

A CALL FOR THANKSGIVING

In 1623, Governor William Bradford called the Pilgrims to gather together for a day of prayer and thanksgiving.

- Only three years earlier, they had left their jobs, their homes and their communities in order to escape religious persecution in England.
- These brave men and women with their children had survived a treacherous ocean voyage, only to find themselves stranded in a strange new land, in a harsh winter climate, without sufficient food or shelter.

During the first winter, half of them died of sickness and starvation... those who remained and persevered, and though they continued to face many challenges... had many reasons to give thanks.

- Governor Bradford issued “A Thanksgiving Proclamation”...

To All Ye Pilgrims... Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as he has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our conscience.

Now, I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and 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 Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor, and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all his blessings.

As Governor Bradford now observed, the harvest was plentiful.

- In the previous winter, food had been rationed to five kernels of corn, per person per day.
- No one would go hungry this year.

Whereas the other colonies had been plagued by conflict, the pilgrims lived at peace—with one another and with the Indians.

- The sickness that claimed so many lives had now subsided.
- Most importantly to the Pilgrims, they were experiencing daily the freedom they had longed for, the freedom to worship God without fear of persecution or interference from the government.

By God's grace, they had flourished in the New World... truly they were blessed.

- And so are we today but unfortunately it's a truth we often lose sight of.
- Contemporary culture often celebrates greed, lust after riches, and promotes envy.

Folks often are tempted to feel sorry for themselves if they don't have everything they want or see!

- All too easily, we forget how blessed we have been... taking for granted the freedom and the prosperity we have enjoyed.

Giving thanks this thanksgiving and everyday

The blessings for which the Pilgrims gave thanks almost four centuries ago are worthy of being celebrated in even greater measure today.

The Pilgrims were Christians and no doubt praised God.

- Praising at all times... giving thanks in every situation is what came to mind as I meditated on folks such as the Pilgrims and ourselves when facing difficult and dangerous challenges.

I know that the Bible doesn't command us to feel thankful in every situation.

- It doesn't command us to manufacture positive feelings.
- Instead, it commands us to "give thanks."
- One theologian put it, "To give thanks when you don't feel like it is not hypocrisy; its obedience."

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

Learning from the Psalms

By turning to Psalm we can learn a great deal about godly praise and thanksgiving in the midst of our challenges and difficult times.

David and the other Psalmists are honest about their feelings, facing them and telling God about them.

- In the Psalms we can see that the writers knew how to pour out their hearts before him...
- The writer of Psalm 62:8 proclaims, "*Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*"

As we read the Psalms (I recommend that you read them aloud as well as silently to gain their full impact.) we see that they would often praise God first, and then express their disturbed emotions, their perplexities, even their complaints.

- They did not deny their feelings or simply ignore them.
- Nor do they seem to wallow in them.
- Nor do they appear to postpone their praise until they have worked through their emotions and felt better.

It appears that they mingle honest pouring-out of their feelings with sincere, God-honoring praise.

READ... Psalm 57 “**Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; God sends his love and his faithfulness.**

I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts—men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. They spread a net for my feet—I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path—but they have fallen into it themselves.

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.

What happens to us when we follow their example and keep praising, in spite of, how things seem to us is...

- The Lord often releases us from being a slave to our distressing, depressing emotions; and turns our focus from us and our current problems to focus on him.
- He unties the knots within and settles our feelings... though he may not answer our questions about how he’s handling our affairs.

Life—and praise—isn’t always a fest of pure, simple gladness.

- In many situations we can experience both pleasant and unpleasant emotions.
- Like the apostle Paul, we can be “sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10).
- We can groan and suffer in this fallen world and yet we can learn to rejoice.

We can learn to triumph in hope, in our trials and the good things they produce in our lives—and above all, in God himself (Rm 8:22-23; 5:2, 3, 11).

- God invites us to praise him, to give thanks in all situations because he knows it enriches our experience of him.

Praising God and giving thanks needs cultivating

Praise and thanks to God flourishes as you weed and water and fertilize your spiritual garden in which it grows.

- Praising and giving thanks in every situation becomes the fruit of your spiritual garden.
- The harvest of blessings becomes more constant as you nurture your soul on God’s Word, his faithfulness, his constant love and care for you.
- God’s Word admonishes us to, “*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*”¹
- Your praise grows richer and more spontaneous as you grow in knowledge of how worthy the Lord is to receive honor and glory and praise.

Expressing our love to God

Praise and thanksgiving is more than acknowledgement... it is also an expression of delight and our love for God.

¹ Colossians 3:2

- It is reveling in the God who has shown himself to us.
- Jesus becomes for us our greatest treasure, the center of our happiness.
- It is expressing the love that wells up within us by speaking our praises to him.

When we speak to him, we join with *believers* through the ages who have expressed their love for the Lord by praising him for his great and wonderful acts and for his great and wonderful self... Hallelujah, what a difference Jesus makes!!

Do not worry

It seems that there is no end of things that we can worry about and the Pilgrims, that first hard and devastating winter had much to concern themselves with... what did they do?

- As Christians, did they turn to the Scriptures and their faith in God's faithfulness as expressed in such passages as these from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount?

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3-14)

In addition to these earthly blessings, we have spiritual blessings as well. In his Word, God assures us that when we call on him, he hears us (Isaiah 65:24).

- He has promised to provide for our every need (Philippians 4:19).
- He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5)

The most precious gift of all is recorded in John 3:16...

READ... "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, God has reconciled us to himself.

- God has reconciled us to himself in.
- We are rescued from the power of sin and death the moment we “**believe**” in Christ as our Savior.
- Through Christ we receive forgiveness of sin... heaven's door has been opened to us

How can we ever thank the Lord enough?