

“That’s impossible. Can’t be done. No one could do that!” Ever spoken any of those phrases? As we look and do a quick assessment of situations, there are some that warrant a reaction of impossibility. Our text for this Thanksgiving Eve could and does prompt most to initially say, “You can’t expect that of me!” Even so, as we will see it a moment, God clearly does expect that of us. As we gather tonight, we focus on the theme: “In All Circumstances.”

I. Although it may appear impossible, God encourages and expects us to give thanks in all circumstances. A. What motivates us to give thanks in all circumstances? 1. We’re motivated by God’s directive. “For this is God’s will for you.” It doesn’t get much clearer than that, does it? When God speaks, God expects. If we didn’t know better, we could easily turn this into a negative command, and, by the time we were done, God would be something just as negative. But we know better. God never gives us a directive without giving us the power to accomplish it. God’s words are impressive motivation provided we remember God’s other directive, “With Me all things are possible.”

2. We’re motivated to give thanks by the results from the cross. Perhaps Christmas is much more on our minds this time of the year. Even so, our motivation to give thanks is prompted by what Christ did for us on the cross. Forgiveness for every sin we ever commit, that prompts thanksgiving. The promise of eternal life in heaven by faith, that prompts a grateful heart. The promise of our crown of life, which is only possible because of the cross is great motivation for us to say, “Give thanks, with a grateful heart.” As we consider what changed because of the cross, we realize that the cross motivates us to give thanks in all circumstances.

3. We’re motivated by an inner joy. When most of us were too little to remember, the Holy Spirit stepped into our lives, worked faith, and placed within us an inner joy that outward circumstances can not steal. Although we face outward situations that prompt everything but thankfulness, it’s that joy that remains no matter what, that joy that endures even as we face our toughest storms that enables us to be grateful. As we take hold of that joy placed within by the Holy Spirit, we find a joy that overshadows our heartache, our pain, our disappointments, everything on the surface, a joy that motivates us to give thanks with joy in our hearts.

4. We’re motivated by continual prayer. Just before Paul makes his “in all circumstances” statement about giving thanks, he says, “Pray continually.” But what does prayer have to do with giving thanks? When we begin, go through, and end our day with prayer, doesn’t it naturally prompt thankfulness? Where there is fervent prayer, where there is prayer that comes from within, prayer that is confidently convinced God is listening and will answer, we give thanks because we know God is listening and God is preparing to act. As long as God is going to make the next move on our behalf, we give thanks regardless of our circumstances.

5. We’re motivated by God’s daily activity. Suppose God identified His activity in your life for the next week. How would you respond? First, there would be shock and amazement, right? Then, once we pinched ourselves to make sure we were still alive, our natural response would be thanksgiving. When we consider God’s activity day after day, when we think about what God did that we realized and what we

didn't even notice, gratefulness is our response. Within each new day, regardless of how good or not-so-good you define it, God does more great things than you can even begin to imagine. That's wonderful motivation for thankfulness.

6. We're motivated by our thought process. Giving thanks in all circumstances is nearly always preceded by our thoughts. How many times have you thanked God for something without first thinking about it? When we think, we give thanks. The one always follows the other. When we create a daily thought process that includes God stepping into our lives more times than we realize, when those thoughts and all the others like them enter our minds for processing, the end product, the outcome will be to give thanks in all circumstances. When we put the right things into our thought process, the right things always come from our hearts and our lips.

7. We're motivated by redefining our circumstances. When a situation occurs, which do we see first, the negative or the positive? Do we think great thoughts or not-so-great thoughts? We want to claim that we're always a great thoughts person but we know better. When in doubt, we define our situations as negative rather than positive. Some may call that the eternal pessimist, but whatever you call it, we need to define our circumstances as good or great so that giving thanks becomes our first response and our last response. No matter what the circumstances, we can give thanks when we choose to define each circumstance as worthy of thankfulness.

8. We're motivated by the privilege of being a child of God. At your Baptism, did God have to claim you as part of His family? Did He close His eyes and say, with a cringe on His face, "Welcome to My family"? Did He add what you had done or not done into His decision-making? The answer to all those questions is a resounding, "no!" At your Baptism, God welcomed you with open arms and as He welcomed you, He said, "Today, You are part of My family. All the privileges that belong to My people now belong to you!" Although we did nothing, God has invited and that invitation makes us the most privileged people on the planet who want to give thanks.

9. We're motivated by the reminder of how things could be. You've heard people say it and so have I, "Things could be so much worse," and they are exactly right. When we take a second look, we realize that there are so many others whose lives are far more challenging than ours. How many days did Paul need to spend in prison before he realized that things could be worse? How many days does it take living among the poverty-stricken to realize that life is far better than you once thought? Whatever our circumstances, remembering how different things could be remains an impressive reminder that we always have reason to give thanks.

10. "In all circumstances" - Impossible it would seem, yet when we reconsider our motivation and God's simple statement, "With Me nothing is impossible," we find ourselves saying, not only at Thanksgiving time but all year long, "In all circumstances, I will give thanks!" Amen.