

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

FOUR THINGS FOR WHICH WE CAN BE THANKFUL

Colossians 1:3-4; 2:6-7; 3:15-17; 4:2-6

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There are four points to today's sermon:

- Be thankful for God's people.
- Be thankful for a personal relationship with Christ.
- Be thankful for the peace that passes understanding.
- Be thankful that you can proclaim the gospel.

I hope that you have a very good Thanksgiving. In the early days of the Pilgrims and in the early days of Thanksgiving, William Bradford is said to have given those gathered five kernels of corn to remind them of the famine that had struck the land earlier in the year. Legend has it that at one point, they had been rationed five kernels per person in order to survive.

Many of you listening to me have lived through tough times. Some of you may never have, but regardless of our past, we should all be thankful today for where we are, who we are with, and how God has blessed us.

Today's sermon will be taken from the book of Colossians. We will read a few scriptures from each of the four chapters.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:3-4

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—

EXPLANATION: The book of Colossians is actually a letter written by Paul to the church of Colossae. Colossae was a city in what is now modern Turkey. It was

an important area in the textile trade. By his own admission (Col. 2:1), Paul was not personally known by the believers in Colossae. However, his preaching had obviously filtered down to them through other missionaries. Although Paul had not met these believers face-to-face, he thanked God for them. He was thankful for their faith in Christ and for their love for one another.

ILLUSTRATION: A mother had two young children strapped in the car with her when she pulled up behind another vehicle at a stop light. On the back of the car in front of her was an obscene bumper sticker. The mom, who was glad that her boys could not yet read, quickly lifted an audible prayer for the man driving the car. Her four-year-old asked who she was praying for and why. She explained that though she did not know the man driving in front of her, she thought it was a good idea to pray for him. As they drove down the road, the little boy pointed to one car after another asking the mom to pray for the various drivers. By the time he pointed to a pedestrian, the mom was growing tired of praying. “You pray for him,” she suggested. So, the little boy bowed his head and said, “Dear God, thank you for that man. Help him to have a good day. Amen.” The mother’s heart softened as she watched the man continue to walk away. “For all I know,” she said later, “my little boy may have been the only person in the world praying for that man that day.”

APPLICATION: Most of us are very blessed. We have family and friends who love us. We have coworkers and fellow church members who care. But even the most lonely among us can be thankful for God’s people. Paul thanked God and prayed for the people in Colossae because they were fellow believers. We can and should thank God for his people—those in our lives and those who are not. When was the last time you prayed for the Christians in Afghanistan? When was the last time you thanked God for the faithful Christian brothers and sisters in the medical field? When was the last time you praised God for the Christian teacher you had in school or who is currently mentoring your child?

- Be thankful for God’s people

BE THANKFUL FOR A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

EXPLANATION: In these verses, Paul encouraged the Colossian believers to thank God for their salvation, but the inference is so much more than a casual “Thank God I’m saved.” The Greek word for rooted is *rhizoó*. It can be used to mean planted, fixed firmly, established. In other words, Paul is saying that we can overflow with gratitude because Jesus is our Lord, and our salvation is secure in him. We are rooted—established, firmly fixed, planted—in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever wondered how a cactus survives in the desert? The harsh sun and overbearing heat overpowers many plants, but the cactus thrives. Why? Because cactus plants are well-rooted. Some of them have a long, thick taproot that is driven straight down into the ground to access water deep below.

I’m often reminded of my Korean friend from my seminary days who said he prays to build up a reservoir of prayer so that when the days are bad, he can pull from the reservoir.

APPLICATION: Roots stabilize and provide nourishment, allowing plants like the cacti to thrive even in a harsh environment. The same is true for us. When we root ourselves in Christ, it is he who holds us secure and he who gives us what we need to survive, even in less-than-ideal circumstances. Paul reminded the Colossians to be thankful for their salvation and security in Christ.

- Be thankful for God’s people
- Be thankful for a personal relationship with Christ

BE THANKFUL FOR THE PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:15-17

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you

richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

EXPLANATION: In the New International translation, the book of Colossians has six references to thanks and one to gratitude. This is significant in that Colossians is a short book, and yet the only other New Testament books with more thanksgiving references are Luke and the Corinthian letters. It is also significant given the circumstances under which Paul wrote the letter.

Paul wrote this, and many of the books of the New Testament, while he was in jail. Yet he encouraged and modeled a heart of thanksgiving.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever listened to a child's prayers? They thank God for everything. "Thank you God for Mommy, Daddy and my brother and my dog. Thank you for the food Mommy fixed for dinner and for my blue jeans and for Daddy's car and that Grandpa took me for a ride on the tractor, and thank you for the bug I saw outside and for Uncle Joe and for the book and my new ball..." You get the picture. Sometimes, we adults get frustrated and want to hurry them along, but really, we could learn a lesson from them.

APPLICATION: So, often we get hung up on God's commands to be thankful in all circumstances. How can I be thankful when my wife has cancer? How can I thank God when my boss is a jerk? What is there to be thankful for when I just lost a loved one to COVID or when my son is on drugs? This is important. God is not necessarily telling us to be thankful for the circumstance. He is telling us to be thankful in the circumstance, and there is always something for which we can be thankful.

Christian author and speaker, Lysa Terkeurst once said, "If there was ever a secret for unleashing God's powerful peace in a situation, it's developing a heart of true thanksgiving." Regardless of the diagnosis, regardless of the problem, regardless of the outlook, we have peace. Our trial may not cease, but we can have peace. The Christ who rules our hearts rules this world, and one day he will make all things right. That's something worth being thankful for.

BE THANKFUL THAT YOU CAN PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 4:2-6

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

EXPLANATION: If you remember from our study in Acts, Paul wanted to go to Rome—even if it meant going by way of the Roman prison system. Traditionally, it's believed that he wrote this book from a Roman prison. Yet, Paul's requests for prayer are not what we would anticipate from someone wrongly imprisoned.

He did not ask the church to pray for his release. He did not request that they pray that the guards treat him better. He did not want financial aid for his defense team or better accommodations or provisions during his confinement. What did he ask for? He said, "Pray that I will have more opportunities to share the gospel and that when I do, I will share it clearly."

ILLUSTRATION: A stay-at-home mom—we'll call her Ann—had grand desires to do something for the Lord, something beyond washing dishes and fixing supper and doing laundry for her family. She wanted to bless people and encourage them in their faith, but most of the time her day-to-day interactions were limited to her husband and children. One day, she misdialed a number and hung up before anyone answered. A few minutes later, an elderly woman saw the number on her caller ID and called Ann back. Ann tried to explain that she'd dialed the wrong number, but she quickly realized the woman had dementia and did not understand. She was in a nursing home, in the middle of COVID, and she was lonely. Ann listened patiently as the woman told her life story, and before they hung up, Ann prayed with her.

APPLICATION: Ann could have responded with frustration to the interruption in her day. Instead, she remembered her prayers. The Lord gave her an opportunity to be his representative, and she was thankful. You and I are not in prison for our faith. We live in America, where we can freely share the gospel message with our friends,

neighbors, and family. How many times have we prayed for opportunities to share God's word? How often do we thank God that we have the opportunity to share the gospel?

Even if our worlds are turned upside down, we can and should give thanks to our God. On Thanksgiving and every day of the year, Paul reminds us that we can be thankful...

- for God's people,
- for a personal relationship with Christ,
- for the peace that passes understanding, and
- that we have the opportunity to proclaim the gospel message.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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