

When Christians give – rejoice greatly in the Lord!

Text: Philippians 4:10-20 for 11/22/2017 by Pastor Bolwerk

What comes to mind when you think of Thanksgiving Day? Typically, we associate Thanksgiving Day with the big three: food, family, and football. It is a day for thanking God for all of the blessings he pours out on us day after day. But here in the United States Thanksgiving Day also begins the Holiday Season. For many people it's simply another reason to throw a party. But for us as Christians it is a time of giving. It starts today with a day of giving thanks to God for physical blessings. It then becomes a time of giving gifts to others in celebration of God giving us his most precious spiritual gift: the gift of a Savior. As believers in Christ we see God's gracious gifts to us, and we in turn want to thank God by giving to others. We want to be generous, just as God has been generous to us.

While we may be gracious in our giving during this Holiday Season, are we as equally gracious in our receiving, especially when the gift comes from a fellow Christian? What I want you to think about is this: When we thank a Christian brother or sister for a gift they have given us, what are we really thankful for? It is very easy, in this sin tainted world of ours, to be focused on the wrong thing. This is why it's so important for us, on this Thanksgiving Day, to look at the example of the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Philippians we see Paul modeling for us gratitude in regard to thanking Christians for a gift.

Theme: When Christians give – rejoice greatly in the Lord!

I. Don't rejoice about the gift

II. Rejoice over the heart of the giver

What Paul received from the Philippians was not some small, insignificant gift. No, the Philippians had been very generous to Paul. Paul says in his letter to them, **"I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent"** (v. 18b). Paul was grateful for the gifts he had received, but he wants the Philippians to know that his gratitude is not self-seeking. Paul says, **"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want"** (vs. 11,12). Paul was certainly grateful for the gift the Philippians had sent. But Paul did not rejoice about the gift itself. Paul rejoiced because he knew that this gift was just another way of God providing for his needs. So Paul rejoiced in the Lord. Paul knew that even if Philippians had not given him anything, God would still provide. Paul could be content because what he had was exactly what God knew he needed.

Paul had put his complete trust in God to get him through this life. Paul said, **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength"** (v. 13). It was only by the grace of God that Paul was alive, both physically and spiritually. God had sustained Paul through some severe physical trials: beatings, stoning, a shipwreck. But where God's strength truly sustained Paul was in his battle against his own sinful nature. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: **"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 7:18, 24, 25). Paul's strength came through the gospel. The power of God working in the gospel is what made Paul alive, and if Paul had nothing else he was content just to have that life-giving gospel; that was all he needed.

If we could only be so content. It is hard for us to be content, especially in this materialistic society that we live in. The world is constantly telling us we can't be content because we do not have everything that the world has to offer. And when our sinful nature does not get what it wants, we become discontent. That discontentment in our lives can even show up in our gratitude. We see

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it in thankfulness that is shallow because thankfulness has become a way we try to get things. We thank others out of pride. We can start to believe that if we thank people they'll like us and think well of us. We even thank people out of greed. We get to thinking that if we thank people for what they have given us they might give us even more the next time. This self-centered thankfulness is just another way of saying we don't trust God. We don't trust him to provide what we need, and we are not content with what he has given us. We are not content because we have forgotten that it is God who gives us everything.

Yet even in our discontentment God still provides more than we could ever imagine. **“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”** (1 John 4:9-10). This is one gift we truly did *not* deserve! We have received the gift of forgiveness. God has given to us the gift of every sinful thought, word and action we have ever committed, forgiven! Even our lack of contentment has been forgiven. This is a gift we can truly be thankful for: The gift of absolute and complete forgiveness that is found in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It is this Good News that gives us life. It is the gospel that gives us the strength to thank God, no matter how he provides for us. So, when Christians give, don't rejoice over the gift, rejoice greatly in the Lord!

Does this mean we don't have to thank people for the gifts that they give us? We just have to thank God, right? That's not the point God is trying to make to us in his word. God certainly wants us to thank others for what they give to us, especially fellow Christians. But as we thank people, God wants us to do it with our focus in the right place. Remember, we don't want to rejoice about the gift, as if that is the only thing that matters. When Christians give, rejoice over the heart of the giver!

Rejoice because it is a heart that has been moved by the gospel. Paul wrote, **“As you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only”** (v. 15). Paul brought the people of Philippi the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus. The good news that Paul proclaimed to them caused faith to spring to life in the hearts of the Philippians. In the joy of salvation these people couldn't wait to help Paul; they couldn't wait to help others. Their desire to help did not come from false motives, but from hearts filled with the love of Christ. They really were concerned, as Paul states, **“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it”** (v. 10). The Philippians had heard of Paul's need and truly wanted to help. The gift that they gave to Paul came from hearts motivated by the gospel.

Paul rejoiced over the hearts of these believers, because these were hearts that were willing to share in the troubles of others, all for the sake of Christ. Paul writes, **“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles”** (v. 14). When a Christian sees someone in need, the love of Christ moves that believer to help. A believer shares in the troubles of others by serving them, giving in whatever way will help to fill their need. And like Christ's heart, the believer's heart looks beyond the physical, looking to the spiritual needs of others. The heart of a believer wants to share the hope it has in Christ. A believer shares that hope by sharing the gospel. The gospel is the power of God that gives life and joy to the hearts of others.

That same believing heart that the Apostle Paul saw in the Philippians is in each one of us. It is a heart that praises God when it sees the faith of fellow Christians in action. It is a heart of faith that says, “Thank you” to God for the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Then, having thanked God, our faith filled heart moves us to thank our fellow believers. We thank them when, out of the

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kindness of their hearts, they willingly share in our troubles by giving of themselves. We thank them, not just for the gift, but for their hearts of faith.

The heart of faith which God has given us responds to God's gracious gift of the gospel. Knowing Christ, and what he has done for us, moves us to give to others by serving them in their time of need. We are also moved to give glory to God for all he has provided for us, whether it was provided through the work of our own hands, or by the gracious gifts of others. Rejoice over the heart of the Christian giver, by thanking God for his continuing gift of grace.

There are many families that have the tradition that on Thanksgiving Day each person tells of one thing they are thankful for. So, what are you thankful for this Thanksgiving Day? Perhaps you are thankful God has provided you with a good job and a roof over your head. Maybe you are thankful for being able to gather again with family and friends whom you have not seen in a while. You might be thankful for having good health, or good grades. Or perhaps, you are simply thankful to enjoy one more day of God's grace here in this world. Whatever you may be grateful for this Thanksgiving, why not add one more thing to the list. Be thankful for faith. Not just your own faith, but for the Christian faith of others. Rejoice in the Lord over the hearts of others whose faith moves them to give in our times of need. Rejoice over all who believe and trust in the saving work Jesus. Christ lived, died, and rose again so that we could be free to be both giving and thankful. Amen.