

We're going to continue in our series through Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. I've entitled our teaching series, "*Rethinking Church*" because in this ancient letter, God has much to say to us about what it means to be the church, aligned to Jesus, to one another, and to our world.

Illus: As I begin this morning I want to begin by telling you a story from my own ancient past. I was in grade 4 or 5 at the time, 10 or 11 years old, and I was literally shaking with nervous energy. It was Christmas time, and we were on our way to a family gathering. And a family gathering at Christmas time always meant two things: great food, and, presents.

When you are a child, so many things are lost on you, like family dynamics for instance. My mom grew up in a home where her parents played favourites; love and affection were used as bargaining tools. When my mom and dad were married, they refused to play the game any longer, and as a result they were shut out. Not literally of course, but a barrier was erected that they couldn't get over or go around.

I didn't know any of this when I was a child; my parents never spoke of it. All I knew was that my experience of my dad's parents was closer and warmer than my experience with my mom's parents. But like I said, as we made our way to the family gathering, I was filled with nervous energy...first the feast, then the presents.

The potatoes and the stuffing, the turkey and gravy, hardly touched my taste buds that night; wherever possible, I swallowed without chewing, who could think about food at a time like this? And when the food had been eaten and the plates had been cleared, it was time.

We all gathered in the living room, the grandkids lined up in a circle, each of us waiting to receive our gift.

My cousins went first. One of them opened a big box of Lego and my heart rate shot up a little; my grandparents had to how much I loved Lego. Another cousin opened a doll and my heart rate sky rocketed...they had better not buy me a doll...that would be a disaster! One by one the grand kids opened presents; every face was filled with excitement when they saw what they'd been given.

And then it was our turn, my two brothers and I; we all received a similar size and shape of present. What could it be? The suspense was killing me...so I tore into that present as fast as my fingers would move. And when the wrapping had fallen away, I couldn't believe my eyes...white socks. Toys, Lego and dolls surrounded me on every side, but on our laps white socks were all that could be found.

I was so disappointed, so angry, that I reacted without even thinking. With those white socks in my hand, I stood up and spiked them on the living floor with all the strength I could muster.

I can't for the life of me remember what happened next, but I will never forget the ride home in the car. As we drove along, my mom broke the silence, but it wasn't with anger. Now that I'm a parent, I can only imagine how much I embarrassed my mom in front of her whole family. And now that I know what she endured as a daughter, I can only imagine her own disappointment as she saw the gifts...toys and Lego for one set of children, and white socks for her kids?

As we drove down the highway, mom said something I didn't understand or appreciate at the time. She said, "Boys, I know you are

really disappointed with your white socks...but they're really good quality socks." It makes me laugh just thinking about it, but that was my mom...she could find something positive in every situation.

My mom was among the most thankful people I've ever met in my life. Difficulty makes some people bitter, angry, jaded but not my mom she chose to be thankful when few others would be. If you didn't know my mom, or her story, you might chalk up her positive outlook and her thankful spirit to her personality, but I'm telling you...there was something deeper going on.

In the later years of her life, I began to understand that Jesus had always been central to her thankful spirit. This morning, as we turn our attention to the Scriptures, we're going to take some time to fix our eyes on Jesus and explore some of the reasons we have to be thankful to God for our past, present, and future.

Read: If you have your Bibles with you this morning, let me encourage you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1:4-9. If you are using the Blue Bibles directly in front of you, you can find our text on page 1772.

"4 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— 6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God,

who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

So let's jump right in and walk through the reasons why Paul, and we, can be thankful because of what God has done, is doing, and will do for us in the future. We'll begin with the past.

1. Thankful for Jesus' past activity:

Paul begins in vs. 4 saying, *"I always thank God for you..."*. In the coming months, the as the Corinthians become more familiar, these words of Paul become even more amazing. Paul thanks God for a church that he fathered, but no longer wants anything to do with him. On multiple occasions the Corinthian church let Paul know that they deserved a better father than him...that he was a disappointment and an embarrassment to them.

Paul thanks God for people who have rejected him. Was he not hurt by their rejection? He was, deeply; the rest of his letter will bear that out. But he's still thankful, and the question is *"why"*? The answer lies in the rest of vs. 4: *"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."*

Last week we looked at the first three verses of 1 Corinthians, which spell out the grace that we've received in Jesus: *we've been called by Jesus, set apart to be His holy people, and we've been filled with His presence*. If you have invited Jesus to forgive your sins, and have surrendered your life to His purpose and direction, then the Bible says that you have crossed over from death to life.

It is as Gordon Fee says, “In every redeemed person there is evidence of the grace of God, and that brings forth Paul’s gratitude”.¹ He thanks God for them, because of what God had done in them. Fee goes on to say that when we give thanks for God’s work in others, especially those with whom we are at odds, we demonstrate that we know how much we are in need of God’s mercy.²

Illus: Sometimes I think the saddest job in the world is to be a critic. Occasionally I’ve seen a food critic on t.v., going around to review restaurants. I wonder...do they actually enjoy food anymore? They spend so much time talking about what is wrong...can they even enjoy what is right?

As we know too well, critics are not bound to the sphere of the restaurant or they theater. They roam through churches, and sometimes, they even carry the title of “pastor”. Like food critics, they can spend so much time fixated on what’s “wrong” or broken, that they entirely miss out on a church’s beauty. What they miss is what God is doing among His people.

I’ve known people to wander from place to place, looking for the “perfect” church. But what they do not realize is that if they were ever to find this mythical gathering, they would ruin it the moment they attempted to join. There is no perfect church because there are no perfect people. So when I hear complaints about the church being

filled with hypocrites I think to myself, “*Of course it’s filled with hypocrites...the church is filled with people who know they need Jesus’ help. And because of Jesus’ great love, we find the help we need.*”

In a letter to the church in Philippi, Paul writes “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*”³

Why thanksgiving? Because of Jesus, because what He’s done, because of what He can do. When God is in the picture there is always hope; nothing is too difficult for Him. We give thanks, remembering who we were when Jesus called us: we were proud, rebellious, and unholy. We give thanks remembering that Jesus has given us both identity and calling: *we’ve been set apart to be His holy people, and we’ve been filled with His presence.*

And in vs. 5-7, Paul shifts his from past to present, thanking God for what He is now doing among the Corinthians, through the Holy Spirit. Let’s turn our attention to these three verses.

2) Thankful for the Spirit’s present activity:

vs. 5-7, “*For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— 6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any*

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: 1 Corinthians*, 37.

² Fee, 37.

³ Philippians 4:4.

spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”

Again, until we’ve read through Paul’s entire letter multiple times, we tend to miss what is going on about in these early verses. Paul is thankful because the Holy Spirit was present and at work in their community. Now where do I get that from? Take another look at verses 5-7.

In vs. 5, Paul says that God has made them rich in their speaking and knowledge, and verse 7 says that they do not lack any spiritual gift. Now, unfortunately the word “spiritual” has become so common in our world, that most of us are nervous around the word and don’t really know what the Bible means by it. “Spiritual” has come to mean whatever we want it to mean. And unfortunately, our English translations do us a disservice by spelling the word with a lowercase “s”.

Whenever we see the word “spiritual,” in nearly every case, we need to understand that Paul is making reference to the Holy Spirit.

- a “spiritual” person is a Spirit-person, someone who is filled with, and belongs to the Holy Spirit.
- a “spiritual” gift is a gift that the Holy Spirit gives.

In vs. 5, Paul refers to various gifts the Holy Spirit gave to the Corinthian church; gifts that enriched their speaking and their knowledge. As we will discover in 1 Corinthians 12, the speaking gifts included the gift of wisdom, the gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues; the knowledge gifts included prophetic revelation, the gift of interpretation, and words of knowledge.

Paul gives thanks because the presence of these gifts means that the Holy Spirit is present, and His presence means (vs. 6) that the message of Jesus has indeed taken root.

But all was not well in this Corinthian church. As I said last week, when are called by Jesus, and set apart for God in this world, then the real work begins. After we are set apart in this world, God must take the world out of us.

Corinth was located in ancient Greece, what many consider the birthplace of western philosophy. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle made their mark in the same corner of the world as Corinth; wisdom, knowledge, and rhetoric were a part of their blood. Then, just as now, knowledge meant power, influence, and fame.

Filled by the Holy Spirit, the Corinthian church became more enamored with these gifts and swelled with self-importance. They thought they had arrived, been made complete, they were the “super-spiritual”. They were so keen to experience the Spirit’s power that they forgot all about love. But Paul invites them to return...to be “spiritual” is to keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

In vs. 7, Paul talks about them “*eagerly waiting for the return of Jesus*,” with tongue in cheek, he is chiding them for not eagerly waiting. With these new gifts, they they think they arrived; they were enamored with the “now”. But Paul reminds them that they have only experienced a taste of what is still to come when Jesus returns.

Now before I move on, I want to address the same issue Paul was highlighting, but in reverse. In spite of the abuse of certain gifts of

the Spirit, Paul still gives thanks to God, for the Corinthians, and for these gifts.

Most churches fall into one of two wide ditches. The first is the ditch that the Corinthians had fallen into. In their eagerness to experience the supernatural/God's power, they lost sight of God and one another. They thought they had arrived, that they'd been made perfect...they were proud, self-confident and it led to fracture and pain. Some churches still fall into this ditch.

But many more seem to fall into another ditch that is perhaps more dangerous. This second ditch is the ditch of low expectation and unbelief. The churches in this ditch have great faith in the life to but they have very little expectation of God in this present age. They look forward to intimacy with God in heaven, but expect Him to be distant in the present.

They live most of their "relationship" with God in their head, giving intellectual assent to certain truth claims about Him. They believe that God is love, but they do not expect that God's love will break into their every-day life. They believe that God is powerful, but they have little or no experience of His power in life or in ministry. They believe that God is present but do not live as though God might speak, lead, or direct at any given moment.

And these churches often push certain spiritual gifts off to the side because of fear. They fear the abuse of certain gifts like prophecy, or tongues, or healing, and so they pay lip service to them but practically deny that they have any place in the church.

As your pastor, can I say this morning that if I have my choice, North Shore Alliance will steer clear of both ditches. If I have to choose between abuse and unbelief, I'll choose neither...because in between these two ditches runs a path that we can travel on.

Just as a good father or mother knows how to give good gifts to their children, so too, God our Father knows how to bless His people with gifts. God loved the world so much that He gave Jesus to us...to show us how to live, to die in our place, and to be raised again to life. Through Him we have forgiveness, mercy, and life.

And when Jesus returned to His Father's side, the Father sent us the Holy Spirit...to be with us, to live in us, to bless and empower us as God's holy people. I don't want to refuse the good gifts the Spirit wants to impart to us.

The error of many churches is in thinking that the problem is with certain gifts. There is no problem with the gifts God gives, only problems with our attitudes towards His gifts.⁴ The question is: *can we trust the One who gives us gifts, to teach us how to use them correctly?* We can trust Him...we will trust Him.

Friends, I thank God for you, and for what I see God doing among us; He is living and active. I believe that God has more in store for us in the present, and I want to call you to prayer, to expectation, and to faith. But as Paul did in Corinth, I also want to invite you to lift your eyes to see that the greater weight of glory is still to come when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁴ Fee, 36.

And I want to talk the last few minutes to direct your attention to vs. 7-9 as we give thanks for the future activity of Jesus.

3) Thankful for Jesus' future activity:

Paul says at the end of verse 7 that we “*eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*” He’s not implying that we don’t know Jesus’ true identity; we know the One in whom we have put our faith. What Paul is saying is that we do not yet see Jesus as He truly is.

We regularly use the phrase “*seeing is believing,*” but this phrase needs to be balanced by another phrase: “*you can’t judge a book by its cover*”. Jesus’ first appearance on the earth will be radically different than His second coming.

Jesus was born in weakness, humility, and obscurity. He did not seek His own glory but those in authority despised and rejected Him. The death He submitted to was a dying in our place, for our sake, to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus died penniless and nearly friendless, naked, humiliated, tortured, and broken. Even when He rose from the dead, many scoffed at the reports. This was His first coming; His second coming will be very different.

When Jesus returns, He will come in beauty, power, majesty, and glory. There will be no mistaking Him when He returns...everyone will see, know, and worship (either in joy, or in fear).

When Jesus is revealed, we will see Him as He is, and, we will be made complete. In the present, the Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus’ life...his love, His wisdom, His power...we have been given a taste of

what is coming. Now, I like appetizers as much as the next person, but none of us should confuse the appetizer with the main course.

Jesus will return for us, and in the mean time we have been set apart and filled with the Holy Spirit that we might be holy people.

And not only will Jesus return for us, but He will sustain us in our waiting. Take another look at verse 8 and 9: “*8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*”

We don’t have to fear the return of Jesus, when we put our faith in Him, sustains us to the end so that we are blameless before God. Now to be “blameless” is to be “beyond reproach, without fault, one who stands without accusation”. And the question is: *how can this be true of the Corinthians, us, or anyone else?*

There are only two ways to stand before God on the day He returns: independently, or *in Christ*. We either stand independently, on our own merit, trying to measure up to God’s perfect, holy standard, or, we make our stand before God based on the righteousness of Jesus. If we choose to stand with Jesus, the Bible refers to us as being *in Christ*. When we are *in Christ*, our standing before God is identical to Jesus standing.

Now, is there any chance that God the Father is going to dismiss Jesus, saying “*You don’t measure up, you don’t cut it, you don’t have the ‘right’ stuff.*” Well...if the Father isn’t going to say it to Jesus, He’s not going to say it to anyone who belongs to Jesus. Our standing before God is identical to Jesus’ standing. His perfection, His

righteousness has removed our every fault...*in* Christ we are blameless, because He took our blame, our guilt, our sin and put it to death on the cross.

If you are *in Christ*, you are loved by God: perfectly, completely, abundantly. Perfect love drives out all fear. *When we stand in His righteousness, we can rest in His faithfulness...what He says, He will do.*

We have a lot to be thankful for, don't we? Our past has been dealt with, our present is filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit, and our future is secure...Jesus is faithful, He will finish what He started, and keep us strong to the end.

Pray

Worship

Benediction: 1 Peter 1:3-4