

**“1 Thessalonians 2  
Thanking God Without Ceasing”  
by Chris Ulrich  
July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Thank you, thank you. You may be seated. It's good to see everybody, this morning, on this beautiful summer day. And, I appreciate the music; I know that it was refreshing, good to hear, and enjoyable, and a good way to start off a Sunday. I was listening to Jason banging on the drums, and it made me think of, “I don't want to go to work; I just want to bang on the drums all day.” Some of you know what that is; some of you may be like, “I have no idea.” Well, I don't want to go to work; I just want to bang on the drums all day.

So, you know what, I'm going to switch gears here for a moment, and, there's a lot of expressions that I think we hear a lot, that we might use ourselves, that sort of describe, well: “We're at our wits end.” I told you I was going to switch gears, so that was definitely switching gears, there. “I'm at my wits' end!” or, “I'm sick and tired of something!” or “I've just about had it!” or “I just can't take it anymore!” A lot of you may remember, or a lot of you may not know who Popeye the sailor man was, but it's a cartoon that actually dates—I think it dates back to the thirties, pretty far back, but it stayed on for a long time, and he used to use an expression: He would say, “That's all I can stand! I can't stand no more!” How many have heard that? Good, good. And it's one that I would say, because it's obviously from that, because he would say, “stands,” not “stand,” as in stand upright. But it gave us an idea he was at his wits' end, he was at a breaking point; dealing with whatever he was dealing with, he needed—he ate a can of spinach, and then he gained super-powers, or whatever. I mean, again, some of you may know what that is; some of you may have no idea. So, either way:

*Mark 4:14-20 The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.*

So, this might be one of the most popular parables that we read in the Bible. It actually appears in this book, the Book of Matthew, and the Book of Luke. And I say that just for the sake of, it was something God had dealt with me recently about, but, first, I'd like to ask everybody if you could bow your heads with me in a word of prayer, please.

Father, we just come to you this morning, and we've talked about many things, we've had music, Lord God, and we've had different times of sharing and welcoming people, Lord God. We come now to the point of the sermon, the message, Lord God. We ask, Lord, to receive Your Word, to take it seriously. That I would get out of the way, Lord God, and that we would gain understanding, that we would do what You would have for us to do, and not just be hearers of Your Word, Lord, but doers of Your Word. We thank You, God, for giving us this day, for giving us the breath of life, Lord, and for waking us up in our right minds, Lord God. We just ask that You would continue to bless this time, and we just want to ask this in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

So, I know that everyone has unique experiences in life that distinguish them as individuals and that's what makes God's creation so great. We're not clones, we're not robots, we're not exact replications of each other. Everybody has an appointed time; we have our time, here on earth, and we have our opportunity. God gives us a chance. The Bible talks about the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). And we all have a chance to hear the Word of God and understand it, to be born again, but God doesn't force it upon us. God doesn't make us do it. But there's a common ground that binds us all together.

We all do have an appointed time. And, I'm going to take it a step further by saying that those of us that are of the faith, those of us that call upon the name of Jesus Christ, we believe that the word of God is true, and we believe that there is a standard for how we need to live to uphold that. I know that our theme for the month is from the book of First Thessalonians chapter two, and we're going to get to that, and there is going to be a connection between this and First Thessalonians, but our first point today, the first part of the message today is:

## **Part 1 – Having Root in Ourselves**

The reason I wanted to mention earlier about how we have times of turmoil and times of hardship; it's an indicator of whether we're going to rely on the power of God to get us through or not. Are we firmly planted in the church God has saved us in? That's your call; that's every individual's call. It depends on how seriously you take it. It depends on whether you think there's something else that's better that's out there. Is there another—I get that we're not the only ones that teach the sound doctrine, we're not the only ones that baptize in Jesus' name, we're not the only ones who are born again, but the Bible does talk about abiding in the calling wherein we are called (1 Corinthians 7:20). Am I looking to go elsewhere, or am I looking to grow where I'm at, and improve upon what God's given us? Am I looking to make it stronger? Am I looking to contribute, or am I looking to criticize, and point the finger, and second-guess, and think that I could do it better, and then, when given the chance, I shirk away, or shrink away from that responsibility, and say, “Oh, well I wasn't given the best opportunity in the first place?” Really? It doesn't really work that way. But, are the roots that we've allowed, in God, to be planted firmly in Jesus Christ? And, will they sustain us even when we are at our wits' end, when we feel like we've taken just about all we can take? And this is something that could apply to people in the world. People in the world go through hardship; we all go through similar type things. It's just a matter of whether we give in to it or not. And there are certain circumstances that are beyond our control, or beyond our situation, and, yet, how are we responding to that? Are we looking at that like, “Well, there's light at the end of the tunnel?”

I saw the movie recently that talked about the rise of Nazi Germany, and, yet, there were people that hid some of the Jews, or some of the dissidents in their basements, and, that they knew, if they were caught, that they'd basically be executed. I remember hearing this one guy that was talking about the Taos Pueblo Indian tribe in New Mexico. He talked about it in a way that, when he was a little kid, there was a guy he remembered, on that reservation, where, there was a lot of different people, and, the way he described it, I really appreciated it, because he just talks about the different nationalities of people that had come together to show support, but, he says that, after sixty-four years of going back and forth to Washington D.C., this little reservation finally won over the government. They finally convinced ??? the government to give their land back, because it was all dealing with litigation; who owns what land or who owns what property. And he said their were many that had passed on, that didn't get to see this day. We talk about when the Cubs won the World Series, and I know Abby's a big fan, that there were a lot of people that didn't get to see that day, that didn't get to see that victory.

But, we're talking about how deep are those roots that we have, because we're talking about roots in ourselves. Whether we think that we have confidence that we can make it. Do we think that God's given us enough, or do we bemoan our situation? And I'm not saying that—we all do, at times. We all do, at times. Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of times of refreshing to go along with those challenges, to go along with enduring temptation, enduring hardship, or whatever else the case might be. The Bible talks, in Psalms, about, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalms 23:6). And we sing about it, we sing about these different things, and, on that day, when my time is ended; it's talking about the end of the world, it's talking about the end of the line, and what did I do with my time? And I get that there's young people in here. And we understand that every person is in a varying stage in their life, again, we're all individuals here. It isn't a matter of what perspective; how deep are those roots? And we've all heard people that were making the old proclamations of, “I'm going to last! I'm going to hang in there! I'm going to stick with it!” get all emotional, and that's great—there's nothing wrong

with emotion—but, then, three months later, it's like, “What happened to that person?” “Oh, I don't know; they just decided not to stick around, or they didn't really think it was worthwhile.” We've seen it time and again. And, yet, there have been people that have done the same, or just didn't say anything at all, that are still around. Thank God! Thank God for those who have decided, “This is where I believe I need to be.” I know this might sound a little bit odd; I had mentioned just a few moments ago, we're not talking about somebody else's roots, we're not talking about anything but having root in yourself. Because, if you back to Mark four, what we read, “**And have no root in themselves...**” (Mark 4:17) And each parable says it the same way. It didn't say, “They have no root in the church,” or, “have no root in Me.” We know He's talking about having faith in God, having belief in God, having trust in God, but it ultimately comes down to, “Do I have root in myself to believe that I can do this, to believe that I can endure, to believe that I can last?”

I want to read a verse from Proverbs, twenty-four verse ten; very quick verse, very short verse, but I have a quick story after that relates to this. And it says:

**Proverbs 24:10**      *If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.*

There were a couple of us from work, a couple of summers ago, that had a job in north-central Florida in the middle of summer at a mining facility. Pot-ash, and the do dry-wall, and whatever else they do. It's a mining facility, and it's hot, and it's a very dry part of the state. I know, Aaron, you lived down there for a while; it was maybe a hundred and fifty miles North of there. And, not a lot to add to this short story except that it was hot, and it was dry, and it was very spread out, and it's not along the coast of Florida, some of the nicer areas, like Tampa, and Miami, and Coral Gables, and some of those areas where, “Oh, I'll just go out to the Gulf, and take a ride in a boat.” And that's nice to do, but it was one of those things where you're just parched. And, so, here's what I remember: That, during the course of the week, as we were getting started, there was a few others of us that were there, sort of griping a little bit to myself, a little bit out loud, and, it was one of those times where we had to wear construction helmets. And I just was like, I just got a towel, put the towel on my head, put the helmet on, and it was still just gushing sweat, and, I mean, not comfortable at all, but God reminded me of this verse. And then He reminded me, “Well, think about your three uncles that were in Vietnam, and they were getting shot at! And Vietnam is an extremely hot country, year round. Ken Shelton, I know you were a Vietnam vet; is there anybody else here that served over there? I know, Sarge, he's not here today, but he's a Vietnam veteran. And, so, they were there for over a year. I have one uncle who did two tours. And, so, I know that it was more of a test of my stamina, but sometimes God gets our attention in different ways that we don't always think, “This is going to be it.” And I know that, just being there for a week—which is all it was—it got me to thinking, “I need more root in myself. I need to be able to stand, and not faint in the day of adversity, because thy strength is small.” And it did cause me to change my perspective, and it did cause me to think, “What am I thinking that's so difficult about this situation? I mean, God knows where I'm at; God knows the situation I'm facing.”

And, I want to talk about something else that I know is not a fun topic, but it's worth addressing, and, I think it affects all of us in the church, and the world, too. There's plenty of things that we go through that we're all susceptible to. I don't know that I can really call it a topic, because it's more of a circumstance. And, don't raise your hand to this, but how many have ever felt alone? You could be in a room full of people and feel it, you could be feeling like you're not being understood by your friends, your family, your spouse, and it could be just a built up anger, sadness, or bitterness about anything that causes that loneliness. And there isn't any quick and easy remedy to it, but do we have root in ourselves? Do we have the in-dwelling of the Holy Ghost that leads us and guides us? Do we believe that God has something greater for us than what we're seeing? The Bible says, “...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9) And, every now and then, when I'm feeling down in the dump, or feeling lonely, or sad, or left out, or whatever the case might be, and that verse come to mind, and God's quick to show it to us. God is quick to always be there; He's going to meet us where we're at. And I said it wasn't a pleasant matter, but I believe addressing these kinds of things in a mature, Christian way is better than ignoring them. I want to say that, if there's any consolation to that, there's a statement that you

made in the service, last week, Parrish, where you said, some of the greatest moves of God occur when we're alone. And I agree with that, and I thank God for that, because we don't feel like we've missed the boat, or our time has passed.

## Part 2 – Heart of Thankfulness

This is a little bit lengthy, but it's going to be our main passage for the sermon, today:

**1 Thessalonians 2:1-13** *For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*

I know that's a lengthy passage, but that's our sermon title for today, "Thanking God Without Ceasing" because that's the verse that stood out the most. Another statement Parrish made last week—I'm going to the well, here, I'm relying on some of what he shared—he talked about, "There is always a new excitement in the word of God." That's something that, again, goes back to our perspective. We could look at it as just words on a page, and not think anything of it, not take it seriously, look at it like it's ancient history, or that it's not applicable, or even from this standpoint: The Bible talks about the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life (2 Corinthians 3:6), but Christ Himself said, "My words are Spirit and they are life." (John 6:63) And that's something that we have to allow it to come to light. We have to understand that it is as applicable to our lives today as it was thousands of years ago, as it was hundreds of years ago, as it was yesterday, as it will always be. Jesus Himself said, "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) And, it's a standpoint that we have to understand that we are making progress, if we choose to have those roots in God. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Proverbs 4:18) And it's a n indicator of us making progress. And, if we look back at the time that we've had, the life that we've lived in Christ, and not having any regrets. Oh, we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)—that's accurate—but, it's a matter of getting back up, dusting ourselves off, accepting God's grace, repenting, and going on, and enduring. And, it's not the same old, same old; it's God creating in us a new heart if we allow it, it's God reaching us in ways we could have never imagined possible, exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think. And, you know, when we think about that, and we look at other people's situations, and, if we see it, whether they're better off or they're worse off, we can't live anybody else's life. We can do the best we can to receive support, and we can do the best we can to offer support, but everybody's going to be standing on their own. And we can't think that we could just help every single solitary person, whether it's monetary, or whether it's assistance of some sort, but we can show them the Gospel. There's a guy I see just about every couple of days, on the corner of Green Bay and Belvidere—driving this way—he sits out in front of that White Castle, and he looks pretty bad; he looks pretty rough. I don't know his exact

situation; I mean, we see these things happen. Maybe, in some areas, more often than not, or more regularly. Does my heart go out to him? Sure. Have I talked to him? No. Do I feel an obligation for anything more than sharing the Gospel? And, again, sometimes when you see it so frequently and so often, and you feel pulled in different directions, then it's a matter of, okay, at what point do we actually draw the line? At what point do we actually create boundaries? At what point do we think, "I've got to stand on my own two feet? I've got to stand still and see the salvation of God." And, what about everybody else? I can't sit there and have roots in somebody else's life; I've got to have the roots in my own life to be able to know that I can make it. And, again, it's a matter of, we can't force it on anybody else. People might just brush it off, or dust it off; it doesn't matter. It doesn't really matter whether the world is going to try to shut down all the churches, or try to force all the churches to teach certain things, or accept certain laws or regulations, or whatever; we stand on the Word of God, and the Word of God is unchanging. And, we're certainly not going to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. And, there is a matter of standards, where it's, "I'm not going to back down from that." We can't back down from that. What's right in the eyes of God? You have to dig in, because it depends on what the point is; it depends on what the issue is, but it's certainly not going to change as far as being born again. We've had—and I appreciate this, Andy and Parrish have alluded to this on occasion, as far as standards for marriage. We even talked about it a little bit, today, as far as mentioning different people celebrating. Well, no, this was a man and a woman, and I'm not going to go much more into that, but, these are things that, there have been legal changes that are attempting to impose and infringe upon where we stand as Christians. Okay, it's not a matter of accepting it, or changing what we believe, or changing our standards, and this wasn't planned, and this isn't something that I had a certain agenda, or, "I'm going to go touch on this," but, I have to say that I appreciate that being mentioned.

So what does a heart of thankfulness and thanking God without ceasing have to do with having root in ourselves? For starters, we're not going to thank God without ceasing if we don't have root in ourselves. It's only go, and take us to a certain point. Oh, we might be happy on occasion, or we might think, "Oh, this is going good," as long as it goes our way, as long as this is taken care of, or everybody's happy with us, or whatever the case might be. Some degree of satisfaction, depending on how well things are going. But it's not going to be on-going, it'll only be occasional as long as our roots aren't in God. That occasional thankfulness is going to run dry. If we're not thankful to God continuously we're not going to last.

So, now, I'd kind of like to turn it over to us, as far as the congregation. I'd like to ask for some participation. What I'm looking for is for you to share briefly, something in your life that was a turning point, or something that caused you to thank God for without ceasing. It could be a healing you received, it could be a job you've had for a long time, or it could be the mending of a broken relationship. When I was putting this together, I got to thinking about Ed Kretzer, and I called him; I wanted to make sure—I shared with him, and asked his permission, but I knew he was going to say, "Definitely! Yeah, please mention that." I'm not going to go too deep into it, but Ed had had a broken relationship with his mother, that went back many years. Many years, from prior to the time that he went into the military, and Ed's been retired from the service for a good ten years. And he just didn't know how to reconnect with his mom; she was living down in El Paso, Texas. , and, it was one of those things that you could see it in his demeanor, and you could feel that emotion, and feel that sadness, over the course of time, whenever somebody would ask about his mom. But, the victory: He connected with her about a year and a half ago, and, not only did he get a chance to reconnect with her, he got a chance to go down there and visit, and he and Pat went down there, they actually baptized her in Jesus' name. And he shared that, and he sent a few pictures about that, and his mom was in a wheel chair. At this point, she's probably in her mid-eighties, but, it was something that he knows that God opened that door. And he and Pat are actually on the way to visit with his brother, whom he had a fractured relationship with for many years. And, you know what? This isn't about who's at fault. Who caused this? What caused this? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. God's actually the One who brought that reconciliation. So thank God for that.

So, what I want to ask is, for anybody in here, if they'd like to share, just briefly, about something that keeps you thankful to God without ceasing. Thankful—and I'm not talking about, "Oh, because I woke up this morning." Okay, that's good, but tomorrow, you're going to say, "Well, I woke up this morning." I want to hear something that's a little more than—an experience that you fall back on. It could have been something a while

ago; it could be something that happened relatively recently, but I'd like to ask for some hands. Ken. Ken Shelton:

**Ken:** Yes, last month, I had a test done on my legs at the V.A. I had bad circulation; I knew about it. So, I went to the doctor and has this test. And the doctor, he came out, and he said, "You know what? There's nothing wrong." So, it's a blessing, and I thank Jesus all the time for that. It's a much a blessing today as it was back then.

Yes. Thanks, Ken, Thank you. Elmira:

**Elmira:** I want to say thank you because, yesterday, my grandson, who was in the army, yesterday, he came back home, alive.

Thank God. Brent:

**Brent:** Well, I got one, because, when I was young, my dad, he was a hard case. I didn't really like the guy. It got to a point where, like, my late teen-age years, I really didn't want to deal with him any more. Then, he started to go to church; he started to change, and I really seen it, and my whole goal in life was just, "As long as I don't turn out like my dad." Because that was, like, the standard: "Don't be like him. Don't be a jerk." You know. When he started to change, and when he shared baptism with me, the way we teach it, you know, and I seen him change, it started to go, "If God can change my dad, then He can change me." I was already set on a path, and I didn't believe I was going to change. And that's something, I go back to seeing my dad. That gave me inspiration and I joined the Navy, and I met y'all folks, and here I am.

Amen. By the way, welcome back to you and Amy. Mike:

**Mike:** God delivered me from cigarettes.

Amen. That's something you can fall back on. Jason:

**Jason:** Yeah, my dad grew up kind of rough; he lost his mom at a really young age. So, as he was raising me, he just wanted me to be tough, you know? I grew up, not really feeling like a man, I never felt like I was powerful. Anyway, fast-forward, my dad called me, out of the blue, maybe, about a year ago. And he broke down, he was crying a little bit, and he told me, "Look man, I just want to let you know why I was the way I was with you." He said, "I apologize for that." He said, "I love you. You're probably the greatest dad I've ever seen in my life, just seeing the way you are with your kids." He started pouring out his love on me, and crying a little bit. I said, "Dad, if this is just a fluke little piece of you, that I'm going to get only for this conversation, I'm going to hold onto it with everything I got for the rest of my life, because it meant so much." That conversation was so healing for me. Every time I think about it, it just shows me how much God loves me, how God cares for me, how much, you know, God is even there when things aren't going right. So, that's all I've got to say.

Thank you, Jason. And, that's what we're talking about, is something that, we go back to the well. We think about those changes that God's brought, and, again, it might have been recent; it might have been long ago, but it's something that we're able to thank God without ceasing for. Is there anybody else that would... Mike?

**Mike K:** There's not much detail, but God's always providing my needs, whether it's something to eat, something to drink. It's like, "Thank You, Jesus; that's the stuff."

Amen. That's something to be thankful, on an ongoing basis. Thank you, thank you. Vince Stepchuk:

Vince: I got baptized in 1986, and, a year alter, I baptized my mom and my two brothers and my sister. My dad, he needed a little more work, but, my mom and me, we spent a little time; we kept working on that one. We agreed together, at the time, to keep working the situation. And, my dad got terminally ill, back in 2001; he probably would have died in the hospital. But, it ended up, over the years of working with him, we saw my dad get baptized in Jesus' name, in the hospital. The physician resisted it, but they thought he would die there, in the hospital, but he ended up surviving it long enough to see my first daughter born. My wife, at the time, was pregnant, you know, and this was back in January of 2001, and my dad, he got discharged from the hospital, and then he came to our house, and then back to my mom's house, and, then, in August, my mom called and said he was back in the hospital again, and we knew it was the end, this time. And, we got over there, we held Andrea up; he got to hold her for a few moments, and they put him on a morphine drip and he never woke up. To me, the miracle of that whole thing was, it was the hospital administrators were so mind-boggled because they were sure that he was so sick, there was no way he could get discharged. They ??? the bunch of them, and, after he got baptized, his condition started to improve, and the hospital administrators actually put that in a letter, and put it in their news bulletin, and distributed it to other hospitals in the area, showing that we baptized him in the therapeutic tank. That's something that, if I live to be a thousand years old, that's something that I'll never forget.

Amen. I appreciate you sharing that, and everybody that did. A reminder, I'm going to allude to it just briefly—I don't want to take away from the impact of what people shared, but—I may have some of the details a little off, but it is from the Book of Genesis, and it's about Jacob had a son named Joseph, that he thought had been killed, and, a lot of us know that story. And, when it was discovered through the course of many events and many years, that Joseph, that he was able to go down and see his son, after that long a time, and the part the really stays with me, that's a long the lines of what you just shared, Vince, is, I don't want to down to the grave in sorrow (Genesis 44:29-31). And it's a heavy thing. It's a thing that, he was already a man that was grieved, because he thought he had lost that son. And, many years after that when he realized, "This is him. This is him." To me, that's a Bible example of something that's miraculous. And I appreciate everybody that shared, and, I believe that's one of my favorite parts of the service, to hear testimonies, and things that keep us going, that keep us in the faith. And I'm closing, here, in a moment.

Nobody can force us to be thankful. It's a choice we make every day. I know we've all read about different passages in the Bible that allude to being thankful, and encourage us to be thankful. And I'm not trying to be whimsical now, but time goes fast, and it seems to even accelerate a little bit more as the years go by. But, the Bible tells us that our life is but a vapor. And that's kind of a hard pill to swallow, because we think that, as we sit outside, and look up at the clouds that move really slow, or you can't watch the grass grow, I mean, it's just—but then, a week later, or after a rain, you see it, "Oh, got to go out there and mow the lawn," or whatever the case might be, but time gets behind us. Time still gets behind us. And, whether we look at it like it's in our rear-view mirror, or whatever way you want to describe it, that's the case. It still happens. But when we're able to thank God without ceasing we know we're in a good place. And that's a good place to be. Thank you, and God bless you.