



A Thankful Thanksgiving 2022

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I wonder how often you think in demonic ways. There's a good opening question for a sermon right there. How often do you think like a demon? Now, I would venture to say that the temptation that surfaces in the sermon today is probably not something you would naturally categorize as satanic. But perhaps you should, because the Scripture does, and in the text that we're going to study this morning, the outworking of this demonic mindset ends up being a kind of thinking that I think all of us struggle with at one level or another. In short, the idea is how do we receive, enjoy and appreciate God's gifts? And you may think, "Oh, I do fine with that." And I just wonder if we really analyze that, how well we really do at receiving and enjoying and appreciating the things that God gives us.

There's a problem, and much like most of Satan's strategies, he loves to cloak himself in some righteous garb to present himself as an angel of light. The problem when it gets really out of hand, it derives a title in the New Testament and in our English text it's translated asceticism. Have you heard that word? Asceticism. If you're an ascetic you are a person who struggles with receiving and enjoying and appreciating God's gifts. I say that because it's cloaked in something that is actually a virtue. If you were to do a word study on the word that the Greek New Testament uses that translates into the word asceticism, you'd find the root of the word being the word humility. And it's connected to another word. It's a compound word of "mind," like humility of mind, like my mind is very humble.

You think, well, that's a good thing. We should all be humble, right? Pride is sin, and humility is a virtue. And that's a good thing. But the problem is the kind of mindset that is humble to the place in the person who is rightly called an ascetic, they're interfacing with the things that God gives them in their lives in an unbiblical way. And that should be no surprise to us because Satan's got all kinds of strategies to take things that God says are good and to make them bad. And one of the ways is for you not to know rightly how to receive and enjoy and appreciate the things that God is giving you.

So I want to take a look at a passage that can safeguard us against that. And I would think, you know, that'd be a good thing, to come to church, to come away with something that safeguards me against thinking in demonic ways. That's a win, that's big. So let's turn to the passage I have in mind in first Timothy Chapter 4 verses 1 through 5, First Timothy 4:1 through 5. Let's look at this set of instructions that Paul gives to Timothy, who's the pastor at a church in the city of Ephesus. It's a big church, an important church. And Timothy is a young guy, but he's getting good instructions here from his discipler, his mentor. And Paul is telling him how to deal with things that are going to be happening in the church age, latter times they're called, which really involves everything from the ascension of Christ to the return of Christ. And we're living in those last times.

But as we know, there's a compounding of the problems that are often talked about in the pastoral epistles regarding the last times or the end times. We've seen an ebb and flow of this problem throughout church history, and I just want us to note it as we read the dramatic words



with which it's presented because it's pretty dramatic. Let's start here in verse 1. First Timothy Chapter 4 verse 1. I'll read it from the English Standard Version and it reads, "Now the Spirit." You'll notice that's a capital "S." Talking about the third person of the Godhead here, the one who's writing the Bible. "The Spirit expressly says," interesting way even that's put grammatically, he's writing like big words here, firm words, highlighted words. It's hard to express that in some way that we get. But the idea is he's underscoring this. He wants to make sure you get this.

"That in latter times some will depart from the faith by..." Now, we're going to get the "by" in a minute. But "depart from the faith" means that this is a kind of problem that begins within the walls of the church. This is something that starts with people, as Paul warned the Ephesian elders when he left this town that he's now writing back to, there are going to be people from within your own ranks who are going to pull up wrong thinking. They'll start with good theology, but they're going to deviate into ways of thinking that aren't right. They're going to "depart from the faith and they're going to be devoting themselves to," here's the weird part, "to deceitful spirits." And if there were any doubt of what we were talking about there, "deceitful spirits," it gets clear here in the next few words, "and teachings of demons."

So, I mean, this is dramatic. I get it's dramatic, but it's dramatic for a reason. It's dramatic, I guess, just unnecessarily or inconsequential because it's true. But it's also dramatic in that I think Paul's wanting us to see what a big deal this is with God's wanting us to see this is a huge deal. And I think it makes sense the more we contemplate it that this is the kind of thing Satan would want to do within churches, within people who claim the truth to get kind of off a little bit in how we view the gifts of God.

Verse 2, it's going to come through teachers, of course. And he says, it's "through the insincerity of liars," not sincere, they're not telling the truth, "whose consciences," they should know better, but their consciences "are seared." Seared. They're callous, they're burned over, literally that's the word from the Greek word that wouldn't matter to you but except it's transliterated into the word "cauterized" in English, transliterated into that word. So they have a burnt-over, scabbed-up, scarred conscience. And so they kept trying to think in a particular way that's warped their thinking.

And what do they do? Well, he gives us two examples, two examples on the table of the kinds of things that they do. "They forbid marriage." That's certainly a gift of God from the very beginning. Right? This is a gift. The first gift we see God giving to human beings. He gives the gift of marriage to them. And these people say, "No, you shouldn't participate in that." And you don't have to know much about church history to know that we've seen that equated with godliness many times. Sometimes it's legislated into church functions in terms of how they are going to qualify people for leadership. If you are interested in being married, you can't be a leader in this church, right? We talk about the celibate priesthood, for instance, in the Roman Catholic Church. I mean, these are the kinds of things that people have equated with godliness. And if you're to be godly, you got to say no to that gift.



Now, there's nothing wrong with being single, and we can look at that later as we think through this logic of this particular passage. But here these people were saying you shouldn't do it. "And they require abstinence," middle of verse 3, "from foods." Now, the theme here is that they're trying to tell people, here's the right and righteous way to live. And they're doing it really as we'll see elsewhere under the title of the ascetics because they're acting like they're really humble. As Colossians 2 says it gives the appearance of godliness because of their great humility that they have and that they are not going to indulge in those things they shouldn't. And there are lots of reasons through church history, we've seen people who have this mentality and maybe it's affecting you in the way that you think about things that God has given you. You think about in your humility, you're not worthy of this or it's not appropriate, or I shouldn't do it, shouldn't have it. Or if I don't have it, then I'll be more godly if I can work through this deprivation and not indulge in that, then it'll be good. Okay. We can see where that might be the case.

But look at that sentence, even though that's where I'm going to break our points down today between that line and the next. But let's just see where this goes. "Require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." Verse 4. "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. Now, that's an interesting mouthful. What does that mean? Well, we'll try to untangle that when we get there. But let's just start with the first two and a half verses.

The Spirit says, in latter times that people departing from the faith, they start with us, they are in our group, they carry Bibles around, but they start giving themselves over to a lie. Right? Things that Satan would want us to believe. "Deceitful spirits, teachings of demons." And even the leaders who start this, they're not sincere in it, they've got consciences that are damaged. And they're asking people to be godly, to be Christians, to be pure, to be holy, to say no to certain gifts that God has given. And that becomes a trend in a pattern of the ascetics that you shouldn't have those things and we shouldn't indulge in those things. And so they obscure the greatness and the glory of God as they're evidenced through gifts to his people. It's like, "No, you shouldn't partake in those things."

Which, in contradistinction in the middle of verse 3, "God created them to be received with thanksgiving." He meant them to be received and you're rejecting them. You're abstaining from them but I wanted you to have them. So you can see it's a problem. And it's a problem that he describes in attaching the gift to God and people getting in between that and saying, "No, you shouldn't have it." And the people who are getting in between it saying no, you shouldn't have it, are motivated here it says by demonic thinking. And I just want to show you how logical that is in Scripture.

Matter of fact, the first demon that you know about on the timeline chronologically is a demon who's really concerned about God getting all the spotlight, all the balloons and confetti. Right? God's getting all the attention and he's not. And he's supposed to be a part of giving that God attention, giving glory to God. And he struggles with that. He wants some of that glory for



himself. He'd like to take some of that glory, some of that celebration from God and appropriate that to himself.

And then he goes and messes with the creation down here on earth. And he says to Eve, "You know, God is trying to keep some glory from you, some good stuff you'd like to have, but he's trying to keep it from you. So he's trying to keep that from you. You should have it." And so he tempts the woman to eat of this tree that God clearly said, don't eat that from that tree. And again, putting this concern in her mind that God's really getting glory, but "You should have some of that glory and he shouldn't have a corner on all of it. You're going to be like him if you just do this thing."

And all I got to say is that Satan would love to get between you and God and make sure that whatever glory and honor and gratitude and whatever celebration you might have that God is great, he'd love for you to minimize that. And in a roundabout way, if you follow me here, there are ways that you in not making a connection in your mind between a good thing that God gives you to enjoy, if you can somehow circumvent that, well then God doesn't get the glory for that. And that's good because that's the whole strategy of the enemy. Let's get as much glory away from him as possible. "Matter of fact, if I can just put a mirror in front of you and the glory can be about you and not about him, that would be great."

All right. Let's try to make sense of this. The Bible is presenting God as a God who is invariably good, right? He's immutably good. And a very early verse you learn, matter of fact, it depicts all of what I'm trying to present here in the first two and a half verses, and that is that God is the God who is the source of all good things. And we know that from James Chapter 1 verse 17, right? "Every good and perfect gift comes from God," it comes from this perfect God, "it comes down from the Father of lights, through whom there's no shifting shadow, no shadow of variance." Because he doesn't move, he doesn't change, he doesn't morph. So we have a God who gives good things. And I think that's where this starts. And we need to jot that down and then we'll try to explain it.

Number one, if you're taking notes, you need to "Acknowledge the Source of Good Things." And you could add more words to that if you want to make it a longer point. But you should acknowledge that God is the source of ALL good things. He is the one who gives all good things. And if it's good, it comes from God. Even though in this world it's full of junk, the world's messed up. All of us can see that. And from the time we did see our ancestors reach out and rebel against God's rules, there came all these consequences on the planet and everything else on this earth that used to be good, started to get messed up.

So the marring of sin on the planet has messed everything up from Genesis 3 all the way through Revelation 19. And we got a lot of trouble in the Bible and it's all sinful. But here's what we learned throughout the Bible. There's good stuff happening that God continues to do on the planet like he causes to quote Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount "causes his sun to rise," and that's a good thing, that ball of fusion here as the earth spins, "to shine down on the evil and the good." And that's a good thing, that keeps us going. And he sends the rains



which nourish the crops. And so we can all have lunch today. He "sends the rains on the crops of the just and the unjust." Right?

So God is doing good things in a sinful world, even though one farmer might be stealing from the other. Right? Or one person, you know, might be murdering another. Here's all this sin but there are good things poking through all of this. Matter of fact, if you think about the unchanging God who is completely separate than all the sin in this world, you might think of Isaiah in Isaiah Chapter 6 when the prophet gets this view in the commissioning of his ministry, which really it's already been going on for five chapters, and he's been railing on the sins of Israel. But he gets this view of God "high and exalted, sitting upon this throne, the train of his robe filling the temple," and the seraphim are flying around. And what are they crying out? You remember from Sunday school. What are they saying? "Holy, holy, holy." Right? Separate, separate, separate. You're different. You're unique. You're transcendent. You're not like everything down here that's messed up that Isaiah has just been recounting for the last five chapters. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of host." Lord God Almighty, he's perfect.

Do you know the next line? "And the whole earth is full of his glory!" Remember that line? Now, that's interesting because everything we've been learning about in the first five chapters of Isaiah is there's a lot of junk that's characterizing the world. But we know this, thinking about the Sermon on the Mount, there's plenty that happens here on earth that still is good. But whatever is good poking through onto this sinful planet, those things you should be able to trace back to God. Because if it's bad, you know where it came from, sinful rebellion of angels or men. But if it's good, it's coming from God. Because with God there's "no shifting shadow, there's no change." He's holy, he's immutable, he doesn't change. And the good things in life, as veiled as they might be for us to see as clearly as we should, as the old hymn says, "though the eye of sinful man his glory may not see." I get that there are problems in recognizing some of that, but we should recognize that and we should say there's good here, and when the good happens, we attribute it to God.

If you read the footnote, by the way, in the Hebrew phrase there in Isaiah Chapter 6, "the whole earth is full of his glory," you'll find there's a way to read that Hebrew phrase that it's just like a wish. It's like we would say in Greek, an optative. It's a wish. It's a hope. It's what we want it to be, it's going to be, which is exactly what Habakkuk 2 says is that it will be "the glory one day will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea." So we know one day the wretchedness and the sin and the transgression and the hurt and the pain and the death and the disease, all that will be removed. But it doesn't mean that it's not present now. So however you read that phrase in Isaiah 6, "The whole earth is full of his glory," you could say full, not to the exclusion of all the bad, because there's plenty of bad in this world. But every time you observe good, you're observing something that God is doing. And what we need to recognize is that's the case.

And those who want to take a look at God's good gifts and they want to put some distance between themselves and those gifts, and they want to say sometimes for dumb reasons, even though they seem spiritual, like, "I don't want to have that. I don't participate in that. I don't need to enjoy that. I'm not worthy of that," whatever your reason might be. Right? We don't



get the opportunity to draw the connection in the way that we ought to. And we ought to, not just from some intellectual perspective, but often from some experimental perspective that I have had an experience with the good that I'm praising God for here in this, because God is the source of all good things.

One passage on this, go with me to Romans Chapter 1, Romans Chapter 1. In Romans Chapter 1, let's start in verse 18 where we see God saying, I'm going to bring judgment on sinners. And that's going to happen unless they're repentant, they're going to incur the penalty of their own unrighteousness. So here is this wrath of God, this anger of God, this just, right, indignant response to sin. It's going to come upon those who are unrepentant. Are you with me on this? This is Romans Chapter 1 verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

Now, here's the interesting thing. "Who by their unrighteousness, suppress the truth." Now he's going to elaborate on this and unpack what this means. But they have something that they're living inconsistently with. There's good and it's external to them, it's alien to them. Right? It's not them. They didn't build it. They didn't make it. It wasn't part of them. In this world they experience the truth of God and the goodness of God but they suppress it. And they suppress it by doing their unrighteous deeds. It's just like the piling blankets upon blankets, upon blankets to cover this thing up.

What's the good? "For what can be known about God," God is the good one, "is plain to them." Plain to them? Well, they're working hard to cover it up, but it's like billboards just in their face, shining in their face. It's plain to them "because God has shown it to them. Like the sun rising on the evil and the good, just like the rains coming on the crops for the just and the unjust. He keeps showing them these things, his beauty, his majesty, his greatness. And he goes on to say that, verse 20, "For his," God's, "invisible attributes, namely, things like his eternal power and divine nature," divine is a great word, his perfect, loving, benevolent nature, "have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."

They've been yelling and declaring, right? Psalm 19. The glory of God. God has been showing his greatness. It's been poking through. The glory of God, it's all over the planet. And when you see things that are good, you're saying, "Well, I'm looking at a ray of God's glory bouncing down here on the planet," and that's a good thing. And God's been demonstrating that. He's been raining that good down on the earth. "So that they are without excuse. For although they knew God," the billboards were everywhere, "they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him." Right? They didn't receive it. They didn't enjoy it. It's a gift from God and they didn't appreciate it as a gift from God. Instead, "they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were just darkened," they kept covering up this truth and "claiming to be wise," which of course they do, "they became fools."

So here is a reminder to us that there's a God who is giving good to this world in all the things that are good in this world, and those should be recognized by us as something coming from him. And the world is in the pattern of saying, "Well, I don't want to see that connection. I don't



want to make that connection." And the difference between you and a non-Christian should be this, if you happen to be a Christian, look at look at verse 21. Right? We know God, but we know him not only objectively, in terms of intellectually, we know him in terms of our personal relationship with him. And we're supposed to honor him as God, giver of all good things, and give thanks to him. And our thinking won't be futile. It'll be clear. We'll understand the truth.

So I've got to be the kind of person who says, I know that the non-Christian who I live next door to is going to experience a lot of good gifts of God in this life, from the sunshine to the rain to all the other things that they enjoy. From a good meal, to a warm, you know, nap, whatever they experience, to a steak that they had for lunch, to seeing the sunset, whatever it is. Those good things are lavished on them. They don't honor God for it. They don't thank God for it. You're supposed to be making those connections and we're supposed to be saying, "Hey, there's a difference between me and them in that I see them, I note them, and to the extent even that I receive them and enjoy them, I become one who makes that connection to God and I bring glory to God by recognizing his glory and all the gifts that he gives.

And unfortunately asceticism, for whatever the reason, whatever godly-sounding reason it is, I'm cutting off my participation in those things. It's like saying I'm going to go out and enjoy barbecuing a rack of ribs on my barbecue in my backyard. But what I'm going to do is I'm going to take the Kleenex and stuff it up my nostrils so I don't really fully smell it. I want to see it. I don't want to really smell it. It's like going on a walk in the High Sierras. And all I want to look at is the tops of my hiking boots and the dirt trail and I don't want to really take in the vistas and I don't want to experience all that because there's enough here for me to deal with.

There are a lot of reasons people like to have this narrow view of me being this lowly worm who really doesn't deserve to take in these wonderful things. And I don't really have any reason that God would honor me and give me these gifts. I mean, I get that you have that mentality sometimes, but it's a kind of humility that's leading to a demonic kind of disconnect between God's great gifts that should motivate praise and gratitude to God. And instead, we think we're being godly, when in fact we're not and it all starts within the walls of the church when people say things that in reality are not biblical, though they sound good.

Now, before you say to me there's a time to say no to God's gifts. And of course, I am saying this is no license for greed or self-indulgence or, you know, if the good things in this world are to be enjoyed, I'm just going to go get as many good things as possible and enjoy it to the full. And you could say I'm becoming a glutton or I'm becoming a greedy materialist or whatever. And of course, I'm not saying that. Matter of fact, look later in this passage, you go back to our text in First Timothy Chapter 4, drop down to verse 7 when he... I mean, I guess I stopped in verse 5, so let's read verse 6. So I'm not letting anything out of your eyeballs here. Verse 6, "If you put these things before the brothers," Timothy, "you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of faith and the good doctrine that you followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths." And there are a lot of them that float around under the rubric of godliness, but don't.



"Rather," instead here are the things you ought to be working on, "train yourself for godliness." That word, by the way, is the Greek word we get the word "gymnastics" from. And it certainly gives you that feeling of work and effort and sweat. "Train yourself for godliness." I'm thinking about training myself. Well, it's not like having two pieces of cheesecake and sleeping in and skipping the gym. You're thinking about, "Wow, that sounds like an analogy of training." Well, immediately that comes to mind, verse 8, "For while bodily training is of some value," and that's what it takes for bodily training, you can't just indulge in whatever feels good, but "godliness is a value in every way." But it is like that. It feels like that. Sometimes it is depriving things. From what? From your life. Because when you do, when you're training yourself for godliness, "it holds a promise not only for the present life, but for the one to come."

So I am going to say yes. Is there a time to fast? Yes. Is there a time for us not to even say to someone who says, you know, "I'm going to renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom"? Jesus said, "Yes, there's a time for that." Even Paul, when the question was being addressed, which was a question of the ascetics in First Corinthians Chapter 7, it seems like if I'm really godly, I wouldn't be interested in sex and so I shouldn't get married. And Paul says, "Stop, stop with that. That is not true." He makes a case now for domestically and logically, considering the fact that domestic life comes with a lot of things you got to focus on. And if you're not gifted to be single, you are going to involve yourself in a lot of things like your kid's dental plan or his braces that you probably aren't going to think about if you're just leading in a church and you're single.

So he says singleness is a preferred thing if you have the gift. But he says one man has "one gift and another man has another." And of course, he even describes in that passage that the general default is most people are not going to be gifted to be single. And it certainly is not the deprivation from the pleasures of marital conjugal relationships is not in some way equated with godliness, contra a lot of church movements that have said, yes, to really be godly you got to be celibate. That's not how this works.

And yet he does say there can be advantages. Just like I can say, you know, not indulging in God's gifts has an advantage. There are things like fasting. When you fast, Jesus says, he's assuming that you're going to have times that you fast where you're not going to indulge in things. Okay. With that said, we can learn something from the pattern of God in the Scripture and the pattern of the ascetics. The ascetics had a pattern of saying, "My general view on life is deprivation. My general view on life is I'm not going to enjoy those things. I'll be godly if I just hold back and fast from those things," whatever they might be. And that's their general position on life.

God shows us the proper role, I believe, and I don't want to make too much of the patterns in Scripture, but the pattern of Scripture, if I think about like the festivals of the Old Testament in worship, the worship of the Old Testament, particularly the festivals of the Old Testament were like 7 to 1 that they would be feasting and celebrating and rejoicing and singing and pulling out all the stops on feasting as opposed to the one in the calendar where you were supposed to deprive yourself. There was one day called the day of Yom Kippur. So one of the



holidays on the Jewish calendar, God says, yes, you're going to fast for one day. And all I'm going to tell you is there a time to say no? Right? Of course there is. But the general default in God's calendar is just the opposite.

Matter of fact, let me quote for you Leviticus 23, which you probably weren't reading recently, but in Leviticus 23, it reminds me of the way God addresses the kinds of things that he's concerned about us having as our values, as we think about the goodness and greatness of God. Listen to this from Leviticus Chapter 23. If you haven't read this lately, it's a good one. Verse 39 starts this paragraph, "On the 15th day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate," here's a good word, "the feast of the Lord." Got this? From 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. No. Here's what it says. "For seven days." That changes the whole view of things, doesn't it? I mean, from 3 to 6, that's a pretty good feast for me, right? But no, for seven days.

"On the first day, I just want you to rest," put your feet up, "solemn rest. On the eighth day, I just want you to rest," put your feet up. "You shall take on the first day all the fruit of the splendid trees," get the best of the produce. "Take the palm branches of the palm trees and the boughs of the leafy trees and the willows of the brooks, and you shall come and bring them together and rejoice before the Lord for seven days. You will celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days." Are you getting the idea that it's supposed to last for seven days? For seven days? "And it is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month."

I could keep looking through all of the things that God asks Israel to do as they stop and think about their God. Most of it is characterized by feasting and celebration and gladness, which is really easy when you're sitting back at the end of day five and you're digesting your fifth day of feasting to think about the amazing bounty of what God has done in the fields in providing you with all the splendid fruit and all the food that you've just eaten, and to sit back and say, "Wow, God is good." And he wants his children to understand that he's the source of these good things. And most of the celebrations of Scripture are not depriving yourself. They're not saying no to engaging in the gifts of God.

Does it happen? Sure it happens. Is there a time for it? Yes. Is there a time to train yourself? Yes. There's even a time in marriage it says to say no to even conjugal relationships for a time for prayer. But make it short, he says, because the average engagement and what God has given us is for us to enjoy these things. They're gifts of God. They reflect the glory of God. And it's Satan that wants to get between you and the gifts of God in seeing the greatness of God in those gifts. Satan does not want you to see the goodness, the generosity, the joy, the pleasures that God brings as he brings into your life the good things that he's provided for you.

Now back to our text. I don't know if you went through Leviticus with me, but if you're in First Timothy Chapter 4, I had you down there in verses 7 and 8, go back up, if you would, to the middle of verse 3. We saw the distinction between the demons trying to get between people and the gifts of God, and sadly that detracts from the glory of God. Instead, we want to fully



engage in that by understanding God creates these things to be received with thanksgiving. Now, I'm going to stop the first point thereafter the word "thanksgiving" and start the next point with the word "by." And you're going to think when you're breaking, you know, some good hermeneutical principles here by dividing this in the middle of a sentence. And the reason I'm doing that is because he gets to a whole another level of drilling down to something in this concept that is very profound and I want to pull it out, put it on the table, shine the light on it, and give it a point. Because this is very important for us to catch and I think it can be revolutionary in the way you view God's gifts.

Are you ready? Here it comes. Read the first part again. These guys who are wrong. They forbid marriage. They forbid certain foods that they require that you abstain from that "God created to be received with thanksgiving." Here it comes, "by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected." And I'm going to split it right there too. And I know that's unorthodox, but we'll get to why in a second. But let's just look at that. We've gone from receiving with thanksgiving thinking in a general way about God giving gifts not just to the unjust, but to the just, his children. Well, we think well that's a neat thing. God wants us to enjoy those. But he gets very specific about WHO he's done this for, for "those who believe and know the truth."

Now, some people take the word "believe" and they think that the object of that is the truth. Right? Believe the truth. Know the truth. I don't think that's what's going on here. I think Paul uses "believe" the way you use believe and you use it often this way, and Paul does as well. We use the word believe without the object and we know what we mean because the most important thing to believe of all. And that is you say like, "Hey, I met a guy here and we start talking about church and God and the Bible," and you might say, "Was he a believer?" Okay, well, you don't give us the object. What do you mean, believer?

Well, you know what I really mean. What I mean is is he a believer in Christ? Does he trust in Christ? Is he a Christian? That's shorthand for is he a Christian. Okay? So I think the first thing here is he's done this, created these things to be shared in, that's literally the word, to be received or embraced, enjoyed by those who believe, those who are Christians. And that's a huge concept. Right? Think about it. They're Christians. They're Christians who not only believe, but they "know the truth." Now, again, some people and commentators and preachers have tried to say "truth" and they go way out, they go broad. And I'm thinking, okay, you can do that. But I think the truth that's on the table that is in contradistinction to the lies of the demons who are lying. Right? The seared-conscience teachers are lying, "Well, what's the truth?" The truth is, these are good gifts from God given by God to be received by believers with thanksgiving. So that's the truth. It's the connection between the gift and the giver.

So here's the thing. The gifts that God gives, the glory that's in the earth that are given and intersecting with your life, they should be received, number two, as good things, right? These good things as God's gifts, here it comes, very specifically to you. To you. "Receive Good Things as God's Gifts to You," if, in fact, you believe and you know the truth. To confirm what I just said, which was nothing groundbreaking, God is the giver of all good things. I believe



that if there's a good thing in my life, it is a God thing and God put it there sovereignly and generously. If you believe that, then you believe the truth. The truth that's on the table in this particular passage.

And I would ask are you a Christian? Do you trust in Christ? Are you a believer? Okay, I'm a believer. And I acknowledge the truth. I know the truth that you're talking about. Great. These gifts in this world that God has given to be enjoyed and shared in are given to you. They're given to you. Now, you just told me, Pastor Mike, that on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said they're given to non-Christians and the unjust. Yes, they're given to them as well. But you know what? The thing about them is? They don't honor God, nor do they give thanks.

The whole point of this passage is you do honor God and you do give things. You honor God by making the connection. You draw the line between the gift and the giver, and you give thanks, which we're going to get to in a second. But in doing that, God says that's the way it's supposed to work. I'm giving them to you, and you're responding rightly to them. You have the privileged position of being the recipient of the gifts the way that God intended them to be received. And that just puts you on a whole another level, and that is something that's worth us thinking about. It's a good thing.

And again, if you have the lowly worm kind of puritan theology that makes you think wrongly about yourself, that makes you think, I can't think in those terms. All I can think about is I'm an unworthy worm. Here's the deal. If you ask me, am I an unworthy worm, I'm going to say yes, you are. Okay? Now let's check that box and see that God took a bunch of unworthy worms and he made them inheritors of the Kingdom of God. Right? And that's a big, big deal. And I just want you to consider what that means.

Let's picture the Oval Office inhabited by someone you respect. Let's just put it that way if that's a stretch. And you were bringing your kids or your grandkids in and they're just little toddlers. And as the president said, "Oh, bring them, bring them in. That's fine. Yeah, they can come in here." I mean, you would feel like, oh, man, you know, you tell your kid not to knock anything over and be careful. I mean, it would be very generous for that president to be able to open up the Oval Office to your toddlers who, you know, make a mess and crawl around.

But it's a different thought altogether when you go back in time when we had JFK in the Oval Office and he had two toddlers himself, right? Caroline and John Jr were running around in the Oval Office. Matter of fact, use our free Wi-Fi, go on Google Images and just look up like Kennedy in the Oval Office with his toddlers. Yeah, there are tons of pictures, some famous ones like the Resolute Desk has that kickboard that hinges open. Remember that image? Old people raise your eyebrow if you remember that. And John Junior is there sticking his head out. And there's one too of Caroline and John. There are several pictures of them messing around while he's in his black suit, skinny black tie, doing his things. You got flags behind him.

You think, wow, now that's different. Those are his kids, right? It's like they're running around like they own the place because in a sense they do, at least by virtue of them being children



of the president. The president is rightly there and the children are rightly there. Your kids are just guests. And all I'm telling you is there's a huge difference between God sending the sun on the evil and the good and God sending the rains on the just and the unjust. Right? If you're a good one, which means you're a child of God, you believe in Christ, you're wrapped in his righteousness. Right? And you're a just one. You live by the definitions of Scripture and you say I'm a child of God in the process of my sanctification. Then you need to understand the reality of what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches things like this: that makes you one who sees your sin. You, in meekness, come to God. And here's what Jesus said about the meek. The meek shall inherit what? The earth. That's gigantic. I mean that's huge. When Paul was talking about all the factions within the church. "I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos. I'm of Cephas." He said, stop it. One of his arguments was this, "You possess all things." Remember that? That's a weird way to put it. You possess all things. Even later, when he talks about the meat sacrificed to idols, he quotes the Old Testament psalms and he says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

Everything is God's and you're his kids, right? You want to climb through the Resolute Desk, right? God's the kind of God who looks at his kids and allows them to have stuff that other kids don't have. You're his children. And he says, go to the meat market and just eat whatever's put in front of you. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." You're arguing about which teacher is yours. All the teachers are yours. You have all things. All things belong to you.

Now think about that. When they were talking about the two drachma tax and they came to the disciples asking for it and the disciples and Jesus got in a conversation and Jesus said this, "Will you tell me, Peter, who pays the tax? Do the king's sons, the princes and princesses, do they pay the tax or do the citizens have to pay the tax?" Oh, the citizens. Right? The kids are exempt. And he said, so it is. "The children of the kingdom are exempt, but so as not to offend let's pay the two drachma tax." Right? And through that interesting thing, fish in the mouth, the drachma, they pay the tax.

But once again, that's weird, right? Think about it. It's like you don't have to pay the tax. Why? Because you're children of the king. "The earth is the Lord's in the fullness thereof." Everything in it is the Lord's. And yet we turn to Romans 13. I got to pay my taxes. Got to pay my revenue, got to pay honor to whom honors are due. Okay. But here's the thing. In reality, this earth is not theirs, right? This earth is ours. This earth is ours because the "fullness of the earth belongs to the Lord" and I happen to belong to him. The world, they reject him, and one day they will be rejected. We have embraced him. He has embraced us. And because we are his kids we have all things.

Now, before you drive to Newport and come up to a guy driving a Lambo and you say, "Hey, are you a Christian?" They say, "No." And you say, "Well, it ain't yours then, that's mine." Right? Before you do that, please understand it doesn't mean that we have everything in our portfolio now, but it does mean this: that everything that God has is ours and one day we will inherit it all. And the point is between now and then anything he does give us we recognize



this is just a reflection of God's goodness in giving gifts to his kids. Didn't he say that when he was talking... speaking of the Sermon on the Mount, talking about prayer, he said, "Guys, even you being evil know how to give good gifts to your kids. Do you think I don't know how to give good gifts to my kids?"

That's way different than us just sitting around going, "Well, I'm just a humble servant trying to get along. And, you know, God gave me something here, but I don't know if I should really do it." Listen, this is not the prosperity gospel. Are you following me on this? You know, I'm not turning into an arena preacher. I'm just telling you, the reality is, as a Christian, the good things in your lives are gifts to be enjoyed. God is good and he's giving you good gifts.

Now some of you are rolling your eyes. I see your eyes way back in your head right now. I see it. I feel it, for those of you looking at me with your eyes. But I feel some of you are rolling your eyes because you're inverting this principle and you shouldn't. And you're inverting it this way. "Well, you know what? The guy across the aisle, maybe he's loving him. I've seen his car, right? I've seen his wife. I've seen his house. God ain't loving me because I don't have those things or I used to have some things, and then God took him away from me. So I know this: you keep talking about the goodness of God and all these gifts. I don't have those gifts so God is not being good to me." Be careful with that. Right?

I could make the case that there are a lot of things on your Christmas list that you want from God that God is not giving you. And if you say he doesn't give them to me, then he doesn't love me. Well, then I would say you're a brat, right? Because that's not how it works. It shouldn't work that way for your kids, and it doesn't work that way for God's kids. As a matter of fact, you should be more like Paul who recognizes part of you not getting everything on your Christmas list is because he doesn't want you to be a brat. Do you know what I'm talking about? Second Corinthians Chapter 12. Do you know what Paul wanted on his Christmas list? "I want a healthy body." Does anybody want that? I want that. And if you got cancer, you got arthritis, you got some problem that's killing you, you want a healthy body and you've asked God. You pleaded with the Lord to use the verbiage of Second Corinthians 15. You pleaded with the Lord for that, and the Lord said no. Okay?

And what Paul did is say, "Then God doesn't love me." Is that what he said? He believed the very thing he wrote to the Romans in Chapter 8 verse 28, that he knows that God's working out a good plan before we do inherit all things in this time, he's going to do things even with the deprivation in our life and it has nothing to do with his lack of love for his children. And the point is, hey, you can't have a healthy body. But I know what I'm doing. And Paul could even figure it out because if I had it, I think I would be a brat. Because I know now that this weakness in my flesh is something God is using to put a muffler on my pride and it's working. And so praise be to God that I'm weak and I'll revel in my weakness because there's power in being right in the middle of God's will, doing what he's called me to do when I don't get that thing on my wish list.

So here's the deal. Some of you are sitting here and you're infertile, you want a baby, you can't have one. You're single and you want to be married, right? You're broke and you need



money. You want money, right? You're in an apartment. You want a house. You're sick and you want to be healthy. You have all these things and you cannot handle this sermon right now because it's all about God's love, God's gifts, enjoy the gifts, receive the gifts. And all you can look at is the few things on your list that you don't have. I know they're big things. I'm not saying it's not a big thing. It is a big thing. But just like Job, who couldn't even figure out why all the good things were taken from him, in the end was there any doubt at all in God's big plan that he loved Job? He was willing to go and go to, you know, go to blows with Job's critics because they criticize Job and he restored Job in the end. This was not about his lack of love for Job.

And your deprivations are not about his lack of love for you. And you'd better say, even with all the things I don't have on my Christmas wish list, there are plenty of gifts that God has given me. The glory of God is evident in this area of my life, in this area of my life, in this area of my life. And you better be thankful for those things because that's why you were created: to honor God and give him thanks. That's the goal. And you receive those good things as gifts to you, even though you don't have everything on the list that you may want. God loves giving good gifts to his children. Just like he said, do you know how to do it? He says, I know how to do it. All things belong to us. And one day, they will be given to us in great measure, unmitigated generosity.

Back to our passage if you're still there "by those who believe and know the truth." I hope that's true of you. I hope that you. "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected." Why? "Because you believe and know the truth," "receive it." But here's the thing. If it is "received with thanksgiving." Okay, that's the whole theme of this passage. I've already seen this word up in verse 3. I know this is about thanksgiving. "For it is made holy by the word of God and prayer." Okay. How do I give thanks? Well, I make it "holy by the word of God in prayer." So you get a Ferrari, you paint a Bible verse on it, you put the Bible on it, the word of God. And then there you go. It's made holy and then you can give thanks for it. If you've got no Scripture on it then you can't give thanks for it.

No, that's not what this means. What does this mean? How is it made holy? Right? Thanksgiving is I'm making it holy by the word of God and by prayer. How does that work? Okay. "Made holy," by the way. "Hagiazō." Hagiazō. Hagios means holy. Hagiazō is the verbal form "to make something holy." We usually use the word "sanctify," and that's the same Greek word. Hagiazō. Made holy. That's the word here. You'll see the word elsewhere translated "sanctify." And if I said to you what does it mean to get a gift and you've really given thanks for it if you've sanctified it by the word. I don't know what... I mean putting a Bible on it? What does it mean? Okay.

But I don't think you'd struggle if I asked you this. John 17:17. Jesus was praying for his disciples, right? And those who would believe because of their testimony, that's us too. He said, "Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth." John 17:17. "Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth." And if I said now what does that mean? To sanctify. "Set them apart in truth; your word is truth." You'd say, "Well, I know what that means." That's different than this thing that I have. Right? That's different because that thing I don't know how to sanctify that, but I know



how to sanctify a person. You lead someone to Christ. I want to see them sanctified in truth, God's word is truth. I go to God's word. I learn about what's right, what's wrong, and I say, conformed to the image of his Son, be increasingly sanctified.

So I know what sanctification is if I'm talking about a person and his behavior and his lifestyle and his priorities and his values. But what does it mean to sanctify a thing by the word? Okay. This could have been preached at the beginning of the sermon. And sometimes I do take the end of the passage and put it to the top, and then you think I'm crazy. So I didn't risk it this time. But, if perhaps you've been thinking about things you shouldn't be thinking about, when I talk about enjoying and receiving the good gifts of God and you're thinking about good things that actually aren't gifts of God, they're sinful things, right? This is going to save that. Okay? Because here is a governor to it all.

It is saying I can thank God for it if it's something that is set apart by the truth, God's truth, God's word. I could not say to Eve in Genesis 3, "Hey, that apple looks really good, doesn't it? Hey, it's good for food and it's good for making you wise." It seems like it's a win, win, win, win, win. And here's the deal. You just heard a sermon from Pastor Mike Fabarez in Aliso Viejo California and he said this: he said you ought to enjoy it, you ought to receive it, you ought to be grateful for it. So go ahead and eat it. I couldn't say that because it's not sanctified by the word. What was the word, God's word? God's word was you can't eat that.

So there's no way, even if you think it's good, which she said, "good, good, good, good, good. I want it." Right? You can't indulge in that. Why? Because it's not good. Because God said it's not good, even though it is good. There are things that are good that would feel good, that might be satisfying, that might be fun. But it can't be received with thanksgiving and enjoyed in a godly way. And you can't be grateful to God for it because it's not sanctified by the truth, not sanctified by the word. And that means it's got to be a biblical thing. There are things you can think about that you say, "Wow, this is a great sermon. I want to go indulge in those things." You can't indulge in those things, wink, wink, you know what you're thinking about. Why? Because it's not sanctified by the word. It can only be sanctified by the word and the word is a set, concrete thing. And God has told us what his word is, what his truth is. Here's what's right, here's what's wrong, here's what's godly, here's what's not. So you can't just go and just do whatever you want. Sanctified by the word. Does that help?

And then sanctified by prayer. How is it set apart by prayer? How does it fit into this category of being what is right and good and godly to be received and enjoyed and appreciated? Why? Well, when you pray. I even use this purposely as a kind of summarize the whole passage. I talked about receiving, enjoying and appreciating God's gifts. Appreciating God's gifts is not quite enough. Now I'm going to turn this into something deliberate. Do you see that first word of the third point on your worksheet? Deliberate. It's got to be deliberate. Prayer is deliberate. Prayer is moving my thought out of my head and addressing it to God. That's what prayer is. It's not enough to be thankful is what I'm telling you. You have to say thanks or give thanks. The problem with the non-Christian world is they don't honor God and they don't give thanks. You're supposed to honor God. And that can be something I think that's going on even in your value system, in your connections, in your mind. But now you have to GIVE thanks.



Number three, you have to "Deliberately Express Your Gratitude for God." And if you want to include the rest of the passage there are things that God says are good gifts. Right? They are the right things. And I hope that you can stay at least on a Sunday morning in a church building thinking about those things. The good gifts of God. He does want you to enjoy them. He wants you to have them. He wants you to appreciate them. But he also wants you to direct your thanks to him, to say thank you, to sincerely and genuinely express your thanks to God.

I know that most of our small groups are not meeting this week, but on the back of your worksheet or your digital worksheet to scroll down, you'll see I did take you to a passage that I think you would expect if you know your Bibles, First Thessalonians Chapter 5. And I love that passage because it says "this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." What is? To give thanks in all circumstances, "give thanks in all circumstances." And again, I love the verbiage of that. Give thanks. You need to be giving thanks, deliberately giving thanks. You got to identify it. You got to know where it's coming from. You got to see it's for you, which I think ups the whole value and profundity of this. And then you got to be deliberately thankful.

Jesus came and lived a life for us that was not only earning this act of obedience and righteousness that would be imputed to us and not only dying on a cross to absorb passively this sin that came upon him as he endured that so that I could be forgiven and my sin could be credited to his cross and that forgiveness credited back to me. Not only is that true, he also came to be a pattern of how to live. I'm wanting to turn to you a passage that you've heard a hundred times. If you grew up in church you've heard it a thousand times. Go to First Corinthians Chapter 11. In First Corinthians Chapter 11, I want to read a passage for you, and I want you to hold your head back, hold your brain back, and don't think about what you think it's about. Because it is about what you think it's about and it's always quoted when someone's doing the thing that they're describing. But there's a little phrase in this passage that I think is telling if I'm trying to learn how to live the Christian life.

Take a look at this. First Corinthians Chapter 11, drop down to verse 23. Paul's speaking to the Corinthians, he says, "For I've received from the Lord what I also delivered to you," and we see it in the Gospels as well, "that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks." Stop. Okay. As soon as I start reading that, if you grew up in church, it's like you start, you know, I know I'm about to taste the juice and the bread, you know, you're already in communion mode. But what did he do when he picked up this bread? The first thing he did. I just want you to think about this. I understand it's a Passover meal. It's a modified Passover meal. It's about to set up the Lord's Supper, but he takes the bread. These are hungry fishermen. These are like old teenagers or early 20-something guys. It's a piece of bread. It's not like they got into a, you know, a pizza parlor with free pizza for everyone, it's like just a piece of bread. And the first thing he does, he gives thanks.

And you know what he says next, but look at verse 25. "In the same way also he took the cup." In the same way also. What? Did he say the same thing about the cup that he said about the bread? No, but he did in the same way he took the cup, which was what? He gave thanks. I mean, how annoying would it be to go out to lunch with someone and they prayed



before the chips and then they prayed before the salad and then they prayed before the tostada gets there. It's like we prayed already, right? Jesus is praying and he's giving thanks for each part of this meal. I just want to tell you that's so powerful that Jesus was seen throughout... He was feeding 5,000. You get that. Okay. "We're feeding a bunch of people with a little lunch." Let's give thanks. But here in the Upper Room giving thanks, giving thanks, giving thanks.

We need to follow in the pattern of Christ and give thanks. And of course, we're giving thanks here for something to be so profoundly significant. Right? This cup would represent the blood of the covenant that's poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. The body of the bread broken. Right? So that God's punishment, justice could be satisfied on the cross. Huge. I get that.

But even the giving of thanks and the giving of thanks. And even in one variant reading of Corinthians, the idea of the Cup of Thanksgiving, the Greek word for thanksgiving here, and the Greek word later in the variant reading is the Greek word "Eucharisteo." Eucharisteo. You know that word because you've heard communion called the Eucharist, right? I know a lot of bad theology attached to those who call it that, but that's what the idea is. It's a thanksgiving, it's a meal of thanksgiving. It's a meal that was inaugurated with thanksgiving. It's a meal that we should give thanks for. It's a representative of reality that we should give thanks for. Nothing really should be more profoundly moving to us than the fact that "God loved us so much that he gave his Son that whoever believed him should not perish but have everlasting life."

And that's why this sermon, even if you were rolling your eyes all the way through it, you think, "Well, I got the worst life ever, right? Job's got nothing on me. This guy's preaching about stuff. I got none of that. I got none of the good gifts of God." This is the great equalizer. That's why I'm going to call the ushers down to celebrate the Lord's Supper, because if you got nothing else, if you're a Christian, you have this. You have the forgiveness of sins by the broken body of Christ and the spilt blood of Christ. And you have much to be thankful for.

So they're going to pass these out. I want this to be just for Christians. If you're not a Christian let it pass by. It doesn't matter if you're from our church or not. Just as long as you are a real, genuine Christian. Take the bread. Take the cup. Hang on to that. Joseph is going to play and his team can play a little background music. That's for you to give your mind to praying. Of course, I want it to be punctuated by thanksgiving, but the thanksgiving should be punctuating you saying, "God, I'm so grateful that I'm forgiven." And you know when we're forgiven? We're forgiven as we confess our sins to God. "He's faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So part of this is confession. Paul said it should be a time of introspection. We should search ourselves, judge ourselves in this time. So make sure that you're looking through your life. You're confessing your sins. And then I'm going to come back up in just a couple of minutes after you spend some time silently praying, and we'll take these elements at the same time.



But take those elements and be sure there are a few expressions of giving thanks to God for his forgiveness.

Talking about the Lord's Supper being a great equalizer. And that it doesn't matter how many blessings you have in your life. If you have this, this is everything. Be as though we were in a prison, all of us, and there are two destinies for prisoners in this prison. One group of prisoners is going to be released into a beautiful reality with their family and friends, and they'll enjoy food and feasting and everything will be as it ought to be. And then the other group is headed to a hard labor and drudgery and pain. And we're sitting around comparing each other's cells. Right? And you're saying, "Well, I don't know, I don't have a TV, I don't have a stereo. I just got a couple of little books. My cell is just... it's there's so much deprivation here in my cell. Look what that guy's got."

Jesus put it this way. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" I understand you may not have much to be thankful for, and I'm just assuming just for the small minority of you, because I want to catch everyone with this sermon, I want to catch you with this. It may look bleak for you. Marriage disaster, money is a mess, health is a mess. And I want you to be as joyful as everybody else in this auditorium because the reality is, whatever you got, your God is a gift of grace and God wants you to see it as a gift of grace from your redeemer. He is coming to take us out of this world into a new place, a new world. And it's going to be great.

Our soul is what matters. Are we right with our God? And that is true for every person in the room. Whether you're Job in Job Chapter 1 verse 1, or whether you're in Job Chapter 2 verse 12. I mean, you could have buried all your kids this week. You could be scraping sores with a piece of broken pottery, or you could be enjoying all the stuff you enjoyed when we met him in Chapter 1. Or maybe even through all that near at the end of the book and you got twice as much as you had in the first day. It doesn't matter. All of it needs to be a source of thanksgiving and we need to credit God with it. We want to be thankful Christians.

But the thing we come back to is where we're headed beyond the book. We're heading to something that's beyond this life. It's not about the "here and now," it's about the "then and there" and the "then and there," as Romans Chapter 8 verse 18 says, is not worth comparing to the stuff we're dealing with here. Give God thanks for every good thing you have. But start with this, because this one is more important than anything else, that you are a Christian, you've repented of your sins, you've put your trust in Christ, right? And because of the finished work of Christ, you're not hoping you're going to heaven. You know that you have your soul saved. That's the most important thing of all. If you got that, we've got a lot to be thankful for. And then don't forget to thank God for everything else. So if you're trusting in Christ this morning, I'd like you, as Christ commanded, for us to eat this and drink this in remembrance of him.

Pray with me. God, we've been obedient this morning to what you've told us to do. When we eat this bread and drink this cup we're proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes. We did that. You told us to do it in remembrance of you. We've done that. You've also told us the will



of God is for us to give thanks in all circumstances. So we'd like to do that as well. We'd like to start doing that today. Obviously this week, with all the cultural cues we want to remember real thanksgiving. We'll hear the world talking about it. We'd like to make that a more regular part of our lives, a disciplined part of our lives where we're really rejoicing and being grateful for everything you give us, enjoying them, receiving them, participating in them, and being grateful for them with expressions of thanksgiving. So make that true of us starting today in a greater way than ever before.

In Jesus name. Amen.