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Sermon 7 February 2021 SOURCE

Giving 1: Giving Thanks: 1 Thess. 5: 16-19

- Good morning church—it is so good to be with you this morning—on Super Bowl Sunday. And whether you are a supporter of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers or the Kansas City Chiefs—even if you don't even know who those teams are or what the Super Bowl is, we are glad that you have taken the time and made the effort to be with us today.
- We are beginning a new four-week sermon series today. It's called a Generous Life—The Beauty in Giving, and we will be talking about what it means to live a generous life—a life that is characterised by giving—by a willingness to share the blessings that God has provided to each of us with others, to make what we have available for the building of the Kingdom of God—to offer ourselves to God and His purposes.
- Now before you think, “well, here we go—get out your chequebook, they're gonna be asking for money for the next month,” let me assure you that that is NOT what we're going to be doing for the next four weeks.
- Financial support of the local church, and of the general church, of missions and community programs is certainly important—even crucial to their continued well-being—it takes money to do things, that is for sure—the church could not exist without financial support—but financial support of the church and the activities of the Kingdom is only one facet of a generous life—only one aspect of what it means to have the attitude of giving, of faithful stewardship, pervading one's being and embodying the way that we live our lives.

- And that's what we're going to be examining over the next four weeks, because generosity—abundant and unrestrained giving-- is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian--to follow Jesus—to be godly—to be holy--to reflect the image of God, who from the very beginning GIVES to humanity—He gave the whole of creation and a purpose and companionship and all that we needed, to us—but we were ungrateful—we saw what we lacked and were tempted by it and took it for ourselves—but God kept on giving—God kept on providing—
- God kept on calling his people to repentance and forgiveness and reconciliation— calling them to be thankful for his provision—and then of course in time we know of that greatest gift that was given—for God so loved the world that he GAVE—gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes on him should not perish--John 3:16— God GAVE—and God's giving was not parsimonious, not tightfisted, not miserly, but generous, abundant, extravagant—amazing love, and can it be-- that God emptied himself of all but love—and that's the same mind that Paul tells us that we should have in the kenosis hymn in Philippians 2—the same mind as Jesus who emptied himself out—and so we find in the teachings of Jesus in the sermon on the Mount and the sermon on the Plain, but also running through all that Jesus teaches during his ministry this idea that to seek the Kingdom is about giving, about letting go, relinquishing control--about depending on God who provides us with blessings that we are to empty out to others--not hoarding, not holding on to things, but emptying out for others—
- We certainly hear that sentiment in the second of the greatest commandments, as we heard about last week, that admonition from Jesus to love others as ourselves—and if you think about the way we love ourselves, it occurs to me that even a person

with terrible self-esteem, even someone who has a poor self-image, who might not admit that they love themselves, even such a person would still, if they are to stay alive, be driven to provide basic necessities for themselves—to GIVE themselves certain things—because above all, we care for ourselves—we make sure that we give ourselves what we need to survive--we breathe, we give ourselves air-- we drink, we give ourselves water-- we eat, we give ourselves food-- we seek shelter, we give ourselves protection from the elements—and at the end of the day we give ourselves a break, we rest—as much as it is within our power, we give ourselves the things we need, as well as many of the things we simply desire—many of us give ourselves things we don't need at all—but we GIVE to ourselves—every minute of every day—this is a very big part of what it means to LOVE ourselves—to care for, to take care of—to GIVE TO—and now consider that we are called to love others as ourselves—as part of the greatest commandment straight from the mouth of Jesus-- and so GIVING is fundamental to what it means to follow Jesus, to be a part of the Kingdom of God

- And there are many things that we can give when we are following God's example, when we are seeking to have the same mind as Christ—when we live a generous life—we've already mentioned the most obvious one—we can give of our resources—we can give financial support to the work of the Kingdom
- But as we said that's only one way to give—that's only one thing that we can give—and over the next four weeks we are going to think about some other ways to give, some other things we can give—and today we're going to start with a kind of giving that I believe is essential, is fundamental to living a generous life
- And that is giving thanks.

- You know, humanity has had a problem with giving thanks, with being grateful, with expressing our gratitude, with appreciating what has been provided for them, since the beginning. We all know the story of how, even though they were placed into a garden that was abundant with everything they could possibly need, Adam and Eve were tempted by what they didn't have—by what they lacked—they looked at the abundance around them and said “this is not enough,” we want more—we want what we don't have—what we were told we shouldn't have—they looked at abundance and saw scarcity—they were not satisfied nor did they appreciate God's provision for them—which they had done nothing to deserve—and so we could say that human nature has had a tendency toward ungratefulness for a very long time. We often forget to show gratitude—and so we need to be reminded every now and then that it is important to give thanks, to be thankful.
- That is what the Apostle Paul is reminding the church about in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Thessalonians—and that's where we find the scripture for today.
- Now sometimes Paul writes a letter to a church—in Corinth, or Ephesus, for example—and in that letter he needs to address a problem that has arisen—sometimes more than one problem—Paul might need to let the church know that they need to stop doing something—like judging each other or celebrating the Lord's supper without certain people—or maybe they've misunderstood something and he needs to set them straight—like the fact that they're saved by faith and not by works, or how the gifts of the Spirit work—but for the most part, the first epistle to the church at Thessalonica, is not that kind of corrective letter.
- Paul, likely with help from Silvanus and Timothy, writes First Thessalonians as a letter of encouragement—its tone is warm and supportive—there is some clarification

about certain issues that have been raised, but in general, Paul is telling the church at Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, in northern Greece, that they are doing a good job and they need to keep on doing what they're doing.

- Now that's what a church likes to hear—especially an early church that is trying to figure out, that is developing, what it means to be a Christian church—without previous precedents and models to look to
- It is a challenge and an exciting venture to do a new thing, and that is what the church at Thessalonica is part of, and Paul is letting them know that they are on the right track.
- And at the end of his letter—in his concluding remarks, Paul leaves his audience with some final exhortations—some suggestions, some admonitions—a to-do list of things to pay attention to.
- We find these in verses 12 through 22 of chapter 5. Paul tells the church to respect those who are doing the Lord's work among them, to get along peacefully, to admonish the idlers—that's some good advice right there—let folks who aren't pulling their weight or working or contributing to the mission of the Kingdom that they need to pitch in—but Paul says to be patient with them and to help the weak and fainthearted-- he also says to not seek revenge, to avoid evil, to be led by the Spirit and not to extinguish the Spirit's power, that sort of thing. The kinds of things Paul might want to make sure that a young church keeps in the forefront of their minds so they don't veer off course.
- But I want us to look at a single sentence that sits sort of in the middle of these exhortations, in verses 16 through 18.

- 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- And I'd like for us this morning to consider just a few observations about this one sentence that Paul writes to this church, because I believe there's not just a message for the early church at Thessalonica here, but there's a message for the church of the Nazarene in Largs, and all the believers who are part of it and who are connected to our church family—I believe God has something to say to each and every one of us this morning—something life-changing, something that can transform the very nature of our being if we'll let it—something that can transform the way we think and act and live.
- And so the first point I want to make about verses 16, 17 and 18 is this: these three verses are one sentence. They go together. They are not independent thoughts nor are they independent commands—they are inter-related, they rely upon each other and follow from each other. And Paul tells us of these 3 commands, “this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”---
- What is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you? This—these three: Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances
- In his Explanatory Notes on the Scriptures, John Wesley says of these three commands that “This is Christian perfection. Farther than this we cannot go; and we need not stop short of it.” Wesley says that these 3 commands are “holiness—Christian perfection”—they represent the fullest extent of what it means to be “holy,” to be “perfect,” to be “sanctified”—and Wesley says we can live like this, and we need not settle for less than this

- So the next time someone asks you, “What’s this Nazarene talk about Wesleyan holiness and Christian perfection—what does that mean?” you can direct them to 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 16-18 and tell them John Wesley said that this was Christian perfection—
- Wesley explains that praying without ceasing is the fruit of rejoicing in the Lord, and that giving thanks in every situation is the fruit of praying without ceasing—taken together these three describe a life that is wholly given over to the direction of the Holy Spirit so that one is always in a position of prayer, continuously communicating with and listening to God—and that enables us to give thanks in everything—because we are constantly in his watchcare and guided every moment of every day to walk in the steps of Jesus—to follow the path He has laid out for us—and in that path we can enjoy the assurance that where we are—whatever our situation, whatever we have or don’t have, whatever trials or triumphs we face, we can rejoice because we know—we know—that we are right where God wants us to be.
- That is Christian perfection. That is holiness. That is sanctification.
- And now I want to look specifically at that command about giving thanks—those two words in English, “give thanks,” they are only one word in the original Greek
- You didn’t think I was going to get through this sermon without at least ONE reference to the original Greek, now, did you?
- The word that is translated as “give thanks” there is “*eucharisteo*”—you will no doubt recognise the English word “Eucharist” right there in that word, and that’s because when we celebrate the Eucharist, when we take Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper, the liturgy contains the words “On the night He was betrayed, Jesus

took bread, and when He had given thanks, he broke it”—when he had given thanks— *eucharisteó* —so we call the Lord’s supper the Eucharist

- And this word *eucharisteó*—that’s a verb, and so Paul is using it to give a command: “give thanks.” But an interesting thing about the verb “*eucharisteó*” is that it not only means “give thanks,” but it also means “be thankful.” And so while in English we’d have to choose one or the other of those commands, or use both of them— give thanks AND be thankful-- in the Greek, with just one word, *eucharisteó*, Paul can say both of those at the same time—give thanks AND be thankful—*eucharisteó*—and so I think when we read “give thanks” in English, we miss out on the other half of that command—and I don’t think this is merely a semantic detail, because I think it’s important, and I think Paul is telling us that it’s important, both to BE thankful and to GIVE thanks.
- Because we can give thanks without being thankful—and we can be thankful without giving thanks. You can do one without the other. Anyone who’s ever heard somebody sarcastically say “thanks so much for all your help”—maybe you’ve said it to a customer service representative when you called some company on the telephone—maybe because your internet went out or your power bill was incorrect—you can say “thank you”—you can “give thanks” without actually being thankful—how many thank you cards are sent out each year for gifts that people don’t really appreciate? Anyone can say the words, or write them, or even give a gift that’s supposed to be a symbol of gratitude without really meaning it. But God knows our heart. So this is a reminder against mere lip service that doesn’t correspond to what’s in our hearts. And so Paul says *eucharisteo*—give thanks AND be thankful.

- And you can be thankful without giving thanks. You can hold your tongue. But as any kid who's ever said at the dinner table, "I don't need to say grace, God knows I'm thankful," knows—because our parents told us-- you need to say it. That's what Paul is telling us here--express your gratitude—if you are thankful, say it. Give voice to your gratefulness. Tell God that you're thankful for His provision.
- And the same goes for people, too—if you appreciate someone, if you are thankful for their presence in your life—tell them. Don't wait. A lot of people have gone to the funerals of people they loved and appreciated and wondered if they really knew how thankful they were for the things they did and said. Sometimes we wait too late. If you are thankful—tell people—tell God about it. Be thankful and give thanks, *eucharisteo*.
- This word *eucharisteo*—not only does it mean both "be thankful" and "give thanks" but it has another characteristic that makes it unusual and significant. Even though the word *eucharisteo* MEANS "give thanks" and "be thankful," it is made up of two other words that mean something else entirely.
- First, there's "eu" there at the beginning—and that means "good." We hear that prefix in English in words like "euphemism" and "euphoria" and "euthanasia."
- And then secondly there's "*charis*"—we see that word in English in words like "charisma" and "charismatic" and it means "grace," the unmerited favour and blessing of God
- So we have "eu-charis"—good grace.
- And so not only does "*eucharisteo*" literally MEAN "be thankful" and "give thanks" but it is made up of the very thing that we are to be thankful FOR, God's good grace—His unmerited favour toward humanity—that undeserved blessing not only

of all creation and the promise to provide for and watch over His children, but also that ultimate gift of which we are entirely unworthy and undeserving, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us

- And so when Paul says “*eucharisteo*” we are reminded to “give thanks” and to “be thankful” FOR God’s “good grace.”
- And because God’s grace is good, because His provision is beneficial, because His resources are unlimited and His generosity knows no limit, we can give thanks not only when life is pleasant and comfortable, but also when times are hard—when things get uncomfortable—when the storms arise—when we are suffering-- when sorrows like sea pillows roll—in all circumstances. Give thanks for God’s good grace in ALL circumstances.
- This means give thanks not only for what you have but also for what you don’t have, give thanks for what you have been blessed **with** and what you have been blessed **without**, for the people around you and the people who are **not** around you—give thanks even for those who are around you, that you have to deal with each day who maybe you’d rather not deal with—those folks who try your patience, who get on your last nerve—give thanks for them just as you give thanks for the folks who encourage you, who build you up, who make you feel glad to be alive
- Give thanks for the plans that unfold like clockwork—when things just seem to fall into place, when your day goes smoothly and efficiently—AND give thanks when it doesn’t—when nothing works like it should, when time gets wasted, when detours are necessary—when we have to wait, even though we are eager and ready to make things happen. When a pandemic brings the whole world to a screeching halt. Give thanks.

- This is Antonis Mavropoulos. He is a scientist, and this image is from a recent video lecture that he gave about disposing of healthcare waste in ways that prevent COVID infection and are sustainable and protect the planet and the people and wildlife in it. He has been a major contributor to thinking and action around ways to manage waste during the pandemic—he is the head of the nonprofit ISWA, the International Solid Waste Association, an organisation that works toward what it calls a “wasteless future”—a future in which the world practices good stewardship of creation and doesn’t exploit or destroy it. His work during the pandemic has undoubtedly saved countless lives and prevented the spread of the virus. He’s a very smart guy with a vision and a mission, and it has been a very good thing that he’s been around during the last year or so.
- But, in March of 2019, Antonis was travelling from his home in Athens, Greece to the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi. To get to Nairobi, Antonis had to catch a connecting flight in Ethiopia. His flight landed in Ethiopia at 7:40 am, and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 to Nairobi left 35 minutes later. It would be a tight connection, but not impossible.
- Now the conference in Nairobi was important—it was a United Nations Environment Assembly meeting. They’re the world’s highest-level decision-making body on the environment, with all 193 member states contributing—at their meetings they set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law. Their decisions matter and have lasting effects on the whole world.
- And so it wasn’t surprising that Antonis was the first person off the plane when he landed in Ethiopia. To save time and to make sure he got to the conference as early as possible, Antonis had not even checked a suitcase.

- There was supposed to be an airline representative to meet him and make sure he got to the next gate for his departing flight—but Antonis couldn't find him, and he knew he had to hurry. So Antonis ran, figuring out as he ran where the terminal and gate he needed to leave from was. He had his boarding pass in hand—flight 302, seat 2L, Gate 12. Boarding gate will be closed at 8:00. Departure time 8:15. Frantically, Antonis ran. He had to find that gate.
- Antonis didn't know it, but if he had checked a suitcase, the plane would have waited for it to be loaded and he might have had a few extra minutes to get to that gate.
- Finally, at 8:02, out of breath but hopeful, Antonis arrived at Gate 12.
- Boarding had closed at 8:00. He was 2 minutes late. Through the windows he could see passengers boarding the plane—and he pleaded with the airline staff to let him board the plane—he was not on vacation, not on some holiday—he was on his way to the United Nations Assembly on the Environment—he had meetings to attend. This was important!
- But his protests were of no avail. He would have to catch the next flight to Nairobi. Three hours later.
- So Antonis waited. And fretted and fumed and lamented his situation. He was mad and feeling sorry for himself.
- Almost 3 hours later, Antonis was still angry and put out at the nerve of those airline employees who just couldn't see how important he was, and how important his meeting was, and how important it was that he be on Flight 302 to Nairobi.
- About that time, two security guards approached Antonis and asked him to come with them to the airport's police station.

- “What?” Antonis thought, “I am angry and disappointed but I was not being overly disruptive—why are you doing this? I have already missed my flight and I have a very important meeting!” Antonis began to get even more upset.
- The security guards explained that they needed to know who he was and why he had missed his flight. Antonis told them, but he was still annoyed by the situation, and he let them know about it.
- That was when one of the security guards said, “You should stop complaining and start thanking God instead. Flight 302 crashed six minutes after takeoff, killing all 157 people on board.”
- There had been 149 passengers on Flight 302. Antonis would have made 150. But seat 2L was empty.
- Antonis suddenly realised that he should call his family and let them know he had missed his flight.
- Surely Antonis learned that day, and we should all remember as well, to give thanks for the inconveniences, for the misfortunes, for the adversities—because the truth is we don’t know the miraculous details of how all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord and have been called according to his purpose.
- Give thanks in all circumstances.
- In feast or famine; in trials and in triumphs; in celebration and in lamentation, God’s grace and goodness, His peace and provision will never leave us nor forsake us—and so we give thanks in ALL circumstances
- With God’s help, we can do just that. As we yield to the direction of the Holy Spirit, we can live a holy, sanctified life. Paul’s words are just as relevant to the church today as they were for the church in the 1st century—Rejoice always, pray without

ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.