

End Times Thanksgiving and Encouraging (1 Thessalonians)

You've heard it said before: 'In the year 1621, the Pilgrims held their first Thanksgiving feast. They invited the great Indian chief ... who brought ninety of his brave Indians and a great abundance of food. Gov. William Bradford and Captain Miles Standish were honored guests. Elder William Brewster, who was a minister, said a prayer that went something like this: "We thank God for our homes and our food and our safety in a new land. We thank God for the opportunity to create a new world for freedom and justice." And everyone said Amen. If that sounds familiar, the theologian that comes from is named Linus van Pelt. Patricia, aka Peppermint Patty or 'sir' to Marcie, said someone should say grace, at the end she said 'Amen,' but soon she complained about the food till the guy she liked got offended, got up and left.

Sally Brown had said earlier 'why should I give thanks on Thanksgiving? What have I got to be thankful for?' Lucy had asked 'Isn't it peculiar...how some traditions just slowly fade away?' Charlie had lamented 'holidays always depress me.' But Marcie, a voice of wisdom, encourages her friend: 'Thanksgiving is more than eating, Chuck. You heard what Linus was saying out there. Those early Pilgrims were thankful for what had happened to them, and we should be thankful, too. We should just be thankful for being together. I think that's what they mean by 'Thanksgiving,' Charlie ...'

Well, that familiar fictional interchange isn't that far off reality for some. We can be spiritual blockheads at times. It may be some here have had family get-togethers that didn't go much better than that scene, maybe a loved one got offended and left, or maybe there's a chronic complainer around your Thanksgiving table. Maybe you're dreading Thursday because of a difficult family situation. There are some who are depressed during holidays, probably some in this room who need to be encouraged this week and next month in particular. There are some coming to church who seem to never smile. There are some who don't see much to be thankful for. Maybe some today come with chips on shoulders. Let's not be spiritual blockheads. If we have a place to live, food, freedom to worship and church, thank God! Not because of a historical holiday, but because of the Holy Word of a God who has our good in mind. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied and most thankful in Him. So please turn to 1 Thessalonians and I want us to see how thanksgiving is related to encouraging and Jesus coming

Last year the Sunday before Thanksgiving I did a special message from the Word of God on thanks-living, or living in thankfulness to God. Our normal pattern is to teach books chapter by chapter and let the next passage we're in determine what we're studying so we don't just cover the preacher's favorite subjects. But in the providence of God on this Sunday before Thanksgiving, the subject of the Day of the Lord and His 2nd coming that we ended with last week is very connected to thanksgiving and encouraging each other. It's God's agenda for us to give thanks, not just this week on Thursday for a few moments and then pig out, every day. I can't hear too much about gratitude and so I want to camp one more week on this before moving on to Rev 7, as my sense is we all need encouraging and thanksgiving in light of his coming

In last week's message we looked at what Jesus taught about what the world would be like from the time of the disciples to the time of His 2nd coming, and the parallels with Rev 6 that ends with the same last *day of the Lord*, if I understand it rightly.

One of the applications I ended with I want to begin with and continue, is how it should affect believers to encourage each other, to give thanks instead of giving complaints, to be joyful instead of fearful. Isaiah talked about the heavenly bodies coming to an end and falling as figs from a tree, and the sky rolling up like a scroll (just as Rev 6 describes), the prophet then calls on a renewed world to renewed thanksgiving (Isa 34:4-35:2). Listen again to Isaiah: *Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance ... **But He will save you.**" ... And the ransomed of the LORD will return And come with joyful shouting ... With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy...*" (Isa 35:3-4, 10 NASB)

When He comes our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring
Then anew this song we'll sing, Hallelujah! What a Savior!¹

1 Thessalonians has more to say about the Lord's return than any NT book besides Revelation, and much of the book applies where we left off in Rev 6 last week and what that parallel in Isaiah says. Let's start in 1 Thess 1 and as I read, notice the emphasis on *thanksgiving*, God *saving* us in the future day of the Lord in wrath, and how in the present we're to be *encouraging* others. 1 Thess 1:2: *We give thanks to God always for all of you ...* chapter 1 starts with thanksgiving for past and present gospel blessings, notice how it ends in v. 10 in future hope as it says we: *'wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.'*

Paul begins with thanksgiving and right out the gate he's encouraging them the One they're waiting to come from heaven saves us from wrath to come. Rev 6 ended last week with unbelievers seeing the heavens come down and collapse, and they say *'the day of...wrath has come'* and they ask who can be saved? Rev 6 doesn't give the answer, but this text does. Those who by faith in Jesus are looking to Him and His return will be saved from the wrath to come. Those who received the gospel in v. 5 *in power and in the Holy Spirit* and have repented as it says in v. 9 at the end, turning from sin and all of its idolatries and turning to serve the living God, they are saved from His wrath

If the gospel has never come to you in power so that by the Holy Spirit, you repented of your sin, false idols and false ideas, so you now serve the living true God, if that hasn't taken place in your life, you can't take promises like v. 10 in your life. You still need to be saved from the wrath to come, and it's only Jesus who can do that, by taking God's wrath on the cross that you and I deserve, dying for us, and v. 10 adds *'raised from the dead, Jesus...delivers us from the wrath to come.'* If you know that took place in your life because you're trusting in His life, death, resurrection, and coming for you, and He's transformed you life so you now serve Him, thank God Jesus has saved you.

Our family sometimes sings around our dinner table in family worship: 'Thank You Lord, for saving my soul, thank you Lord for making me whole, thank You Lord, for giving to me, Thy great salvation so rich and free.' We need to not only thank God for food before we eat around a table, we should thank God that we who were once His enemies get to be seated at His table! We get the Lord's Table now and a greater wedding feast in Rev 19. Every day we wake up in a place other than hell should cause thanksgiving. The fact that we are still in this world and that He's given us so much more than so many in this world, as added bonus blessings ... give thanks!

How can we “be thankful in all circumstances” like paying taxes, big bills, cleaning up a mess, having a lot of work to do around the house, etc.? Someone has written examples to help us:

I'm thankful for:

- the taxes that I pay, Because it means that I am employed.

- the mess to clean after a party,

because it means that I have been surrounded by friends.

For the clothes that fit a little too snug [that] means I have enough to eat.

For a lawn that needs mowing, Windows that need cleaning,

Gutters that need fixing, Because it means I have a home.

For all the complaining I hear about the Government,

Because it means we have freedom of speech.

For the parking spot I find at the far end of the lot,

Because it means ... I have been blessed with transportation.

For my huge heating bill, Because it means I am warm.

For the lady behind me in church that sings off-key,

Because it means that I can hear.

For the pile of laundry and ironing, Because it means I have clothes to wear.

For weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day,

Because it means I have been capable of working hard.

For the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours,

Because it means that I am alive.¹²

And more than all those physical blessings, study what moves Paul to thank God in the beginning of his letters. Paul's pattern was thanksgiving when he thinks of Christians for gospel benefits and evidences of grace in their lives. He doesn't just start there, he ends this way commanding thanksgiving in all things, the physical and spiritual, and in all circumstances, chapter 5, v. 18.

Spurgeon quoted a Puritan 'the very chickens shame us if we are ungrateful, for they do not take a drink of water without lifting up their heads, as if in thankfulness for the refreshing draught. If we, who are the Lord's children, do not bless him for the mercies which so constantly come to us from him, we are of all people the most ungrateful. Oh, for a grateful frame of mind, for I am sure that is a happy frame of mind. Those who are determined to murmur, and to complain of God's dealings with them, are sure to find plenty of things to complain of; while those who are of a thankful spirit will see reasons and occasions for gratitude in everything that happens.'¹³

Bless the Lord O my soul, forget none of His benefits, He forgives your sin... (Psalm 103)

The #1 reason: 'Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus thank You,

The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus thank You,

Once your enemy, now seated at Your table, Jesus thank You.'¹⁴

#1 thanksgiving reason is Jesus saves and delivers from coming wrath

A #1 reason for thanksgiving: Jesus saves and delivers from coming wrath...

if you're taking notes, #2 reason: Jesus gives us a family of faith for our joy at His coming. #2

He gives us a family of faith for our joy at His coming.

1 Thess 2:19 *For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?* ²⁰ *For you are our glory and joy.*

Again, this is connected to the end times. Our hope is in Christ's coming, it says in chapter 1, but here in chapter 2 Paul says his joy is also 'in you,' it's in you the church he's writing to. His joy is in the family of faith, Paul says. Paul is looking forward to seeing Jesus most of all, but he also can't wait to see the family of Jesus, whether here or there or in the air. 'When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!' I don't know what it's like in your family for Thanksgiving around the dining room, but I do know there's a family of faith around this room that Jesus gives His brethren for their joy. Note the bulletin insert also for those with physical family of faith during week

Family Worship Aid [lyrics we sang today, extra copies at back table]

To prepare for or continue worship (Col 3:16)

Now Thank We All Our God

Suggested reading: Psalm 100 'A Psalm for Thanksgiving. Make a joyful noise...enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise, give thanks to him, bless his name'

Jesus Thank You

Suggested reading: Rom 5:6-11, Jer 25:15, Jn 18:11

In Jer 25:15 God the Father says "Take this cup of...wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it." We deserve that cup but in John 18:11 Jesus chose to drink that cup of the Father instead of us. So Rom 5:9 says those who trust Christ alone "shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." And it says we rejoice that He's reconciled us. That should make us want to sing! Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath, what I deserve, and gives grace I don't deserve! He prepares a table for me, once His enemy, now seated at His table, my head anointed, my cup runs over in goodness and mercy. So why not sing 'Jesus thank You' at a table with saved family

A simple song to remember and sing is: The Steadfast Love of the Lord

Lamentations 3:22-24 ESV "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning Great is Your faithfulness, O God"

For more copies of song sheets see back counter/table/website sermon page. If you don't normally sing and worship as a family at home, this is a perfect time to start, not just on Thursday, if you wanted to read a Scripture or sing a song before or after a meal. There's 6 songs and Scriptures, one for every day of the week, you could read a passage and maybe just reflect on it a bit, sing a song together, and maybe pray as a family for those in church family. On Fridays we email upcoming songs if you want to prepare for worship. If you don't have a Christian family to do devotions with, or reading schedule for personal devotions, use this, sing or make a joyful humming noise. It's good to worship in private, but we should long to with our church family. We have much to give thanks for at home and the house of God, the church.

Look at chapter 3, v. 9: *For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God,* ¹⁰ *as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?*

¹¹ *Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, **direct our way to you,*** ¹² *and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you ...*

Paul's thanksgiving for his family of faith in the Thessalonian church over-flows here. It's like a cornucopia of joyful thanks. His cup runneth over, it overflows, because not only did Jesus drink the cup of the Father's wrath for us on the cross so we don't ever have to drink it, but we who were once His enemies are now seated at His table with His family of faith for our joy! So Jesus, thank you! And this thanksgiving is also connected to Jesus coming in v. 13: *so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, **at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.***

'When we all see Jesus we'll sing and shout the victory'-that should start here. It's to establish our hearts here, to effect how we live rightly before God now as we find joy in our family of faith in the church and long to be with them all. That's one of the ways Paul applied the end times when Jesus comes, he was thankful joyful in his family of faith and hopeful for its glorious big reunion

And Paul wanted his family of faith to move beyond giving thanks to loving the saints, living out that appreciation, as he says in v. 12 says: *'and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...'*

I'm very thankful to be a part of a church that's a most loving family of faith. I can say with Paul truly *'you are my joy.'* I want to give thanks publically for you all who I love and who are so loving to our family and to this family of faith, and I also want to say with v. 12: *'may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you ...'*

In chapter 4, v. 1, the end of the verses says *'... just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.'* I would echo v. 9 of chapter 4: *Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,* ¹⁰ *for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more* [or 'increase/excel still more']

And what does Paul talk about then in v. 13-18? The coming of the Lord is the subject in v. 15 and it's part of his application of love for family in v. 18. It's good to be thankful and joyful for our family of faith, but let that move us to express it in love as we can never be too full of love. Excel still more. Which leads to reason #3 for thanks: Jesus blesses us with faithful laborers

A 3rd reason for giving thanks is that Jesus blesses us with faithful laborers. This is still in the context of the family of faith, a local church in its servant-leaders who labor among you. 5:12 KJV *'know them that labor among you.'* And that's a start, get to know them. The word means more than intellectual knowing, but start getting to know people by staying after church, talking with people, fellowship with coffee before SS 8:30ish. Or bring a lunch on the first Sunday of the month, stay after with those staying for fellowship lunchtime. You can't obey a command to know if you just show up and go. Church is a start, but to get to know further you need to get together with or invite over, and that's another way to obey this command to know laborers among you. Think of someone involved here you can obey this with today.

The word 'know' in old English and in biblical languages often includes the idea of love, even intimacy. The NKJV 'recognize' doesn't mean when you see them at the store you recognize they look familiar. Our photo directory is coming out soon to help with names and faces (we can give thanks for a help in that regard). The ESV/NIV have 'respect,' and maybe the NASB has the best wording: '*appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.*' This is a call to love and highly esteem, recognize their labor of love, respect their position, and express your appreciation for those you know labor among you faithfully. Do you make any effort to know the servant-leaders, laborers, and teachers of your children or our church and do you ever show appreciation to them? Is there someone here you can express your thanksgiving to this very day? How can you show someone esteem and love today, or this week?

One way to recognize, as it says '*those who are over you in the Lord,*' is to respect the role of shepherds to lead and feed and give oversight, to request them to be 'over you in the Lord' as your overseers or elders. It assumes in v. 12 that you've put yourself *under them* so they can be *over you* and *have charge over you*, and joining a church is a most basic way to express that principle: you coming under its charge and care and admonishment. Church isn't something you join like a club, membership here is more a committing and submitting to leaders laboring among you you're asking to be over you.

I don't assume every visitor or attendee wants that, and it's hard to shepherd those who don't see or seek elders as leaders '*over you*' (just guys up in front of you). But if you want oversight, come join us. Let us know by asking for it. If you're not sure yet, get to know those laboring among you till you find a church with leaders you want over you, but also be a laborer among them. And wherever you are in your walk, appreciate faithful laborers of a church.

I don't need man's praise, but there are many who faithfully labor among us who we can be giving thanks for and giving encouragement to. Maybe a SS teacher or someone who labors with kids or labors more behind the scenes or just someone who you appreciate. Tell them, write a card, send an email. Be thankful for those who admonish you and faithful to admonish in return.

¹⁴ *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle [or 'unruly'], encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* ¹⁵ *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.* ¹⁶ *Rejoice always,* ¹⁷ *pray without ceasing,* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Young people sometimes wonder 'what is God's will for my life?' Here it is! Thanksgiving, rejoicing always in all circumstances, helping, encouraging, till He comes. ²³ *may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ²⁴ *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.* ²⁵ *Brothers, pray for us.* ²⁶ *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.*

Some cultures greet friends with a kiss on a cheek, our culture might apply a holy hug (or handshake at least to start)? Don't go smooching visitors after - it may send a different message than Paul intended in NT culture. For some young people, hugs might be best just guys-with-guys or girls-with-girls for it to keep holy.

For guys not comfortable even with other guys, maybe start small with the holy handshake, then maybe one day you can graduate up to side hugs for those you appreciate laboring among you, or you can combine that handshake semi-hug man-to-man thing. I don't need a pat on my back after the sermon or a peck on my cheek, but I do need your prayers, brother or sister, pray for us, Paul says, and show family love to brethren or sistren. However you show affection or appreciation, love is a command and so is greeting people at church before or after.

These reasons for thanksgiving are all in the context of Christ's 2nd coming:

#1 reason: Jesus saves and delivers from His coming wrath

#2: Jesus gives us a family of faith for our joy at His coming

#3: Jesus blesses us with faithful laborers till His coming

4thly and finally: **Jesus will gather His saints to Himself at His coming**

4:15 *For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until **the coming of the Lord**, will not precede those who have fallen asleep [i.e., the dead, end of v. 16]. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first [they're the 1st resurrection, bodies joining spirits] ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up [in Latin, root for 'raptured'] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

The verb 'rapture' is a biblical word, it just means to be 'caught up,' but it's in the Bible in the same sense that the 'beatitudes' are in the Bible (though 'beatitude' is also from the Latin language, you won't find it in an English concordance, 'beatitude' is just a word for 'blessed'). If you say you don't believe there is a rapture, which means *caught up*, risen and living saints in the air, you have to deny 1 Thess 4:17 and deny the encouragement of v. 18

This word in v. 17 that we get the Latin 'rapture' from, or 'caught up' in the English, Paul used in another text for a man he knew '*caught up to the third heaven...caught up to Paradise*' (2 Cor 12:2-3, whether a bodily rapture or an out-of-body experience, Paul wasn't sure, but apparently he was 'caught up' from the earth to heaven). In Acts 8:39 Philip is baptizing an Ethiopian and listen to this: '*when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **suddenly took Philip away**, and the eunuch did not see him again ...Philip, however, appeared at Azotus*' (same word *raptured*, a sudden taking, NIV) Other versions 'carried away,' 'caught away,' 'snatched away,' no longer to be seen there, but his body and soul appears in Azotus, over 20 miles away.

It was said of Elijah in the OT '*the Spirit of the Lord has caught him up...*' (2 Kings 2:16), he was taken up bodily from earth to heaven without dying. Here Paul says in v. 17 all Christians alive at Christ's coming will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air but first dead Christians will be raised bodily. This is the only passage that uses this Latin verb we get 'rapture' from in an end times context, but there should be no question that there will be this 'rapture' of v. 17, the only question is its timing, where it fits in Revelation. Revelation never uses the word for rapture but it does use the word for dead rising at the time of the end of Revelation (19-20) called *the first resurrection* (20:4)

So, many Christians believe this time when the dead rise and the rest will be caught up to escape final judgment is at the very end, but others say Rev 20 isn't literally '*the first resurrection*,' the first one was before Rev 6, they would say before the tribulation, there must be another pre-tribulation resurrection/rapture that Revelation doesn't explicitly mention. It might be pointed out by them that 1 Thess 5:9 says in context of end times '*God has not destined us for wrath...*' so it's argued the wrath of God that comes on the world in Rev 6 and following would require the church to be caught up before Rev 6 to avoid God's wrath. Others disagree on the conclusion and agree wrath is not for any believers at any time, whether saved before or after the final tribulation, but they might say God saves His people *from wrath through tribulation* (like Rev 7)

The word for *tribulation* in Rev 7 and Matt 24 is actually used in 1 Thess 3 as something Christians are destined to. 1 Thess 3:4 NKJV '*in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation...*' (end of v. 3 says we're appointed to this, same word as *tribulation* in Rev 7). Tribulation is destined for Christians, but God's wrath is not our destiny.

Last Sunday night I talked about different views of Rev 6-18, theologians of the past and present who interpret those chapters as past, present, or future. I went 10 minutes too long on that part and with too many technical terms. I recall some eyes glaze over and one dear lady looked like she was in pain. So I don't want to do that again on Sunday morning, but you can go to our sermon audio page and find 2 SS classes in June on the premillennial views and study the Scriptures for yourself for clarity with charity to others. Christians may disagree on the timing of the 'raptured/caught up' event in v. 17, and probably always will disagree on where it fits in Revelation until we come together in the air, but it'll be ok to change your view in mid-air :) Till then let's not get too caught up arguing about when we'll be *caught up*! I don't think Christians should be too divided about when we'll be united with Christ.

MSB: 'The time of the Rapture cannot be conclusively determined from this passage alone ... [note on v. 18] The primary purpose of this passage is not to teach a scheme of prophecy, but rather to provide encouragement to those Christians whose loved ones have died. The comfort here is based on the following: 1) the dead will be resurrected and will participate in the Lord's coming for His own; 2) when Christ comes the living will be reunited forever with their loved ones; and 3) they all will be with the Lord eternally'

The point is encouraging in v. 18 leading to thanksgiving in chapter 5, v. 18

1st encouragement: All in Christ know death is not the end (4:13-15)

#2 encouragement: All in Christ will be caught up to Him at the end (16-18)

3rd encouragement: All in Christ won't face His wrath of the end (5:1-11)

This is what helps us rejoice always in v. 16 and give thanks always in v. 18

If you're in Christ, as you read through Revelation about the end time wrath of God being poured out, be saying and singing 'Jesus thank You' that 'the Father's wrath [was] completely satisfied' on Jesus on the cross as He hung between earth and heaven, to save us from that wrath on earth or in hell. We who understand these truths should be the most thanksgiving people around, and the most encouraging people to be around! When Paul talks about Jesus coming for His saints he says in 4:18 *Therefore encourage one another with these words*. And in 5:11 right after he says we're not appointed to wrath in the day of the Lord, he says *Therefore encourage one another ...*

Hebrews 10:25 says ‘*let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching*’ (and then it goes on to describe a day of wrath). It is so critical as the day approaches that we’re encouraging and thanksgiving.

#1 reason: Jesus saves and delivers from His coming wrath

#2: Jesus gives us a family of faith for our joy at His coming

#3: Jesus blesses us with faithful laborers till His coming

#4: Jesus will gather His saints to Himself at His coming

The language of gathering His people at the end of the age in Matt 13 ties in with harvest imagery many of our homes are decorated with (read it later).

Come ye thankful people come, Raise the song of harvest home
 All is safely gathered in, Ere the winter storms begin ...
 Gather Thou Thy people in, Free from sorrow free from sin ...
 For the Lord our God shall come, And shall take His harvest home ...
 Even so Lord quickly come, To Thy final harvest home⁵

¹ Philip Bliss, “Hallelujah, What a Savior!”

² Roy Zuck, *The Speaker’s Quote Book* (Kregel, 2009), p. 500.

³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Fifteen Years After,” *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 69.

⁴ “Jesus Thank You,” Sovereign Grace Music.

⁵ Alford, “Come Ye Thankful People.”