

Thanksgiving

BE YE THANKFUL

Radio Sermon delivered over Station KRLD
Nov. 23, 1947 7:05 to 7:30 a.m.
Sears and Summitt Church of Christ
Dallas, Texas
by Melvin J. Wise, Minister

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in, one body; and be ye thankful." (Col. 3:15)

By national custom the last Thursday in November has been set apart with the designation of "Thanksgiving Day". But Christians are exhorted to be grateful each day for the daily blessings which Heaven showers upon us. Paul said, "In everything give thanks." (1 Thess. 5:17)

The observance of the last Thursday in November as "Thanksgiving Day" started with the Proclamation of President Lincoln in 1863. It had been observed on different days for many years before this time, by people who got the thought from the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. They observed Thanksgiving in America for the first time in the autumn of 1621. The Pilgrims had been driven from their old country because of their religious convictions. They believed the Bible, and in some things they differed from the religion of state; and inasmuch as they would not subscribe to their state's religion they were driven out. But the thought of Thanksgiving did not originate with them. Being lovers of God's Word, they would read in the Bible of the "Feast of Ingathering", or the "Feast of Tabernacles", being observed by the Jews of Judaism from the fifteenth to the twenty-second day of the seventh month - the month of Tisri. Feasts in a religious sense are ceremonies of fasting and thanksgiving. So after the Pilgrims had spent one year in this country in peace, and without persecution, they appointed a day and came together and united in thanksgiving to Almighty God for his blessings during the year.

Those of us who are so fortunate as to live in America in this Twentieth Century little realize the extent of our blessings. We are surrounded with conveniences beyond the wildest imaginations of our forefathers. I would not want to carry our modern civilization back for even one decade, not even if I could, but in spite of all our prosperity and advancement, most generally we are exceedingly ungrateful, and never stop often enough to think of praising Him from whom all blessings flow, and from whose Hand "every good and perfect gift" cometh. Despite certain economic woes, no people have ever had so much for which to be thankful as have we Americans. We have murmured and complained about this and that, but we have never drifted into Socialism or Communism; we have never adopted the dols system.

There is no sin that cuts deeper than ingratitude. To slave and sacrifice for somebody who may chance to be "down and out" and then see that person when on his feet again, forget the help given, and even spurn the given, is just about the most heart-rending experience that one is called upon to endure. Yet so common is this lack of appreciation that these words have become a proverb among us: "Feed a hungry dog and he will bite your hand." Shakespeare spoke volumes in these two lines:

"Blow, blow, thou wintry wind;
Yet thou art not half so unkind as man's ingratitude."

The ice, the sleet, the snow can only sting the body; while ingratitude pierces the souls of men.

Examples of ingratitude are found everywhere. The world rejected the God that gave it life, only to follow Satan, who can give only death and misery. When Jehovah freely offered up His only begotten Son as a means of "reconciling the world unto Himself", the very people whom Christ had come to save formed a hissing mob and cried: "let Him be crucified." In principle that cry has never ceased.

Some mothers and fathers have spent their lives rearing children who have done no more in return than to bring disgrace upon the family name. Parental fingers have toiled till numb that their boy or girl might have educational advantages of high school and college. Words will not describe the blow some of those parents have received when their children cease to be grateful and even become ashamed of the folks back at home.

"Filial ingratitude;
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child."

During the life of our Lord there came to Him one day, ten miserable outcasts covered with leprosy. They were just outside the limits of a certain village, because their contagious disease had made it necessary that they be segregated from society. As required by the law of Moses, lepers were compelled to dwell alone or outside the camp. Thus excluded from friends and loved ones, from all society, these ten unfortunate wrecks of humanity seemed to group themselves together for company. Their condition was pitiable, not only because of the loathsome disease, but also because of their enforced seclusion and loneliness. They were companions in suffering and misery, and in unison they cried out to Jesus in the distance and said: "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us." Afflicted with an incurable disease, cast off and avoided, pronounced unclean, quarantined by law, they were indeed objects of pity, and surely Jesus would not pass them by. His simple command to these lepers was: "Go and show yourselves unto the priests." They obeyed, and while going on their way they were cleansed. In narrating this incident, Luke the historian said: "And one of them, when he ~~was~~ saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." (Luke 17:15-18) This was a case of gratitude versus ingratitude. Possibly the nine are a good representation of the percentage who today are ungrateful for life's innumerable blessings; while the one is a good example of the percentage who are grateful. We would do well if we searched out ~~our~~ our own hearts to see if we may not find such ingratitude in our own souls. As did the Samaritan, let us turn back each day and give thanks and glory to God.

Throughout the New Testament Christians are exhorted to give thanks. Paul said, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. 5:20). Note here three things the apostle says: First, "Giving thanks always for all things." We have so much, as recipients of God's abundant grace, to be thankful for. Let us thank Him for His goodness and mercy. We are so often prone to magnify our calamities we often overlook the occasions for gratitude. He who looks on his trials will soon find that his disposition has become sour and bitter. But he who endeavors to find how many occasions for gratitude he has, will soon find the burdens of sorrow alleviated and his ~~main~~ mind tranquil and calm. Second, Paul here says, "Unto God the Father." And why give thanks to God the Father? Because, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17). Third, in this verse the apostle says, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". That is, through His mediation. When we

ask for mercy and strength from God, it is through His merits that we receive it. It is through Jesus Christ that even the gratitude of our hearts can be accepted by a Holy God.

To the Philippian Christians, Paul said, "In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. 4:6 RV). Here we are taught that even in making known unto God our requests, we should do so with thankful hearts for blessings already enjoyed from His bountiful mercy. We can always find something to be thankful for, no matter what may be the burdens of our wants. As we pray for the supply of our wants, let us be thankful for His rich and kind Providence which has hitherto befriended us. When we pray for a restoration of health, let us be thankful for the health that we have enjoyed in the past.

To the church at Colosse, Paul in the text said, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." (Col. 3:15). A spirit of thankfulness will do much to promote harmony and peace. An ungrateful people will become a tumultuous, agitative, restless and dissatisfied people. Such was the condition of the Japanese and German people who became impassioned with a desire for expansion and world power. Such also characterizes the threat of Communism today. But a grateful people will overcome selfishness, and will rejoice in the happiness and success and prosperity of others.

To the Thessalonian Christians, Paul said, "Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thess. 5:17-18). In these two verses the apostle says three distinct things. First, "Pray without ceasing." We are to persevere in prayer; that is, we are to maintain an uninterrupted and constant spirit of prayer. We are to observe the duty and privilege of prayer in private at the family altar, and in public worship at the house of God. Just how often a Christian should pray, the Scriptures do not inform us. However, David said, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray." (Psa. 55:17). But again David said: "Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments." (Psa. 119:164). In spite of the king's decree against it, Daniel went into ~~his~~ his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he knelt upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before His God, as he did aforetime." (Daniel 6:10). Every Christian should have a regular time allotted for prayer, for it is not easy to maintain devotion to God without regular habits of devotion. In the early morning, after having experienced God's protecting Providence during the night, let us thank Him while our minds are fresh. In the late evening, after experiencing His goodness during the day, let us give thanks to Him from whom all blessings flow. Second, in this statement to the Thessalonians, Paul said, "In every thing give thanks". We can always find many things for which to be thankful. We should praise God for everything that happens to us under His kind Providence, for truly "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." (Romans 8:28). Even when we suffer tribulation, let us praise God for His help in time of trouble. Third, in this admonition to the Thessalonians, Paul said, "For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." That is, it is God's will that we should be grateful. Even any father in the flesh delights to see his children manifest gratitude toward their father for his favors bestowed upon them.

The things for which we should be thankful are too numerous to mention. We should thank Him for the sunrise of another day with its innumerable temporal blessings. We should thank Him for America - the land of the free and the home of the brave - for our heritage that came to us through the sacrifices of our forefathers. We should be thankful to God, above all, for the spiritual blessings which we enjoy in Christ Jesus, that give us an heritage to the Promised Land -

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the home of the soul.

"I should like above all to be thankful,
To be grateful for blessings each day,
To show by my words and my actions
That my heart echoes all that I say.

The stars in the beautiful heaven
Brightly shine on the rich and the poor;
God grant that each one will be thankful
In a palace or a hut on the moor.

God showers the earth with His sunshine,
Darkness gives us the blessing of sleep;
Though put plain or mountains surround us,
Yet we know God is found on the deep.

So let us be thankful each morning,
Then let us be thankful each night -
With the plain Gospel Pathway before us,
Let us carefully do what is right.

God will prosper folk that are grateful
Humble folk that give thanks every day
Can pluck from his sight Satan's minions -
Lift the soul that has learned how to pray."

