

Making Thanksgiving Real (Part 1)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

In these strange new “perilous times” (2 Tim. 3:1), it takes an awful lot to shock us. An unexpected trend has emerged, however, that is so unthinkably disturbing that we hate to even fathom it. It involves pushing a random stranger down onto subway tracks, or even in front of an oncoming train.

If more evidence were needed for the depraved nature of man, I am not sure where it could come from. But this is not mere depravity—it is a form of debauchery and degradation that only occurs in the final stages of cultural descent.

No matter what anyone says about such hideous crimes, one thing is beyond dispute: Anyone who could perpetrate such lawlessness is not thankful to their Creator God.

The Apostle Paul, in fact, made it clear in Rom. 1:21 that it is the very sin of thanklessness that plunges lost humanity—as if pushing down on a broken step—into ghastly exaggerations of iniquity, and finally into the lake of fire itself.

Hopefully no one reading these words is flirting with performing random acts of murder. Yet, we must ask ourselves if we are, in fact, also allowing that root sin of thanklessness, of ingratitude, to undertake its infernal efforts in our hearts.

What does Thanksgiving mean to us? Feasting, football and finding bargains? How can it become so much more to us as we approach another Thanksgiving Day? To put it bluntly, how can we make Thanksgiving real? I believe that doing so will, first of all, require us to ground our Thanksgiving season in Scripture.

There is no end of the verses that we might use to prompt us to give thanks. But in case you need to prime the pump, I thought I would share this list—including a few favorites, as well as some that might not immediately come to our minds:

- 2 Samuel 22:1-51
- Nehemiah 12:27-47
- Psalm 26:6-8
- Psalm 35:17-18
- Psalm 75:1
- Psalm 92:1-4
- Psalm 100
- Psalm 103
- Psalm 118
- Psalm 136
- Daniel 2:20-23
- 2 Corinthians 2:14-17
- Philippians 4:4-9

- Revelation 7:9-17

When I think about these Scriptures, the men who wrote them, and the trials that each endured, I realize how I ought to be completely overwhelmed with a spirit of gratitude.

Our Pilgrim Fathers grounded the very first Thanksgiving Day in Scripture back in 1621 when they constructed their entire notion of a harvest celebration on the feast of tabernacles—often called a *pilgrim feast*—which was prescribed for the nation of Israel in Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:33-43; Num. 29:12-38; and Deut.16:13-17.

How can we today ground our Thanksgiving celebration in the Scriptures? Obviously, we have to read them, meditate on them, pray over them and share them. We can spend time studying them, write them in cards, post them on social media and read them aloud at our Thanksgiving tables.

It is ironic that, while Thanksgiving itself may be receiving less attention than it ever has in our culture, many people have much more time for it than ever. Some employees and students have the entire week off! Conversely, with less significance attached to Thanksgiving Day and even more to the materialism of *the holidays*, others may now be called upon to work right through Thanksgiving Day.

But we can give thanks in either case. If you have extra time, how are you using that time? May I encourage you to view this as a holy season and take advantage of the opportunity to consider the “mighty acts” of God, passed down to us from “one generation ... to another” (Ps. 145:4)? Read a significant book, or catch up on your Bible reading. Take some time to think about the most important things.

If you don't have extra time, you can still use some of your precious time to saturate this season with the Scriptures—and gratitude. Maybe you aren't even invited anywhere for Thanksgiving. But you can still be thankful. All of us can. Indeed, we must.

Ground your Thanksgiving in Scripture, and watch God work in your life.

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.

Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.