

Thanksgiving, A Biblical Commandment

If you were to ask me what is the most American holiday, I would answer, Thanksgiving. It is a wonderful time of the year. It comes in autumn when the heat, cold and usually severe storms are not occurring. It's often beautiful, especially in those areas where the leaves have turned and softly covered the earth in splendid colors like a rainbow blanket upon the earth. It's a time when we think of Pilgrims, Indians, turkey and pumpkin pie. I remember growing up, those who were preparing the Thanksgiving dinner would say, "Now don't eat too much breakfast; save room for your Thanksgiving meal." As I think back at the scene of the table with enough leftovers to last a week, it reminds me how wonderful it is to live in America, where God has abundantly blessed us. God said to His people in the Old Testament, "The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deuteronomy 28:8). We need to be aware this was the blessing contingent upon Israel's walk with the Lord. God help us to come back to the Lord as a nation, that we, too, might maintain His gracious blessing!

As we prepare our hearts for another Thanksgiving, let us keep in mind that thanksgiving for the child of God is not to be only an annual event, but a state of mind before the Lord. Hebrews 13:15 says, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." In light of this, we see thanksgiving is to be continual and we are to express it audibly!

Giving thanks is the very attitude and atmosphere of heaven! Revelation 4:9 says, "... give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever." Revelation 11:17 gives us a glimpse of the magnification of our Lord in glory, "Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned."

Being thankful is the way in which we approach God, as is illustrated in the passage that says, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Psalm 100:4). We can see in the initiating point of becoming a Christian that we enter into salvation with a thankful heart. The Word of God says of those who are not trusting the Lord for salvation, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1; 21). To refuse to humble one's self and give thanks is the attitude of the unregenerate. According to the Bible, we need to give thanks. Let us, therefore, give thanks:

1. FOR OUR PROVISION.

In Scripture, when our Lord fed the four thousand He taught us to first be thankful before we ate and for what we ate: "And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude" (Matthew 15:36). Christ did it again in John 6:11, "And

Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would." We understand that it was an ancient Hebrew custom to give thanks after one eats. Our Lord seems to set a precedent to give thanks before we receive. It is an act of faith when we believe that our needs will definitely be met through Christ (Philippians 4:19). Our Lord's act of thanksgiving for the meal stands out, for after he fed the multitude the Bible says, "(Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks)" (John 6:23). Paul followed the same pattern in Acts 27:35, "And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat."

Let us also give thanks:

2. FOR FRIENDS.

Listen to the great Apostle as he gives thanks for the people God has brought into his life: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15,16). II Thessalonians 2:13, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord...."

Paul is so dogmatic about being thankful for one another, that if there has been a falling out between believers, he commands, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:13-15). We are the Body of Christ and God intends for us to get along one with another. Also, let us give thanks:

3. WHEN IT DOESN'T MAKE COMMON SENSE.

Christians have been born from above and we of all people on earth should live the uncommon life. Too often we are tempted to respond in a common way. Someone gets mad at us, and in childish revenge we try to get back at them. I have heard it said, even if we cannot give thanks for our circumstances, we can always give thanks in the Lord. Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." But the Bible also says to go a little farther with this when we are exhorted, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thessalonians 5:18). We are to look at everything God directs and permits as His will and He tells us to be content with His choice of circumstance, "...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11). Also included in this form of thanksgiving is to be thankful for the people He, in sovereignty, places in our path. I heard the late Charles "Tremendous" Jones commending us to continue to work with people, no matter how difficult they become. He said, "don't give up on people, because they are all we have to work with!" How simple, but true! We

are to be thankful for all persons placed in our field of reference. The Bible says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men" (I Timothy 2:1).

Daniel continued to give thanks to God, even when he was faced with death in the lion's den. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Daniel 6:10). This is not a common man! His dignified spirituality is reflected in the phrase, "...and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." This should speak to all of us to be never changing in giving thanks all the time, for all people, and for all things.

Finally, let us give thanks:

4. FOR CALVARY.

Psalm 119:62 says, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments". In contrast, one of the most often used statements in the Psalms is a command to give thanks for God's mercies. For instance, from the beginning of the 118th Psalm to the end it says, "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 118:1, 29). How can praise for God's holy judgment be harmonized with His mercy? There is one way only, the Bible says, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10). At the cross, Holy God in Jesus Christ took the hand of unholy man and brought us together. And through His death we enjoy the righteous kiss of redemption because God's judgment was satisfied in our Lord's vicarious death.

Our response to Calvary should always be thanksgiving, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Corinthians 9:15). I appreciate the man who said, "Thank God, I am not what I used to be and even though I am not what I ought to be, thank God I am not all that I'm going to be." This is all possible because of the cross. I usually begin my time of prayer with thanksgiving for my Savior who died for me. This perspective enhances my whole time of prayer. From the viewpoint of the cross, priorities are adjusted and life is appreciated to the maximum!

- Pastor Pope -