

Giving Thanks - Why the World Thinks We Are Weird

There is a very different perspective we have about giving thanks to God - different from the rest of the world. It sets us apart and it requires some explanation.

Paul talked about it in his letters, and the theme is consistent from one to the other. In the early one he said, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances ..." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) In the later one he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; ... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:4-6)

Does he really mean that we should thank God right in the middle of trouble? Paul wrote this the first time while on a mission journey. But he wrote the second one while a prisoner in Rome. If that's not extreme enough he started that second letter telling how he expected to lose his case and be executed. "With thanksgiving"? How does that work.

No matter what happens we are not out on our own. We are connected with Jesus and are under His protection. That does not mean we will not face problems, hardship, suffering, even hostility in this world. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation." (John 16:33) But it does mean that none of those things can separate us "from the love of God in Christ Jesus". (Romans 8:39)

We are secure, connected with Easter and the risen Lord Jesus. So we pray and we give thanks. We call out to God in the middle of our problems, and we thank Him that He promised, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) We raise our prayers to God in the middle of sickness or suffering, and we give thanks that Jesus "bore our griefs and carries our sorrows". (Isaiah 53:4) One day we will face death. We will call out to God on that day, and we will thank Him that He promises, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:27-28)

It may be difficult to learn, one of the hardest exercises of faith, but it is a very real part of our life as Christians. We live an eternal Easter. The more difficult the challenge, the more difference it makes that we are connected to Jesus, to His sin-forgiving cross, and to His rising on the Third Day.

The rest of the world may not understand this, but it is part of the blessing of being a Christian. It changes everything in life. It gives a calm and a peace. God is in charge, and you are loved. No matter what may challenge, Jesus is still the Living One. "Neither death nor life, nor angels [nor viruses], nor [problems today], nor [the mess that waits tomorrow], nor [worries], nor height nor depth, nor [any way that you can mess up anywhere] in all [of God's good] creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39 - kind of)

So bring the petitions. Bring the call for help. Bring the cry from deep within the soul. And know that God's heart is turned toward you and His ears are open to your prayers. Thanks be to God we have a Savior and Friend, and we can turn to Him and find "grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 5:16)