

THANKSGIVING SUNDAY - I Give Thanks to God

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is Thanksgiving Sunday at Holy Trinity on the 2nd of November 2003. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled I Give Thanks to God and is based on 1 Corinthians 1.4-9.

In Melbourne, we have much to give thanks for. Besides the minor things of clear drinking water, electricity gas, clean air, food, good health system and education system, freedom from wars and political turmoil, we have many good things.

We have good coffee. We have sport with passion. We have some magnificent beautiful features like the Great Ocean Road.

We have fantastic weather. Look out there at the moment. We have culture. We're a cultured lot in Melbourne.

[1 : 14] We also have the MCG. We have many great things to be thankful for. In Corinth, some 2,000 years ago, a city in Greece, in the time of Paul the Apostle, they had much to give thanks for as well.

They were a city that was rebuilt by Julius Caesar some 40 years before Jesus' birth. It was probably one of the most wealthiest cities in Greece.

It was a bustling city with great trade routes going through it. The boats used to go from east to west through Corinth. The north-south trade routes used to go up via the land.

It was a great city. It was a city where you could seek your fortune. It, too, was a place of a great sporting arena, holding up to 18,000 people.

It had culture as well. It had a concert hall of 3,000 people. Remember, this is 2,000 years ago. It had drama and musical entertainment. There were large markets where lots of food would come in.

[2 : 24] This city had every reason to be thankful. Yet both Melbourne and Corinth, on the whole, are thankless cities.

They do not thank God for the things that they have. They do not honour Him. They do not praise Him. They do not give Him the credit that is due to our great God.

They live self-centred lives. This thanklessness reveals what is at the core of their lives, sinful lives.

It shows, this thanklessness shows that they do not honour God as God. You only have to look around Melbourne to see it, don't you? We don't thank God for the great things that He has given us.

The city back there in Corinth, it was a city full of many other religious idols and cults and it was just packed with all sorts of religious temples.

[3 : 26] Up on the hill behind Corinth, there was the temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. There were temples and shrines in many houses and in many places in the city.

It was a city of licentiousness, a city of prostitutes. It was not a city that honoured or gave thanks to God. But in this godless place of Corinth, Paul planted some churches, house churches, the churches of Corinth.

And it is in this letter that we see Paul writing to these churches where he gives thanks. Paul gives thanks. Open up to page 926 in your Bible so you can have a look at this prayer of thanks.

Paul does give thanks here. But look at what he gives thanks to. Chapter 1, verse 4 of 1 Corinthians. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus.

Notice what he gives thanks for. He gives thanks for the grace of God. He gives thanks for the great gift given in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 37] The way that God has worked in the Corinthian lives. A typical letter back then when Paul would write would often have a thanksgiving. But in that thanksgiving they would thank God or their gods or whoever they were thanking.

They would thank him for material possessions. They would thank that person for the way that they have been successful in business or the fact that they have good health at the moment. They were the type of things that they would give thanks for.

But Paul here, he gives thanks to the way that God worked in the Corinthians lives. You see, Paul went there and planted these churches. He preached the good news of Jesus Christ.

They heard it and they responded in faith and repentance. And God poured out his Holy Spirit upon the Corinthians. Look there in verse 5, the way that Paul describes this.

For in every way you have been enriched in him. They have been enriched. They have been made wealthy in Christ. Paul points out the signs of this grace.

[5 : 41] The signs that has been made visible among them in the rest of verse 5. In speech and knowledge of every kind. In verse 6, he talks about the fact that this shows the great testimony to the power of Jesus and the message of Jesus.

It gives them great confidence. In verse 7, we see that this Spirit, God's Spirit, gives them everything they need.

They are not lacking in any spiritual gift as they wait the return of Christ. What a rich blessing they have been given. What a great thing to be given God's Holy Spirit, to be given all these riches.

But then he goes on to say, not only have you been given these things, but in verse 8 he tells them that he will strengthen them to the end. He will give them the power to be able to last to that great and final day when Christ will return.

So it says there at the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a rich gift. What grace God has shown here.

[6 : 49] The watch that I was given by my parents for my 21st birthday, it's a lovely watch. I know how much it costs because I lost the original and rather than sort of telling my parents that I'd lost the watch, I thought I'd go and buy a new one and it was very expensive, let me assure you.

It's a rich gift that my parents gave me for my 21st birthday. But this compares nothing to the riches that Christ gave the Corinthians.

What riches? The way that God has worked in their life. What is even more amazing is the way that Paul gives this prayer of thanksgiving. It is a remarkable prayer because as we read through the rest of 1 Corinthians, we see that this church is wrapped by divisions.

It is torn with strife. One of the leaders is having an affair with his stepmother. There are others who are visiting prostitutes. There are those who do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus or that he will return.

They thought that they had it all there and then. What is even more remarkable is the way that Paul gives thanks for the gifts that they have of knowledge and speech.

[8 : 03] But as we read through the rest of 1 Corinthians, we see that they abuse these gifts terribly. The question is, how can Paul be so thankful when this church is so torn with strife and abuse?

How can he be so positive? Look there in verse 9, the final verse of today's reading. How can he be so positive about this church? How can he give thanks to God?

Because in verse 9, God is faithful. By him you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

God is the one who guarantees that he'll get them to the end. He is faithful and trustworthy. His promises are sure. He is a solid rock.

To put it into horse racing terms, in his past form, in his track record, he is absolutely a sure and certain bet. He is worth putting all on him.

[9 : 03] Everything. You will not lose out. He will be a sure and certain bet to carry us through to the finish line. Despite whatever obstacles are in the way, despite the track, despite whatever comes before us, God is faithful.

He is rich in grace to us. So the question is, are you a thankful people?

Are we thankful to God in the way that he works in our life? I was reflecting on this myself during the week and I reflected on the fact that perhaps I wasn't as thankful as I ought to be.

I grew up in a Christian household. I don't ever remember not being a Christian. I remember just significant times in my life where God worked powerfully in my life and drawing me closer to him.

But I don't remember a significant point where I gave my life to Christ necessarily. But just the way that God worked throughout my life. As I reflected on it, I thought, what a gracious God towards me.

[10 : 11] As I think back on my life, there are many times that I could have taken a different path. I could have been tempted to fall into sin or to neglect church or to just drift away.

Yet God in his graciousness has held me. God has put in my life people to encourage me. Churches where I may grow.

People. God has been gracious to me. And for that, I am very thankful. Well, what is it that we thank God for?

Think on the things that you thank God for. At most meals, we thank God for the food. Olivia and Georgie love praying. They love thanking God for the food.

But it's interesting when you listen to little children's prayers, often you ask them, what things can we thank God for? I want to thank God for my Barbie. I want to thank God for the different things that they have.

[11 : 10] often that's what a lot of our prayers of thankfulness are, of the things that we have or the health that we enjoy. For the new car that we may have got.

For the time when we're driving along the road and we have a near miss on the freeway, we offer a quick prayer of thanks to God. We thank God sincerely and rightfully when we are healed from serious illness.

These are good things to thank God for. But are all our thanksgiving prayers on material things and our comfort and well-being?

Or are they like Paul's? Prayers, thanking God for the way that he works in our life. Have you sat down and given thanks for the people here? For the people that have encouraged you in your Christian life?

Have you worked through lists of people in the church and thanked God for the signs of grace and their life? For the well-being, for the great things that God has done in people's lives?

[12 : 15] Do you give him praise and thanksgiving the way that we ought? There was a man by the name of Maximilian Kobe. He was a Franciscan monk during the Second World War and he was in a concentration camp.

Ten men were chosen to go under an experiment where they would end up dying and Maximilian Kobe wasn't chosen but he noticed a man who was and he said to the guards, look, take me instead.

I have no family. Take me. Let this man live. And so that man was spared his life. Maximilian, after ten days, he was the only one left and so he was killed.

A horrible, gruesome death. The man who survived, whose life was spared, was very thankful. There is a moving point where both he and his wife, his family, his children, his grandchildren, all came to the Pope for a service of thanksgiving for the life of this man.

This man whose life was spared, he was thankful. The family were thankful. The grandkids, the kids, they were all thankful for this life that was spared.

[13 : 41] How about us? Are we thankful for the rich blessings that we have in Christ and the way that he has spared us? Are we thankful? May we be thankful and at show in all our lives.

Amen. Lo■ana All right. All right.

Many of czas of course will be thankful to the Diego and oh nothing to be was in our lives.■ Issues Ass wedding■