

Reasons To Be Thankful

Colossians 1:12-14

Pastor John Miller

I'm going to read the text. I want you to follow with me, beginning in verse 12.

Paul says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet..."—or "fit"—"...to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated..."—or "transferred"—"...us into the kingdom of His dear Son, in Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

I wonder what it is that you are thankful for today. Maybe you'd say, "I am thankful for my husband. I am thankful for my wife." That's a great thing to be thankful for; the Bible says, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." Maybe you're thankful for your children. I'm thankful for all my children. I'm thankful for my grandchildren. Maybe you're thankful for your job. Maybe you're thankful for your health. There are so many things to be thankful for, and I believe that, as Christians, we should count our blessings and name them one by one, to quote a familiar song. Count your many blessings and see what God has done. So often we're counting our bummers, and we're counting what God hasn't done, instead of really being thankful.

Our passage today comes from the heart of Paul, who had an attitude of gratitude; he had a thankful heart. Paul is praying in this text for the believers of Colosse, and he wants two things: verse 9, he wants them to "be filled with the knowledge of God's will; and secondly in verse 10, he wanted them to "walk worthy of the Lord." The worthy walk is a pleasing walk, a fruitful walk, a growing walk. And in verse 11, it is a powerful walk. He said in verse 11 that they might be "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

You might say that when we come to verse 12, we actually have the fifth characteristic of the pleasing walk or the worthy walk, and that is a thankful walk. Look at verse 12 where Paul says, "giving thanks unto the Father." Why does Paul include thanksgiving as part of the worthy walk in this prayer for the believers in Colosse?

I believe Paul realized that thanksgiving was the hallmark characteristic of the Spirit-filled life. If you are a Spirit-filled Christian, you are a thankful Christian. One of the evident signs that you are not walking in the Spirit, that you're not filled with the Holy Spirit, is that you lose your joy and you no longer have a thankful heart. A thankful heart is evidence of the Spirit-filled life.

That is one of the themes throughout the book of Colossians. Look at chapter 2, verses 6-7. Paul says, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him; rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." We find all the way through the book of Colossians that the hallmark of the Christian life is that we are thankful.

Notice in our text today that Paul is not praying for spiritual blessings; he is actually praying that they would be thankful for the blessings they already have. They are blessed and they have blessings in Christ, and they need to recognize and be thankful for their blessings. This is very important.

He's praying for the Colossians, but when he gets to verse 12, his prayer takes a different shift. He's not petitioning God; he's praising God. What he is asking God to do is to help the Colossian believers—and you and I—to be thankful for these spiritual blessings of salvation. It's the idea of knowing what you have in Christ and being thankful for those blessings.

Prayer includes petition—we ask of God—and prayer includes praise—we thank God. Praise is worshipping God for who He is; thanksgiving is thanking God for what He has given to us and what He has done for us. Do you wake up every morning and thank God for salvation? Do you thank God for your health and your life and your marriage and your children and the blessings that God has given to you? We're to be thankful in verse 12, as Paul instructs us, "giving thanks unto the Father."

There are three blessings, in verses 12, 13 and 14, that every Christian should be thankful for. One blessing for each verse. The first blessing we should be thankful for is in verse 12: the Father has qualified us or made us fit for heaven. We're to give "thanks unto God the Father." Why? Because He "has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Notice to whom our thanksgiving is directed; to God the Father. We are the children of God, and we're thanking our Father, Who is in heaven. The Bible says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above." James says it comes down "from the Father of lights, in Whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning." Theologians call this the "immutability of God"; God doesn't change. All these good and perfect and blessed gifts come down to us from God the Father, so we're directing our praise to Him.

What does it mean in verse 12 when it says he has "made us meet" in the King James translation? A better rendering would be "made us fit," but the best rendering would be "qualified us." So if I were doing a translation, it would say, "Thanks be unto God the Father, Who has qualified us."

What does Paul mean by "qualified us"? He's not talking about our character or our practice, which is the believer's sanctification; he's talking about our privilege or our position or our right, which is the believer's justification.

Let me explain. He's not saying that God gives you character fit for heaven. Rather, He gives you a position or standing fit to go to heaven. Your position is the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. The only thing that fits you to go to heaven is Christ's righteousness given to you. It's not your own goodness. It's not your own merit. So what qualified us is God doing the work of making us fit to go to heaven. It means that the moment you were saved or born again, you were fit or qualified to go to heaven. I don't know about you, but I like that.

Before I was saved, I didn't like to be around Christians. They creeped me out. Before I was saved, I didn't like to go to church. "Who likes to go to church and listen to those creepy Christians singing? Smiling, clapping." You feel just like slapping them, or something like that. "Come on—you're really that happy?! You really have that much joy?" I didn't want to hear a Bible message about my sin and my need to repent and get right with God. I didn't like to go to church; I was uncomfortable.

And the same would be true if an unbeliever, a non-Christian, could go to heaven; they wouldn't like it, because God's there. They wouldn't like it. And Christians will be there, and they don't like Christians. So if you don't like to go to church, you're not going to want to be in heaven; right? It's not some place you want to spend eternity. If church is torture, can you imagine eternity in heaven? You'll be up there and say, "When does it get over?" So God has to change our hearts; He has to give us a new nature. He has to make us fit or qualified to be able to share it with the saints in light.

The point is that the very moment you are converted or born again or regenerated or saved, you are fit. You don't have to grow to be fit. You don't have to fast to be fit. Or pray to be fit. You are immediately fit or qualified to go to heaven.

One of the best illustrations of this is the thief on the cross. Remember when Jesus was hanging on the Cross and paying for our sins? Finally, one of the thieves became repentant and turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when You enter into Your kingdom."

What did Jesus say back to that thief? He didn't say, "No, you can't go to My kingdom; you're not fit. You haven't been baptized. You haven't gone to church. You need a haircut. You're a criminal; you're dying because you're a wicked man. You're not ready; you're not fit to go to heaven." What did Jesus say? He said, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Isn't that amazing? The thief went from death to life; he went from hell to heaven. In a moment, by turning to Jesus Christ by faith and saying, "Lord, remember me when You enter into Your kingdom," Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in paradise."

Anyone who repents of their sins and believes in Jesus Christ—that very moment—they are fully fit or qualified to inherit heaven and become the "saints in light." That's what Paul means here, in verse 12, when he says "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." We become inheritors of light. So we're going to see that we're translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Write the word "light" next to verse 12.

Jesus said in John 14, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; for where I am there you may be also." "In My Father's house..."—a reference to heaven—"...are many mansions"—or "abiding places."—"... I'm going to come and take you to heaven." So the moment you were born again, you were fit and ready for heaven.

In the Old Testament, Israel inherited the Promised Land, and it was all the work of God. They

were slaves in Egypt. Through the death of the Passover Lamb, God brought them out of Egypt with a strong arm. God parted the Red Sea. God destroyed the Egyptian army. God prepared the way. They entered into the land. They drank of wells they didn't dig. They lived in houses they didn't build. They had vineyards they didn't plant. They were in a land "flowing with milk and honey." God did it all for them. It was kind of a picture of what it is to be a Christian; to come to know Christ and enter into the kingdom of God, and that one day you will inherit eternal life in heaven with God.

Salvation is for us today. It starts the moment you are saved. And the Holy Spirit is the down-payment foretaste of what is to come; it's a little taste of the heaven you're going to inherit. One day when we die or the Lord comes again, we'll be eternally in heaven. R. Kent Hughes said it like this: "One day we will pass beyond the stars. When they have burned themselves out, we will shine even brighter." I love that.

Then what am I to be thankful for? God has qualified me. And in Greek grammar there, the structure indicates that it is God Who does the work; I can't qualify myself. God does it for me.

Here's the second thing we are thankful for, in verse 13: that the Father and the Son have delivered us and transferred us. The first reason to be thankful is the blessing that the Father has qualified us. The second blessing is that the Father and the Son have delivered us and transferred us. Paul says, in verse 13, "Who hath..." Now this "Who hath," in verse 13, is a reference to God the Father, in verse 12. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us..."—or "transferred us"—"...into the kingdom of His dear Son"—that's Jesus Christ.

The form of the verb "delivered" or "transferred" that Paul uses are only used in the New Testament for the work of God, indicating that we are helpless, and only God can deliver us. So number one, only God can qualify us; and number two, only God, through the work of His Son Jesus Christ, can deliver us.

You know what man's greatest problem is? Man's greatest problem is sin. It's interesting because we hear so little about it today. What happened to sin? What happened to man being a sinner in need of a savior? If there's no sin, there's no need of a savior. If there's no need of a savior, there's no need of Jesus Christ. But the Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory..."—or "standard"—"...of God." The Bible says, "There is no one righteous; no, not one." The Bible says, "We have all gone astray. We have all turned to our own way."

Man's greatest problem is sin. It's a problem that no scientist, no philosopher, no psychiatrist, no politician, no physician can solve. No one can solve it. The only one who can forgive our sin is God. The Bible says that; it says, "Who can forgive sins except God alone?" You can't work to be forgiven. You can't earn forgiveness. You can't merit forgiveness. You can't try to reform your life to be forgiven by God. Only God can forgive your sins. And the basis by which God does that is that Jesus paid for your sins on the Cross. When you believe in Jesus, He appropriates His righteousness to you and your sin to Him, paid for at the Cross when He died.

So only God can deliver us from sin and from Satan and from the kingdom of darkness.

Notice it in verse 13: He has “delivered us from the power of darkness.” Remember when you lived in darkness before your conversion? You lived in hate and envy and jealousy and pride and lust and greed; you basically lived in darkness. That’s what God comes to deliver us from. I believe that salvation is God’s “rescue mission”; that God actually came from heaven to rescue us. I love that concept: I was drowning in my sin and was on my way to hell, and God actually came and rescued me. It’s the rescue mission of Jesus Christ. He said, “I have come to seek and to save that which was lost.” He rescues us from sin’s power. He rescues us from sin’s penalty. He rescues us from sin’s guilt and shame.

If we had a testimony service in which we all stood up and talked about what great sinners we were before we were saved, some of you would probably run for your life. If you knew who you were sitting right next to now and the sinful life they were involved in, you’d scoot over in the pew just a little bit. “I don’t know if I’m safe.”

But now you’re washed and now you’re cleansed, and we’ll see in the next verse that you’re forgiven. What a blessing to be thankful for. So we’re thankful, number one, that God the Father has qualified us and made us fit for heaven; thankful, number two, that He delivered us or rescued us.

This is the negative side, but notice, in verse 13, that not only does God deliver us from Satan’s kingdom of darkness, but God also “translates us...”—or “transfers” us—“...into the kingdom of His dear Son.” Literally that would read “the Son of His love.” I like that. He’s taken us out of the kingdom of darkness, Satan’s kingdom, and He’s transferred us and brought us into a new kingdom, the kingdom of the Son of His love. That’s how it would read in the Greek; the Son of His love.

Remember when Jesus was baptized and He came out of the water and the Father spoke from heaven? What did He say? “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased, in Whom My soul delights.” So the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, the Father and the Son love the saints, the saints love the Father and the Son and the saints love each other. It’s a kingdom of love. I love going around in God’s kingdom. You go from a kingdom of hate and darkness and bondage to the kingdom of light and the kingdom of love. Next to verse 13 write the word “love”; the kingdom of the Son of His love. So what do we have? We’ve been qualified to inherit light, and we’ve been translated from the kingdom of darkness or hate to a kingdom of light and the love of His Son.

What does it mean to be “transferred”? The King James Bible has “translated,” but a better translation would actually be the word “transferred.” It was used to describe the deportation of a population from one country to another. We hear about deporting in our country today. We hear a lot about deporting people who don’t belong here and deportation of others. God has actually deported you; the moment you were saved, He pulled you. It speaks of a work of God of taking you out of Satan’s kingdom and He transferred or deported you into His kingdom of

light and love. It occurs at the moment of your conversion. The moment all Christians are saved, they are taken out of darkness and placed in the light.

And it's not progressive, by the way; you don't get more into the kingdom the longer you're a Christian. The moment you are saved, you are fit for heaven and living in the kingdom. You're a king's kid. You need to remind yourself of that so you can be thankful for that. It's not your progressive sanctification; it's your positional righteousness in Christ. You're taken out of death and placed into life. You're taken out of sin and placed into the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You're taken out of the kingdom of hate and anger and death and dying, and you're placed into a kingdom of love and light where there is the hope of heaven. It happens to all Christians the moment they are saved. So we, as children of God, live in the kingdom of light and love, and it happens the moment we are converted and is equally true of all Christians.

Now there is a sense in the future when we're actually going to go to heaven. We're not in heaven yet; have you noticed that? It was so hot yesterday, I was beginning to wonder where I was. But now heaven comes to you; you're living in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not "eating and drinking but righteousness and joy in the Holy Spirit." So there is a future sense, but we also experience it right now.

Here's a thought I want to leave you with before I move on, and this is my third point, a point of application. Every morning when you wake up, I want you to try this. I tried it this week, and though I had a difficult, trying, hard week, it helped me. Every morning before I got out of bed and my feet hit the floor, I opened my eyes, saw the light coming through the bedroom window and told myself, "I am a child of God, and I live in God's kingdom. Today is kingdom living; 'joy, righteousness and peace in the Holy Spirit.'" Every day when you wake up, try that; say, "I'm a king's kid and I'm living in the kingdom of God. And the kingdom of God is not 'eating and drinking' but 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.'"

Now here's the third blessing to be thankful for, verse 14: the Son has redeemed us. The Father has qualified us, verse 12; the Father and Son have transferred or delivered us; and verse 14, "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." So you might say that in verse 13, we are captives, who have been delivered; now in verse 14, we are slaves that have been ransomed and set free by the paying of a price.

I want to give you five facts about redemption, all taken from this passage, verse 14. Fact number one: Redemption is in Christ. It's the little phrase "in Whom." When you get to verse 14, the "in Whom" is a reference to not the Father, but the Son. It's a reference to Jesus Christ, "the Son of His love," "in Whom we have redemption." What does that mean? It means that there is no salvation, no redemption, outside of Jesus Christ. Buddha is not the redeemer. Confucius is not a redeemer. Mohammed is not a redeemer. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not redeemers. Jesus Christ is the Redeemer; He is the Savior of the world.

The angel said, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior." Aren't you glad he didn't say "a politician"? Can you imagine if the angel said, "Unto you is born this day in the city

of David a Republican. There is hope." Forget it. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord."

God sent Jesus on a rescue mission. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." Salvation and redemption, verse 14, is in Christ alone. "Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him." Jesus is our Redeemer.

Then, secondly, notice in verse 14, it's certainty that we have. "In Whom"—it's in Christ; it's certain—"we have." It speaks of the fact that we don't hope to have, we maybe have, if we're lucky we'll have, if we're good people we'll have. In Christ we actually possess redemption. The moment you are saved, you are redeemed.

I love John 3:16 as a great text not only for the Gospel but for assurance. It says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life." "Shall not perish..."—that's pretty clear—"...but have everlasting life." So the moment you are saved, you have everlasting life. You will not perish. You are qualified for heaven. You've been taken out of the kingdom of Satan and have been translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love. You have been redeemed.

What is the meaning of "redemption," thirdly, in verse 14? It means "to purchase and set free by paying a price." It means to buy or purchase and then to set free. Why? Because in the Greco-Roman world of New Testament times, slaves were so common. In the Roman world, about one-in-four people were slaves. There were more slaves than free people. You know how you got a slave? You went to the slave market. The actually had slave markets. You would go to buy a slave, a living tool. You'd buy a slave, and that slave became your property. You had the power of life and death over that slave.

You say, "That's not right." I'm not saying that's right. The Bible nowhere says that slavery is right. It just states the fact of what was happening in the culture. It is Christian influence that has emancipated slavery, from the clear teaching that all men are created equal in the eyes of God. It was Christians who were at the forefront of the emancipation movement. The Bible doesn't condone slavery; it just states the fact.

But in those days you could buy a slave. And a slave could buy his own freedom. If they could save up some money, they could actually buy their own freedom. They could be emancipated or free. Or a master, who maybe loved the slave—which would happen quite often—would actually give the slave their freedom. That's redemption: "I bought you; you're mine. I give you your freedom." And then if a slave says to his master, "I love you, too, and I'm so thankful that you set me free. And because you set me free, I want to willingly, voluntarily work for you. I want to be your slave voluntarily. I want to stay here and I want to serve you." He then became what's called a "doulos," which means "bond slave." The master would put an earring in your ear, which was an indication that you were a doulos and a bond slave for life. But you were a bond slave because you chose to be one.

The Bible tells us that we are His *doulos*, His bond slaves. God, in the person of Jesus, came into this world. We were slaves to sin, so Jesus died on the Cross to purchase us and buy us out of the slave market of sin and then to set us free. Then we said, "I love You. I want to serve You," and we become His *doulos* or bond slave. Being His slave means that we are free. That is the picture; that Jesus Christ is our redeemer. He bought us, took us out of the slave market of sin and set us free.

And fourthly, the means by which He did that is "through His blood," verse 14. You might say, "Well, John, my Bible does not have that phrase in verse 14." Don't freak out. In most of the oldest Greek manuscripts, it is omitted from Colossians 1:14, but it is Biblical; it is Scriptural. It is included in parallel passages. It's included in the King James Bible, and it's in the New King James Bible. And there is a discrepancy as to whether it belongs here, but we know for sure that it is clearly taught in other places of the Bible. In Ephesians 1:7 it says, "In Whom..."—referring to Jesus—"...we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." So how were our sins forgiven? Through the blood of Jesus Christ. Then look at Colossians 1:20. "...having made peace through the blood of His Cross..." There it is.

So what was the redemptive price? The blood of Jesus Christ. The price of our redemption was the blood or the death of Jesus Christ. When the Bible speaks of the blood of Jesus Christ, it means His whole, redemptive, sacrificial, substitutionary death on the Cross. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins."

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:18-19 that "...you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." The blood of Jesus Christ. That's why Christians sing of the blood of Christ. They glory in the blood of Christ; that Christ has washed me, cleansed me and that I have been forgiven of all my sins. I've been redeemed by the blood. That's the price He paid. Your salvation was free, but it cost God the life of His own dear Son.

In the Old Testament when the Jews came out of Egypt in the exodus, what was the last plague that God brought upon the Egyptians? The firstborn in each house would die, unless the blood of the lamb was applied to the house on the lintel and doorposts. If the angel saw the blood, he would pass over. That's where we get the word "Passover." He would pass over the houses where the blood was applied.

So it was prefiguring and typical of how the blood of Jesus Christ is applied to us. His wrath passes over us; it was poured out on Christ and not on us. His righteousness is given to me; my sin was given to Him. He paid the penalty in full upon the Cross.

Fifthly, and lastly, in verse 14, the results of our redemption: "even the forgiveness of sins." Isn't that amazing? Forgiveness is something to celebrate. That's what we're doing here today, by the way. When we gather in the sanctuary and we sing, clap and pray to the Lord, guess what we're celebrating? Forgiveness; our sins have all been forgiven. The word "forgiveness" comes from two words, which literally mean "to send away." Guess what God has done with your

sins? He's sent them away. John the Baptist looked at Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world."

In the Old Testament they had the scapegoat. The word "scapegoat" comes from the Bible. In picture form, what they would do is put their hands on this goat, and their sins were transferred to this goat. Symbolically, they were transferring their sins to this goat. This goat wasn't killed; he was run off. They would watch the goat run off into the hills, and when that goat finally went over that last hill, it was "Bye, bye sins! There go my sins!"

I thought, What if the goat comes back? Throw rocks at it. "Get away you goat!" You wake up the next morning and hear "Baa." It's on the front porch. "My sins have returned!"

But Jesus Christ, as our sacrificial lamb, carried away, once and for all, our sin. The Bible says that He drops them in the sea, never to be remembered again. What a thing that is! David actually cried out in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."

I believe that the first thing we experience as Christians when we're saved—that initial experience—is an overwhelming consciousness and joy that our sins have been forgiven. Praise God! I'll never forget that day when I turned to the Lord and repented of my sins. I experienced the feeling that a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I literally felt clean on the inside. God had washed me and cleansed me, I felt free and I felt forgiven. I wept tears of joy, knowing that God had carried away my sins.

So we have redemption; He died on the Cross to buy us out of slavery. Then we have freedom and forgiveness. The forgiveness is that He carried away our sins, and they don't have any power over us anymore. We are forgiven and we are free.

My question now in closing is: Have you been qualified or made fit for heaven? Have you been delivered from Satan's kingdom of darkness and been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love? Have you been redeemed by the death of Christ on the Cross and had your sins forgiven?

I told you to write the word "light" in verse 12, the word "love" in verse 13. Now write the word "liberty" in verse 14. In Christ we have light, love and liberty.

Have you been forgiven of your sins? Have you experienced what it means to be made fit for heaven? Have you been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son? Have you been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Are you His child? Are your sins forgiven? If not, why not?

You may be here now and a lot of this message to you is, "I don't know what this guy is talkin' about. I've no comprehension of these things." Maybe you need to be born again today. Maybe you need to repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ.

Today I want to give you an opportunity. I don't want anyone to leave today without being given an opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ; to have your sins forgiven, to have the Holy Spirit come to live inside you, to know that you are His child, that you are fit for heaven.

If you were to die right now, do you know whether or not you would go to heaven? Where will you spend eternity? Are your sins forgiven? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ? The Bible doesn't tell us that we can go to heaven by being good. It says that "We're saved by grace." It's "through faith. Not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast." So God wants to give you a free gift right now. I want to give you the opportunity to open your heart, to invite Christ to come in and to be your Savior.

If you're here and you say, "Pastor John, I don't know if I died I would go to heaven. I don't know if I'm really a Christian. I don't know if I've really been born again. But I'm tired of living in darkness. I'm tired of living in sin. I'm tired of the emptiness of my life and the vanity of my life. There's no fulfillment. There's no purpose."

God wants to fulfill you and give you purpose and meaning and the hope of heaven. Today you can know that you are fit for heaven and that you are a child of God. But you must open the door of your heart and invite Christ to come in.