



**Oct 11, 2020 - The Evidence of Celebration - I Thess 3:6-13**

**OPEN**

What kind of thanksgiving celebration are you going to have this weekend? Will you have a turkey with all the trimmings? When the Apostle Paul wrote to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, he constantly shared his thanks and celebration. Have you noticed that in his letters to Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessaloniki, Timothy and Philemon he always started with a familiar greeting of gratitude! Paul celebrated, with thanks, the journey of Jesus followers. Today we are going to uncover three exciting components of that kind of thankfulness.

**DIG**

In the many passages where Paul wrote about thankfulness, he documents some important markers that thankfulness is active in the life of the believer. First, we talked about joy...then generosity...and today we are looking at the evidence of celebration. Consider what he wrote in I Thessalonians 3:6-13.

**ONE: Celebration of certainty**

When you sit down to devour a delicious dinner today, who are you going to be thankful for? Of course, there are many wonderful people in our lives whom we should thank. But we must be careful that our primary orientation in the celebration of thankfulness is towards God. This was consistently true of Paul's letters. "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?" (v.9) Paul wondered what could possibly be an appropriate appreciation to God. Do you see the orientation of his thanks? It was towards God! In 1636 Martin Rinkart wrote,

*Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done, in whom God's world rejoices,  
who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

*Oh may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us,  
and keep us all with grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills in this world and the next.*

*All praise and thanks to God who reigns in highest heaven,  
the Father and the Son and Spirit now be given,  
the one eternal God, whom heaven and earth adore,  
for thus it was, is now and shall be evermore.*

The interesting thing is that Martin Rinkart was one of four pastors in the walled town of Eilenburg, serving among the horrific Thirty Years War (1618-1648). His town was full of refugees who were dying from an epidemic and famine. Rinkart buried two of his pastoral colleagues – the other fled. At times he had up to fifty funerals in one day. Over 4,400 died. Near the end of the war Rinkart was instrumental in seeking leniency from the Swedish army which had surrounded Eilenburg ([READ MORE](#)). What made the difference for Rinkart? Good circumstances? No! It was the certainty of who God is.

Tuesday morning I drove south across Golden Ears Bridge. It was eerie to look from the ramp and see only the first quarter of the bridge. Beyond that it disappeared in the fog. It appeared we were going to launch into an abyss! But no one stopped to question it. Why? Because we were certain that the rest of the bridge was there. What about you? Are you "driving into a fog bank"? In all Paul's travels and trials he celebrated and thanked God. How? He remained certain that God was producing new life! Despite difficult circumstances, you can celebrate the certainty of God in your life.

**TWO: Celebration of victory**

What else caused Paul to give thanks and celebrate? In verse 8 he confessed: "For now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord" (new life in the NLT). This is like our phrase, "a new lease on life"! Paul's work to strengthen struggling churches overwhelmed him at times...or landed him in prison! Yet Paul could "thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe." (2:13) He put it this way to the Corinthians, "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (I Corinthians 15:57)

Regardless of Paul's circumstances, he could always celebrate the power of God's Good News in the lives of believers. Note what he said about a true Gospel transformation in I Thessalonians 1.

- **Recognition** – "not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction." (1:5)

- **Repentance** – “you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” (1:9)
- **Relationship** – “For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you.” (1:4)

Victory was accomplished because God first extended His love to them and chose them. Today, He reaches out to us with the same gracious invitation to repent of our self-sufficiency and trust in Him.

### THREE: Celebration of possibility

Paul was no “Pollyanna”. He understood that the churches he served had problems. For the most part, that was exactly why he wrote his letters to them! As John Stott writes about the Corinthian church,

The image of the church as presented in the first four chapters of I Corinthians is extremely ambiguous. There is a paradox at the heart of the church. It is the painful tension between what the church *claims* to be and what it *seems* to be; between the divine ideal and the human reality; between the romantic talk about “the bride of Christ” and the very unromantic, ugly, unholy and quarrelsome Christian community we know ourselves to be. It is the tension between our final, glorious destiny in heaven and our present, very inglorious performance on earth. (*Christian Leadership*, 11).

Paul was not blind to the problems. Yet he celebrated. Why? He focused on two amazing possibilities.

- **Wholly loving** – “make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.” (v.12)
- **Holy living** – “strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God.” (v.13)

<b>REFLECT</b>
----------------

Paul wrote, “*we ought always to thank God for you*” (II Thessalonians 1:3; i.e. “a special, personal obligation”). In relationship with Jesus we always have reason to celebrate...for certainty, victory, and possibility! What will your thanksgiving celebration entail? Turkey and trimmings?

A meal Jesus had with two followers in Emmaus was remarkable. These two were heartbroken over His crucifixion. Returning from Jerusalem to their little village Jesus joined them, unrecognized. They later described “how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.” One author calls this “Presence bread” and offers this prayer...

*Hallow our meal, dear Lord, this eventide,  
Master beloved, adored, with us abide;  
So from Thy plenitude shall we be fed,  
And all our common food be Presence bread.*

(Edges of His Ways, Amy Carmichael, September 28)

The important question this Thanksgiving is not “what are you thankful for?” If we take a circumstance-oriented view of thanksgiving, we will at best be superficial in our celebration. The question is whether God is **present** in your life. If that question is settled, God will produce thankfulness in you in wonderful ways!

Consider these Scriptures where Paul thanked God and celebrated the faith of Jesus followers in various cities:

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Romans 1:8</b>        | I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed through the whole world  |
| <b>I Corinthians 1:4</b> | I thank my god always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus   |
| <b>Ephesians 1:15-16</b> | For this reason I too, having heard of the faith the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers.                                     |
| <b>Philippians 1:3</b>   | I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.   |
| <b>Colossians 1:3-4</b>  | We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints.   |
| <b>I Thess 1:2-3</b>     | We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, |
| <b>II Thess 1:3</b>      | We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.  |
| <b>II Timothy 1:3</b>    | I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.  |
| <b>Philemon 1:4-5</b>    | I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.   |