

# **"While Joyfully Giving Thanks"**

*Colossians 1:11-14*

**November 21, 2004**

***In the church things don't get much bigger than the proclamation of Christ as King - and it is that which we proclaim on this day. But it seems so strange to read scripture that speaks of Christ on the cross at this time of the year. Christmas is approaching - and before that Thanksgiving. And even though I would love to explore with you what it means that Jesus the Christ is acclaimed as king - I decided to focus on the second lesson and a theme of giving thanks. Let me plant a strange little question in your minds: "Are you going home with your gratitude this year?"***

***An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are getting a divorce; 45 years of misery is enough." "Pop, what are you talking about?" the son screams. "We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her." Then he hangs up. Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouts, "I'll take care of this." She calls Phoenix immediately, and screams at the old man, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?" The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Okay, honey" he says, "The kids are coming home for Thanksgiving and paying their own fares."***

***So are you going home for Thanksgiving? The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Colosse. As we come to our text we find Paul praying for the members of the church. What he prays is very personal. The church at Colosse was doing pretty well but it was facing some danger. We don't know exactly what the dangers were but we know that there were beliefs that were spreading through the early church that threatened to lead the people away from their faith in Jesus the Christ. And so Paul prays that the church would find strength in the power of God and, in that strength, be able to endure / hold fast to their faith in Christ. While he reminds the people of the fact that there are difficult challenges that they face and that they need the strength of God, Paul sets the situation in a particular context. Paul says - find strength in God; endure the struggle with patience; and all the while, live thru all of the struggles while giving thanks to the Father.***

***So very often in the writings of Paul we find what seems to be a core conviction for this follower of Christ. In everything we can have joy - in everything we can pray - in everything we can give thanks to God. It is not an easy concept when our lives seem to be filled with more and more stuff that makes us anxious, frustrated, annoyed or angry. And yet here it is again in Paul's writings - endure while joyfully giving thanks!***

***Paul does give some rationale that I think is really wonderful. If you have access to the scriptures, look at what we are told next. In Colossians 1:12ff Paul challenges us to give thanks to the Father because He has "... enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints of light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness***

***and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son." Paul is using an image that the people of those days would have understood much more readily than we do. He is pointing the people to a practice that was common in that region of the world in those days. Those were days of constant warring between nations. When two nations or even two cities went to war, the winning nation would take all of the surviving people of the conquered nation out of their homes and relocate them as slaves in another place. The conquered nations homes and land would then be re-occupied by the foreign invaders. It happened to God's people. Still, with time things changes and at least a couple of times in Israel's history, the people were rescued by the power of God and they were able to return home. God rescued and transferred His people home. Paul uses this image as a way of talking about what God has done for us. He speaks of the evil occupying force as a kingdom of darkness - a kingdom in which we are often enslaved. But God rescues and we are free to go home to His kingdom and live in the light of forgiveness and love.***

***Where are you going for Thanksgiving? Why live in the state of despair when you have a home in the kingdom of God? Why continue to live as a slave in the household of hate and anger when you can come home to love and forgiveness? Why settle for an existence in the county of doubt and fear when you have a home in the assurance of redemption?***

***Where are you going for Thanksgiving? I ran across an article that contained a list of several things for which we should be thankful this Thanksgiving. I enjoyed the list. It included things like:***

***\* Be thankful for automatic dishwashers. They make it possible to get out of the kitchen before the family comes back for their after-dinner snacks.***

***\* Be thankful for husbands who attack those small repair jobs around the house. They usually make them big enough to call in professionals. {Obviously a list compiled by a loving wife}***

***\* Be thankful for children who put away their things and clean up after themselves. They're such a joy you hate to see them go home to their own parents.***

***\* Be thankful for smoke alarms. They let you know when the turkey's done.***

***It is a cute list, and each item would be appropriate for a moment of thankful reflection. But I would like to extend the invitation for you to come home for a real thanksgiving. Come home to the kingdom into which God has transferred you. Come home with a heart full of gratitude for things more enduring than smoke alarms and dishwashers. Maybe it doesn't seem as real or as practical but it is with a deep sense of joy and thankfulness that we acknowledge a gift of redemption and forgiveness of sin.***

***AMEN***