**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**Walking Worthy: Spirit Filled Gratitude**

**Ephesians 5:18-21**

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 We are continuing our series in Ephesians, Brought to Life; Brought Together. As we have said, Ephesians can be divided into two sections, chapters one through three describe what *God has done in us* through Christ while chapters four through six call us to *live out what God has done in us*. We are looking at 5:18-21, being filled with the Spirit. Today we are looking at Spirit filled gratitude.

Big Idea: Spirit Filled people are grateful people.

 Recapping from the last few weeks, this present evil age seeks to draw us away from Christ so we are to be careful how we live by walking wisely. One way we walk wisely is to be filled with the Spirit, filled with God’s power and presence in our lives (Eph 3:15-19). God fills us with his Spirit by our thirsting for Jesus (Jn 7:37-39); by filling ourselves with Scripture (Jn 6:63); and by making time for prayer (Lk 11:13). Paul gives three results as examples of what being filled with the Spirit looks like: worship, gratitude, and submissiveness. Today we look at Spirit filled gratitude, being grateful for who Jesus is and what he has done for us described in chapters 1-3!

**Spirit Filled Gratitude Characterizes Life**

 The first characteristic of Spirit filled gratitude is that thankfulness characterizes your life. The tense of verb, giving thanks, describes thankfulness that is continually flows from our lips. It is the overflow of heart filled with God’s power and presence. This reminds us that Spirit filled living is supernatural living, the Spirit is exerting His influence on us. Yet this does not exclude nor deny pain and suffering and the sorrow of the present evil days. There are paradoxes in the Christian life. Paul describes his own life as sorrowful yet always rejoicing (2 Cor 6:10).

**Spirit Filled Gratitude Despite Circumstances**

 The second characteristic of Spirit filled gratitude is that it defies circumstances. We are grateful despite living in evil days (5:16) despite circumstances that seek to draw us away from Christ. It is not difficult to be thankful when life is easy, comfortable or going our way. But Paul says Spirit filled people give thanks always, including all circumstances, and for everything, including all times. His point is that Spirit filled people are thankful whether life is easy or hard, good or bad. This is written by a guy who suffered greatly for the gospel. One experience is described in Acts 16. Paul is dragged before the magistrates, beaten with rods, thrown in prison, and locked up in chains yet he is praying and singing hymns, which I am sure included giving thanks (Acts 16:16-25).

 Let’s look at his suffering as an apostle. He had many imprisonments, countless beatings, and often nearly died. Five times he received forty lashes less one. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. Three times he was shipwrecked; a night and a day he was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from Jews and Gentiles, danger in the city, in the wilderness, at sea, and from false Christians; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, on top of all this, he faced the daily pressure and stress of all the churches (2 Cor 11:23–28).

 How did Paul understand the suffering in his life? His mind was saturated with his bible which shaped a biblical worldview that saw all of life guided by an overarching plan and purpose. Again, Look at what he writes to the Corinthians, for we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead (2 Cor 1:8–9). And in Romans, he writes, “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:3-5). In his letter to the Philippians, he says that what happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some do preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love while the former proclaim Christ hoping that I suffer more in my imprisonment. But either way, from good or bad motives I rejoice that Christ is proclaimed (1:12-18)! For Christians, suffering is not meaningless nor a life out of control but has been purposed and ordained by God to strengthen our faith, make us like Jesus, and extend the gospel. Suffering is not good in and of itself but only as part of God’s larger purposes.

 So Paul is not telling us to be thankful for suffering or evil in and of itself like when a spouse abandons their marriage, a child dies, or we get a terminal illness, etc. Scripture tells us to hate evil (Ps 97:10; Prov 8:13). How are we to understand the bible telling us to hate evil on one hand and be thankful always and for everything? Scripture looks at suffering and evil with two lenses, a narrow lens and a wide angle lens. In the narrow lens, suffering is seen as bad and evil but with the wide angle lens, it is seen as ultimately part of God’s sovereign design to fulfill his eternal purposes. So, we are *not* to be thankful for a particular evil event apart from its connection to God’s larger purposes and the greater good it accomplishes. For instance, we are not to be thankful for Judas betraying Jesus; or the Jewish council railroading Jesus; or Pilate turning Jesus over even though he believed him to be innocent. But we are thankful for them in light of them ordained by God (Act 2:23; 4:28) as part of his eternal plan to bring salvation. Be thankful always and for everything.

**Spirit Filled Gratitude for a Good and Gracious Father**

 Third, Spirit filled gratitude gives thanks to God the Father who is wise in all that he does, whose motives and actions toward his children are always good and gracious. God is always looking out for our *highest* and *eternal* good. Highest good means your best interests are always in mind; eternal good means that our eternal happiness is always the ultimate goal. God loves us more than we will every fully grasp because of what the Son has done for us.

**Spirit Filled Gratitude is Rooted in Gospel**

 Finally, Spirit filled gratitude is giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lord, not just a man. He is the God man who lived a perfect life as our representative and died to make forgiveness and reconciliation with God possible. And he is the Christ or Messiah who fulfills all that the Old Testament pointed.

Response:

* Are you seeking to be filled with the Spirit?
* Is your life characterized by gratitude?
* How is God speaking to you?

**Life Group Questions:**

1. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit (see Eph 3:15-19)?
2. How are we filled with the Spirit?
3. What are the three results or expressions of being filled with the Spirit?
4. What is Spirit filled gratitude? What does it look like?
5. What does it mean and not mean to be thankful always and for everything?
6. How is God speaking to you in this message?
7. How does this passage relate to you own discipleship?
8. How does this message help you in making disciples?