

Thanksgiving 2022

A Message of Thanksgiving

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(11/27/22)

This past week we celebrated Thanksgiving Day—a day that we have set aside as a nation to thank the Lord for all His goodness and blessings which He has so richly given to us.

Our nation was birthed in an attitude of thanksgiving to Almighty God for His blessings and providence that planted, sustained, and nurtured our fledgling nation from infancy to maturity as the strongest and most blessed nation on the face of the earth.

Back in those early days, before we were even a nation, those early settlers were thankful to God—not for big houses and new cars—but for keeping them alive!

Most of us are familiar with the traditional story of Thanksgiving, where in 1621 William Bradford, of Plymouth Rock, proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the survival of the Pilgrims in their second year in the New World, and for the abundant harvest that He had provided with the aid of the native population.

However, most people don't know that the first American Thanksgiving didn't occur in 1621, the first recorded Thanksgiving actually took place in Virginia more than 11 years earlier—and it wasn't a feast!

The winter of 1610 at Jamestown had reduced a group of 409 settlers to 60—the survivors prayed for help, without knowing when or how it might come.

When help arrived, in the form of a ship filled with food and supplies from England—a prayer meeting was held to give thanks to God.

You would think that after seeing so many of their loved ones die due to the hardships of the New World, they would not feel very thankful—however, the opposite was true, they realized they had much to be thankful for!

I'd like you to compare the attitude of those early settlers to what we see in our country today—as embodied in an article written by columnist, Craig Smith a few years ago—

“A Newsweek poll alleges that 67 percent of Americans are unhappy with the direction the country is headed and 69 percent of the country is unhappy with the performance of the president. In essence two-thirds of our citizens just ain't happy and want a change.

So being the knuckle dragger I am, I starting thinking, “What we are so unhappy about?” Is it that we have electricity and running water 24 hours a day, 7 days a week? Is our unhappiness the result of having air conditioning in the summer and heating in the winter?

Could it be that a large percentage of these unhappy folks have a job? Maybe it is the ability to walk into a grocery store at any time and see more food in moments than Darfur has seen in the last year?...

Perhaps you are one of the 70 percent of Americans who own a home, you may be upset with knowing that in the unfortunate case of having a fire, a group of trained firefighters will appear in moments and use top notch equipment to extinguish the flames thus saving you, your family and your belongings. Or if, while at home watching one of your many flat screen TVs, a burglar or prowler intrudes; an officer equipped with a gun and a

bullet-proof vest will come to defend you and your family against attack or loss. This all in the backdrop of a neighborhood free of bombs or militias raping and pillaging the residents. Neighborhoods where 90 percent of teenagers own cell phones and computers.

How about the complete religious, social and political freedoms we enjoy that are the envy of everyone in the world? Maybe that is what has 67 percent of you folks unhappy.

Fact is, we are the largest group of ungrateful, spoiled brats the world has ever seen. No wonder the world loves the U.S. yet has a great disdain for its citizens. They see us for what we are. The most blessed people in the world who do nothing but complain about what we don't have and what we hate about the country instead of thanking the good Lord we live here."

- *Why is this?*
- What has turned us from being thankful for the smallest blessings from God to being the complaining, self-indulgent, ungrateful people we have become even though we have been blessed beyond any nation on the face of the earth?

Let me answer that question with a story that I think will help to illustrate what has brought us to the place we are in as a nation.

The story is told of two old friends that bumped into one another on the street one day. One of them looked forlorn, almost on the verge of tears—his friend asked,

"What has the world done to you, my old friend?" The sad fellow said, *"Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars."* *"That's a lot of money"* his friend said. *"Yea, but, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand free and clear."*

"Sounds like you've been blessed...." *"You don't understand!"* he interrupted. *"Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million dollars."* Now he was really confused. *"Then, why do you look so glum?"* *"Well—this week... nothing!"*

That's the trouble with receiving something on a regular basis, even if it's a gift—we eventually come to expect it—and even feel we deserve it!

This is the *"entitlement mindset"* that has permeated American society at almost every level.

We have been blessed to live in a land of plenty and as a result we have come to believe that these blessings are our "rights" and that we *deserve* them.

When that happens, we forget about God and focus on ourselves as being the source of our prosperity—in other words, we begin to take credit for what God has done.

This is exactly what happened to Israel in the O.T. even though God warned them to be on guard against this very thing before leading them into the Promised Land—

Deuteronomy 8:7–14 (NLT)

⁷ 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. ⁸ It is a land of wheat and barley; of grapevines, fig trees, and pomegranates; of olive oil and honey. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ "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. ¹² For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live

in,¹³ and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! ¹⁴ Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.

This sounds like it could have been spoken by God directly to America today—warning us not to let our blessings and prosperity, which He has given us, take our hearts away from Him.

You see one of the results of forgetting God and pushing Him out of our national conscience is that—we then start taking credit for what He has done.

Where there was once thanksgiving and dependence upon God—pride and self-reliance take their place.

This begins the downward spiral of national decline where we go from being a thankful people to an entitlement nation where people no longer appreciate the gifts God has given them but come to expect and feel they deserve the blessings they have—that God owes them!

When that happens, it becomes impossible for people to see the good in life and be grateful for the smallest of God's blessings—they become miserable, complaining people unable to enjoy life no matter how much they acquire.

Dr. Dale Robbins writes,

"I used to think people complained because they had a lot of problems. But I have come to realize that they have problems because they complain. Complaining doesn't change anything or make situations better. It amplifies frustration, spreads discontent and discord, and can invoke an invitation for the devil to cause havoc with our lives. Complaining makes us miserable. Psalm 77:3 says, "I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed."

We ourselves often don't realize how blessed we are, or how thankful we ought to be—until what we have is threatened to be taken away.

It is good and fitting that as Christians we learn to be thankful to God every day for the many blessings He so richly pours out upon us and not to feel that He owes us anything but that everything comes to us as a gift of His grace.

Someone once said that gratitude is the source for all other Christian virtues.

If that be the case, then perhaps we need to reason that *ingratitude* may well be the source of all (or at least many) of our faults and problems as well.

When we begin to take for granted what God has done for us, we become selfish, calloused and filled with pride—and when that happens, God can no longer use us or bless us.

➤ *So how can we replace a life of discontent and complaining with one of thankfulness and contentment?*

Well, let me just say that in life—***"Attitude is everything."***

One person can look at a glass and see it half *empty*, while another can look at the same glass and see it half *full*.

➤ *What's the difference?*

Well, it isn't the glass—***it's the attitude each person brings to the situation.***

One purposes to see life from the perspective of *gratitude* and the other person from the perspective of *selfishness* and *ingratitude*.

The attitude we carry with us through life is of paramount importance if we are truly to live lives that demonstrate our gratitude towards God on a daily basis for all He has given us.

➤ *So, how can we cultivate an attitude of gratitude in life?*

Let's look at Luke 17 and see how one man achieved it—

Luke 17:11-19 (NKJV)

¹¹ Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.¹² Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off.¹³ And they lifted up *their* voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"¹⁴ So when He saw *them*, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.¹⁵ And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God,¹⁶ and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.¹⁷ So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine?"¹⁸ "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"¹⁹ And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

I want you to notice something from this story—we are told that as these ten lepers began their journey to the priests—they were *cleansed* (healed) of their leprosy. What is significant is that, out of the 10, there was only one who reacted differently than the rest.

He came back out of a heart of gratitude to give God glory—and he was a foreigner! (Sometimes unbelievers are more thankful to God than God's own people for His blessings!)

➤ *Why did this one react differently? (**Don't miss this**; it is the key to a life of gratitude)*

Verse 15 says, "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed."

Now the others no doubt knew that they had been healed—but there was something different about this one man who came back to give God glory for his healing.

The Greek word used here is the word "eido", which means 'to see and understand', 'to perceive with intelligent comprehension.' In other words, this one man took the time to *notice* that he had been blessed—he recognized that God had given him a wonderful gift and it caused him to be filled with thanksgiving and praise!

Maybe the other nine that didn't return to give thanks felt they deserved to be healed (possibly an early version of the entitlement mentality)!

I do know this—sometimes we're so busy focusing on what we *don't* have and on what's *wrong* in our lives—that we don't take the time to take a good hard look at the many ways that God *has* blessed us! Sometimes we don't see how God has blessed us until we lose it.

There is an old Jewish story that illustrates this point—

"There is a man who goes to the rabbi and complains, *"Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?"*

The rabbi answers, *"Take your goat into the room with you."* The man is incredulous, but the rabbi insists. *"Do as I say and come back in a week."*

A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before. *"We cannot stand it,"* he tells the rabbi. *"The goat is filthy."*

The rabbi then tells him, *"Go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week."*

A radiant man returns to the rabbi a week later, exclaiming, *"Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there's no goat and it's only the nine of us."*

The situation was the same as at first, but now his perception had changed—he finally realized that he was blessed to begin with!

➤ Do we really perceive the ways that God has blessed us?

Not one of us is hungry, not one of us is naked, but most importantly, if you are a Christian—you already have been given the most precious gift in the world—the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ! I mean, if God never gave you another thing in this life, you'd still have your salvation—and that would be enough to be thankful for everyday of your life (not to mention eternity)!

Listen, the devil will do his best to keep your mind off the blessings of God. He will constantly tell you how bad you have it, and how everything in your life is wrong! And if you buy into that lie—you will begin a downward spiral that will make you more and more miserable and less and less thankful.

*When you begin to realize how much the Lord has already given you
that you will truly begin to be thankful.*

When you're thankful, your heart will abound with love and praise toward Him for everything has so graciously given to you and be able to say with a heart of gratitude like David, *"My cup is running over!"*

An unthankful Christian is a miserable, defeated Christian for he or she has lost their perspective of how much God has blessed, how much He has already given them in so many ways both big and small! When that happens—all they will see is a life that is *'half-full'* and not a life that has been given much—and joy will be replaced by complaining, self-pity and anger toward God Who has "cheated them" out of happiness!

Psalm 100:1–5 (NLT)

¹ Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth! ² Worship the LORD with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy. ³ Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. ⁵ For the LORD is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ **in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

Spurgeon said, *"When joy and prayer are married their first-born child is gratitude."*

"In everything" not "for everything" (Listen* for the Betsy Ten Boom story)

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

For a Christian, every day ought to be a day of thanksgiving—especially for those of us who live in America.

“America, America, God shed His grace on thee. And crowned thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.”

I leave you with the words of President George Washington who in 1789 issued the first national Thanksgiving Day Proclamation:

“Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor. Whereas, both the houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me ‘to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness!’ Now therefore, I do recommend next, to be devoted by the people of the states to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country.”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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