

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14 ST JAMES'; 10.7.16; 11.00 am

INTRODUCTION

When I was little, like most children, I really looked forward to getting lots of presents at Christmas, and on my birthday. Afterwards wasn't such fun though! My parents insisted that I sat and wrote to everyone to thank them for their present. I don't suppose I was ungrateful, but I found writing 'thank-you' letters, or bread-and-butter letters, boring! As I grew up, I learned that showing our appreciation when people give us nice presents, saying a proper 'thank you', is a way of showing how much we value that person's love and generosity. It's like that with God. He's given us so much, and he likes to hear us thank him for it properly.

Paul can teach us a lot about thanking God. Paul overflows with thanksgiving. His letters are full of it. Paul could no more stop giving thanks than he could stop breathing. When he wrote this letter to the Colossians, Paul was in prison. But he couldn't stop thanking God. In verses 3 & 4, he thanks God for the Colossians' faith in Christ Jesus, and for their love for all the Christian believers. In verses 10-12, as he prays for the Colossians, Paul makes it clear that he can't imagine Christians not giving thanks to the Father. If we're living as Christians should live, then we'll always be thankful, even when we're going through a really hard time, when nothing seems to be going right, and we're downright miserable.

It's not easy to give thanks to God during the hard times. But this passage helps us to understand how it's possible to 'give thanks in all circumstances' (1 Thessalonians 5). In verse 12, Paul tells us to give thanks to the Father; if we think about the reasons he tells us to give thanks, we'll see that we're to give thanks for the Son; and further study of the passage will show that we can give thanks by the Spirit.

GIVING THANKS TO THE FATHER

In verse 10, Paul prays that the Colossian believers *may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way*. One of the ways they'll do this, is by joyfully giving thanks to the Father (v 12).

Many people have 'an attitude of gratitude'. They're thankful for what they've got, whether it's family, friends, food, furniture or flowers. But not everyone can give their thanks to someone. Many people don't know the One to whom they could give thanks.

But we do know Him. We know that our God is not remote. He hasn't just put us in the world with a set of rules to live by, and left us to get on with it. No: he's our Father. We have a relationship with him. He loves us. He knows what's best for us. He's involved in our lives, and he'll always care for us. We do know the One to whom we can give thanks. And he's given us so many good things to enjoy. Some things he's given to everyone to enjoy. But he gives so much more to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

We can sum up that 'so much more' which God gives to Christian believers by saying that God's made it possible for us to call him

'Father'. By rights, we should stand before God our Judge, convicted of disobeying his law, and condemned to eternal death. Instead, we stand before God our Father, as children adopted into his family, and given the free gift of eternal life. That's only possible because of all that Jesus Christ has done. So the key thing for which we should give thanks is Jesus Christ.

GIVING THANKS FOR THE SON

In verses 12-14, Paul spells out all that God has done for us: he's *qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light* (v 12); he's *rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves* (v 13); and he's set us free by forgiving our sins (v 14).

In these verses, Paul's using a lot of pictures from the OT, and especially from the story of the Exodus. I'm going to start at the end, by talking about setting us free (v 14). The literal meaning of the word *redemption* in this verse, is to pay the price to set a slave free. The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt, until God paid the price to 'redeem' them. The Colossians were slaves to sin, that is, they couldn't help but disobey God, until Jesus Christ paid the price to redeem them. Now, they're no longer slaves: they're free to choose to obey God. And even if they knew nothing about the history of the people of Israel, the Colossians would understand what Paul meant, because in the C1, a slave could be set free if someone 'redeemed' him, or paid a price for him. The price which Jesus paid for the freedom of the Colossians, and for our freedom, was his own life. And God's forgiven us, not just

for the ways in which we've disobeyed him in the past, but for the fact that we're sinners born and bred, and so we'll go on disobeying him, no matter how hard we try not to.

Forty years after the people of Israel left Egypt, God brought them into Canaan, the land which he'd promised Abraham would belong to his descendants. Each tribe received the portion of the Land, or the 'inheritance', which God had reserved for them.

In a similar way now, God's brought his people not into a physical land, but into the kingdom of Christ. This is what God *has qualified* us, as Christian believers, *to share in* (v 12). We haven't yet fully entered into the kingdom of Christ: whereas in the OT, God promised his people a new land; in the NT, God promises us a new creation, when Jesus comes again.

We're also to be thankful because God's *rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves* (v 13). Before they became Christians, the Colossians had lived in fear of spiritual forces which, they believed, controlled their fate. But God's rescued them from these powers, and now that they're in the kingdom of Christ, they no longer need to be afraid. There are still evil powers at work in the world; but God's rescued those of us who are Christians from these powers; we don't need to be afraid.

So these are the things for which Paul urges us to give thanks to the Father. But I said that primarily we should give thanks for the Son, for Jesus Christ. That's because all these things have been made possible

for us only because of what Jesus has done for us, on the Cross. We don't deserve any of these things: Jesus does. But Jesus took the punishment which we do deserve, when he died on the Cross. God gave him our punishment, and gave us his 'inheritance'. Isn't it amazing? No wonder Paul can't imagine Christians not continually giving thanks to the Father, for Jesus Christ!

GIVING THANKS BY THE SPIRIT

There's still a BUT!! As I said at the beginning, there are plenty of times when the last thing we feel like doing is saying 'thank you' to God. Even though we know that all this is true, it doesn't make it any easier to give him thanks when we're struggling. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in.

In verse 9, Paul says that when he prays for the Colossians, he asks *God to fill them with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.* And in verse 11, he prays that they'll be *strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that they may have great endurance and patience.*

Think about God's power. By his power, God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. By his power, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. By his power, God is now strengthening you!

God's strengthening you, so you can live in the world with patience and praise him for all he's done for you. He's strengthening you by his power, so that even when your individual circumstances are painful,

when you feel you have nothing to thank God for, you still give him thanks anyway.

Nothing can change what God's already done for us. But we need the power of the Holy Spirit to work in our lives; its he who makes it possible for us to give thanks in the hard times, as well as the easy times; its he who reminds us of all that God's done for us; and as he works in us, as we grow as Christians, we'll find ourselves becoming ever more full of thanks to the Lord.

CONCLUSION

I want to finish by giving us all the opportunity to give thanks to the Lord, for all that he's done for us. After we've had a few moments quiet, to think about what God's said to us this morning, and about all that he's done for us, I'm going to say *A General Thanksgiving*, a prayer which dates back at least as far as the 1662 Book of Common Prayer:-

A GENERAL THANKSGIVING

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving kindness.
We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,
and that we show forth your praise,
not only with our lips but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**¹

¹ New Patterns for Worship, (London, Church House Publishing, 2002), p 236