

Giving Thanks Always And For Everything **Ephesians 5:15-21**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Can you imagine getting kicked out of wedding for wearing the wrong clothes? I've been to a restaurant which had a dress code, and they would not let me in. However, they also had ties available and sports jackets for customers without them. As the cost for food there was also astronomical, we went elsewhere.

Today Gospel lesson has a man kicked out of the wedding banquet for not having on the wedding clothes. Of course, the wedding is the eternal banquet with God – heaven – and the man is kicked out for trying to wear his own clothes. That is, he was trying to get into heaven by his own merits, his own works. It did not happen.

That is a hard teaching. We like to think that we are at least responsible for something in regard to our eternal salvation – at least our faith is our own work, right? Sorry, not it is not. Even our faith, and the coming to faith, are God's work for us. He clothes us with faith.

Our Epistle lesson also has a hard teaching. Most people overlook it though, because they are too busy thinking about the call for holy living. Indeed, we should be wise in these evil days – we should not be foolish – we should not get drunk – we should not let our fleshly passions rule us, like the phrase, "if it feels good, do it!" We are to speak to one another by using Scriptural forms of address, things like, "God bless you!" "Peace be with you!"

But the phrase most people miss is that we are to be giving than always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank God always? Seriously? And for everything?

I am not sure why people miss this phrase, but they often do. There are many prosperity preachers out there that proclaim that if you believe strong enough, then God will give you all the desires of your heart. This is simply not true! So, maybe people miss this phrase because they think, "Well, God's Word cannot be telling me to give thanks to God for my trials and tribulations, so it cannot really mean *always and for everything*, some things we don't have to give thanks to God for! Right?"

I have heard people proclaim that God is not listening to them, or ignoring them, or maybe is just very upset with them. When asked why, they declare that it is because God is not answering their prayers.

What I, and other pastors have discovered when asking further questions is, that what people mean by this is rather simple, "God has not given me what I have prayed for."

I have not encountered anybody who thinks this in regards to such things as, "God give me a new boat," or "Please let the Packers win the Super Bowl."

What kinds of things were requested of God which people claim He did not answer, or which He ignored?

God, please heal me – please heal Heloise! God, take away my pain – take away Helmut’s pain! Please don’t let Franklin die. God, please take care of this problem, or that problem, or remove this tribulation, of that trial.

How is it that people think that God did not answer their prayer? Why do they believe that God either did not hear, was not listening, or might be ignoring them? Because they did not get what they wanted. Heloise is still sick, my pain is still there, Franklin died, the problem still exists, the trial is ongoing, and my tribulations are about ready to overwhelm. And in it all, God does nothing!

Dear friends, just because God did not do what you and I wanted Him to do does not mean that He did not answer our prayers! There were numerous occasions when one of my children made a request of me which I did not grant. Sometimes I said no because they were not ready for whatever, sometime because it would do them harm.

You know the book of Job? Have you read it? When God finally spoke to Job, he did not answer Job’s questions of “why”. Instead, God asked questions of Job. God could have explained what was taking place, but He did not. An explanation might have made Job look better in front of his friends, and would have answered God’s role in his suffering. God did not do that! You see, God had something more important in mind, Job’s faith. God’s questions simply point Job back to God.

God did not give Job what he wanted to hear, but what he needed to hear.

Dear friends, Satan tempts us constantly, and one of his greatest temptations is to assault us with trials, afflictions, opposition, suffering. Satan brings doubt into our hearts and minds as we agonize over internal conflicts, He wants us to believe that God is failing us, not living up to His Word, and does not care. So we sin! We fail in our trust of God.

We want our troubles to end, or at least an answer so that we can understand why. God simply wants our trust! When we trust in God, it is His strength that bears us through our suffering. God’s questions to Job are not for Job alone, but for us. In them He was saying, “If I am God almighty, able to create and sustain the entire universe, then I am able to work ALL things for good in your life.”

Ultimately the question is not a why question from us to God! Instead, it is a question from God to us, “will you trust me?” Will you thank Me for testing your faith, for allowing that tribulation to bring you closer to me? Will you thank me always, and for everything?

Dear friends, it is all about Jesus! He declares to you boldly, “I took on human flesh for you. I gave up my divine throne, glory, and might to live among you. I suffered in the same human flesh you wear. I endured trials and tribulations, wept over those I loved who rejected me. In my

love for you I trust the Father in your behalf, I begged Him to let the cup of suffering pass from Me, but it was His will that I endure it for you. And so, I was arrested, beaten, and finally crucified. Even on the cross I faithfully entrusted myself into my Father's hands. This I endured for you."

This is what God has done for you. The Father did not withhold His only Son, but gave Him willingly as the sacrifice for your sins – the sacrifice that pays for your lack of trust in God.

But this was not something that was done on the cross and then you were expected simply to think about it. So that you may find comfort in the forgiveness of your lack of trust in God, He instituted means by which that forgiveness might come to you. Instead of looking to your heart for confidence, because your heart can often be overcome with doubt and lack of trust, God provided ways that Christ might give His Spirit to you often. He does that so that you might trust God and give thanks always and for everything.

Let's be honest, our fickle hearts aren't always in the mood to thank God always and for everything.

But we need to remember Jesus gracious invitation, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matt. 11:28-30

Why are you here today? Have you come to Christ in your time of weariness, when you are heavy-laden? Did you come because you seriously desire to give thanks always and for everything? Have you gathered with your fellow saints to do just that?

My friends, have you ever noticed that our liturgy helps us to say all that we should say in response to God? Did you notice that is always and in everything gives thanks to God? It is right there in your liturgical responses, verses taken from Scripture, they give you voice to what God would have you say to Him.

You are here because you bear the name of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – give thanks to Lord always.

You are here because you need to know that you are forgiven, and forgive you are declared by the blood of Christ – and you give thanks to the Lord always.

You are here to feast, coming into God's house, robed in His righteousness, and He sets a festive table before you of His own flesh and blood – and you give thanks for holy food.

You give thanks to the Lord always and for everything, for all the gifts He gives you which strengthen your faith, that you do trust in Him in all things. You give thanks to the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endures forever. Amen.