

What a marvelous image! – Thankfulness so thankful that it overflows – and touches everything and everyone round about!

Is *your* heart thankful like that – overflowing with thankfulness?

What would bring forth such an outpouring of gratitude and joy?

Let's take a closer look at the chapter – Colossians chapter 2. Paul is writing this chapter, he says (in verse 2), to make sure that the followers of Jesus are *“encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ! – in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*

Paul is writing to people who are surrounded by mystery cult religions, which claim to have the secret knowledge which will lead to true joy and eternal life – they claim to be “crack the code” mysteries like Indiana Jones adventures. But Paul is clear – the amazing mystery that unlocks abundant and eternal life is *not* some secret knowledge. No, *“the mystery of God”* is Christ! *“All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* are found in Christ. *“Full riches of complete understanding!”*

Therefore, *“continue to live in him”*, Paul says. Be *“rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith ...”* – that's how you will reach the joyful fullness of life that overflows with thankfulness.

*“See to it,”* vs. 8 goes on to say, *“that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.”*

What more could you ask for!?! The full power of God *is* in Christ!

Don't forget, Paul goes on to say, that *“when you were dead in your sins ..., God made you alive with Christ!”* He took away all that condemned us, *“nailing it to his cross”* (end of vs. 14), disarming the powers and authorities!

How can we help but stand amazed at the awesome wonder of God's Life-giving power as it works a miracle in us!

*"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord," Paul writes in Colossians 2:6-7, "continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness!"*

The passage makes me think of Psalm 23. We read it often at funeral services, because we believe that just as God leads us in *"paths of righteousness"* in this world, teaching us what is right, helping us to choose what is good ... so also the Lord will lead us when we walk *"through the valley of the shadow of death."* We will not need to fear evil at all, because the Lord will be with us and will bring us safely through death to sit at table with him *"in the presence of [our] enemies,"* the ones we are afraid of, where the Lord will anoint us with oil – both as a sign of being honored guests at his table and also as a means of healing us from whatever our enemies might have done to us. *"Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over!"* Or as the NIV translates it: *"my cup overflows!"* *"Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!"*

We need not be afraid because God is with us. His care for us blesses us so fully and completely that the blessings flow over and beyond all we can ever hold onto. We overflow with thankfulness!

It's a good time to remember these things – during the harvest time of the year. The hard work of the growing season is rewarded with the fruits God brings forth. Maybe we don't get exactly the fruits we wanted, but there are always fruits for our labor.

Now and again I think of that story about the man who found a huge boulder outside his home one day and heard God telling him to push on it. Perhaps you have heard the story. So he pushed, and he pushed, and he pushed, and he pushed, but the enormous rock did not move. He thought perhaps it was a threat to his home. Perhaps that's why he was supposed to push it away. So day after day, he did as he had been told, and he pushed and he pushed, but the boulder remained. After many months, God said to him, *"It's okay, that's enough now."* *"But the rock hasn't moved!"* the man said to God. *"It hasn't changed one bit!"* *"Ahh,"* said the Lord, *"but look in a mirror. You have changed greatly. You are strong and have developed great endurance and the ability to persevere against all odds. I can now use you in*

*ways I could not before.*” And indeed, the man had matured in body and in spirit and was useful to God’s work in strong, new ways.

The moral of the story, as it is usually told, is that there may be very difficult things for you to deal with in your life, struggles that never go away. But if you will apply yourself faithfully, doing the best you can, steadfastly, God will be at work in you, making you ready for other tests yet to come, where the spiritual strength and steadfastness you have developed will be crucial. Let God shape and mold you. *“Continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, overflowing with thankfulness.”* Know that the Lord, the Almighty God, will be at work in you.

One of my favorite scripture passages is Philippians 4, where Paul writes, *“Do not worry about anything, but in all of your prayers, ask God for whatever you need, always asking with a thankful heart.”* What that means to me is that whenever we pray, we should begin by saying *“thank you”* to God for all the blessings of our lives – even in the midst of terrible times. We are to count our blessings, to be grateful for what God is doing, even in the smallest of ways. Then we will be able to trust that God will yet work for good in the midst of the hard parts of our lives as well. We can turn our concerns and our worries over to the Lord, trusting that just as God has brought forth blessings in other parts of life (especially as we remember how he is conquering the powers of sin and guilt and shame in our lives), even so God’s power will yet work mightily through our prayers for all the troubles and trials we must face. Perhaps you remember that those verses in Philippians 4:6-7 go on to say, *“And the peace of God which passes all human understanding will keep your heart and your mind safe, in union with Christ Jesus.”*

*“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness!”*

I heard yesterday about a school where the children were asked to tell what they are thankful for. What would *you* say *you* are thankful for? The sad part of the story is that some of the children did not know what the word *“thankful”* means. They seemed to not have heard it before. Hard for us to believe – we are so accustomed to the Bible’s teaching that we should be thankful. But there are some homes when thankfulness is a foreign concept. How will *you* learn to *model thankfulness* so that others will learn to understand what it means in its most spirited, godly sense?

The bulletin cover today portrays a woman who is serving tea, linked together with the story Jesus told about a poor widow who had only two small coins left – it was all she had, and she went to God’s House to give all she had to the work of the Lord. That is a dimension of thankfulness known only by a very few.

But we all aim towards it, don’t we? The Greatest Commandment, Jesus said, is that we learn to love the Lord our God with *all* our heart, with *all* our soul, with *all* our mind, with *all* our strength. We are called to love as we have been loved ... by the One who gave all his earthly body could give, sacrificing his very life on the cross, in order that we might receive the full blessings of the eternal God.

It is not enough to simply say “*thank you*” to Jesus for this amazing, saving grace.

I passed a church in Mt. Joy this past week that has a sign out front saying: “*Tithe if you love Jesus. Anybody can honk.*” And it’s true. There’s a lot of honking going on in worshipping services around the world – lots of noise, lots of promises, lots of loud praying. But it is only when lives are changed into lives that make God’s work in this world their priority, lives that put their money with their mouth is, lives that tithe time and energy and give themselves to show God’s love to people, to put themselves on the line for justice and for truth ... those are the lives that embody the saving grace of Christ, the Risen Lord! Those are the lives that truly love Jesus.

What about *you*? What about *me*?

“*Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,*” Paul writes in Colossians 2:6-7, “*continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*”

Give freely, give joyfully, just as you have received blessing upon blessing from God. Forgive fully, forgive faithfully, just as God in Christ has forgiven you from the cross. Love! Love fully, love completely, love long before others are capable of loving you in return, just as Christ Jesus has first loved you, even while you were still lost in sin. ... And your life will overflow with thankfulness ... for all that the Lord has done, is doing, and will continue to do ... in you and through you and among us all. This day and forever, overflow with thankfulness! Amen.

Hymn *Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord* 76