

Thanksgiving / Advent

Eph 5:19,20; 1 Thess 5:18

The following proclamation was made by Governor Bradford in 1623, 3 years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth;

“To all ye Pilgrims,

Inasmuch as the great father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, squashes and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as he has protected us from the raids of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday November ye 29th of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three, and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Plymouth rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving t ye Almighty God for all His blessings.”

This Thursday was Thanksgiving. One day in which we like those early Pilgrims set aside time in our busy schedules to give thanks to God. Now, there is nothing wrong with that except the Word of God tells us that this should be a continual, daily, attitude.

Eph. 5:19,20 tells Christians to "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ALWAYS giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Thes. 5:16-18 says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Paul's main subject here is PRAISE, THANKSGIVING. Notice the other important words in these passages; ALWAYS, CONTINUALLY, and IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. It sounds as if Paul is talking about a church service here, especially in Eph. **"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart..."** But he isn't. He is talking about a continual attitude for Christians - an attitude driven from the center of our being. How we are to be to each other. But how, you may wonder, can we have this attitude continually, especially "in all circumstances?" I believe the answer lies in our perspective of thanksgiving. We need the proper perspective.

Now, I believe there are a few attitudes that steal away our gratitude or our ability to be thankful.

Attitudes that steal our ability to be thankful. (float in 1-3)

1) One is our pride. This is the attitude that says, "Nobody ever gave me anything, I worked for everything I have. Or, What has God done for me?" With this kind of attitude, we feel that we have no one to thank but ourselves.

2) A critical spirit is another attitude that keeps us from being **thankful** --- or constantly complaining. Instead of being grateful, this person will always find something to complain about.

3) Carelessness is another attitude that keeps us from being grateful. Someone once said that if the stars only came out once a year, we would stay out all night to watch them. But they are there every night and we have grown accustomed to them.

The Israelites grumbled because they had no food so God miraculously sent manna (a crust-like bread) to cover the ground each day except the Sabbath day. Then they started to grumble because it was the same thing every day.

They had a miracle - straight from God every day but became complacent and were no longer satisfied. Because of **pride, carelessness or a critical spirit** we will never be truly thankful for all that God has given us.

We are called to be a thankful people.

If any nation ought to be thankful to God and grateful for his goodness, it ought to be America. If any people in America ought to be thankful to God and grateful for his goodness, it ought to be Christians.

THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE EXPRESSED -- If we are grateful for something or to someone and we never tell them, it does little good. **Psalm 107, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good."** We should express our thanks to God and others.

In Luke 17 we read about ten men who were healed by Jesus of their leprosy. Out of those ten men only one came back to give thanks and Jesus said, "Where are the other nine?" He was the only one willing to take time to go back and say "thank you." Because of that Jesus said to him, **"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."**

Have you ever wondered why Jesus said that? I mean like the others, the man was already healed of his leprosy from the time they went to show themselves to the priest. But when Jesus says to this one man, **"Your faith has made you well, "he wasn't just talking about a physical healing, he was talking about a spiritual one, a mental one. I believe He was made whole.**

We too are made whole by our thanksgiving. Psychologists today tell us that sincere gratitude, thanksgiving, is the healthiest of all human emotions. Hans Selye, who is considered the guru of stress studies, has said that gratitude produces more positive emotional energy than any other attitude in life.

God appreciates our thanksgiving. I believe It actually lifts Him up and it glorifies Him. And thanksgiving draws us closer to Him. If we are not grateful, if we do not express our thanksgiving, then it can have the opposite effect. In Rom. 1:21 Paul says, **"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."**

This passage seems to imply that people who are ungrateful to God will soon fall away - their hearts will become hardened. Here, we see pride keeping people from worshipping God and being thankful.

OUR THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE EXPANSIVE (flutter in 1-3)

And as our thanksgiving expands, it should include

1) **The Blessings of Life.** When is the last time to took time to “count your blessings?”

Thank God for the

2) Burdens of Life. This is a tough one. I Thes. 5:18 says, **"Give thanks in ALL circumstances."** Eph. 5:20 says, **"always giving thanks."** You may think, surely Paul made a mistake or even that this was easy for him to say. But it wasn't. Paul suffered from some very difficult problem that he called a thorn in the flesh. He also had been run out of town, beaten, whipped, imprisoned, betrayed by friends, naked, cold, hungry shipwrecked, and stoned because of his faith. Yet, Paul never stopped giving thanks. He writes: **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us..." Romans 8:18**

In our weakness God can make us strong. I've experienced this personally and know it is true. I don't believe God expects us to be thankful for the suffering itself, but rather that God can work in us through

Our thanksgiving should include

3) The benefits of life as well.

When the Israelites focused on what they didn't have, they failed to see ALL that they DID have. We are constantly adding to our prayer list but more than anything we should be adding to our praise list.

An experiment was done in New York's Central Park where an advertising firm dressed a man up as a blind man and gave him a cup to collect money. One day they put a sign around his neck that read, "I'm Blind." On that day he collected about \$4.00. The next day they dressed him the same way, placed him in the same place but changed the sign to read, "It's Spring and I'm Blind." That day he collected nearly \$40.00. That day, those people realized how blessed they were by the beautiful flowers, birds, the sunrise and sunset.

Paul says we are to "give thanks in all circumstances BECAUSE this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." This is God's will for us. And he knows, if we will do it, that our lives will be changed.

Marks of a Thankful Christian (flutter in 1-2)

1) Growing Christian. As we understand the blessing we have we desire to give thanks to God.

2) Giving Christian. When we realize how much God has done for us and how much he continues to do, we should be more than happy to give something back to him.

James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift (do you have any good gifts in your life?) is from above, and comes down from the father of lights."

Something to consider is When we go to a restaurant, we are more than happy to give a good waitress a 15% tip, but for some reason, many have a problem with giving God 10% of all the good gifts he has given us. **We need to ask ourselves if we are truly thankful.**

Henry Frost was a missionary to China. In his journal he wrote of a very difficult time in his life. He says, **"I had received sad news from home, and deep shadows had covered my soul. I prayed BUT the darkness did not vanish. I summoned myself to endure, BUT the darkness only deepened. Then I went to an inland station and saw on the wall of the mission home these words: 'TRY THANKSGIVING.'** I did, and in a moment every shadow was gone, not to return.

Have you been going through some difficult times? Have you prayed but they're still there?

Have you told yourself to keep on going and it would someday disappear - but it got deeper?

Then why not try THANKSGIVING?

Especially we can give thanks for the season of Advent, which is to prepare us for Christmas.

- I wonder how many of you can remember when you first met Jesus?

Do you remember? - How did that happen for you? Do you remember the joy you felt?

- What have you learned about Jesus since?
- Who do you believe Jesus is?

- When I was first introduced to Jesus I was a very young. I knew that he was a good guy who I could trust. I knew he had a beard and sandals, and that he healed sick people and loved the people that others disliked. But for a long time, that's just about as far as it went. I basically had a causal relationship with Jesus and God. I knew God was real – but just out there somewhere.

It wasn't really till after getting a start on a family that I re-visited what I thought I believed. It was then that I really got in touch with who Jesus really is. Then as I began to study the Bible for myself, I discovered that the only Son of God was born into this world to die for me. It was then I got in touch with the suffering Christ and the love & mercy of God.

Now you might be thinking – hang on here, this is the first Sunday in Advent, the beginning the Christmas season. – it's all about baby Jesus – not the suffering Jesus --- but you know what – you really cannot separate the two. Jesus was born to die for you and I.

God became flesh and dwelt among us. God chose to be born into the world He created for us, to teach us how to live and rescue us from Sin.

Have you ever thought about who Jesus was before the beginning of the world. Why would you? None of us were there and nobody wrote about Jesus until he came into the world as a man (apart from the prophecies that didn't make sense until that happened). Yet Paul address' it in **Colossians 1: 15- 20** **“¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross”**

Paul is teaching the church in Colosse, that it matters a great deal who Jesus was before he became a man. Because if we don't know who he always was, we won't get what his death and resurrection really means. We've gotta know, that when the world saw Jesus it saw God. And therefore Jesus is these things:

- **He is the image of the invisible God -- He is equal to the Father – v15**
- **He created us and everything else – v16**
- **Nothing works without him – v17**
- **And that includes the church – v18**
- **Fully God – v19**

All of this tells me that Jesus came to this planet to show us what God is like and what His purpose is for us. Christmas therefore reminds us of our need to put God in first place in our lives and surrender all we are and have to Him.