

March 16, 2007 - Palm Sunday

Colossians 1:12

Alright good morning! Welcome to this Spring Break Palm Sunday morning. Grab your Bibles and your message maps and let's go back to Colossians chapter 1. If you've been here the past several weeks, you know that we are still in the intro of Paul's letter to the Colossians. We've seen Paul tell them he is praying for them. We've seen him tell them that what he is praying for them is that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will. We've seen him explain the reason for that – that they might live lives worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way. And the question that comes up after he says that is of course – what does that mean? What does the life that pleases God look like? So Paul gives us a quick sketch here.

We saw last week that life is a life where we are bearing fruit in every good work – a life filled with good works motivated by the Holy Spirit within us through which the Holy Spirit produces fruit and character that glorifies God.

We saw it is a life in which we are growing in the knowledge of God – a life not of clinical knowledge about God, but relational knowledge of God so that what we do is an outflow of what we know.

We saw it is a life where we are being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might – a life where what we know of God empowers us to do His will even when doing so requires endurance and patience.

And this morning we come to the 4th characteristic of the life worthy of our Lord – the life that pleases God in every way. Look at verse 12 with me. It is a life where we are...

"...joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."

The 4th characteristic of a life that pleases God, that is worthy of the Lord, is JOYFUL THANKFULNESS.

Thankfulness is the opposite of selfishness. The selfish person says "I deserve what comes to me. Other people ought to make me happy." Compare that to what we saw a few weeks ago that life isn't about me – life is about Jesus Christ and His will for me and for you. Thankfulness boils down to the **understanding we've seen so often in our study of God's Word, that all we are and all we have comes from GOD.**

But notice this too. This giving thanks has got to be more than just a happy feeling that cause us to bubble over in joy – more than a feeling which we can't control. In fact, in several places throughout God's Word, we are commanded to be thankful. If you want to turn the page and look at it, **Colossians 3:17** says, *"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*

Paul says in **Romans 1:21** that one of the defining qualities of a wicked person is that he or she doesn't give thanks to God.

But this is a not a new thought for us. This is one of those concepts that Paul like to repeat over and over. In fact he talks about giving thanks some 40 times in his letter – 7 times here in Colossians. So we can mark it down: **You are not living your life in a manner that pleases God if you are a COMPLAINER.**

Chronic complainers are never satisfied and they always feel cheated in some way. That makes them more susceptible to heresies in their desperate search to find something good somewhere else. A true Christian has experienced the grace of God so intensely that they allow their gratitude for what God has done to shape their whole life.

But look at the text again – there is a certain type of thanks that pleases God – that defines a life that is worthy of the Lord. He says "joyfully giving thanks..." You know there are a lot of people who think

you can only be holy if you're miserable. Not according to this – the life that pleases God is a life of consistent joyful thanks to God. So we could also say that **you're not living your life in a manner worthy of the Lord if you simply BEGRUDGINGLY give thanks.** Half-heartedly. Routinely. Without really meaning it.

And when you look at the context of what we saw last week, we can see even more about this quality. The phrase right before this talks about us having great endurance and patience – two things that are needed when we are facing difficulty or persecution or even suffering sometimes because of our faith and then the next thing the Paul says is “joyfully giving thanks to the Father...” We can see that **this kind of joy is not dependant on PHYSICAL circumstances and these thanks are not dependant on the MOMENT.**

In the book of Acts you remember the story of Paul and Silas sitting in jail after being beaten and flogged for preaching Jesus – if you don't know that story you need to go back and read it in **Acts 16** – the Philippian jailor comes and asks them how he can be saved as much because they were sitting in prison singing hymns and praising God at midnight as because of the earthquake that opened the cell doors.

So God expects us – God wants us – God is pleased with us when we live lives joyfully giving thanks to the Father. And if that joyful thanks is not just about circumstances – though all of us have so much to joyfully thank God for that is tangible – if it isn't just about that, then why do we give joyful thanks? Look back at verse 12.

“joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.” Let's look at this.

God has **qualified** us. This word is used only one other time in the Bible. It means **to be given the right or title – to be given the privilege or POSITION.** It's not talking about our practice it's talking about our position. In fact it is in the aorist tense in Greek – which means unlike the present participles we've been looking at in this passage that are ongoing, this is pointing to the time of the Colossian's conversion. This being qualified is **not a PROCESS – it is an instantaneous act.** And lest we think this is not a big deal, you know one moment we're unqualified and the next we're qualified – no big deal – I want us to see what unqualified meant. Turn back a couple of pages to **Ephesians chapter 2.** Beginning in verse 1

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

That's disqualified. Dead in our sin. Walking according to the course of this world. Trapped by the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Satan). Controlled by our sinful nature and its demands. Nothing but a target for wrath. God looks you over and says – there's no way that guy enters my heaven – he's not qualified. There's no way he'll get an inheritance given to him.

Look down at **verse 12:**

“...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

Again – not qualified – without Christ – without a home – without God's promises – without hope – without God.

And in this one simple word, Paul explains that God changed all of that. He took us in that hopeless condition and he says he qualified us. Well for what? *“to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.”*

The Greek word “**inheritance**” doesn’t exclusively refer to the future. It means literally “**one’s allotted PORTION.**” For us that may not sound like a big deal, but from a Jewish perspective this is a very clear link to Israel after Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt going into the promised land – the land that God promised to give them – and how tribe was going to be given specific land – and each family within the tribe would be given a specific inheritance in what God was providing. So it **carries a personal element to it – something that belongs to me as an INDIVIDUAL.**

And when you combine that with the word “**share**” or “**partake**” in some versions – that also is in the **present tense.** So **we are qualified to receive this inheritance individually and RIGHT NOW.** Which means Paul isn’t just talking about heaven here is he? So what is this inheritance of the saint – where saints of course is the word that means “**holy one**” – those set aside as belonging to God, separate from those who don’t?

This inheritance first of all is ETERNAL LIFE. In **Matthew 19:29** Jesus explains that when we step away from society and identify with Jesus, we inherit eternal life. That is not a length of life, it is a kind of life. It is not a quantity of life, it is a quality of life. Jesus defined this inheritance that God qualifies us for in **John 17:3** when he says “*this is eternal life – that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” This eternal life is a life defined by knowing Jesus, by a relationship with Him, it is the life of Jesus lived through me. That’s the first thing I inherited when God qualified me.

And because of that, **the second thing our inheritance includes are all the PROMISES of God.** **Hebrews 6:12** says that we inherit the promises of God. **2 Corinthians 1:20** says that all the promises of God are yes in Christ. All of God’s Old Testament and New Testament promises of peace, joy, love, goodness, forgiveness, salvation, sanctification, fellowship, hope, glorification, and heaven and on and on are made possible and fulfilled in Christ in us.

So **2 Peter 1:3** combines all that to say that now you and I have all we need for life and godliness through knowing Him because through knowing Him we get His promises so we can live like Jesus.

Wow. That’s worthy being thankful for.

But there’s more. This inheritance of the saints is in the “**kingdom of light.**” Actually in Greek the word for “**kingdom**” doesn’t appear here. The translators of the NIV added it by implication of what Paul is talking about here and in connection to verses 13 and 14 that we’ll see next week where Paul says we have been “*brought into the Kingdom of the Son He loves...*”

You see light represents two things biblically. As John Macarthur explains, intellectually it represents truth and morally it represents purity. So the saint’s inheritance being in the light is **the spiritual realm of TRUTH and PURITY where God Himself dwells.**

And that’s huge because this changes everything about this inheritance of ours and we need to understand why. I’m glad that today is Palm Sunday because it gives us a perfect illustration of what Paul is communicating.

Palm Sunday is a reminder of the day Christ entered Jerusalem the last time leading up to his death on the cross and his resurrection. And when he did, it was to much acclaim and excitement. The Jews were hoping and expecting this to be the beginning of a huge change – that Jesus would bring about the kingdom of God: when the Messiah – the anointed one – the king would come to Jerusalem to restore the Jews to their autonomy – to get rid of the Roman oppressors – and to restore their rightful inheritance in the land of their fathers.

Let’s read the story together in case you haven’t heard it in awhile. **Mark chapter 11 verses 1-10.**

See in that excited group of Jews were all kinds of views about how this kingdom of God would come. If you were aligned with Herod or the chief priests, you saw the futility of opposing the immense

military power of Rome – so trying to bring in the kingdom by overthrowing Rome was suicide so they decided to compromise with the prevailing culture – the “if you can’t beat em join em” mindset.

The other side of the spectrum was the Zealots – they would have nothing to do with compromise. The only solution they saw to bringing in the kingdom of God was to usher the Romans out – even if that meant a bloody fight to the death.

Usually in between those two extremes you have those who want to withdraw from the whole thing – they don’t want to compromise and they don’t want a military revolution. This group were the Essenes. They took the “go live in a cave” approach literally. They went and lived in caves and prayed and fasted and studied the scriptures. They saw the kingdom coming when God returns and overthrows his enemies and establishes justice on the earth and their job in the mean time was to live as monks in the desert.

Lastly you had the group called the Pharisees. They believed that God would one day return to Jerusalem to rule and reign. And their view of how to bring that about was to be ready – to be pure. So they set out to enforce the full weight of the laws – diet, circumcision, Sabbath, etc – and to marginalize anyone who didn’t fit for any reason in order to keep Israel pure, otherwise God might not return to Jerusalem.

So all of that is playing into the excitement when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. And yet they had all missed the point of the kingdom. In fact in Luke’s account of this story he says in **Luke 19:41-42** *“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-- but now it is hidden from your eyes.’”*

See the problem on Palm Sunday was they were missing the point. The kingdom of God is not a matter of politics and geography. The kingdom of God was coming in and THROUGH JESUS. In fact no long before his entry into Jerusalem, we see in **Luke 17:20-21** *“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because **the kingdom of God is within you.**”*

Do you understand that? Can you get a grip on that? I mean if we can just get our minds out of the mundane or out of the ruts we think in – I wonder if we every get it – whether we ever grasp this grandiose truth – I mean most of us kind of piddle around in the mud thinking “oh yes – I know God – God’s up there and I’m down here – lalalalala – and we never stretch to conceive of this. No wonder Paul prayed in **Ephesians 1:18** oh *“that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”*

These are extraordinary concepts and it is so easy for us to simply turn back to our little worlds and forget what we are involved in.

The Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

That each of us personally who believes in Jesus Christ for salvation is given life – is given access – is given existence in the realm of truth and purity where God Himself dwells – where He reigns as king – IN US – in me – in you.

Do you see why Paul says a life that is worthy of the Lord – that please God is a life of joyful thanksgiving to the Father?

Because no matter what has happened – no matter what is happening – no matter what will ever happen to us in this world, God has given us forever life by bringing His kingdom into us.

When we understand that – listen – when we understand that – nothing is so bad that it can darken it. Nothing is so good that it can replace it. That inheritance – that kingdom – defines us NOW and FOREVER.

The question is do we get it? Is your life dominated by joyful thanks knowing that you are never outside of the presence of your King or has the kingdom of light become something displaced from now that you are waiting for when you die?

Oh that our eyes might be opened – that we might know the riches of the glory of our inheritance with the saints – and that our lives might be permeated with gratitude and thanks to our Father – so that our lives are worthy of our Lord.

Jesus show us your GLORY – the glory of your Kingdom in us – and help it change our lives today!