

## PREACHING THROUGH THE CALENDAR (15)

### Thanksgiving Day

Today, we continue with another lesson for our 2025 theme. This coming Thursday is Thanksgiving.

As we have noted in each of these lessons, I am NOT presenting these as something the church observes.

What we are doing today is no different than any Sunday. However, because when we see this day on the calendar it often causes us to pause and consider the meaning behind that day. And often, there are Biblical applications we can consider. That is something that we can clearly consider with Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving in America traces its origin the fall of 1621 where citizens of the Plymouth Colony (pilgrims) and the Native Americans of the Wampanoag Confederacy celebrated a 3-day feast together, after some of the Native Americans taught the Europeans how to survive the land. According to surviving accounts, both the Pilgrims and Native Americans made provisions for the feast (deer and fowl – possibly wild turkey). Thanksgiving observances are recorded on various occasions throughout early American history. But it did not become a national annual observance until Abraham Lincoln in 1863. He established the last Thursday in November to be a day of remembrance. His goal was to promote unity during the civil war. In 1941, FD Roosevelt established it as the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in November. Our modern observance was formalized across the U.S. by President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Prior to that it was more regional in its observance.

Thanksgiving is one of the most popular holidays in the U.S. observed with family gatherings, benevolence for the poor, parades and watching football. Many pause to consider how blessed we really are and to give thanks. It has also unofficially been declared the beginning of the holiday season. According to NPR, it was moved to the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday at the request of retailers to give more time for end-of-year holiday shopping (let the commercialization begin).

As Christians, we have many reasons to be thankful, and the Bible has much to say about that. So let us consider how we ought to be thankful.

#### I. What is thanksgiving?

- a. NOTE: As I use this term, I am no longer addressing the holiday, but an attitude we are to have as Christians. We appeal to its use in scripture.
- b. The word “thanksgiving” is found 34x in the Bible (NKJV) – 9x in the NT. The word “thanks” is found 108x in the Bible (59x in the NT).
- c. The Greek word for thanksgiving is *εὐχαριστία* (eucharistia). The word for “thanks” is most often a derivative of this same word. It is the act of expressing gratitude or appreciation for blessings received.
- d. Being thankful is an acknowledgment that we have been blessed, as well as who has blessed us and in what way (we think about the ways we have been blessed). Thanksgiving also serves as a reminder of our dependence upon God and one another.
- e. The sin of ingratitude – while many may from time to time say thank you to someone, our society is influenced by many qualities that are contrary to gratitude – pride and self-centeredness (e.g., self-reliance, self-satisfaction, selfishness, etc.). Habits such as constant comparisons, self-pity (the victim mentality), fault-finding, materialism, busyness (which keeps one from pausing to reflect) and entitlement can lead one to be ungrateful. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 - I describe as the list of selfishness which specifically mentions it. Romans 1:21 notes that even among the worldly who knew God, they did not glorify Him as God and were not thankful.

#### II. In everything give thanks.

- a. *The Bible is clear that we ought to be thankful –*

- i. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 – in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- ii. Ephesians 5:20 we give thanks always for all things to God the Father
- iii. 2 Corinthians 9:15, *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*
- iv. Psalm 92:1-2, *It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness every night,*  
NOTE: Throughout the psalms we find the call to be thankful. We will notice a handful of these verses in our lesson.
- v. Psalm 100:4, *Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.*
- b. **For our physical blessings** – 1 Timothy 4:3-4 – whatever we have is to be received with thanksgiving. James 1:17, every good and perfect gift is from above... 3 John 2 finds John praying that he prosper in all things and be in good health.
- c. **For our spiritual blessings** – Colossians 2:6-7, Ephesians 1:3 – He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.
- d. **Why should I be thankful**
  - i. Because God loved me – The root word for thanksgiving is associated with the word for “grace”. We are thankful because we have been shown grace. John 3:16, 1 John 4:8 – God IS love. Psalm 107:1, *Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. 15 - Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!* At least 4x in this psalm, the call to give thanks to Him is mentioned.
  - ii. Because He provides for us – Matthew 5:45 – God sustains the world; 6:11- we pray for our material needs, 6:30-33 – He knows what we need and thus we are called to seek first the kingdom of God.
  - iii. Because I have been forgiven – is there a greater need? Psalm 103:2-3, *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases.* Romans 6:17, But God be thanked...
  - iv. Because I have a spiritual family, His church – 2 Thess 1:3 - *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,*  
Ephesians 1:16 – Paul continually gave thanks for brethren, etc. Our spiritual family are our lifeline in this dark world. We ought to regularly be thankful for them.
  - v. Because He has given me direction through His word – Psalm 119:97-98 – *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me.*  
1 Corinthians 2:9-10 – God has revealed to us His will; 2 Peter 1:3, etc.
  - vi. Because He has provided something better for us when we pass from this life – Hebrews 12:28-29 – we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace (gratitude).
  - vii. Because He answers our prayers – 1 John 5:14-15
- e. In good times and bad. It is easy to be thankful when things are going well (though often such have a tendency to forget God too) – cf. Proverbs 30:9-10. But what about when you are struggling or suffering? Paul and Silas in Philippi – are singing and praying to God. Acts 16:25, James 1:2-5 – count it all joy... if you lack wisdom... ask, etc.

### III. How should we express thanks

- a. Through prayer – Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Timothy 2:1, Colossians 3:17. Prayer is the primary avenue through which we express thanksgiving to God.

- b. With our whole being – Gratitude needs to be a foundational attitude. Colossians 2:6-7, *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.* Colossians 3:17 – whatever you do... giving thanks.
- c. In worship to God – Ephesians 5:19-20 – singing and giving thanks, Hebrews 13:15 – the fruit of our lips., Psalm 95:1-2, *Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.*
- d. By counting your blessings – we will NEVER outgive God. One of the surest ways to develop genuine gratitude is to honestly consider how much you do have.
- e. Learn to be content – 1 Timothy 6:6-8 – godliness with contentment is great gain. Recall Paul in Philippians 4:11-13 where he declared that he had learned to be content no matter the circumstances. Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:9-10 – Paul was willing to accept whatever and make the best of it.
- f. By saying “thank you” to others and MEANING it! Gratitude is not exclusively for God. We are to be a gracious, humble and considerate people. That will lead to being thankful when others help us. As an example, Paul expressed gratitude to the Philippians for supporting him – Philippians 4:14ff.
- g. By paying it forward – the Christian life is supposed to be a selfless life – Philippians 2:3-4. One way we can show gratitude is to help others, appreciating what others have done for us. Jesus gave an illustration of FAILED gratitude with the parable of the unforgiving steward – Matthew 18:21-35. A servant who had been shown great GRACE failed to show grace to his fellow servant. God took note. We make the world better through acts of kindness toward others.

Truly, God's word calls for us to be thankful. It is foundational as we have noted. We have so much to be thankful for. Let us never take for granted our blessings, both physical and spiritual. So as you enjoy family and feasting this coming Thursday, PLEASE pause and give thanks. It gives the day a much greater perspective. AND, by all means, understand that giving thanks is NOT just a once-a-year exercise. It is an ongoing pursuit. What about you? Are you genuinely thankful? Think about it!