and overjoyed at the same time. “I want to do that,” he told Hugh. “Okay. Now take this book to the gate that is about two miles in that direction,” Hugh pointed along the wall. “When you reach the gate, tell the guard that you believe what the king wrote in this book. Tell him that you are sorry for being a citizen of the Kingdom of Darkness. Tell him that you trust the king to make you a member of his family.”

James stood, took the book firmly in his hand, hugged the messenger, and thanked him profusely. Then off he went in the direction the messenger had pointed. In about thirty minutes he

arrived at the large gate just as the messenger had promised. And true to the messenger's word, one of those guards stood before the gate. "May I help you?" "Yes, please kind sir," James stammered. "I believe everything in this book, I am sorry I have offended the king, and I would love to have his son's ransom applied to me." With that the guard smiled broadly, swung open the door to the kingdom and bowing said, "Welcome." James gingerly stepped into the kingdom and was astonished by the sights. But what astonished him most of all was that he was greeted by the king himself who hugged him and said, "Welcome, my son. I have been expecting you."

That is a parable – an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. I think you get the meaning. I tell you this story simply to ask you a question: "Do you think James was thankful?"

Because We Have Been Delivered From The Kingdom of Darkness, Christ's Peace Rules (v.15).

From Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae, we learn that everyone in the Body of Christ which is the Church, the family of Christ was called. In the middle part of verse fifteen we read, *To which indeed you were called in one body (v.15b)*. None of us entered the kingdom through our own authority. We are in the Kingdom because the King of the Kingdom drew us to enter. The King Himself issued the invitation to enter.

Because of His invitation to us, we are now citizens of the heavenly kingdom. That also makes us members of the family of God. We are the Church, the Bride, the children of God. We're as tight with God as it is possible to get.

If we are in the family along with Christ, Christ's peace governs us. The first part of this verse states, *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts (v.15a)*. This is peace that Christ gives. It is available only to those who He redeems with His own blood. Those who trust in Him receive His peace. From that point and throughout life, His peace is the umpire who declares boundaries and applies the rules in our hearts. We are no longer governed by the chaotic and fickle desires of the flesh.

This is also peace that characterizes Christ. Try to imagine the kind of peace the ruler of the universe experiences. The Ruler has given us that peace because we are citizens of His Kingdom.

Surely people who the King has invited into His family ought to be thankful people. Apparently, that is the case because we have the command, *And be thankful (v.15c)*. How could we not be thankful? There must be a possibility that we won't be thankful because here the command reveals that thanksgiving is supposed to be the character of our life. In fact, the verb tense means that we are supposed to be becoming more and more thankful. And so it is. The better we understand the blessings we have through Christ and the more His peace umpires our hearts, the more thankful we will be.

Because We Have Been Delivered from the Kingdom of Darkness, Christ's Word Dwells in Us (v.16).

In verse sixteen, the reasons for our thankfulness pile up. Because we are part of God's family, Christ's word dwells in us. Or more accurately Paul wrote, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (v.16a)*. The word of Christ is the Bible. How is the Bible supposed to take up dwelling within us?

We each are responsible to let the Bible dwell in us. Why shouldn't it? It is the book that gave us entrance into the Kingdom of Light. But because we still have this fleshly body with its desires, there will always be conflict between the word of Christ and the desires of the flesh. Therefore, we are supposed to be allowing the word of Christ to reside in our hearts where it will take control. That is only possible as we read the Bible habitually – not just regularly. We must regularly pray through the Bible. We must meditate on the Bible and we must practice the Bible. Through that process, the word of Christ will be dwelling in our very souls.

Then we can teach and challenge each other while singing praises. We are to be people who are *teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (v.16b)*. Because the Bible dwells in us, we can impact other children of God. Our impact on others should encourage their relationship with the Christ of the Bible. We teach each other what God teaches us from the word of Christ. We admonish (to warn, rebuke,

challenge) each other to walk in step with the word of Christ. We accomplish these ministries by exercising wisdom, which is just plain common sense – the kind of sense Proverbs principles give us.

Another aspect or means of teaching and admonishing each other is by singing psalms, which means to sing the actual Psalms that are written in our Bible. Singing is to include the singing of hymns also. A hymn is a song with doctrinal or scriptural content. There are several examples of these in the Old Testament. One of these is what Jesus and His disciples sang before they left the upper room (Mt. 26.30). Finally, we are to sing spiritual songs also. A spiritual song is a testimony in song of what God has done.

As we are impacting the lives of others, guess what trait we should reveal? Yes. Thankfulness characterizes our heart in this kind of ministry. We teach, admonish, and sing *with thankfulness in your hearts to God (v.16c)*. All of our ministry is done with thankfulness instead of a sense of drudgery or obligation. We should be grateful to be able to teach, admonish, and sing.

Our gratitude is toward God. We demonstrate gratitude that God has allowed us into His Kingdom. We are thankful that He gives us the word of Christ to shape us. People who are thankful to God do not consider gathering with God's people to be a chore or obligation, but think of it as a special privilege. People who are trying to work their way into heaven go to church services because they have to; People who are already in the Kingdom go to church to meet with fellow citizens to praise our Great God.

Because We Have Been Delivered from the Kingdom of Darkness, We Give Thanks in Everything (v.17).

Citizens of God's Kingdom are going to be busy doing in word and deed. *And whatever you do, in word or deed (v.17a)*. There is no argument that we are busy people. We have many duties that we must fulfill. We have many pleasures that we want to fulfill. But in our busyness, our words and deeds are to meet a certain standard.

We are to *do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (v.17b)*. The name of the Lord Jesus is the governing standard for our works. So do our words and deeds reflect His person and character? Do our words and deeds draw others to Him? Too often our words and deeds

reflect our personal preferences and attempt to draw people to ourselves. Everything we do is to fit into this box. That is the last thing contemporary professing Christians want to hear. But the rule is very simple. People who God has drawn into the Kingdom of Light think, talk, and act like citizens of the Kingdom of Light.

And one of the most obvious traits of such people is that as we go about our busyness, as we “do,” we give thanks. We are to be *giving thanks to God the Father through him (v.17c)*. It is easy and natural to be grumblers and critics. If we are children of God, we have innumerable reasons to thank God through Christ.

Because God has delivered us from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light, we are characterized as thankful people, we edify others and praise God with thankfulness, and we speak and do everything with a thankful attitude. Sure, life is tough. Sure, we have trials and difficulties. Sure, it seems like the whole world is unraveling around us. Sure, we can acknowledge the truth instead of pretending that everything is fine. But be sure to conclude that your loving heavenly Father who called you to be His own child and gave you entrance into His Kingdom already is in control of all things. That will make you thankful!