

# Thanksgiving Day Message

**Introduction:** We gather together today to celebrate Thanksgiving as one of our cherished American traditions.

**History:** I'd like to start with a brief history of this important holiday. The Puritans in England sought to reform and purify the Church of England, but not being satisfied with the progress, they chose to separate themselves from it, which forced them to pray in private. They believed it was beyond redemption due to its resistance to reform and its Roman Catholic past. Starting in 1608, a group of English families left England for the Netherlands, where they could worship freely. By 1620, the community determined to cross the Atlantic for America, which they considered a "new Promised Land", where they would establish Plymouth Colony. In spite of the potential dangers of sickness, shipwreck and death, they made the treacherous voyage across the Atlantic which took a very long 10 weeks.

The Pilgrims had originally hoped to reach America by early October using two ships, but delays and complications meant they could use only one, the Mayflower. Arriving in November, they had to survive unprepared through a harsh winter. As a result, only half of the original Pilgrims survived the first winter at Plymouth. If not for the help of local indigenous peoples to teach them food gathering and other survival skills, all of the colonists might have perished. God's providence in action. The following year, those 53 who survived, celebrated the colony's first fall harvest along with 90 Wampanoag Native American people, an occasion declared later as the first American Thanksgiving. Think about how good we have it!

**Biblical Stories of Thankfulness:** Thankfulness is an important theme that runs throughout the bible as it in part, represents a right relationship to God. It is seen in many different situations and is expressed in various forms but is mainly a form of worship to God and in gratitude for who he is and what he had done. There are many examples throughout the bible about Thankfulness but I would like to start with three examples of Thanklessness in order to provide some contrast and to demonstrate how God sees this.

## 1. Examples of Thanklessness

- a. **Adam & Eve not content with God's provision. Gen. 3:1-7** In the Garden of Eden, God provided everything that Adam and Eve needed. There were plants, trees and animals - a perfect world, peaceful and full of life. By far the best feature was that God himself visited them - what more could they want? But God's enemy Satan was also there seeking to spoil this ideal environment. So, he questioned Eve in a way that caused doubt about God's goodness, as if he

were holding back something from them. Deception is one of Satan's main strategies to distract God's children from God by presenting a perceived better reality than what God has for them or what God is to them.

Think of the multitude of marketing techniques that companies use to entice us to buy their product or service. Some are forthright and truthful but some make their product or service to be better than what it is or they may leave out facts that would be helpful to know ahead of time in making a decision. Also, they might use concepts or images that add luster or appeal in a way that is deceptive. For example, a product might be associated with happiness or satisfaction in some way which of course appeals to man's basic desires. A product may be portrayed as taking away your problems or giving you something that you really deserve or are deprived of. This should be no surprise as the bible states that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one who uses similar ways to draw our attention away from God and his good provision for us thus distracting us from being thankful to God.

- b. **Grumbling against Moses in the wilderness: Ex. 17:1-7** In Egypt the Israelites were under increasing work burden and bondage as their slaves so they cried out to God for deliverance. God raised up Moses to lead the nation to a new land. God inflicted 10 acts of judgement upon Egypt before Pharaoh relented, all the while God making it clear who was in charge of his people and the entire created order as well. Before the Israelites left Egypt, God demonstrated himself in mighty ways on their behalf giving them a great deliverance which required them to patiently wait on God for his provision and timing. Their long-awaited deliverance provided his people with riches they were not expecting and greater glory for God in defeating their oppressor.

However, in the wilderness, it didn't take them long to forget this as they only needed to be out of water for a short time to lose faith and complain about it. Moses challenged them about testing the Lord, but they were hardened in their complaint. Moses pleaded to God about this and God provided a way for Moses to get enough water out of a rock to supply the whole nation. He named the place in a way that would remind them of their grumbling. The flesh wants its needs to be met in its way and in its timing, demonstrating thankless hearts. God's way for his people is to be content in completely trusting him, knowing he is a good God and is continually and actively working for our good and his glory.

- c. **Israel rejects God as their King: 1 Sam. 8:4-9** God made a wonderful promise to his people about being their King who would protect them, fight for them and provide for them. In seeing the nations around them have earthly kings,

Israel imagined that to be far better than its' reality. They had not lived under the rule of those self-centered, domineering godless leaders so really didn't know what they were demanding of Samuel. Samuel prayed to God who told him to give the people what they wanted because they were rejecting God and serving other gods. Without exercising faith, they saw and desired what was physical and apparent and refused the much greater reality of God's promise to them. The flesh only relates to what it can see, hear, feel, touch and taste – only the physical realm. Without faith, they were only living according to the flesh. Forgetting God's goodness and taking on thankless hearts, they rejected God's way. God gave the people what they wanted which started a long saga of earthly king rule which for the most part brought them unnecessary suffering and ruin.

## 2. Summary of Thanklessness

- a. Man can easily be deceived into wanting something other than God and not satisfied in him and his provisions.
- b. Man can lack in belief in God's provisions for us in spirit, soul and body.
- c. Though man is made to be ruled only by God, he can be believe the lie that what the world has is better.

## 3. Examples of Thankfulness

- a. **God's Covenant with Noah** *Gen. 8:15-22* We know the story about the earth being so evil that God wanted to destroy it and start over. He only found one righteous man so decided to put him, Noah and his family in the center of his plan. Imagine what it was like for Noah and his family to be the only ones that God was willing to work with. To stand against such an evil society must have had its challenges. Noah spent over 100 years building an ark which God commanded him to do. Now try imagine this scene: there had never been a flood before and there is no record of there being boat before this, let alone a massive one. Noah and his 3 sons must have been working hard day after day building something that was likely the object of scorn and ridicule. Quite the father/son project and all without power tools!

After completion, Noah collected many animals and put them in the ark along with his family as God commanded him. The rain started pouring down and water from the deep came up – all enough to float the ark and flood the earth. Now imagine this family in the ark with no one else, realizing that they were the only ones on the earth to escape the destruction. It must have caused great fear and worship of God. Noah and his family didn't know where they were going, but they were on a long cruise to Mt. Ararat which took over 10 months. However, they had plenty of company with all of the animals and I imagine they had a few chores to do. At long last the flood

subsided and Noah and family were able to leave the ark and walk on dry ground again. By God's deliverance they escaped the death waters that covered the earth. Imagine this family walking out of the ark knowing they were the only humans in existence. God ordered for the animals to once again be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. What was Noah's first act? To build and alter to the Lord and offer sacrifices for thanksgiving. Imagine how thankful he must have been after enduring such an ordeal! God's response to Noah's thankfulness was to make a covenant with him to never again curse the ground because of man and to never again strike down every living creature, and promised seasonal blessings to return. How do we respond to God after he has brought us through a long trial and delivered us from destruction?

- b. Seeing God Rightly** Psalm 50:13-15 *God said "Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? 14 Offer to God a sacrifice of, thanksgiving and perform your vows to the Most High, 15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."* God was not satisfied with the multitude of animal sacrifices offered to him in the Old Testament. What he wanted started with sacrifices of thanksgiving, which could only come out of thankful hearts. In order to do so, God's people needed to see him rightly. In this Psalm it is about fearing him, worshipping him, and calling on him for deliverance. He is to be the focus and the source of their needs; in which context he is glorified. Let us all maintain thankful hearts before God.
- c. The Ark brought to Jerusalem: 1 Chron. 15-16.** After the Ark of God had been captured and detained for a long time by the Philistines, David was very zealous for it to be returned to Jerusalem. So, he made great preparations for this to take place including assembling all of Israel at Jerusalem and gathering Aaron, his sons, the Levites and Priests, and many singers and instruments. David, the elders of Israel and commanders went to bring the ark from its' place with great rejoicing, sacrifices and all of Israel shouting to the sound of the music. David then appointed some of the Levites as ministers to thank and praise the Lord. He also wrote a thanksgiving song and assigned people to sing it. So, after years of languishing from the Ark of God missing from its true place, the king and Israel were revived at its return causing much heartfelt thanksgiving. What is our hearts' attitude about God's continual presence with us?
- d. Canaan Land Spies** Num. 13:17-20, 25-33 *When Israel was about to enter the promise land, Moses under God's direction sent out 12 spies into the land to survey it and bring back reports of what it was like. Though Moses told them to be of good courage, 10 spies brought back a fearful report of fortified cities and giants saying: "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows*

*with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.* <sup>28</sup> However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak (giants) there". Though they could see it was a rich land, they allowed the size of the cities and the people to cause them to be fearful. *"The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height.* Though only 2 of the spies saw the same land, they reported that they were able to overcome it. They saw the land as God's abundant provision for them and out of thankful and courageous hearts were ready to lead the people there. How do we respond when God provides us with a new challenge?

- e. Samaritan Woman** *John 4* On one of his journeys, Jesus went to a divinely arranged meeting with a woman in Samaria. In fact, he stated that *"I must go to Samaria"*. As we know, he met her at a well. She was lost in sin and continued seeking fulfillment in sin. Jesus's knowledge of her life caused the conversation to get to the root of her problem quickly. She was drinking from the wrong well but Jesus was the well of eternal life. When Jesus revealed the answer to her thirst, she went back to town joyfully telling everyone that she found the Messiah causing many in the town to believe. Here is the account: <sup>39</sup> *Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."* <sup>40</sup> *So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.* <sup>41</sup> *And many more believed because of his word.* <sup>42</sup> *They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.* What hearts of overflowing thankfulness to God from the woman and the town. How do we respond to God when he lovingly points out our sin?
- f. Ten Lepers Cleansed** *Luke 17:11-19* <sup>11</sup> *On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.* <sup>12</sup> *And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers,<sup>[f]</sup> who stood at a distance* <sup>13</sup> *and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* <sup>14</sup> *When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.* <sup>15</sup> *Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice;* <sup>16</sup> *and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.* <sup>17</sup> *Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"* <sup>18</sup> *Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"* <sup>19</sup> *And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."* So, 10 lepers were cleansed by Jesus but only 1 turned back to praise God and give Jesus thanks. Imagine being

healed from one of the worst diseases imaginable and not being thankful. I doubt that they would get invited to Thanksgiving dinner! The one who was thankful was exceedingly so, causing him to worship Jesus. How do we respond when God does good things for us?

- g. Peter and the Resurrected Jesus** John 21: 4-8 After Jesus crucifixion, some of the disciples returned to fishing and one time they fished all night but didn't catch anything. When a man on the shore gave them direction on what to do, they had a mind-blowing, boat sinking, life changing catch of fish which caused John to recognize it was the Lord and it caused Peter to throw himself into the sea to reach him. Apparently, the remorse over his denial of Jesus was overcome by the joy of seeing him again. The Lord who he gave everything for and followed for 3.5 years had returned, causing Peter to respond with a thankful heart. Clearly, he treasured Christ. Does our joy in knowing Christ overshadow any of our failures to love him?
- h. Mary's Praise regarding Jesus' Birth** Luke 1:26-55 In Luke 1 the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary announcing that she will be the mother of the Messiah. <sup>28</sup> *And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"*<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>29</sup> *But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.* <sup>30</sup> *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* <sup>31</sup> *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.* <sup>32</sup> *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,* <sup>33</sup> *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*<sup>34</sup> *And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"*<sup>[d]</sup><sup>35</sup> *And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born*<sup>[e]</sup> *will be called holy—the Son of God.* What a total surprise to Mary and a great honor to be the mother of the Messiah. She did respond in faith. *"Behold, I am the servant*<sup>[f]</sup> *of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* Later she visited Elizabeth the expectant mother of John the Baptist. Upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit prophesied about how blessed Mary was to be the mother of the Lord. <sup>42</sup> *and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"* Mary then prophesied about the greatness of her Savior and what he accomplishes *"My soul magnifies the Lord,*<sup>47</sup> *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."* This is an amazing account to read. Both women were filled with thankfulness at the amazing things God was doing through them.

i. **Zacharias' Prophecy** *Luke 1: 67-79*

The angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias the priest when he was burning incense in the temple, announcing to him that Elizabeth his wife was to be the mother of Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist. Zacharias was troubled and fearful (as anyone is when surprised by an angel) and responded in unbelief. This caused a rebuke from Gabriel that included Zacharias to be mute for a long time. Much later upon John's birth, his tongue was loosed and he spoke praising God. He prophesied about the greatness of Jesus and how John would be his forerunner. Imagine having such an incredible blessing come upon you, and not being able to speak for nine months! He had a lot of time to consider what was happening, the results of which we see later in his grand expression of gratitude for what God was going to do through Jesus and John. He was overwhelmed with praise and thankfulness. How thankful are we from God involving us in his plan of redemption?

j. **Mary Anoints Jesus** (Sister of Martha and Lazarus) *John 12:1-3* "Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. <sup>3</sup> Mary therefore took a pound<sup>[a]</sup> of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

Just a few days before Jesus' crucifixion, Mary performed this act of deep devotion and worship to Jesus in great humility and sacrifice. The ointment was estimated to be about equivalent to a year's wages. Imaging pouring out a gift on someone that took a year to earn. Wiping feet was a lowly servant's job in which we see her humility and reverence toward Jesus. Using her own hair instead of a towel seems to show great sacrifice considering the personal value of a woman's hair. This being six days before the Passover, was she doing it while being aware of Jesus soon crucifixion? Jesus did announce this more than once to his disciples. Whether she did or not, what an appropriate act of loving adoration and thankfulness to her Savior. Do we count sacrifice as a joy and honor?

k. **Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar** *Luke 18:35-43*<sup>35</sup> *As he (Jesus) drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>36</sup> And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. <sup>37</sup> They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." <sup>38</sup> And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>39</sup> And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>40</sup> And Jesus*

*stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, <sup>41</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight." <sup>42</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." <sup>43</sup> And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."*

We see that the blind beggar knew enough about Jesus to know that he was the King and that he had power to heal. He not only cried out to him but persisted with that in spite of the crowds' rebuke towards him. His request to Jesus was straightforward and bold upon which he received his sight. His heart of thankfulness was demonstrated by following Jesus and glorifying God. How do we respond when God does good things for us?

- l. **Jesus Ascension** *Luke 24:50-53 <sup>50</sup> "And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple blessing God."* From the great tragedy of Jesus' death, to the shocking amazement of his resurrection, and now witnessing his ascension, the disciples' thankfulness is seen in worshipping Jesus, being filled with joy, and blessing God together continually. The great hope they had in Jesus seemed lost temporarily, but was soon fulfilled better than they could have imagined.
- m. **Post Resurrection Fellowship** *Acts 2: 46-47 <sup>46</sup> "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."* In the early church, thankfulness seemed to be readily apparent and continual. They spent much time together praying, listening to the apostles' teaching and praising God.

- 4. **Summary of Thankfulness:** Our gracious Lord has given us these and many more examples of thankfulness for us to take to heart. Try to picture yourself in one or more of these stories and consider what would be your hearts' disposition in it. Then be strengthened to live in greater thankfulness to God.

Apart from God's ongoing work in my heart, I would not be a thankful person. He has graciously taken some things away in order to humble me and cause thankfulness to emerge. The continual discovery of who he is and what he has done, draws my focus away from self and onto him who is our all in all.