

REASONS TO BE THANKFUL

Texts:

I Thessalonians 5:18 "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"

Psalm 100:4: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name."

I. LET US GIVE THANKS FOR OUR FREEDOMS.

First of all, there is no freedom in the earth as precious as the freedom of knowing Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. If one has never experienced this freedom, he or she is not really free. Jesus said in John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And lest there be any argument on this matter, our Lord reaffirmed in John 8:36, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." We should remind ourselves that the freedom in Jesus is never a freedom that simply means we live in any manner we so please. In the same chapter in which Jesus declares our freedom to us, He first of all said in John 8:29, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." We are made free to serve Christ. This is stated in Romans 6:18: "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Romans 6:1, 2: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" To turn back to the world in which we have been delivered from is stepping back into bondage as Galatians 5:1 affirms, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." I Corinthians 15:57: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us also give thanks for our freedoms as Americans. One of my favorite holidays is Thanksgiving. The roots are very Christian and very American. Our Pilgrim forefathers, along with the Native Americans, gathered the best of their food and in peace gave thanks to God. The God-denying secularist has a hard time with Thanksgiving, because, after all, to whom are we giving thanks if not to God? It's truly difficult to have a generic, non-specific spirit of thanksgiving, without an object of our thanksgiving. "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving" (Psalms 69:30).

While enroute to the new world, the Mayflower was hit by a cataclysmic storm that nearly sank them. The main mast was broken and they were helpless, doomed to drift until the inhabitants of the ship died and the ship became a ghost ship, lost at sea. But alas! A long bolt was taken from the Bible and book press being brought by the Pilgrims to keep them in the Word and in good reading. The massive bolt secured the broken main mast and soon they were on their journey again. Imagine it--saved by a single bolt!

The hardships for the Pilgrims were not over; during the voyage five passengers died. Then in the winter of 1620-21, the Pilgrims had to bury forty-

five more, bring the total of fifty deaths of the original 102 passengers who set sail. Think of it--in just over one year, half of the Pilgrims died!

Then one of history's most remarkable heroes, Squanto, who years before the Pilgrims arrived on Plymouth Rock, was captured and taken to slavery in Europe. But finally finding passage back to his home in what is now Massachusetts, he was deeply disturbed to discover his entire tribe of the Pawtuxets had died. It is estimated that over one hundred thousand Indians had died during this devastating disease. Had Squanto stayed in the new world, he, too, would have died. But instead, he survived and thrived in spite of all and returned to this new world speaking perfect English. That spring and summer Squanto proved himself invaluable. He led the Pilgrims to brooks brimming with herring beginning their spring migration upstream. He showed the Pilgrims how to fish with traps. He taught them where to stalk game in the forest. The children learned what berries they could pick for their families. Twenty acres of corn grew tall after Squanto showed the Pilgrims how to plant fish (as natural fertilizer) with the native corn seeds from a local tribe.

Historians have conjectured that had not Squanto been at that right place at the right time, the early Plymouth settlement simply would not have been. The people would have starved to death and the America as we know it today would have been drastically different. Appropriately, at this time of the year we give thanks. Although God does not orchestrate human bondage, He worked all things, including Squanto's brief slavery, for our good and His glory. If Squanto had not been captured, carried away and mastered the English language, he would not have been available to come to the aid of the Pilgrims. Governor William Bradford wrote, "Squanto is a special instrument sent by God for their good beyond their expectations." And in October 1621 the Pilgrims and their new Indian friends celebrated the first Thanksgiving.

We observe God's providence and are reminded of William Cowper's poem, a portion of which says, "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face."

II. LET US GIVE THANKS FOR A CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

I am convinced that many who were reared up in a Christian home do not understand the great benefits. I often think of something my uncle, Columbus Franklin Edwards told me many years ago. He said, "Johnny, you can thank God that you were saved as child, because in our family if anyone ever tasted alcohol, he became an alcoholic." One never knows what might have happened had not certain events taken place, but we know the personal relationship with Christ is the greatest defense against a wasted life. II Timothy 3:15: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

For those who are first generation Christians, you have the ability, as a rule, to understand, by virtue of comparison, how great it is to be saved and in a

Christian home. And you want to instill within your children the principles of this great life of faith.

In a Christian home, conversation with God through prayer is a lifetime reminder to whom we may go with our needs, our sorrows and the avenue in which to express our joyful thanks. 1Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing." In a Christian home we are taught to cherish the Bible that provides the basic principles for life at it's very best. Psalm 119:130: "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." Psalm 119:105: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

III. LET US GIVE THANKS THAT THE BEST IS YET TO COME.

I John 3:2: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

When we think of Thanksgiving, we think of a meal with our family. Many years ago when our four children were sitting around the Sunday afternoon dinner table, we were blessed to have Grandpa Wright sitting with us. I always loved having the Deacon (as I called him) at the table because that is when his daughter would be at her best in culinary expression. And this certain day was no exception. The pot roast was so tender and succulent you could cut it with a butter knife. The corn on the cob was so juicy when I bit into it, I sprayed the nearest kid in the high chair. The mashed potatoes were smooth and buttery and then when the gravy was applied, it became manna. The Deacon and I were pushing back from the table and my wife was collecting our plates, but then she placed our forks back in front of us and he and I looked at one another with a smile. I said, "Well, Deacon, that only means one thing; the best is yet to come!" And sure enough the oven door was lowered and there bubbling and filling the room with its fragrance was peach cobbler. It was entirely too hot to eat, so my wife placed a huge scoop of Blue Bell vanilla ice cream on to cool it off. Now we needed a spoon! But, the best part of the meal was not the food; it was the people, the loved ones around the table.

Life may hand you lemons and when that happens, you may make lemonade, as the old saying goes. But there are times that ultimately some things in life we may not be able to recover from on this side of eternity. But cheer up! No matter what happens in this life to a Christian, God promises you, the best is yet to come! John 21:12a: "Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine...." Revelation 19:9b: "And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb...." Rev. 22:20b: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

-Pastor Pope-