

Yesterday, on Sunday, August 16, I enjoyed preaching about singing praises and thanksgivings to God. Using our Second Lesson (Ephesians 5:15-20) as our text we commented on how Ephesians tries to encourage its readers during difficult times of perversity and evil in the world to focus on God, God's will, making the most of the time, and being filled with the Spirit. Our text encourages us to live a spirit-filled life of praise and thanksgiving that occurs, not just in our worship services, but throughout the entire Christian life. Giving thanks is appropriate as all that we are and have comes as a gift from God. This means that even we are entirely God's. Furthermore, giving thanks is certainly in order because death, sin, and the law have been overcome by Christ. Our Lord died so that our sins could be forgiven and in order that we might live in eternity with our most gracious God where there will be no more sin, perversity, and evil.

As I emphasized yesterday, this is really good news. We are a deeply loved and richly blessed people. Not even our sinfulness keeps us out of God's loving grace and mercy. Indeed, Christ died for us because we are sinners. In yesterday's text we are encouraged to experience and express our joy in singing psalms (yes, the Psalms were written to be sung), hymns, and spiritual songs. We are encouraged to sing and

make melody to the Lord in our hearts and to thank God at all times and for everything in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus we emphasize corporate worship where we have resources and gifted musicians who lead us in singing songs of praise and thanksgiving. We assert the value of individual and family prayer time and devotions, as well as the benefit of spontaneous prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

I also pointed out that we have the opportunity to worship God each week during the offering in our worship services. No, the offering is not an unfortunate business interlude in our worship service. It is, in and of itself, a very real act of worship as we who are richly blessed have the opportunity to return to God, for the spread of his work in the world, a portion of what God has first given us. Really, we give of ourselves as we are the Lord's