

Dec. 1, 2019

## “Abounding With Thanksgiving”

This past Thursday, November 28, 2019, our nation celebrated what has become an annual national holiday; it is called “Thanksgiving Day.” To some degree, the observance of such dates back to 1621 when Governor William Bradford of the Plymouth Colony decreed that a three-day feast be held. It was to be a time of prayer, thanksgiving, and celebration. Many of the first settlers had come to this country seeking religious freedom and opportunity, but initially found sickness, scarcity and even the threat of starvation. Finally their labors were rewarded with a bountiful harvest. God had blessed them. It was time to give thanks! There was an outpouring of gratitude.

As time progressed, the idea of giving thanks to God really caught on. For example, on November 26, 1789 President George Washington issued a proclamation for a day of thanksgiving. Later President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November, 1863, as “a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father.” For the next 75 years each President in office set aside the last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day. In 1939 President Roosevelt set Thanksgiving Day a week earlier in order to give businesses a longer period to take advantage of the Christmas shopping season. Finally, in 1941. Congress ruled that the fourth Thursday of November should be observed as Thanksgiving and that it would be a legal holiday.

I am glad that our nation’s “founding fathers” believed in “freedom **of** religion” instead of freedom *from* religion! I am glad they believed in acknowledging both the existence and the bountifulness of God instead of trying to divorce our nation from God. I am glad the ACLU, and their ilk, were not around in those days to constantly raise their irksome voices of protest in a continuous, nonsensical harangue that such actions violate the principle of separation of church and state! I personally believe God greatly blessed America because Americans, for the most part, were a God-believing, God-fearing, and God-thanking people!

Yes, I am glad our nation still observes “Thanksgiving **Day**.” However, giving thanks to God must be a daily, on-going practice; it must not be limited to a special day in the year! The Bible is literally filled with admonitions for God’s people to be thankful. Some Old Testament passages recording such admonitions are: I Chronicles 16:7-10,34; 23:30; Psalm 30:4; 35:18; 92:1; 97:12; 100:4; 103:1,2; 105:1; 106:1; 118:1; 136:1,26, etc. Some New Testament passages which contain admonitions to be thankful are: Ephesians 5:4,19,20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 2:6,7; 3:15,17; 4:2; I Thessalonians 5:17,18; Hebrews 13:15, etc. Inasmuch as “*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,*” James 1:17, then we should learn, “*in every thing,*” to “*give thanks,*” I Thessalonians 5:18. In fact, we ought to be “*abounding...with thanksgiving,*” Colossians 2:7!

But, alas! The American people, and too often even the Lord’s people, live more in the complaining mode than the thanking mode. Like the apostate Israelites, who quickly forgot what God had done for them and began to murmur, Exodus 16:1-3; Number 14:1-4, Jeremiah 5:23-25, etc., the American people have largely become more prone to complain because of what they don’t have than to thank God for the many blessings they **do** have. For years we have lived in the land of plenty and luxuriated in the lap of luxury, while much of the rest of the world has experienced deprivation and even starvation. Yet many have concluded that we, as a people, are

among the least thankful people on earth! Why is there so much ingratitude in our land? There are many reasons, a few of which we shall now address.

### **Ingratitude is Caused by:**

**1. Materialism.** The apostle Paul described this “ism” in Philippians 3:19 wherein he admonished those “*whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things.*” It is a fact that one whose “god” is his “belly” is not likely to give glory, or to voice gratitude to the God of heaven! And those “*who mind earthly things*” are never content with the many “*things*” they do have, so naturally they will be more cursed by ingratitude than blessed by gratitude.

**2. Pride.** Long before they ever entered the land of Canaan, God warned the Israelites of the danger they would encounter once they entered the promised land and were able to “*build goodly houses,*” when their “*herds*” and their “*flocks,*” and their “*silver*” and “*gold*” were multiplied, that their hearts could “*be lifted up,*” so that they would “*forget the Lord*” which “*bought them out of the land of Egypt,*” that then they would be prone to say in their own hearts “*my power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth,*” Deuteronomy 8:10-17. Successive biblical history reveals that this is exactly what happened. As Israel prospered, they forgot the very God Who had blessed them so abundantly; their hearts were lifted up, they turned to idolatry and began to worship the gods of their own making, and ultimately wound up in captivity!

**3. Busy Life Styles.** God wants us to be busy; in fact, the person who will not work should not eat, 2 Thessalonians 3:10! But God also wants us to take time to be holy. In the parable of the Sower Jesus mentioned those who “*are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life,*” and these are the people who were represented by the seed that “*fell among thorns*” which brought “*no fruit to perfection,*” Luke 8:14. As a people we are continually pressed for time; hence, we find it difficult to pause, meditate, count our blessings, and thank God for the blessings received. We generally “take time” for everything except that of taking “time to be holy.”

**4. A Sense of Entitlement.** It seems that Naaman had that attitude. The prophet told him to “*Go and wash in Jordan seven times,*” and assured him that in so doing he would be cleansed of leprosy, 2 Kings 5:10. These instructions were too simple to be misunderstood, yet Naaman initially went away angry. He said “*Behold, I thought He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper,*” 2 King 5:11. He wanted to be treated like the “*captain of the host of the king of Syria,*” 2 Kings 5:1, or in keeping with his position in government. He did not want to be dealt with simply as Naaman the leper! He had that entitlement mentality; hence, he was more motivated by anger than gratitude. However, he remained a leper until he got over his mad spell and went and did exactly as the man of God had directed. But Naaman has so many modern counterparts — people who say to themselves, “I deserve something better than this,” “I deserve a nicer car,” “I deserve a bigger house,” “I deserve a better job,” etc., so they fall into a complaining mode, and do not even think about thanking God for the many things they do have, including so many things they don’t really deserve!

### **How Can I Become More Thankful?**

**1. Read the Bible and learn what God thinks of Complainers!** For starters, read I Corinthians 10:5-11, and the Old Testament references contained therein regarding the children of Israel. They were “*overthrown in the wilderness,*” and in so many ways incurred the wrath of

God.

**2. Pause to reflect upon God's goodness.** Develop the attitude of the Psalmist who said "*O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness,*" Psalm 107:8. In fact, take the time to read the book of Psalms, some 80 percent of which are said to relate in some way to giving thanks to God.

**3. Reflect upon God's sacrifice in our behalf!** He sent "*His only begotten Son*" to die upon the cross so that we could be saved. John 3:16; Hebrews 2:9; Romans 5:6-8, etc.

**4. Spend more time counting your blessings than your worries!** Study Matthew 6:19-33, and see what the Lord thinks about worry. Read Luke 17:11-19 and learn what Jesus thought about nine of the ten lepers, whom He healed, but who did not so much as come back and say "thank you!"

**Conclusion:** We do not expect a just-born baby, even if it could talk, to thank its mother for nine months of free room and board. But God expects mature people to have more reasoning ability than a newborn, and He expects us to develop the attitude of Gratitude. All physical blessings come from God, James 1:17. All "*spiritual*" blessings come from God, Ephesians 1:3. Let us learn to be thankful!

\*\*\* —B. Witherington