

Lessons from the Thanksgiving Pilgrims (Part 3)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

In our last installment, we considered three essential lessons that we may learn from the lives of the Thanksgiving Pilgrims. Here are the final two lessons that we will consider.

- **Perseverance:** The Pilgrims model perseverance in the midst of difficulty (Phil. 3:14).

The Pilgrims were persecuted, jailed, harassed, hunted and humiliated. They knew almost every type of danger and embarrassment. Even modern action films cannot match the stories of their harrowing escapes from danger. They were betrayed by a shipmaster in their first attempt to escape persecution in England in 1607, but that did not stop them.

William Bradford and his mentor, William Brewster, are perhaps the most notable in this regard—having led the church in the midst of peril all the way from Scrooby to Plymouth. When the Pilgrim women and children were arrested after the men had successfully escaped to Amsterdam on their second attempt in 1608, it was these two men who stayed behind to care for those wives and children. Yet Bradford still managed to outlast many of his brethren by serving for more than 30 years as governor of Plymouth Colony.

The Pilgrims suffered loss, hardship and ruin. Finally, many of them died in Holland without ever reaching their goal in this life. And all but four families who arrived in the New World suffered at least one death during the winter of 1620-21. But they never quit. They kept pursuing what they believed to be the will of God for them. They never turned back, but kept pressing forward.

How many of us would be so determined to follow and so quick to obey in the midst of such hard circumstances? The Pilgrims give us a tremendous example of steadfastness.

- **Praise:** The Pilgrims exemplify the spirit of Thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:18).

The first Thanksgiving did not grow out of the enjoyment of abundance, but out of gratitude for the provision of necessities. The Pilgrims had very little to eat in their first year at Plymouth—a year marked more than anything by the scourge of sickness and death. With overwhelming odds against them, they devoted themselves to God and His principles for all areas of their lives. When He blessed them, they did not “forget ... all His benefits” (Ps. 103:2), but turned themselves to Him wholeheartedly in thanksgiving.

In the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims gave thanks to God for sparing the lives of those who had not died in the first winter. They were grateful that He had brought them to this new land and given them a bountiful harvest. We enjoy so much more in terms of the comforts of this world, but I wonder if we have even as much gratitude as they displayed. Surely at this time of Thanksgiving all of us have so much for which to be thankful: our Savior Jesus Christ, the freedom to worship, the opportunity to serve God, our families, our churches, our homes, our health, our strength—and many other provisions from God, as well.

The Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 1:21 that thanklessness is far from an innocent omission, and is actually a crucial step in man's downfall into degradation. The picture Paul paints is one of a society which is one step away from a free-fall into gross, godless immorality, with the tread of that step being thanklessness.

Among the many things for which we ought to be thankful to God is the great heritage which we as believers have in those that we follow—including these amazing Pilgrims.

May the lessons that we learn from the Pilgrims encourage and inspire us, and help us to say with all the redeemed—"Thanks *be* to God" (2 Cor. 2:14)!

I pray that these thoughts—in this the 400th anniversary year of the Pilgrims' arrival on these shores—will help to make your Thanksgiving celebration more meaningful and memorable.

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