

Whatever you do ...

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, and can I add my welcome to Mark's. It's great you could join us for our Thanksgiving Sunday tonight. I wonder how you would finish this sentence. The sentence is, whatever you do, dot, dot, dot.

How would you finish that sentence? Whatever you do, dot, dot, dot. Would it be, whatever you do, be happy? This is one book that's out there you can get on Amazon by Julia Dellett.

Or would it be, whatever you do in life, don't give up on your dreams by that wise sage Nicole Kidman. Or would it be like Derek Chen who says, whatever you do, eat dumplings.

And then there he is enjoying them. I wonder how you would finish that sentence, whatever you do, dot, dot, dot. We've heard how God might finish that sentence from our second reading, and we've heard that it actually involves Thanksgiving.

But before we get to that, I want us to think about the most fundamental reason why we give thanks. And the fundamental reason for Thanksgiving is that it's actually part of worshipping God rightly.

[1 : 09] And so if you've got an outline, hopefully you've got an outline. It's where at point one. This is a little bit of a different Bible talk tonight. Normally, you'll know that we just work our way through passages and books of the Bible so that we can see the passage in context.

It's a bit more of a topical talk tonight, so I'm going to put them all on the slides. But feel free, of course, to use your Bibles. I'm never against people using your Bibles.

So worship, as you know, is more than just singing. It includes singing, but it's more than just singing. It's living for God in all of life. And that includes Thanksgiving.

And so in Revelation, for example, the living creatures, when they worship God, they give God glory, honor and thanks. When the angels fall down on their faces in heaven and worship God, they praise and glory and wisdom and thank God.

Thanksgiving, you see, is part of worshipping God. We heard it in our first reading, actually. So in Psalm 100, the psalmist tells Israel to enter God's temple gates with thanksgiving and his temple courts with praise.

[2 : 21] To give thanks to God and to praise his name. You see, giving thanks goes hand in hand with praising God. It's part of worshipping God. Why, though?

Well, because it rightly acknowledges God as the good God who gives every good gift we enjoy. And so in verse five, the psalmist gives the reason.

He says for or because you thanks to him, praise his name, because the Lord is good. And then he explains God's goodness in terms of his love that endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.

And that includes giving good gifts. As James chapter one puts it, every good and perfect gift is from above. Coming down from the father.

You see, when you thank someone for giving you something good in life, you're not just showing your gratitude towards them. You're also acknowledging that they're the one who gave it.

[3 : 29] Aren't you? So too with God. Giving God thanks rightly acknowledges that he is the good God who created every good gift that we enjoy in this world.

As one Christian writer put it, he said, When giving thanks, God the creator is acknowledged to be the source of all goodness.

Which is why if we don't give thanks, we are actually denying that God is the one who ultimately enabled us to enjoy this good thing.

He created it, enabled us to have it. And if we don't give thanks, it's pretty shameful, really.

In fact, even non-Christians know that being ungrateful is shameful. Did anyone hear about that couple last week? I think it was last week who won that \$4 million house that was on the block.

[4 : 31] Do you hear that? And then they kind of, as they walked through, they complained that the paintwork wasn't good and it didn't come with the wine fridge and that sort of thing. And there was this huge backlash in social media and the media.

Headline from The Guardian, I think it was. Backlash erupts after Australian couples' ungrateful reaction. Even non-Christians know that being ungrateful is shameful.

Well, how much more so when it comes to God? Who gave us every good gift in this world that we enjoy. From family to friends to food to fun.

To the nice cup of tea or cup of coffee in the morning. To even those, my daughter put me onto these shaved ice cream things down the road at Bing, Bing, what is it?

That thing. It's pretty cool. But they're all good gifts from God. And when God created food, He didn't just give us one type of food and that was it.

[5 : 38] In His generosity, He gave us variety. In fact, being ungrateful is not just shameful, it's actually sinful.

Did you realize? And so in 2 Timothy, when Paul is describing sinful people, he lists being ungrateful right next to being unholy. And by the way, for the kids, next to being disobedient to their parents.

But the point is, it is sinful. Because again, being ungrateful is denying the truth that God is good and the source of all goodness.

And like all sin, in the end, being ungrateful is just not good for us. I mean, if we're ungrateful all the time, it just makes us grumpy, doesn't it?

And unpleasant to be around. Our problem, of course, is we often focus on what God has not given us and forget all the good things He has given us.

[6 : 43] Do you ever do that? I do. And the point is, Thanksgiving is part of worshipping God rightly in life because it acknowledges that He is the source of every good thing we enjoy in this world.

And since Thanksgiving is part of worshipping God in life, then it also ought to be part of our church life. Point two. This brings us to our second reading.

And I think in verses 15 to 16 in particular, the focus is on the church gathering. It's talking about being a piece between members of the one body. It's talking about singing together, teaching one another and the like.

So I think what's on view here is a church meeting. And as we gather the church, verse 15 says, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you are called to peace.

And be thankful. Now we'll get to the be thankful bit in a moment. But given what's happening in the world, I thought it worthwhile focusing on the peace part as well.

[7 : 50] This peace here is the peace of Christ. It's the peace that Christ gives us. And it's both with God and with one another. Because, as you know, sin makes us enemies with God.

And yet Christ took the punishment for our sins at the cross. So that we could not just be forgiven, but we who believe can also be given peace with God.

A right relationship, in other words. A loving relationship. What's more, Christ brought us together as members of his body, as God's family.

And in doing so, he brought us peace with each other. A friendship or relationship with each other. A few verses earlier in chapter 3, you can see it there in your Bibles.

But in verse 11, Paul talks about that in Christ there is no Gentile or Jew. Circumcised or uncircumcised. They were the big categories and divisions in Israel.

[8 : 52] Barbarian, Scythian, slave or free. But Christ is all and is in all. In other words, being brought together in Christ means our old identities that divided us are now superseded by a new identity that unites us.

The identity of Christ. Christ is all. His one identity rules all others. Which brings us peace.

Before we were divided by our different cultures, our different interests, our different jobs, our different genders. And so we may never have spoken to each other or cared for one another or worked with each other.

But by bringing us together, we've been given peace in terms of a relationship, a friendship with one another. So that we do now talk to each other.

We do, don't we? We talk to each other, right? And we do care for one another. And we do work together with one another for the sake of the gospel. This is why more than anything else, what Israel and Palestine, Gaza and so on, what they really need is Jesus.

[10 : 08] I don't mean that flippantly, because that's what I'm supposed to say as a pastor. I mean that genuinely. He alone brings true peace. Not just in terms of stopping war, but establishing relationship.

I mean, can you imagine a Hamas and an Israeli soldier, not just putting down their guns, but then sitting down to eat a meal together, to talk and enjoy one another's company, to care for each other.

I mean, right at the moment, it's really hard to imagine, isn't it? But the peace of Christ can do that. It's done it before. And it's this peace that we're given, and it's this peace that, verse 15, we're to let rule in our hearts as church.

We're to let this peace direct our hearts so that we'll seek to always maintain it with one another. In fact, the word rule here has the idea of being an umpire or referee.

In a game, the umpire makes a call when there's a dispute. You know, whether it's a foul or not, whether it's in or out. Well, when there's a dispute in the church, we're to let the peace of Christ umpire our hearts.

[11 : 29] Rule them with a call for peace. So that that's what we'll always seek to maintain. So if someone says something hurtful to you or unfollows you on, I don't know what the latest platform is, Insta, maybe?

I don't know. I understand it's hurtful if you get unfollowed. But if someone does that, we're to let the peace of Christ umpire our hearts so that we seek peace.

Not by holding a grudge, but by forbearing and forgiving. Or if someone voted differently to us yesterday, we're to let the peace of Christ umpire our hearts so that we seek peace.

By not being judgmental, but by acknowledging the freedom, freedom of conscience we have to choose how we'll vote in this particular manner.

It's not, of course, peace at the expense of truth. We are still to uphold the truth of God's word. But where there are disputes because of personality differences or conscience issues or even our sinful natures where we hurt one another, we're to let the peace of Christ rule or umpire our hearts with a call to maintain peace.

- [12 : 51] By forbearing and forgiving. For Christ has already established peace amongst us. He's brought us together. Created us with relationship with one another. But then Paul adds at the end of verse 15, And be thankful.

Thankful for all things, but I take it especially this thing of peace, which Christ has given us. We are now in a loving relationship with God.

We know him as our heavenly father. With the hope of a world to come. All at the expense of Christ's blood. That's the kind of peace he's given us.

And is not peace with one another so much better than war? Are not loving relationships or friendships so much better than hatred? Have not the images from Israel and Gaza reminded us of this this past week?

We often forget how good peace is until we see how bad war is, don't we? And so we're to be thankful for this peace we have both with God and with one another.

- [14 : 06] This idea of thanksgiving is again then seen in verse 16. Where we're not just to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, but we're also to let the word of Christ dwell richly amongst us.

How? Well, as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. In other words, we're to let the word of Christ dwell richly amongst us as we sing.

As we sing songs full of God's word. Because as we sing, we're not just singing to God. We're singing in earshot of one another. And that's a way of teaching each other God's truth through music, through the songs.

And this is one way we let the word of Christ dwell richly amongst us and why our songs need to match the truth of Christ's word. And why Paul lists some examples like psalms, hymns and songs for the Spirit or spiritual songs.

There are lots of songs which are not spiritual because they don't have Christ's word in them. I mean, there's loads of songs out there, isn't there? Like, you know, the old Taylor Swift song, you know, she get off, she get...

- [15 : 23] Okay. I was trying to find another contemporary song. I asked my kids. They found out I was going to do this and that's why two out of the three are not here tonight. They're at home online dying.

But there are lots of unspiritual songs out there, aren't there? And in fact, sadly, there's even songs in churches which are not full of Christ's word.

Like this one called Champion from Bethel Music. When I open my mouth, miracles start breaking out. I have the authority Jesus has given me. That's not quite right, is it?

It's not. And so we need to make sure that our songs are full of Christ's word, which is one way of letting his word dwell richly amongst us and teaching one another.

And so can I say thank you to all our musos who choose our songs week by week and for leading us in singing them. I think they're mainly over there this week, so thank you guys.

- [16 : 20] But notice also how we are to sing at the end of the verse. We're to sing with gratitude in our hearts. It doesn't say we're to sing well, which I'm thankful about, but it does say we're to sing with gratitude in your hearts.

As we sing songs that remind us of truth. For me, one of my favourite songs is Before the Throne of God Above. I have a strong, a perfect plea.

A great high priest whose name is love, who ever lives and pleads for me. Is that not a heartwarming truth that Jesus ever lives?

He's always living to plead and to pray for you and for me. I mean, that's fantastic. That's so encouraging. It's worth singing with gratitude in our hearts, isn't it?

I saw this website during the week. It has 24 signs of church health, and it even gave a bonus 25th sign for a super healthy church, which is honest self-assessment.

[17 : 32] I read the blurb afterwards. I still don't quite understand what it's talking about, but anyway. In the other 24 signs, it did include, I think, it didn't use these words, but I think it included peace between one another.

So loving each other, maintaining the peace. I think it also included letting the word of Christ dwell richly. So it talked about the kind of songs and Bible teaching and so on. But out of the 25 signs, not one of them mentioned being thankful.

And yet it's hearing God's word. For God, it is a sign of a healthy church. Thankfulness. For Thanksgiving is part of worshipping God in life.

So it ought to be part of our church life. And in fact, part of our own life. Point three, verse 17. Paul says, Here's how God finishes that sentence we started with.

Whatever you do, dot, dot, dot. Well, here it is. Whatever you do, whether word or action, which means in everything, we're to firstly do it in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[18 : 52] But what does that mean? Well, our name represents who we are. It represents our character, doesn't it? So to drag someone's name through the mud means to drag their character through the mud.

Or to praise someone's name, like, you know, Mark is magnificent. He's nodding, yeah. It's to praise that person.

And so to do everything in the name of Jesus is to do everything in his character, in his likeness, in other words. So this verse is saying, Whatever you do, be like Christ.

After all, if we are all part of Christ's body, then we're all to reflect Christ's character, aren't we? But notice again, Paul adds at the end of the verse, giving thanks to God the Father.

Now, out of all the things Paul could have added about what we should do in all of life, whether word or action, out of all the things he could have added, he adds giving thanks.

[19 : 57] That's how important it is. In fact, in these three verses, I hope you've noticed, three times we're told to be thankful. And again, in verse 17, it's to be in all of life.

Whatever you do, be like Christ with thanksgiving. That's how important it is. It's actually equated with being like Christ and giving thanks.

That's how important it is. And we're to do it not just in the good times when we enjoy good gifts from God, we're to do it in the bad times when we find it hard to trust God.

Because even in the bad times, we still have reason to thank God. For example, in chapter 1 of Colossians, we're to give thanks to the Father because he's qualified us.

He's enabled us to share in the inheritance of the world to come. All at the expense of Christ's blood. Or even in our chapter, a few verses earlier, we are reminded who we are as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

[21 : 05] That's who we are. No matter what results we get in VCE or uni exams, we are still dearly loved, chosen, holy. That's worth giving thanks for.

And so, whatever we do, be like Christ with thanksgiving, even when you're suffering in life.

I must confess that I have found it a bit hard to feel thankful this past week. I've perhaps watched too many news reports about what's been happening in Israel and Gaza.

And as we hear horror stories coming out of what's happening to women and children and babies. And yet, as my anger rose at this evil, I became even more thankful that God will one day hold them all to account.

That one day, there will be perfect justice in a world where there'll be no more war, no more evil. And that's still worth giving God thanks for, isn't it?

[22 : 14] Or take a lady I was visiting in hospital a couple of weeks ago. She was told she didn't have long to live. She obviously wanted to live.

Her daughters wanted her to live. And so we prayed that God would enable her to keep living. But after the prayer, we just finished praying and she said straight after, she said, thanks be to God that he'll either heal me or take me.

And then she pointed upwards, home to heaven. Here is someone who still gave thanks even though she was facing her own death.

In fact, then she added, the Lord's will be done. And so again, here is someone, whatever she did, she was like Christ who himself said, not my will, but your will be done.

And gave thanks to God even in her awful situation. We'll take another person from our church, from the morning service. She had \$20,000 stolen from a bank, through a banking scam a couple of months ago, earlier this year.

[23 : 28] She's not rich, she's retired. And so that's, you know, a big chunk out of her savings. The bank claimed it was not their fault. And yet, you know what she said?

She said, Andrew, I'm still thankful because it has really taught me it's all God's money anyway. So I'm not worried. That was her response.

We prayed about it at our Bible study group and with the persistent help of another church member and several months later, the bank amazingly reimbursed her. With interest, actually.

But then she said to me, I'm so thankful for the good lesson that God taught me. I want to give it away for God's work. And she did. All \$20,000 of it.

Again, the point is, here are people who not only acted like Christ, but were still thankful despite awful situations. Derek Chen may say, whatever you do, eat dumplings.

[24 : 34] And they are nice, aren't they? But for us Christians, God says, whatever you do, be like Christ with thanksgiving. Let's pray.