

Giving Thanks In A Troubled Time

We've been talking about what to do in a troubled time. Once again the headlines this week have been worrisome at the least. The economy isn't rebounding and more layoffs have been announced. What are we going to do in a troubled time like we are facing today?

I began this series of messages by reminding us to cast our cares upon the Lord because he cares for us. This is where we start in a time of trouble – knowing that God cares about us and we can run to him and leave our cares and troubles and fears with him. Cast your cares then commit your ways to the Lord. When you recognize that he is the Sovereign Lord over your life and over the universe and he has not abdicated his throne nor relinquished his authority and power, you can rest in the Lord. Cast your cares, commit your ways and then chill out. Just quiet down, be still and rest in the knowledge that he is God and he will handle it all.

We spent some time on a Sunday night talking about the assurance we have in knowing that God is our refuge and our strength and he is an ever present help in a time of trouble. Because of that, we will not fear, regardless of what may come against us. The Psalmist suggested quite a dilemma – “though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea...” I would call that trouble wouldn't you? But the bible says even if the “earth be removed” we don't give way to fear because God is our refuge and our strength and he is with us. The difficulties we are facing are no match for the strength and power and provision of our God.

We spoke about David moving the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem and the problems he encountered trying to do things his way rather than God's way. I told you then that an ox cart won't work in troubled times. There is only one solution and that is to seek God and his will and then do what he tells us to do. That's how we find our way in troubled times, living life God's way rather than our way.

We took time two weeks ago to talk about an assurance of hope for a troubled time. God said, in spite of the difficulties in the economy and in our world, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

Last Sunday we talking about giving and living in troubled times – that in spite of

the economy and in spite of the trouble around the world, we remain focused upon God's word and his principles for giving and living. That we keep on giving, paying our tithes and offerings to the work of the Lord, regardless of the economy. Heaven isn't announcing any layoffs today. Heaven's resources are secure. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God's commands are non-negotiable. They are not affected by public opinion polls or changing standards. In troubled times we keep on obeying his commands and living by the principles of God's word and we can rest in him knowing that he will supply all of our needs according to his riches in glory.

With all of that said, we still read the paper and watch the news and wonder, what is going to happen? Am I safe and secure in this world? In this economy? Are we going to be all right?

In troubled times it's important that we make a couple of essential decisions. 1) We must decide whether God's word is true. If it's not, then none of this matters and we are simply on our own in a time of trouble. But if it is true, then it is true in the good times and the bad times, in the lean years and in the prosperous years, in the highs and the lows of life. 2) We must decide whether God is faithful and trustworthy. If he isn't, then we have no hope and we are simply on our own. But if he is both faithful and trustworthy, then he is faithful and trustworthy when we can clearly see his hand of provision and he is still faithful and trustworthy when he seems cloaked in mystery and we see little or nothing at all.

If God is God and he is faithful and he is trustworthy and if his word is true, then we can remain hopeful and confident, regardless of the circumstances around us. If he is faithful and trustworthy, then we can rest in his word and not be afraid of today or tomorrow because both are in his hands.

With all of that said and with Thursday being Thanksgiving, I want to wrap up this series of messages by talking about giving thanks in a troubled time, but I want to set it in the context of God's will. This is God's will for us: **Giving Thanks In A Troubled Time**. If you believe what I just said a moment ago, that God's word is true and that he is faithful and can be trusted, then here is a lesson, a principle, an attitude to be applied to every aspect of your life, regardless of the circumstances. **"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in**

Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Paul gives us some very concise, precise and clear instructions. Be joyful always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. It appears that the rest of verse 18, “for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” applies to all three things. God’s will for us is that we be joyful, prayerful, and thankful. I like the sound of it. It makes for a good sermon. It’s easy to remember isn’t it?

But to be honest with you, I see some problems with living it out, all things considered. The reason I struggle a bit is with the inclusion of one little phrase – three words that qualify and complicate the whole verse – “in all circumstances.” That’s quite a qualification don’t you think? Be joyful, not just sometimes, not just on the good days, not just when life is funny, but “in all circumstances.” Be thankful in all circumstances. Really? In all circumstances? Because I can think of some places and situations where I haven’t felt like giving thanks. The prayerful part, I can handle that. I can see being willing to pray in all circumstances. Good and bad I’m happy to pray and talk to the Lord. But being joyful and thankful. That’s a different story.

How can we be joyful and thankful in all circumstances? How can we be thankful when things are so difficult financially right now? How can we be thankful or joyful when there is so much trouble? How can we be thankful if we just got laid off from our job? How can we be thankful when the cut off notices came in the mail today? Let me just point out some simple thoughts this morning.

Notice that our thankfulness is not for every circumstance, rather it says to be thankful in every circumstance. If you look with eyes of faith in every circumstance, you’ll find reasons for which to be thankful and even joyful.

“But why should I give thanks in the middle of this trouble and this mess I’m going through?” For the very reason you just stated: because you are going through this mess, you aren’t going to stay in this mess. You are on a journey and God is leading you through this into his provision and his victory ahead. When you recognize that this trouble is not meant to stay nor will it be allowed to defeat or destroy you, you can give thanks to God and even find a reason for remaining joyful in it all.

“But it doesn’t seem like I’m making any progress in getting through this. Why should I give thanks when it seems I’m stuck and getting deeper in trouble?”

Remember we've decided that God can be trusted and his word is true and he declares in his word that he will cause all things to work together for our good because we love God and we are called according to his purpose.

He causes all of this to work together for our good and according to his will. As our text says, giving thanks is tied to his will and his purpose for us and our lives. His will is expressed in and through us as we give thanks in every situation. I believe thanksgiving helps transform every circumstance, it helps redeem every situation, it helps us discover his will and his purpose in every thing - in every event in our life. When we give thanks in every situation, I believe God takes the stuff that is troubling us, the stuff that was meant for evil against us, and dismantles it and rebuilds it into something good. Thanksgiving gives God the material necessary to rebuild and transform our circumstances.

"But things look pretty bleak. The prospects for the future look rather grim." Yes, but don't you agree that God is at work? He is redeeming every situation. As we remain thankful and joyful he is at work, for our good. Paul learned to be thankful and express praise and rejoicing even when he was going through suffering and trials because he knew God had something in store for him. Paul declared, **"...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us."** Romans 5:3-5

What kind of person could say "we rejoice in our suffering"? A masochist? A crazy person? Or perhaps someone who knew that God would be faithful to his word and would redeem every situation. God is the great economist and he wastes absolutely nothing in our life or our experience. As we continue to give thanks unto God, committing our ways to him and remaining joyful in him, he continues to transform and redeem every situation, every circumstance, working it for our good.

Because we know God is at work, redeeming every situation, then we have a cause for giving thanks. Paul said we have hope in the midst of all of this, all the suffering and the trouble, and it is a hope that is resting solidly and safely in the abounding love of God that he has for each one of us. God loves us and that is the

cause and the basis for our hope. I'm not afraid of the future because God loves me and the God who loves me is at work in all of my circumstances and if he really is, then I have every reason to be filled with hope. It's going to be all right.

I can give thanks to God in all circumstances because I trust the process. Redemption. Transformation. Giving thanks as God continues to work in and through all of the circumstances of our lives. Can you trust him with the process? Will you continue to be joyful and thankful as God works all things for your good? (Bob Benson, page 202)

“Be joyful, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” How can we give thanks in everything or be joyful in everything? Because of three other little words: “in Christ Jesus.” I’m taking that phrase out of context, but the truth is, we don’t have to be afraid because ultimately everything rests “in Christ Jesus”. You can fixate on all the problems facing our nation and the other nations of the world, you can worry yourself into a heart attack about money, global warming, some little dictator somewhere with a nuclear weapon, but ultimately everything rests “in Christ Jesus.” Here is what the bible says concerning Christ Jesus. **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...”**

Colossians 1:15-19

All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. He has supremacy in everything, he holds supremacy over everything, including death and the grave. Do you think he can't handle an economic crisis or a military crisis or a terrorist attack? Do you think there are any circumstances or situations that are beyond the one who has the supremacy over all? Do you think he will have to stop holding on to you and caring for you because he has to attend to all these other problems? Of course not. He said he would never leave you or forsake

you. He has you engraved upon the palm of his hand. He is holding on to you. You are in his firm grip.

So stop worrying. Don't be afraid. Go ahead and give God thanks. Go ahead and be joyful in the midst of it all because God is holding it all together. Give thanks because he isn't going to let you slip through his hands. Give thanks in everything because Jesus is holding everything together.

This is God's will for us. To give thanks in everything. Give thanks because he is right here with us. He promised to be with us – remember he said he was an ever present help in a time of trouble. He is present with us today. He has always been with his people during times of trouble. He was with Israel as they marched through 40 years of wilderness experience, providing food and water in the desert. He was with David when he faced a lion, a bear, a giant and an angry and crazy king. He was with Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego in a fiery furnace, he stood with Daniel in a den of lions, he stood with Paul on board the ship when no one else would stand with him and he has been standing with his church for 2000 years and nothing has changed because of the trouble in our world today. He remains steadfast and strong and faithful and trustworthy and true. He is with us and we don't have to be afraid. He is with us and we can be joyful in all circumstances because we know he is with us. We can be joyful in all circumstances because we see by faith and we know how this ends - with us forever at home in his presence.

We can give thanks in all circumstances because we know he stands with us. We can give thanks because he has promised to never leave us and never forsake us, regardless of how difficult the circumstances may be. We can give thanks because we will never be alone. We can give thanks because his provision is there for us today and tomorrow and the next day and the next. He will take care of his people, redeeming every situation, delivering us from trouble and destruction. We can give thanks because he holds everything together, including us. This world and the economy and all the troubles we are facing, none of this is too much for our God. He is sovereign and Lord over all.

Be joyful always - in all circumstances -for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Pray continually - in all circumstances - for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Give thanks - in all circumstances - for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

We have every reason to give thanks – even in a troubled time, for the Lord God Almighty reigns. How do we live in a troubled time? We live joyfully, prayerfully and thankfully for this is the will of God for each one of us.