

Theme: Christian should express thankfulness for God's blessings and the people in their lives.

I. Intro - Eschatology & Irrelevance

- A. Eschatology - study of last things - end times
- B. It can be really popular among Christians - Late Great Planet Earth; Left Behind
- C. Often very speculative - charts, crazy drawings, ideas
- D. But too many it all seems so irrelevant!
- E. But as we saw in Revelation letters - NT eschatology is very relevant
- F. 1 Thessalonians - Holy Waiting (Living in Light of Christ's Return)
- G. In the book of 1 Thessalonians Paul encourages Christians in the midst of an ungodly culture to live in holiness as they eagerly await the return of Jesus.

II. The Background to 1 Thessalonians

- A. The city of Thessalonica
 - 1. Thessalonica - capital of Macedonia & largest city
 - 2. City still exists today; 2nd largest in Greece
 - 3. Paul went there on 2nd missionary journey
 - 4. Went on Via Egnatia from Philippi to Thessalonica
 - 5. Suffered persecution in Philippi and Thessalonica
 - 6. Thessalonian troublemakers followed to Berea!
 - 7. Can read more about this in Acts 17

B. The letter of 1 Thessalonians

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To **the church of the Thessalonians** in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 1 Thessalonians 1:1

- 1. Probably one of the earliest writings in the NT
- 2. Only Galatians is probably earlier
- 3. Here the faith is taking hold in a pagan environment
- 4. Two key themes: eschatology & holiness
- 5. A proper focus on the return of Christ does not lead to speculation about dates and times, but rather to holy living

III. A Holy Prayer of Thanks

A. The apostolic **blessing** and **prayer**

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace and peace to you.** ² **We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.** 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2

- 1. Paul almost always begins with **blessing** and **prayer**
- 2. Modeled on Greek letters of time - with Gospel twist
- 3. After Hours will have more on this and speaking blessing
- 4. This practice of speaking blessing almost always leads into giving thanks in Paul's letters - and 1 Thessalonians is no exception

B. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians

1. They give thanks for the Thessalonians continually
We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 1 Thessalonians 1:2
 - a. We - this was the practice of the whole apostolic team
 - b. Always - Thanksgiving for the Thessalonian's was a constant practice
 - c. God- The thanks is ultimately to God for the people
 - d. All of you - the thanks was primarily about God's work in and through the people - not 'stuff'!
2. The Gospel should make all Christians thankful people, both for what God has done for us, and the evidence of His work in others.
3. Thankfulness should permeate the lives of believers - no matter the circumstances
Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18
 - a. Christians are called to lives of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving - regardless of the circumstances
 - b. Joy, prayer, and thanksgiving are not dependent upon external circumstances, but flow from spirits permeated by the Gospel

C. A symphony of thanksgiving prayer - 3 participles

We always **thank** God for all of you, **mentioning** you in our prayers. ³ We continually **remember** before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we **know**, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you... 1 Thess 1:2–4

1. Thanksgiving - **mentioning** you in prayer
We always thank God for all of you, **mentioning you in our prayers**. 1 Thessalonians 1:2
 - a. Thanksgiving ultimately goes back to God
 - b. (This is one reason our culture has become so uncomfortable with thanksgiving!)
 - c. We should verbally give thanks to God in prayer
 1. This should be regular practice - always, continually
 2. When we pray, our prayers should contain thanksgiving to God
 3. When we pray for people, we should thank God for the evidence of His work in their lives
 4. This work includes both common and saving grace
2. Thanksgiving - **remembering Gospel fruit** in you
We continually **remember** before our God and Father your **work** produced by **faith**, your **labor** prompted by **love**, and your **endurance** inspired by **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:3
 - a. Thanksgiving requires **remembering** - reminding ourselves of God's faithfulness to us and others
 - b. If I focus on negatives in others, thanksgiving withers; if I daily recount evidence of God's work in myself & others, gratitude overflows.
 - c. Should be a particular focus on the **Gospel** & its **fruit**
 1. Faith, love, hope - key triad in Christian thought
 2. Work, labor, endurance - also in Revelation 2:2 - Ephesian church commended for these
 3. Gospel root - faith, love, & hope in Jesus Christ
 4. Fruit - work, labor, endurance flow from Gospel

- 5. Faith, love, and hope are toward Jesus
 - 6. Work, labor, & endurance are actions to others
 - d. When we think about and pray for others, we should have a focus on the fruit of the Gospel in their lives
 - e. The fruit of the Gospel in our life and the lives of those we love should produce gratitude to God
 - f. The Gospel and the Spirit, which work on us in an invisible, internal manner, always produce an external, visible result.
 - g. The real focus of thanksgiving here is not the external fruit as much as it is that of which the fruit evidences - the work of God's Spirit and the Gospel in the lives of these believers
3. Thanksgiving - **knowing** God **loved and chose you**
 For we **know**, brothers **loved by God, that he has chosen you**,⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 1 Thessalonians 1:4–5
- a. Thanksgiving includes **knowing** God's eternal love for other believers
 - b. Paul is simply working backwards - Thessalonian believers, the Gospel and its fruit, God's love and election of them
 - c. The same pattern as the Gospel and its fruit is evidenced here - Paul had seen the Spirit's work and the Thessalonian response, and knew the invisible reality - they had been loved and chosen by God
 - d. We will look at this idea more next week

IV. Applying the Word - Holy Waiting

- A. Do I practice thankfulness to God?
- 1. Paul, Silas, and Timothy model thankfulness for us
 - 2. We are all called to lives of thankfulness
 - 3. This is counter cultural! We love to complain and focus on what is wrong!
 - 4. Am I thankful for God's many blessings?
 - 5. Does the Gospel give me joy and gratitude - even in tough times?
 Joy, prayer, and thanksgiving are not dependent upon external circumstances, but flow from spirits permeated by the Gospel
 - 6. Do I verbally express thanks to God in prayer?
 - 7. Thanksgiving that is not verbally expressed is illusory; real thanksgiving finds its way into our prayers and words
- B. Do I practice thanksgiving to others?
- 1. Paul almost always tells the churches why he is thankful for them
 - 2. Do I regularly express thanks to people?
 - 3. Do I focus on problems or things for which I am grateful in those I love and am close to?
 - a. If asked right now, can I quickly list things I am grateful for in my spouse, my kids, my family?
 - b. What about church members, co-workers, neighbors?

c. If I asked them, could they more easily list your complaints or your thanks?

4. How often do I verbally thank those closest to me? Remember - Thanksgiving that is not verbally expressed is illusory; real thanksgiving finds its way into our prayers and words
5. When I pray for family and others - do I give thanks for them, or just pray about what needs to be 'fixed'?

C. Gospel Fruit - Water Baptism

1. Like thanksgiving, faith, love, and hope are externally expressed if real
2. Water baptism is an outward, visible expression of our inward, invisible faith, love, and hope in Jesus
3. The water baptism of Dylan and Kyle Stolle

A Holy Gospel

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

April 23, 2017

Water Baptism

Psalm 115:14-15

Teaching keywords: gratitude and thanksgiving; prayer; blessing; gospel; good works; perseverance

¹⁴ May the Lord make you increase, both you and your children.

¹⁵ May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalms 115:14–15

¹ Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. ² We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. ³ We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

1 Thessalonians 1:1–5