



**Thanks for Nothing!  
Ephesians 1: 15-23  
November 26, 2017**

When I was in grade school, at the end of the year on the last day, teachers would often bring in food to eat for their classroom and have a party. My 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Mrs. Jacobson, did something different. She handed out to each one of us a piece of paper. On that paper, she wrote a letter to us, telling us what we meant to her. I remember some of the guys in class scoffing at a piece of paper for a gift: "Is this all we get?" Thanks for nothing!

I took that letter home and read it over and over again that summer. I cherished every word written on that piece of paper....because she loved us, and she wanted us to know. I thanked her for nothing.

In our scripture passage today, the Apostle Paul encourages us to give thanks for nothing, and it is very similar to what my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher gave us at the end of that school year. Before I have Marvin Clark read the passage let us pray:

→Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

When we pastors pick out our scripture passage for a certain Sunday, we give it to Carla, one of our office administrators, who puts together your worship bulletin. She goes online and looks for a picture that fits the scripture passage or our theme for that particular Sunday.

Carla came into my office in the beginning of last week and said, "I have a great picture for you!" She showed me the picture that you see on the front of your bulletin. I looked at it and said, "Huh? What's with the eye? And why is it in a heart?"

"It's in the scripture passage," she said.

Sure enough there it is was in the beginning of the second paragraph: “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which God has called you.”

“Then what is that leading up to the cross?” I asked. I looked closer. “Is that feet?”

“Yes,” she said, “it’s in the scripture passage.” Sure enough there it was in the last sentence: “And God placed all things under his feet...”

I guess Carla knew the scripture passage better than I did! So for those of you who are visual, the picture today on the front of the bulletin is for you. It is a visual of our scripture passage.

In this passage, Paul is so excited about what he wants to say that in the original language (Greek) Paul makes one long, jumbled, exhausting rush of words. Kind of like when you ask a child what they got for Christmas. In one long breathe and with great excitement, you get the list all in one fast, jumbled sentence: I got a “Dusty the Super Duper Garbage Truck, and a Disney Frozen Ride-on Sleigh, and a Zoom ‘N Crawl Monster, and a Nerf Rival Nemesis, and a Pixar Cars 3 Ultimate Speedway!” (I have no idea what these are, but they are the top toys for the year.)

Paul does the same thing here In this passage as if his pen can’t move as fast as his thoughts as he prays and thanks God for all His gifts. However, as you notice this list, he gives thanks for not one physical, material, tangible thing.

When he counts his blessings, he lists absolutely nothing you can buy, and nothing you can own. He is thankful for things and blessings that cannot be seen, touched, or purchased (the exact opposite of Black Friday and Cyber Monday). Instead, he gives thanks for things which are not things. Kind of like my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, the Apostle Paul gives thanks for nothing.

So what is this “nothing?” There are quite a few “nothings” in this passage, that is, things that cannot be seen, or touched or purchased: faith, love, wisdom, knowledge, hope, inheritance, power.

Paul first gives thanks for faith and love. “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you.”

The sign of success is not owning the current Lexus, as wonderful as those recent commercials are...or having the current iPhone every year. Success is being a person

who trusts Christ completely, and who loves neighbors consistently. It is living out a vertical relationship with God (faith) and a horizontal relationship with your neighbor (love). This is the key to a fulfilling life.

Paul goes on giving thanks for another “nothing”: a spirit of wisdom and knowledge so that we will know God better. The spirit of wisdom opens our eyes to what God is planning for us. It helps us see that there is nothing richer or more valuable than a life in communion with God.

Paul goes on with thanks for another “nothing”: he gives thanks for hope, the kind that God has called us to. This hope is not just for someday – someday things will be better, someday we will be with God, someday we will see our loved ones again. Hope is about those things, but it is also hope for now.

I came across a blessing by author Jan Richardson. Her husband had recently died at a young age, and she said, “Hope is hard for me these days.” But as she reads this scripture passage, she discovers a hope not for someday, but a hope for now. If you are having trouble finding hope these days, this blessing of hers is for you.

### **Blessing of Hope**

So may we know the hope that is not just for someday but for this day—

here, now, in this moment that opens to us:

hope not made of wishes but of substance,

hope made of sinew and muscle and bone,

hope that has breath and a beating heart...

hope that knows how to sing when there seems little cause,

hope that raises us from the dead—

not someday but this day, every day,

again and again and again.

This is the kind of hope Paul gives thanks for.

Paul gives thanks for another nothing: he gives thanks for the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints. You can look at this several ways. This inheritance Paul talks about can be our eternal inheritance that we look forward someday to in a heavenly place. This inheritance is far more valuable than stocks or bonds or real estate.

It can also be looked at this way: another translation of the Bible says it this way: "I want you to realize how much God has been honored by acquiring his people." (NLT) What Paul is praying that we might have a full appreciation of our worth to God. We are God's inheritance.

God riches are not just in the universes that He possesses, nor in the earth that is God's, but in the saints – that is, us, the ones Jesus went to the cross for. In other words, we are beloved.

Beloved Christian, think not of what you can get from God but, rather, think of what you mean to God. Paul wants us to appreciate our dignity. God has an inheritance in you and me.

We are God's beloved. Don't believe it? It is repeated over and over in the Bible:

Colossians 3:12 says we are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

1 John 3:1-2 See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are....Beloved, we are God's children now.

We always talk about having a strong belief in God. But really, we should be talking about God's belief in us, which is stronger than our belief in God. You may believe in God, but never forget – it is God who believes in you. (from "The Broken Way" by Ann Voskamp). Can you believe this? And not only does God believe in us, God lives in us through the Holy Spirit.

Which brings us to the next "nothing" Paul is thankful for: power – "His incomparably great power for us who believe." God believes in us so much that we are given power – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. This power is at work within us.

I don't know about you but that blows my mind away. The first thing that blows my mind is that we are God's inheritance, and now we have power available to us. What does it mean that this power – that raised Jesus from the dead – is for us?

I still don't quite grasp this concept fully. I've been trying to figure it out my whole Christian life. You know, the Christian life is never boring because there is always something new to learn about God and our faith walk.

A book was recommended to me recently called "The Book of Mysteries" by Jonathan Cahn. The book sounds kind of strange, but it is sort of a daily devotional; it has readings for every day. The reading I read last Friday was about God's power. I share it with because I found it helpful. The power has something to do with the Holy Spirit.

Another name for the Holy Spirit is Holy Wind. The same word for spirit in the Bible is also the same word for wind. What happens when you walk against the wind, especially if it is blowing hard? It creates drag, and it becomes harder to walk against it, and you get tired.

When you walk with the wind, it is much easier and more pleasant because there is no drag against you. The wind helps us walk when we walk with it. It gives us power. It pushes us forward.

So it is with the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Wind. The spirit of God blows in the direction of the Holy. When you walk against God's spirit, everything you do becomes harder. But if you turn, if you change your course, if you walk in the Spirit, then the drag will disappear, and the Wind of God, the Holy Spirit, gives you power. And you move forward.

This is the power available to us in the Holy Spirit. Think on this: our passage says all power and authority has been given to Christ, and therefore since they are Christ's possession, they become our possessions, too, because we are in Christ.

Can you think of a time when you, as a beloved child of God, have experienced the power of God?

I experienced it at a funeral several months ago in Minneapolis. A 33-year-old daughter of a lifelong friend of mine died unexpectedly, and God gave me the sermon before the family asked me to come and speak at the funeral.

Paul Phillips and I experienced the power of God after Larry's death when we were called to walk along side you, and God led us every step of the way. We were given the strength to carry on the task.

I know many of you have experienced of the power of God in your life – when you were called to endure hardship; when you overcame a personal obstacle; when you experienced God’s healing – it may not have been a physical healing, but you knew you were healed in another way.

You experienced God’s power when you walked by the side of someone suffering and God used you; when you shared the love of God with a friend or neighbor and they responded to that love. You experienced God’s power when you experienced the forgiveness of God for something you could not even forgive within yourself.

We experience God’s power in the church – please note, the passage says we are the body of Christ. We as a church experience the power of God when we step out in mission together; when we adopt orphans in Mexico and provide solar power for their living space, and bring them birthday and Christmas presents. We experience the power of God when we help homeless students go to school. We experience the power of God when we give food to the foodbank. We experience the power of God when we help organizations that help abused women. Our list goes on.

And we experience the power of God when we worship together, when we pray together as one and listen to God together. We experience the power of God when we have 125 people together for a Thanksgiving meal. We experience the power of God when we come together in small groups to study the Bible...which we will do this Advent. I encourage you to take part to experience this power of God.

Beloved, Christ is not a distant potentate ruling the church, but is intimately involved in the life of the Church. Christ is the one who is "the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (vv. 22-23).

So, it is really not “thanks for nothing,” is it?

We have access to an amazing set of essential, eternal, unseen treasures: faith, love, wisdom, knowledge, inheritance, power.

As Christians, we can honestly say to God:

Thanks for everything.

