

Growing up, my family had a common thanksgiving practice of going around the table and saying something we're thankful for. I always wanted to go first because then I could say, "family", my mom would smile, and I'd be off the hook. Thanksgiving is great occasion for giving thanks for the many blessings we enjoy, and we certainly have a lot to be thankful for. In the spirit of the holiday, I want to begin by saying something I'm thankful for, and this will be a bit longer than the usual one-word answer:

I thank God for your faith. Today, there are many different gospels you could've believed, but I thank God that you have believed the truth. Conflicting gospels are not just a problem in our day, Timothy was fighting false gospels in Ephesus when Paul wrote him what we call 1 Timothy. Paul encourages Timothy to continue sharing the pure gospel.

Just as Timothy shared the pure gospel, I thank God for your parents, your grandparents, your pastor, your friend, your neighbor, or whoever shared the pure gospel with you. Maybe they baptized you as a baby or told you of our Lord Jesus Christ and led you to be baptized. Either way, I thank God for the men and women who brought the gospel to you.

And I thank God that you believed. Many people have heard the gospel but not believed. But I thank God that he sent the Holy Spirit into your heart so that you would believe and cling to his promises. We were born like everyone else, turned away from God, yet God has given you faith to believe and made you his child. And for this, thanks be to God.

But while I thank God that he has given you faith, I cannot help but mourn the fact that many have not believed. As I said before, there are many gospels and many worldviews that people believe outside of the true gospel. Additionally, in the passage just before our reading,

Paul warns Timothy about Christians who have fallen away from the faith. We all have family, friends, or acquaintances who do not believe, or who once believed but no longer do, and it pains my heart as I'm sure it pains yours. We see the pain it caused Paul in his letter to the Romans where he writes about the Jewish people who rejected Christ, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers."

As I said, in the verses just before our reading, Paul writes about believers who have fallen away. It's regarding this situation, the reality that many do not believe the good news, that Paul instructs Timothy in our reading today. I will read the passage again to refresh your memory:

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."

First of all. First and foremost, pray. If our concern is for people who do not believe, it will be easy to think that our first step should be assembling arguments for why they should believe or reasons to believe that Jesus really is the Lord of heaven and earth. Or we might want to get busy demonstrating our faith through acts of love. These things might even do some good from our limited perspective. But the little good we can do with our own little

power pales in comparison to the infinite power at God's disposal. The first thing we must always do to love our neighbor is to advocate to God on their behalf. If you love someone pray for them.

But if you don't love someone, pray for them all the more. Paul instructs to pray for all people. This could harken back to the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus instructs us to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us". There is no one that we should not pray for. We confess that there is nothing about us that earns us favor with God, and that salvation is by God's grace alone. This fact leaves no room for us to exclude anyone in our prayers.

Pray for all people, that they would enter under the reign of God, but pray especially for kings and rulers in high positions. We should pray that rulers come to believe in God but that's not what Paul has in view right here. Paul's purpose for praying for our rulers is that they would bring peace to our lands. We pray that our rulers successfully enact peace so that the mission of the church can be carried out more easily. Our prayer is not that the government spreads the gospel but that the government uses the power God has given it to create an environment where the church can carry out her mission to proclaim Christ to the world undeterred.

Prayer often seems like a small act. Sitting in our room quietly making requests and thanksgivings to God. And yet, Paul writes that our prayers for the salvation of others are good and pleasing in the sight of God because he desires all to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. As Paul urged Timothy to pray, I urge you as well: Make request, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all people. For people who you get along well with and for people that take a little more effort. For people close to you and people far away. For believers

and non-believers alike. Pray that the gospel would be proclaimed and believed. Pray that all would come to a knowledge of the truth.

I began by giving thanks, and I will end it in the same way. I thanked God that you have come to a knowledge of the truth, but now I thank God for what we know to be true:

That there is one God. This God created all things, including you and me. Humans were the crown jewel of God's creation, made in his own image, and given the job of taking care of all that God created. But humans failed, terribly. They didn't just make a mistake, they outright rebelled against God, they wanted to be God. This rebellion introduced sin and death into God's beautiful creation. And while man thought that rebellion would set them free from the constraints of God, they merely enslaved themselves to their own sinful desires.

God could've scrapped the project and started over but instead he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to make things right and bring back his rebelling people. Humanity made a mess of what God created good, but Jesus came to restore what was broken. And that's what he did: he healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, cast out demons, and raised the dead. But the chief act of redemption was in offering his life as a ransom for all of humanity. Jesus took on our sin to set us free from our bondage to sin. He sets us free from our desires to be God and gives us the freedom to enter under his rule.

But the story does not end with Jesus' death. God raised Jesus from the dead, and in doing so, showed that he accepted his life as payment. God made Jesus Lord of heaven and earth and he will return to finish what he started. When Jesus comes back, he will make all of creation the beautiful perfect paradise it was meant to be. And you, God's adopted children,

will be welcomed into Jesus' redeemed creation and reunited with God. Rebellion, ransom, resurrection, redemption, reunion. This is the true gospel.

On this Thanksgiving Day, let us give thanks to God for sending his Son to redeem the creation that we have broken. Let us give thanks to Jesus for offering his life as a ransom payment. Let us pray each and every day that more and more people would be added to the kingdom of God. And as we pray, let us be ready and willing to speak God's promises to those around us. Promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation through Jesus Christ alone.