**GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (5:18)

*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

This is a sequel from last week’s message on rejoicing always. We are in a time of the year where we may feel the need to reflect on the year 2024. It can be a time we begin we begin to say to ourselves, I should have, I could have, what if and so on. It beginning to sink in that our plans for the year were not achieved, and that we have not just failed but failed dismally. Or we could be under a situation that is just making it difficult to either rejoice or be thankful. To rejoice or be thankful is not something we can fake, its either we have a sense of joy or thankfulness in our hearts or we do not. In todays passage we are encouraged to give thanks in all circumstances because it is God’s will for all of us in Christ Jesus. In other words God expects us to be thankful in all circumstances. We know there are circumstances that we easily give thanks, however how can we give thanks in all circumstances? How can we live by God’s will, rather than our will? From this passage I will also try to extract four key ingredients that I believe are necessary for us to be thankful in all circumstances. May the lord help us to give thanks in all circumstances. Amen!

Look at verse 16-18, “Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” This is an exert from a letter written by Paul to encourage the Thessalonian church. He started off by reminding them of the times we are living in, from 1 Th 5:1-3 we read, “1Now about the times and seasons, brothers, we do not need to write to you. 2For you are fully aware that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3While people are saying, “Peace and security,” destruction will come upon them suddenly, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” Apostle Paul had in mind the coming of the Lord, the day our lord returns. Because of the way we live we find ourselves in circumstances, other circumstances we have no control over how they came over us, however either way we easily start living as though this world is the only thing that there is. We start to think the return of Jesus Christ is something that will happen in some many years in the future. However, to the Apostle Paul, Christ coming can be anytime, like a thief at the night. You know many times, at night when everyone is asleep, I would wake up and just look around some parts of the yard through the window trying to make sure am ready if there is some thief who have entered the yard. I do this because I do not know which day some thief will decide to come visit me. And so I believe this passage is somewhat about that, what are we doing as we anticipate the coming of our lord Jesus Christ. How do we ought to live? Verse 16 tells us, we need to rejoice always.

We learned from shd Desmond message what it means to rejoice in the lord. When we are in the lord and we are looking forward to his coming we can rejoice always. Apostle Paul encourages believers to rejoice always because he knows, it something we can do. Otherwise if it was impossible, why give us this command. The issue really is with us, how are we ought to live such that it becomes possible to be thankful and rejoice in all circumstances? What barriers have we created. In this message I will focus on what we need in order to fulfil this will of God. Firstly, It is important for us to live in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. This helps us have a different view of any circumstance. In the king James version of the bible verse, 16 reads, rejoice ever more. Which implies as believers we somewhat already are rejoicing but can rejoice ever more. As we learned we can because firstly, we are saved and secondly, because Christ coming can be anytime and thirdly, it is God’s will. If we not rejoicing already, we need to ask ourselves, what or who do we depend on for joy.

In verse 17, we are encouraged to pray without ceasing. The issue really is our prayers, how do we view prayer or what is prayer? is prayer a backet list of our needs? Are we viewing God as a vending machine? 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” We can be confident that when we pray in accordance to the will of God, God hears us. So what does it mean to pray without ceasing? It means to have this constant confidence in approaching God, asking anything in accordance to God’s will. It is God’s will that we submit to his him and follow Jesus Christ. In any of our life circumstances, are we submissive to the will of God? Or are we eager to still pursue and push our own human will/agendas. What matters most in our lives, is it what we want or God’s will?

I believe prayer is like oxygen to a believer to remain alive in Christ. Prayer reminds us of who we are before God. Prayer makes us conscious of the coming kingdom of God. It makes us remember that Jesus is coming and coming at any time. Some people wonder why they should pray when God already knows our minds and needs. However, when we do pray, we are actually making a conscious decision to acknowledge that there is a God who created me. It one of the practical ways to be submissive to God. For example, when we pray for the meal before we chow it. We are saying Lord even though I toiled to make the money to buy this food. I acknowledge that it is you who made it possible for me to be able to obtain that work that I could generate that money for this food. I acknowledge that it is all your mercy and grace. That there is our God, graceful and loving who will return one day in the person of Jesus Christ.

Some may ask, how can we pray without ceasing? There is a story of a church member who came to a pastor and asked him what is the best position to pray? You know that position that truly aligns with God and would really make God attention to turn towards me. What is the position pastor? Then the pastor shared a story of a man who was an electrician and was busy working on a power line at a pole. Then suddenly he touched the wrong thing and before he knew it, he was hanging upside down held by a safety rope. While in that position the man prayed, lord have mercy on me and save my life. Moral of the story is that, there is no such a thing as the best position. The question is, are we praying in all of our circumstances? Or do we have circumstances we feel we cant or should not pray? Philippians 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Let us all read verse 18, “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” The third thing apostle Paul encourages us to have is thanks. To give thanks in all circumstances. As we all know, for some circumstances we easily give thanks. For example, if someone decides to give you money, we are thankful. However, those thanksgiving depend on the circumstance. And this is different from what Paul is talking about. Paul is saying, in all circumstances give thanks, not a selected kind of circumstances. How could this be though. It is possible because our thanksgiving are in God. Our circumstances change, however, our God is the same yesterday today and forever. Our God is not like fashion or like weather. He does not change and that is why our thanksgiving have meaning and a unique place. This is not something we wish we could have or had, it is the will of God that we give thanks in all circumstances. This means that it is something that is good for us, it has eternal value and meaning. It does not only count in this life but will also count in God’s kingdom.

We all know that it is not easy to be thankful in all of our circumstances. However, looking at this passage we have an example of this. When we look at apostle Paul, after he became saved. His life took a huge turn, his life was in danger, he suffered from persecution, was imprisoned and finally probably killed. However, there is no letter of his to the churches were he is complaining and anxious about his future. We find that in all his letters, he gives thanks. Even his final letter that was written to Timothy, 2 Timothy is regarded to be one of Paul’s last letters in the bible, and there he writes while In prison, “3I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience as did my forefathers, as I constantly remember you night and day in my prayers” 2 Tim 1:3. Apostle Paul learned to identify with Jesus in his circumstances. Most especially those circumstances we naturally regard difficult to give thanks or to rejoice in.

The second ingredient to live a life of thankfulness in all circumstances, is a life dedicated to serving Jesus Christ. We see this from Apostle Paul, his life was about serving Jesus through serving believers and encouraging believers to remain in the faith. His life mission was to serve Jesus through practically serving the Church, which is the body of Christ Jesus. Third ingredient to live a life of thankfulness in all circumstances, is a life of prayer. In fact we soon realize that it is almost humanly impossible to give thanks in all circumstances. However, by pray and petition to God, we can fulfil God’s will to be thankful in all circumstances. As we know it is not easy to do God’s will. It is impossible with our human strength. Even when Jesus was approaching the peak of his mission on earth, the cross, in the garden of gethsemane. Jesus prayer intensified, at some point he even rebuked his disciples why they were not praying. Where he said, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Jesus foresaw the coming excruciating pain as he neared his arrest and even prayed, God to take away this cup of suffering, however as he continued to pray, he could say, not my will but your will be done. It is through a life of prayer that we too will be able to fulfill the will of God. To be able to give thanks in all circumstances. Lasty, the fourth ingredient to live a life of thankfulness in all circumstances, is a life that already rejoices in the lord. Though in this passage we are encouraged to rejoice all the more.

I became a shepherd through receiving God’s word in my heart, Jesus called me to come follow him and he would turn me into a fisher of men. Though I have not been following Jesus well, still anxious about many things, home ministry and our wits ministry, financial freedom and so on. Still placing my hopes in this world and not fully embracing the coming of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. I am even realizing through this passage that I actually don’t give thanks a lot. Even when humanly speaking the situation commands some thanksgiving. Which reveals that I have become too worried or concerned about many things. Which actually also takes away the joy in the Lord. Like lately I just feel like am like a machine, what I do now feels like mechanized life. Weekly bible studies and message preparation, over time I have lost the joy of simply indulging God’s word and prayer and enjoying Him. I have lost my intimate time with God’s word and prayer. Which would intern help me have a shepherd heart for God’s people. I even remember when it comes to weekends for message preparations, and someone at my workplace asked how was my weekend. I would always respond as though my weekend was not joyous, not having any sense of thankfulness. Now you can imagine, no unbeliever would want to follow Jesus or be saved if I as a believer perceive my faith to be burdensome like prison. The other time, while Gomo was still young and we were trying to find our feet as a family, we would miss some Sundays attendance. Those Sundays we missed the service felt like relieve, like a rest, some form of joy. Which was strange because I was not with the body of Christ the church. How could it be so. However, am realizing that little by little to cope with Wits ministry, family and work, I have mechanized things. A dependance of self and this world rather than in God our savior Jesus Christ. Living by common sense not by faith. This is a result of placing my focus and hopes in this world. As Paul encouraged believed in this epistle, I also want to look forward to the coming of Jesus. May I look forward to the coming of our lord and savior Jesus Christ. And be careful not to be attached to this world as though its final. It is not. Jesus is returning and it can be any moment, like a thief at the night. I thank God, that this world is not it. It is wonderful to know that this world is not it. I am so thankful for that because there is just so much injustice, the value of life has become nothing. Value of life is based on amount of money you have. I am thankful that Jesus saved this wretched sinner, called me to come follow him and that he will turn me into a fisher of men. I believe Jesus is still calling me, come Lesedi, I am still eager to turn you into my servant so you may rejoice and be thankful in all circumstances. Amen!

**In conclusion,** at my work place there is a lady who recently was pregnant with child. However about 25 or so weeks into pregnancy, she was informed she should deliver the baby due to some issues. So she had a premature child. The child remained at hospital and mom would come breast feed at the hospital. And then some weeks after that, they noticed that each time she breast fed, the child’s tommy would become abnormally bigger. Thei analysis was that, one of her colons, small intestines are needed to be removed. Her and her husband were given 2 hours to decide on this operation. That it was critical that it is done. When she asked her gynecologist, she was assured that it is a normal procedure which is done all the time. All will be well. They accepted to do the operation, and in the process lost their child. This left her with so many questions, what if? What if? What if we did not agreed to haver the baby as premature, what if they would have made it? So now I had a premature only to end their life through this operation? All kinds of questions running in their heads. She is telling me all this things as am talking to her, deep down am asking the lord how can I console her, what word can I give her. I believe the lord then laid something in my heart to share with her. And it was to tell her to be thankful, can you believe it. I was reminded of a couple in our ministry that had been praying for years for a child and still today could not have child. I could share with her that, if that couple was given what she had, it would mean a world to them. That as much as she lost the child, she cannot deny the fact that she is a mom. She knows what it feels like to breast feed a child, hold your own child in your own arms, kiss them and say I love you to them. She could experience the eye contact with her own child. Though it is still painful and hurtful that they lost the child, being thankful of having brief taste of that does not take the pain and hurt away. However, still it is something she cannot deny was not joyful and thankful for. All in the Lord. Through God’s grace I could encourage her to rather focus on that rather than her many self condemning questions of what if. Because it is God’s will that we are thankful always. May we give thanks in all circumstances, Amen!