

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Thanksgiving.

November 25, 2020.

**Text: Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Amen.

What were your circumstances at the start of 2020? Unemployment was at an all-time low. So you probably had a job. Did you remember to give thanks to God for that job, every day? Or did you ever complain? I have to go to work. Again. Deal with the boss. Again. Then came March. Layoffs. Furloughs. Maybe happy to have a job, even if less hours. But then it got nice to work at home. In my pajamas. Now I have to go back to the office! What about giving thanks? Job or no job. Home or office?

Were your kids away at college, or teenagers always in their rooms or grade schoolers always at some school activity? Did you remember to give thanks to God for those children? Or complain, "I miss them. I never see them. They're never home." Then came March 15. "They're always home! They're eating too much. And it's dangerous to go to the grocery store!" When they are gone, complain, not give thanks. When they are home, complain, not give thanks.

Give thanks. In all circumstances. Did you really hear that? Give thanks. In all circumstances. In all circumstances. I'm guessing if you go around the family circle tomorrow and say, "What are you thankful for?" Someone might say, "I'm thankful I didn't get COVID." Do you expect anyone to say, "I give thanks I got COVID?" That'd be weird right? Might someone say, "I'm thankful grandma is here. We might not have too many Thanksgivings left with her"? Would you believe I once got a phone call from one of God's people saying, "Pastor, good news! My mother in law died. Wait, that's not the good news. She's with Jesus now." Death is good news? Yes, that mother in law gets to spend this Thanksgiving and every other one with Jesus. And we will get an eternity of Thanksgivings with grandma, and better yet, with Jesus! Jesus is the reason for giving thanks. Christ is the key to giving thanks.

Give thanks! In all circumstances! Give thanks! Keep on giving thanks. Never stop giving thanks. Give thanks over and over. Give thanks! Not just for the circumstances that are good. But for the circumstances that are bad! If there's a year we need to hear this verse, it's got to be this year. Do you have a job? Give thanks! Did you lose your job? Give thanks! Do you love your job? Give thanks! Do you hate your job. Give thanks! Is grandma alive? Give thanks. Is mom gone? Give thanks! Give thanks! In all circumstances.

This is God's will for you. This is what God wants, what he really, really wants. He wants us to give thanks! It's been a tough year to know what God wants. Some are saying, "What God wants is for you to stay home and stay safe. That shows love to others." And that's valid. Give thanks for that view. That's what God wants. Give thanks. Others are saying, "What God wants is for us to be together, in person, for worship. That shows love to others." And that's valid. Give thanks for that view. That's what God wants. Give thanks. Do I know what God wants in every circumstance? No! But I do know he wants me to give thanks. In all circumstances. Do I know who God wanted to win the election? No! But I do know God wants me to give thanks, no matter who won the election. God wants me to give thanks, to keep on giving thanks, in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you. How? In Christ Jesus. Why? In Christ Jesus. Who could possibly give thanks in job loss, in election loss, in COVID, in death? The one who is in Christ Jesus.

In Christ Jesus we keep on giving thanks. Look at the cross. Really look. The cross was an instrument of

torture! Give thanks? Look at the cross. Look at Jesus. He bloody! He's beaten! There's a crown of thorns on his head. He has nails, spikes, through his hands and feet. Give thanks? All but a few friends deserted him. The only ones, at the time, who mentioned anything about "saving" were his enemies, using the word, "saving" in the ultimate form of mockery. But we, at a later date, give thanks. That instrument of torture saves us from the torture of hell. That blood, washed away our sins. Because Jesus was beaten, I will not be beaten by death. Because he wore a crown of thorns, I will wear a crown of life. He was nailed to a cross and so my sins, mine, were nailed. My lack of thankfulness? Nailed! My complaints! Spiked to the cross and left behind and paid in full. Saving? Yes! Saving. From all my sins. At the cross of Christ. Saved. From all my guilt. Once and for all. The cross. What looked most horrible at the time, is our most wonderful reason to give thanks. In Christ Jesus. In all circumstances!

Even the tomb. It was empty. That was troubling. At first. Who would take away Jesus? Why is Jesus gone? Where is his body? No body? That's confusing! That's scary! But we look at the tomb and are comforted, not troubled. God took Jesus, out of that tomb, away from death. And so Jesus will take you, out of your tomb, away from death. Give thanks! Jesus is gone to prepare a place in heaven for you. That's why it's such good news when your Christian mother-in-law dies. She's not in the hospice home. She's in her eternal home, the one that Jesus went on ahead to prepare for her. Give thanks! Where is his body? It's given. For you. For the forgiveness of your sins. It's handed. To you. To say, "I am with you always. As my body died and rose again. So your body will die and rise again. And your body will rise to perfection, just like my body." There's no more fear at the tomb. Only thanks. There's no more trembling at the tomb. Only thanks.

We might be looking at 2020 now and say, "That was a terrible year." Will future generations look at this year and give thanks? Can we look back at this year, right now, and give thanks? We have God's promise, "All things work together for good to those who love God." Yes, I believe in conspiracies. God is conspiring to work everything out for good and we get to wait in eager anticipation for the good God is bringing from 2020. Studies show the anticipation can be the best part. Isn't it exciting to wait and anticipate the good God will bring from 2020?

There's an old legend told of a farmer who had a horse. One day, the horse ran away. The farmer's neighbor came and said, "I'm so sorry this bad thing happened." The farmer said, "Who knows if it's bad, or good? All we can say is the horse ran away." A few days later, the horse returned, followed by 12 other horses. The neighbor said, "You must be so happy this good thing happened!" And the farmer said, "Who knows if it's good or bad? All we can say is now I have 13 horses." A few days later, the farmer's son broke his leg when training the horses. The neighbor came and said, "I'm so sorry this bad thing happened." And the farmer said again, "Who knows if it's good or bad. All we can say is my son broke his leg." A few days later, the army came to town, conscripting young men to go to war. The farmer's son was exempt due to his injury. And the neighbor stopped saying whether circumstances were good or bad.

Who knows if 2020 is good or bad? All we can say is this: God wants me to give thanks. We can say this: In Christ Jesus I have reason to give thanks, for God's love, God's forgiveness, God's promise to work out all things for good. Right now. Give thanks. Tomorrow. Give thanks. In all circumstances. Give thanks. Amen.

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Amen.