

November 23, 2017
Thanksgiving Day
Philippians 4:6-20

The Thanksgiving Day sermon is probably one of the easiest for a pastor to write. Seriously, it's kind of like when you sit down to the big dinner and ask a young child to say the blessing and give thanks and they give thanks for Mom, Dad, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, the dog, the cat, the hamster, the house, the car, each toy by name, trees, flowers, butterflies, birds, firemen, policemen, teachers, and on and on and on. There is just no shortage of things for which we ought to be giving thanks in this life.

So, I was thinking along these lines as I began preparing for today's message, and Paul's writing in Philippians seemed to start out in that vein: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."* But then I was kind of stopped in my tracks by this: *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."*

What kind of struck me is that when we look around our world, yes, there is a lot to be thankful for. But when you look closely, little of it is honorable, pure and excellent.

We regularly in our corporate prayers thank God for our government as we should, but the public rhetoric and private behavior of our leaders doesn't strike me as too honorable as of late.

We thank God for our homes and the many conveniences and luxuries with which we fill them. But homes are in need of constant upkeep and maintenance because stuff is always wearing out and breaking. And these days much of our luxuries have to do with screens—

phones, tablets, computers and televisions and I have to say, a lot of stuff on those screens is very intentionally far from pure and lovely. It's dark and depraved.

Even the bare basics, the produce of the land for which the Bible very clearly directs us to give thanks, in a lot of cases the way we scarf it down is hardly worthy of praise—chief of sinners though I be...

My point is that while Thanksgiving is a good holiday and a right, proper and biblical practice, if all we're doing is giving thanks for the stuff of life that we see in front of our faces, we're missing the big picture. Even the most valued things we can see—family—the parents, children, siblings, spouses and others this holiday brings together, are flawed and fallen and will fail and disappoint us—and we'll do the same to them.

The simple fact is that when Adam's sin brought about its curse of brokenness and death it did a complete and thorough job. Creation itself was infected, and from that time forward nothing created was honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent or worthy of praise in the sight of God. It all became less than what God designed for it, for us. And if this is all we're giving thanks for, well, I guess it's like when somebody buys their child a really fantastic rideable toy car or motorbike, and they're more enamored with the box that it came in than the gift itself.

I think this is why St. Paul can say, *"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* St. Paul knows that in the long run, the eternal run, none of this stuff of the world matters without Jesus...and with Jesus even the bad parts are all good.

The only true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worth of praise thing in creation...is the Christ who entered into creation in assuming our humanity. And by His death to sin and resurrection in triumph over death and evil, it is only in Christ that you are made this same way before God. The simple fact is, that apart from Christ your thanksgiving for the stuff of the world can't even make it to God's ears, because if your words are not made holy in Christ they cannot approach God's seat of Grace! But in Christ your failings are made right and all of you, body and soul, dwells before God's throne.

That's my point today; make sure that your thanksgiving to God is in the right context. As you give thanks for the stuff of the world today, remember that without Jesus it wouldn't be worth giving thanks because the kingdom of the world is perishing under God's wrath. Apart from Jesus, your thanks would not be received. Without Jesus nothing, including you, could be anything close to pure and honorable, but in Christ you reflect the very glory of God! Apart from Christ the family surrounding you that you love so much would have no hope. But baptized into Christ they are clothed with His righteousness and excellence despite themselves.

Jesus' episode with the ten lepers really brings this point home. Ten received the miraculous worldly cleansing of their leprosy. And I'm sure the other nine were thankful...thankful they had the world back in that they could go to the temple and reenter Jewish society. But they weren't healed, because in chasing the world their thanks was falling on deaf ears.

The one guy who turned back, turned back to Jesus, the true temple of God's glory that would be torn down and three days later restored. In turning in faith to God's Christ his sins were forgiven, peace with God became the reality, and God received His thanks as honorable, pure,

lovely and worthy of praise. His worldly leprosy was already gone, but his faith in Jesus had made Him well.

So pray your thanks for every gift you have today. But above all, give thanks for the Savior, knowing that without His perfect and praiseworthy sacrifice, your prayer would never be heard. Moreover, give thanks that in Him, you, despite plenty or hunger, abundance or need, will walk out of the fallen world to body and soul enter the feast of all feasts before God's throne forever.

Amen.