Radical Gratitude

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Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 106:1)
Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

1. Give Thanks in All Circumstances

Happy Thanksgiving! I hope everyone has a wonderful plan for this Thursday. Christine and I will be visiting our son in San Francisco tomorrow. It is easy to look over Thanksgiving as just another holiday. But we have many things to remember and give thanks to God for all He has done for us.

The Bible tells us that we do not have to wait for Thanksgiving to give thanks to God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says, "***give thanks in all circumstances***." Psalm 106:1 says, "***O give thanks to the Lord. For he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever***."

We often give thanks to someone or to the Lord. But Paul tells us today to give thanks to the Lord all the time. Do you think it is possible? You may have seen in the news, last week, that 3 people were killed in a shooting in Oklahoma. If we were there, we would give thanks to God for our safety. But what about the victims? How would their families give thanks to God in this situation? Although it is not easy, if we can give thanks to God despite the circumstance, we would call "radical gratitude."

2. Thanksgiving of the Thessalonians

Why do you think Paul said to the Thessalonians, "***Give thanks in all circumstances***"? In the time of Paul, the church at Thessalonica faced two dilemmas: 1) was the delay of Jesus' return and 2) was the persecution of early Christians.

The Christians in Thessalonica believed that Jesus would soon return to the earth, but many Christians died before Jesus' return. Many worried what would happen to the people who died before Jesus' return. Would those who died join God's kingdom when Jesus would finally come back? Paul says, "***you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus***, ***God will bring with him those who have died***" (4:13-14).

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that physical death is not the end of the story. When Jesus returns, all believers, dead or alive, will be reunited in Christ and will no longer suffer or die. Paul therefore says when loved ones die, people should comfort and encourage one another.

The second issue was the persecution of Christians. 1 Thessalonians 2:14 says, "***you suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out***" (2:14-15). The Thessalonians suffered from other people because of their faith in Jesus. Paul encouraged them to give thanks to God in spite of their suffering because Jesus would return soon.

3. Reasons to Give Thanks

Where does Paul get the idea of being able to give thanks in all circumstances? The answer can be found in Psalm 106:1. The writer of Psalm 106:1 says, "***Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever***." The term in the passage "***he is good***" references that God always does what is right. God's intentions and motivations are always good. The outcome of God's plans is good and in perfect timing. God's goodness can especially be seen in the law He gave to Israel. God's ultimate goodness is seen in His plan to redeem Israel and all of us from sin.

We often refer to the gospel as the "good news." When I studied English grammar, I learned of the concepts of "good, better, and best." However, "good" in Hebrew is not the same as English. Good in Hebrew is "tov." It means not only good, but also better and best. The term also means excellent. So the "good news" means the news that is better than anything else.

When we say, "God is good," what we really are saying is that God is the best. Why is God the best? It is because God's steadfast love endures forever. The term for God's love in Hebrew is "checed." It is translated as "love," faithful love," "lovingkindness," "steadfast love," or even "mercy" in English translations. The word is hard to define because it has a deeper meaning of love. This is a unique covenant love that only God can give. The love never changes and never fails. It is a love that is promised forever.

God never fails to fulfill His promise. His love is ever present. The author of Psalm 136 repeats the statement "***his steadfast love endures forever***" 26 times. The author does not want the Israelites to forget about the love of God.

As Christians, we believe God's love is shown in sending Jesus to us to become the perfect sacrifice, so that we would be forgiven of our sins. God's goodness and steadfast love is what guides us to thankfulness.

4. God is like a Mother Eagle

Yet God's goodness and steadfast love do not guarantee us a perfect life. Each of us will face danger, challenges, sickness, hardship, and even death. However, these times in life don't mean that God is absent. Instead, these times are used to lead us to become stronger than before. Deuteronomy 32:10-11 says, "***He (God) sustained him (God's people) in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste; he shielded him, cared for him, guarded him as the***

apple of his eye. ***11*** ***As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions***." Like an eagle caring for their eaglets, God's leading in our lives trains us to grow. God teaches us and guides us as we follow after Jesus so that we grow in our faith. We remember that God's covenant relationship with us is what allows us not to worry and to remember that God will take care of everything, even when we face troubles or challenges in life.

That's why Paul says "***in everything in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God***" (Philippians 4:6). When we pray, we gain the right perspective. That's why Paul says to the Romans, "***we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose***" (Romans 8:28).

God works in all things for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. Let me share my story.

When I was in Korea, in my early 20s, I was diagnosed with tuberculosis. At the time many of those who were diagnosed with tuberculosis died. Through fasting and prayers miraculously I was healed. God taught me that I am a human being and should take care of me. Since then I have been walking or running every day. God gave me a learning opportunity through sickness. I also learned that God turned my bad circumstance around for good. So if something bad happens to me, I come to be still and wait for what God is going to do.

5. Conclusion

Paul's conviction in God's role in our lives allows him to be grateful in all circumstances. As we shared last Sunday, half of the Pilgrims died by the first Thanksgiving. The people were able to give thanks despite the circumstances because of God's goodness and mercy in the midst of their trials. As Christians, we are called not only to give thanks to the Lord for what he has done for us, but also because "***He is good; his steadfast love endures forever***."

6. Application

Gratitude to God is giving God the credit for the blessings and goodness in our lives. Paul reminds us that even in the midst of disappointment and difficulty, God's love for us endures forever. God reminds us with signs of his love every day and through the greatest sign of God's love for us, through his son, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Many people celebrate the season of Thanksgiving once a year. But the Bible tells us to celebrate every day. Our gratitude in the Lord is rooted in God's goodness and his faithfulness forever. I pray that we would pray without ceasing to give thanks to God in all circumstances. May God fill our Thanksgiving and every day with his goodness and steadfast love. Amen.