

An Indescribable Gift

Message for November 20, 2017

Thanksgiving Community Service/NE Ministerial Association

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IT being the indispensable duty of all Nations...



...not only to offer up their supplications to ALMIGHTY GOD, the giver of all good, for his gracious assistance in a time of distress, but also in a solemn and public manner to give him praise for his goodness in general, and especially for great and signal interpositions of his providence in their behalf: Therefore the United States in Congress assembled, taking into their consideration the many instances of divine goodness to these States, in the course of important conflict in which they have been so long engaged; the present happy and promising state of human affairs; and the events of the war, in the course of the year now drawing to a close; particularly the harmony of the public Councils, which is necessary to the success of the public cause; the perfect union and good understanding which is hitherto subsisted between them and their Allies, notwithstanding the artful and unwearied attempts of the common enemy to divide them; the success of the arms of the United States, and those of their Allies, and the acknowledgment of their independence by another European power, whose friendship and commerce must be of great and lasting advantage to these States: --- Do hereby recommend to the inhabitants of these States in general, to observe, and request the several States to interpose their authority in appointing and commanding the observation of Thursday the twenty-eight day of NOVEMBER next, as a day of solemn THANKSGIVING to God for all his mercies: and they do further recommend to all ranks, to testify to their gratitude to GOD for his goodness, by a cheerful obedience to his laws, and by promoting, each in his station, and by his influence, the practice of true and undefiled religion, which is the great foundation of public prosperity and national happiness.

Our forefathers understood that we must remember the One whom watches over us by “*promoting, each in his station, and by his influence, the practice of true and undefiled religion, which is the great foundation of public prosperity and national happiness...testifying to their gratitude to God for his goodness*”...They understood what Moses wrote about in the book of Deuteronomy, that all blessings are from God, that God is the “*giver of ALL good*” and we must not, as a people, or as a country, forget...

Deuteronomy 8: 7-18

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land of flowing streams and pools of water, with fountains and springs that gush out in the valleys and hills. It is a land of wheat and barley; of grapevines, fig trees, and pomegranates; of olive oil and honey. It is a land where food is plentiful and nothing is lacking. It is a land where iron is as common as stone, and copper is abundant in the hills. When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful!

Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. Do not forget that he led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry. He gave you water from the rock! He fed you with manna in the wilderness, a food unknown to your ancestors.

He did this to humble you and test you for your own good. He did all this so you would never say to yourself, ‘I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.’ Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath.

Have we, in the midst of our success and wealth and plenty, at times forgotten God, forgotten from whom our blessings flow? Do we ever find ourselves pushing God aside, even after He has given us a “*land where we may eat bread without scarcity, where we will lack nothing*”?

Do we often forget all God has done for us in our lives? The many blessings...our families, our beautiful children, a roof over our heads, a church family, the ability, many of us have, to give and help others?

Throughout scripture, men and women continually forget all God has done in their lives, the many blessings God has rained down upon them.



The Israelites are constantly complaining as a nation that God has left them...that it would be better if they were back in Egypt in slavery...they so easily forget the manna from heaven, the water from the rock, the Red Sea split in two, the plagues of Egypt.

In Luke 17: 11-19, we see how quickly someone can forget...how quickly they can jump right back into their own lives, doing their own thing, giving no second thought to the God that got them there in the first place.

As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. As he entered a village there, ten lepers stood at a distance, crying out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

He looked at them and said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy.

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, “Praise God!” He fell to the ground at Jesus’ feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Didn’t I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” And Jesus said to the man, “Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you.”

Only one came back...



...and said, "Thank you" and praised God for what God had done in his life.

This week we will celebrate Thanksgiving...a day created to remind us to give God thanks for a *"land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley...a good land that God has given us..."* It is a day we also give thanks for the family that surrounds us, for the home we have, for the love we have felt, for the people in our lives that are there to get us through difficult times, for the sunshine, the rain, life itself...Thanks for a God who would send His only Son

Thanksgiving begins with remembrance. So often the Bible says, *"Do not forget...do not forget the Lord your God...do not forget what God has done...from where you have come...How God has brought you to this place..."*

We must remember.

One morning years ago, Deb and I pulled our truck out of the garage. The temperature gage on our Durango read much higher than the actual outside temperature. It is only after we begin driving, pulling out of the driveway and heading into town that the temperature rapidly begins to drop until it is accurate. That morning we were taking Matthew to school. Matthew was watching how the temperature was dropping rapidly as we drove into Seaford. Matthew said to Deb, *"The more you go into the world the colder it gets."* From the mouth of babes...

We live in a cold world and at times it causes us to forget...our nation has forgotten...many of our leaders have forgotten...at times we have forgotten...the coldness of life, the issues of the day, the stresses, the problems...cause us to forget...

We must remember.

Think of it this way...

If you own just one Bible, you are abundantly blessed. One-third of the world does not have access to even one.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who will not survive the week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people around the world.

If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people in the world.

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

Think for a moment of these and the many other blessings in your lives...

Now think for a moment about Jesus Christ...Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "***Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!***" How can we describe it?

I came across a sermon illustration years ago that brought it home to me, a father, in many ways...

The day is over, you are driving home. You tune in your radio. You hear a little blurb about a little village in India where some villagers have died suddenly, strangely, of a flu that has never been seen before. It's not influenza, but three or four fellows are dead, and it's kind of interesting, and they're sending some doctors over there to investigate it.

You don't think much about it, but on Sunday, coming home from church, you hear another radio spot. Only they say it's not three villagers, it's 30,000 villagers in the back hills of this particular area of India, and it's on TV that night. CNN runs a little

blurb; people are heading there from the disease center in Atlanta because this disease strain has never been seen before.

By Monday morning when you get up, it's the lead story. For it's not just India; it's Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and before you know it, you're hearing this story everywhere and they have coined it now as "the mystery flu." The President has made some comment that he and everyone are praying and hoping that all will go well over there. But everyone is wondering, "How are we going to contain it?" That's when the President of France makes an announcement that shocks Europe. He is closing their borders. No flights from India, Pakistan, or any of the countries where this thing has been seen.

And that's why that night you are watching a little bit of CNN before going to bed. Your jaw hits your chest when a weeping woman is translated from a French news program into English: "There's a man lying in a hospital in Paris dying of the mystery flu." It has come to Europe. Panic strikes. As best they can tell, once you get it, you have it for a week and you don't know it. Then you have four days of unbelievable symptoms. And then you die.

Britain closes its borders, but it's too late. South Hampton, Liverpool, North Hampton, and it's Tuesday morning when the President of the United States makes the following announcement: "Due to a national security risk, all flights to and from Europe and Asia have been canceled. If your loved ones are overseas, I'm sorry. They cannot come back until we find a cure for this thing."

Within four days our nation has been plunged into an unbelievable fear. People are selling little masks for your face. People are talking about what if it comes to this country, and preachers on Tuesday are saying, "It's the scourge of God."

It's Wednesday night and you are at a church prayer meeting when somebody runs in from the parking lot and says, "Turn on a radio, turn on a radio." And while the church listens to a little transistor radio with a microphone stuck up to it, the announcement is made. "Two women are lying in a Long Island hospital dying from the mystery flu." Within hours it seems, this thing just sweeps across the country. People are working around the clock trying to find an antidote. Nothing is working. California. Oregon. Arizona. Florida. Massachusetts.

It's as though it's just sweeping in from the borders. And then, all of a sudden the news comes out. The code has been broken. A cure can be found. A vaccine can be made. It's going to take the blood of somebody who hasn't been infected, and so, sure enough, all through the Midwest, through all those channels of emergency broadcasting, everyone is asked to do one simple thing: "Go to your downtown hospital and have your blood type taken. That's all we ask of you. And when you hear the sirens go off in your neighborhood, please make your way quickly, quietly, and safely to the hospitals."

Sure enough, when you and your family get down there late on that Friday night, there is a long line, and they've got nurses and doctors coming out and pricking fingers and taking blood and putting labels on it. Your wife and your kids are out there, and they take your blood type and they say, "Wait here in the parking lot and if we call your name, you can be dismissed and go home."

You stand around scared with your neighbors, wondering what in the world is going on, and that this is the end of the world. Suddenly a young man comes running out of the hospital screaming. He's yelling a name and waving a clipboard. What? He yells it again! And your son tugs on your jacket and says, "Daddy, that's me." Before you know it, they have grabbed your boy. "Wait a minute, hold it!" And they say, "It's okay, his blood is clean. His blood is pure. We want to make sure he doesn't have the disease. We think he has got the right type."

Five tense minutes later, out come the doctors and nurses, crying and hugging one another ... some are even laughing. It's the first time you have seen anybody laugh in a week, and an old doctor walks up to you and says, "Thank you, sir. Your son's blood type is perfect. It's clean, it is pure, and we can make the vaccine." As the word begins to spread all across that parking lot full of folks, people are screaming and praying and laughing and crying. But then the gray-haired doctor pulls you and you wife aside and says, "May we see you for a moment? We didn't realize that the donor would be a minor and we need ... we need you to sign a consent form."

You begin to sign and then you see that the number of pints of blood to be taken is empty. "H-h-h-how many pints?" And that is when the old doctor's smile fades and he says, "We need it all!"

Reading that story years ago I had to ask myself, “Would I be able to sign the consent form?” I don’t believe I could...not even for the sake of the world.

Yet, this is what God did for us...He signed the “consent form”...He watched His Son, Jesus, die a horrific death...



...taking on our sin, our faults, our mistakes...nails driven into hands and feet...blood spilt...so that we could be saved, so that we would not face an eternity without our heavenly Father.

We must remember. We must remember this Thanksgiving all God has done for us, especially His most “incredible gift,” the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And let us not only remember but let us truly give thanks.

How do we truly give God thanks for all He has done? How do we thank God for this “*incredible gift?*”

- By sharing God’s love not simply in words but in actions
- By giving and sharing abundantly from the blessings and resources God has given us
- By serving in and through our churches, loving on people in our community and throughout the world, giving them hope, introducing them to a Savior

We show THANKSGIVING to God by living a life that points people to Him...A life that:

- Helps doesn’t hurt
- Lifts up doesn’t put down
- Focuses on others doesn’t focus on self
- Acts with boldness doesn’t live with fear
- Gives doesn’t take
- Loves doesn’t hate

As Albert Schweitzer believed, *"In gratitude for your own good fortune you must render in return some sacrifice of your life for the other life."*

Is the way you are living your life, the decisions you are making, the focus you have, truly showing God that you are thankful for all God has blessed you with? Are you living a life of THANKSGIVING?

The first Thanksgiving in the fall of 1621 was a bountiful feast...



The First Thanksgiving 1621
By Jean Leon Gerome Ferris

...but an inventory taken afterwards in preparation for winter proved that the Pilgrims had grossly overestimated their harvest. The only way they could possibly get through the winter was to cut in half the already meager weekly rations. To make matters worse, soon after in November, arrived the ship *Fortune* with 35 new settlers and absolutely no provisions – no food, bedding, cookware or warm clothing...by 1623, after two years of bad harvest and harsh winters, much death and hardship, history records the Pilgrims being reduced to a daily ration of five kernels of corn apiece. Yet William Bradford wrote, *"By the time our corn is planted, our victuals are spent, not knowing at night where to have a bite in the morning, and have neither bread nor corn for 3 or 4 months together; yet bear our wants with cheerfulness and rest on Providence"*.

The harvest of 1623 was almost wiped out. A six-week drought began in June and the crops turned brown and were slowly withering away. They turned to the only hope they had – intervention by God...



...and appointed a solemn day of humiliation and prayer. They assembled one July morning under a hot, clear sky and for nine hours prayed. Their prayers were answered the next morning,

and for the next two weeks said Winslow, "*distilled such soft, sweet and moderate showers... as it was hard to say whether our withered corn or drooping affections were most quickened and revived*".

It turned out to be a double blessing from above, for that same month arrived the ships *Anne* and *Little James* with 60 new settlers and for a change – loaded with provisions. The harvest that year of 1623 proved to be one of their best. It also promised a new beginning for our Pilgrim ancestors, for they never again faced starvation.

Two hundred years ago in Plymouth, on Forefather's Day, December 1820 on the occasion of the Bi-Centennial of the Landing of the Pilgrims a tradition was started...



...to set 5 kernels of corn on one's plate before the Thanksgiving meal...remembering our ancestors who with very little to eat still gave God thanks and when all seemed lost and the harvest wiped out, they knelt and called on God to intervene and save them...and God did...

Let us set 5 kernels on our plate this Thanksgiving...and not only remember how God protected those who first came to this country and sat at the table that first Thanksgiving, but let us take time before eating the Thanksgiving meal to give thanks for five blessings in our lives, one blessing for each kernel of corn. And may we all take a moment, after going around the table and thanking God for five blessings, to thank God for His most "*indescribable gift*," the gift of His Son, Jesus...Let us bask for just a moment in the glorious mystery that the Creator of the Universe would sacrifice so much for us...

Let us say "Thank you" to God for all these blessings and then, most importantly, let us show God we are truly thankful by living lives that make a difference for Him, that help and point others to Jesus Christ, our greatest blessing.

God has given you an indescribable gift...a precious gift...God has given you life, family, a church to call home...God has blessed you, walking with you, even carrying you, through the valleys and standing next to you and celebrating on the mountaintops...God has given you gifts and opportunity to reach others for Him, to make a difference...God has given you His very own Son, Jesus Christ...

Let us remember...Let us not forget...Let us Give thanks to God for "*His indescribable gift!*"