

1 Thess 5:16-18
Thanksgiving Part 3

Disciples of Jesus, it is okay if you are not okay. It is not okay to hide the fact that you are not okay. And it is useless to think you can hide that from God/Jesus. Not only is it useless, but it is also to your detriment. ²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” **Matt 11:28-30**
NIV Scripture in no way calls us to a false strength. It acknowledges that we will have moments, maybe even seasons of weakness. We will have troubles. There will be times when life bears down on us so, that all we can do is cry out to God.

Psalm 18:6 “⁶ In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.” **ESV**

Lamentations 3:55-57 ““I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit;⁵⁶ you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ ⁵⁷ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’” **ESV**

In this life we will have difficulty no different than our sisters and brothers in Thessalonica and yet, like them, the call for us, for every disciple, is to give thanks to God in all circumstances. In part 1 I shared that thanksgiving is the tenor of our worship, and in part 2 that it is the anchor of our prayers. Today I want you to know that thanksgiving is our way through the storms, the difficulties, the sufferings we all will experience in this life. With this said, I want to draw our attention

more closely to the text and in doing so I have three observations to share.

First observation, Jesus is the only reason we need to rejoice. V16, 18b “¹⁶ Rejoice always... for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” There maybe someone hearing this message that has convinced him or herself that he or she has no cause for rejoicing. This person may even be protesting by telling himself or herself that if things were different maybe he or she would. Let the Spirit help us. Turn your attention to Jesus, away from your situation. I dare you to get off your soapbox and start rendering thanksgiving to God/Christ. I double-dog dare you! God’s will for us all is that we rejoice always, which is to always feel or show great joy or delight. The only way this is possible for us is for us to set our minds, our hearts, our affections, our desires on the one who is eternal, Jesus. Listen, temporal things: people, possessions, accomplishments, good health, you name it can only offer temporary satisfaction. But Jesus gives us a joy that is utterly unworldly. A joy that is eternal. I want to show you scripturally what I believe this looks like in real-time.

Acts 5:40b-41 “When they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” **NKJV**

Acts 7:59-60, “⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.” **NIV**

2 Cor 11:24-29, 12:10, “²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was

pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?...¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” **NIV**

In Jesus there is much cause for rejoicing!

Second observation, what we are instructed to do here is not unreasonable or impossible. V17, 18b “¹⁷ pray without ceasing... for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Undoubtedly, we say to ourselves how is this even possible. Let me say this, first. God/Christ calls us to do nothing that he has not enabled us to do in the power of his Holy Spirit. Now, to do this is certainly easier when we are under pressure or suffering in some way beyond our ability to resolve. In the ‘valley of the shadow of death’ situations most disciples will pray vigorously, and we will ask everybody we know to pray for us. So, I am convinced there are moments we do this, instinctively. The opportunity is for us to understand that we must be incessant in conversating with God regardless of what’s going in our lives. And we will only do this when God/Jesus becomes the center of our joy. Think about all the things we pursue relentlessly. Why would we believe we cannot be relentless in prayer? Thanksgiving, which is expressions of

gratitude to God/ Jesus, is prayer, considering that prayer is simply conversation with God. Thanksgiving is a specific kind of conversation with God, one where our petitions take a back seat to our words of gratitude. Which, by the way, leads to rejoicing.

Col 1:9-14 “⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Final observation, Paul is not telling us we must like our circumstances. V18 “¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Life is like a roller coaster, filled with sharp turns and twist, straight-a-ways and loops, highs and lows. For some more highs, it seems, and for others more lows. Regardless of how it may balance out, no one escapes this life without scars. The rich have them and so do the poor, as well as the in between. The educated and the uneducated have scars. Black, white, red and yellow all have scars. Live long enough and you will be sick, disappointed, hurt, betrayed, lonely, loose a loved one, etc. Live long enough and you will be loved and you will love. You will laugh and smile. You will experience the warmth of the sun on a cold day, and the coolness of the rain on a hot day. In this life there will be success and failure, joy and pain for all. But what separates the disciple of Jesus from the

nonbeliever is this, we know this life is not all there is. We know that every circumstance serves God's good purposes for our lives. We know that we are never alone in anything we go through. We know that everything we encounter in this life is temporary and so we do not put our hope in things. In all circumstances we never stop looking to the hill which comes our help and our help comes from the Lord!

Psalm 121 “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? ² My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. ³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. ⁵ The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. ⁸ The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.” **ESV**

Thanksgiving! It is the tenor of our worship, the anchor to our prayers; it is our way through the storms of life. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**