Thanksgiving – The Forgotten Holiday

1 Thess. 5:16-18

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After nearly two months at sea, sailing across the stormy north Atlantic in the late fall, the Pilgrims spotted Cape Cod on November 9, 1620. Their intended destination was south near the Hudson River, but the currents would not allow them to sail south. Chalking it up to divine providence, the men explored for over a month before finally settling on the location called modern day Plymouth. They laid out a plan for their village and began constructing a central meeting house/church, seven homes and four additional houses for the plantation.

Their bodies weakened by the sea travel and frozen in wet and wintery New England, 47 of the 102 died by the end of March. On March 16, 1621, an Indian walked into the camp…an English speaking Indian named Samoset. He soon brought with him another English speaking Indian named Squanto.

With Squanto’s help, the Pilgrim learned how to survive and flourish in the New World. They entered into a peace treaty with Massasoit, the chief of the Wampanoag tribe. After their first harvest in 1621, they held the First Thanksgiving celebration thanking God for his grace and goodness. Pilgrim Edward Winslow recorded the following about the First Thanksgiving and the Pilgrim’s relationship with the Indians.

It is just me or is the focus on Christmas happening earlier and earlier as the years go by? Years ago you didn't see anything Christmas until after Thanksgiving. Now the attention on Christmas starts before Halloween. And let's not forget Christmas in July; as if Christmas doesn't get enough commercial attention as it is.

And in years past, Black Friday didn't start until Friday. Now, you can get your crazy shopper groove on before Friday. Commercially we move from Halloween to Christmas with a not-so-discreet passing over of Thanksgiving. It's sad that the holiday with the least amount of commercialism has lost its overall appeal. And because of that trap we lose sight of the ever important focus that should be there-the focus on giving thanks.

What we can do to give Thanksgiving the attention it deserves?

1) Be aware of what can get in the way.

There are some things about Thanksgiving that, although not bad things, they can still get in the way of the focus on giving thanks.

Food.

There is a lot of cooking going on for Thanksgiving. It's a lot of work and slaving in the kitchen to get everything ready for the meal. Hours of preparation and everyone tears in and gobbles [pun intended] it up in about a half hour.

But think about a little subtlety that has happened. The holiday is called Thanksgiving but there's another term that people often use instead-Turkey-day. Not that anyone means anything bad by it but within that term you can see the focus being shifted from giving thanks to being about the bird.

Obviously, there are many things being served at the traditional Thanksgiving dinner but the centerpiece is the turkey. But what if something went wrong with the turkey? What if you sat down to eat and when father made the first plunge with the carving knife you had a Christmas Vacation type moment when Clark tried to carve the turkey? Steam poured out and the turkey was as dry as a bone. They tried to make the best of it but it was obvious the ruined turkey made it difficult to endure.

Not that a ruined Thanksgiving meal is no small matter, but if that happened to us would we let it affect our thankfulness?

* Prov. 17:1, *"Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife."*

Maybe you've experienced a Thanksgiving meal where there was all this chaos and drama surrounding getting the meal ready and making sure everything was just so. It can cause anxiety and stress and that can turn into strife; especially if when you're eating the meal you start hearing complaints. "The potatoes are cold." "These aren't the rolls we usually have?" "Tofu turkey? Are you serious?!" Just then you see mom grab the carving knife and waits to see if anyone else has a complaint.

Where's the thankfulness? Is the focus here on enjoying each other's company? I don't think so. Can the kitchen be a place where people are working hard but laughing and enjoying themselves? And no, you don't need a bottle of wine to make that happen. Can we enjoy the food without making it all about the food? Can we be thankful for the food even if everything isn't perfect?

* Prov. 15:17, "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred."

I'm not saying our Thanksgiving is full of hatred but the focus of this verse is to put things in perspective. It's better to have just vegetables if love comes with it than to have a ton of great food but the people eating it are unloving. The food shouldn't be the priority-love and thankfulness should be the priority. We need to be aware of what can get in the way of being thankful.

**Shopping**

The commercialism of Christmas is being pushed sooner and sooner as the years go by. If I'm not mistaken I think there were Santa sightings before Halloween this year. I've already seen commercials with Christmas themes advertising Black Friday sales events.

This time of year is referred to as the holidays, which is supposed to include Thanksgiving, Christmas and possibly New Year's thrown in there too. But let's face it-with Christmas getting all the attention we might as well drop the 's' from holidays.

Is our Thanksgiving Day filled with talk about Christmas lists and Black Friday deals? Do we thank the Lord for what we have and then switch gears to talking about what we want to go out and buy?

What happened to the days when stores were closed for Thanksgiving? What if that were still the case today? What if all on-line shopping was suspended on Thanksgiving? How thankful would we be about that? What if Black Friday didn't even exist?

Black Friday and Cyber Monday are more profitable than Thanksgiving Thursday but last year, online sales in the U.S. on Thanksgiving Day totaled $2.87 billion. "Thank you for all my blessings, Lord, from the bottom of my heart. But now I'm off to Amazon.com to fill my shopping cart."

It's easy to get caught-up in such spending when retailers offer amazing deals. But in doing so, Thanksgiving becomes the forgotten holiday and our minds quickly become transfixed on commercialized Christmas.

**Football**

NFL games on Thanksgiving Day have been going on since the league was formed. So, football on Thanksgiving is a tradition that many people look forward to. Even though I'm a football fan, it's not too hard for me to resist watching football on Thanksgiving since they have the Cowboys on every year. Yes, that must mean I'm a Giants fan. So, unless the Cowboys play the Giants on Thanksgiving, it won't be much of a temptation for me.

But this can be a deterrent from what the holiday is supposed to be about. Although I must say, it can be an opportunity to keep the theme of thankfulness going. We're thankful we get to watch football on Thanksgiving along with being thankful to escape having to clean up as well as being thankful for the opportunity to take a nap and blame it on the tryptophan. I'm not so sure being thankful for these things should really count. Although it can be fun and seemingly harmless to watch football on Thanksgiving, it can serve as a deterrent to focusing on the real meaning of the holiday.

**Going to the movies**

I don't know when this became a thing, but it seems pretty common now for people to go to the movies on Thanksgiving Day. In fact, there are movies that purposely open on Thanksgiving. Sure, it can be an enjoyable event when you go with the people who were sharing the Thanksgiving meal with you. But it can also be a subtle deterrent that helps us to lose the focus on giving thanks.

The bottom line is that there are other days to watch football or go shopping or go to the movies. In the very least wait until the next day to do those things. I'm not saying we need to spend the whole day doing nothing but expressing thanks and I'm not saying that if you do go shopping or watch football or go to the movies that you've blasphemed the spirit of thanksgiving but these things can get us sidetracked from what Thanksgiving is supposed to be about. We need to be aware of what can get in the way.

**2) Don't forget.**

In order for Thanksgiving to not be the forgotten holiday we need to do things that will help us to maintain the essence of it. When God was giving instructions to the Israelites for when they established themselves in Canaan, the land of promise, he warned them about forgetting to be thankful.

* Deut. 8:10-14, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.

Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

God knew they would have the tendency to forget where they came from and forget who delivered them when they started living more comfortably. Sometimes we can be like that. We get comfortable and can lose sight of what's really important. We can get out of touch with what we need to be thankful for and who we need to be thankful to.

It's easy to forget God when things are going well. When we have nice things or nothing major is going on we can put God on the back burner. When we get used to having certain things we can forget to be thankful for them. Instead we take these things for granted; we expect them to always be there. We can do that with people too. We take them for granted and expect them to always be there. So, we don't appreciate them as much as we should.

Thanksgiving is a day where we should stop and really consider all the things we are blessed with and all the people we are blessed to have in our lives. We should be this way every day but the reality is it's easy to not stop and be thankful. It's easy to forget God when our days are hectic and we have a million things to do. So if we find ourselves forgetting to be thankful we need to pray for that to change.

And one way that can start to change that is by making sure we spend Thanksgiving keeping the focus where it deserves to be. Psalm 100:4-5, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

Though this pertains to entering into the temple gates and courtyard (what we might call church today) with thanksgiving and praise, I think this should apply to any place we enter. We should be giving thanks to God and praising him all the time for he is good all the time. 1st Thess. 5:16-18, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus."

Think about it-if we are to be joyful always and thankful in all circumstances then that includes having a spirit of thanksgiving and praise wherever we go.

* When you go to school or work is there a spirit of thanksgiving and praise?
* We might not like our job or maybe some of the people we work with but are we able to focus on the fact that we should be thankful we have a job?
* Is there something about our work environment we can be thankful for?
* What about when we come home from work? Do we enter with a spirit of thanksgiving and praise? Are we thankful we have a home?
* Are we thankful for the people in our home? Or do we bring home the miserable attitude we had at work and bring others down?
* When we enter into a place do we sour the mood, or do we sweeten it?

When we come to church are we thankful to be here? Do we possess a spirit of praise? Or do we just have the spirit of obligation and are in a hurry for the service to be over? How about our thankfulness toward God? Do we declare him good all the time or only when things are going well for us?

In closing,

"On Oct. 3, 1863, Abraham Lincoln invited the people in every part of the U.S to observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father. Lincoln's proclamation was written in the third year of the Civil War, a difficult time for anyone-especially a leader-to give thanks. Nevertheless, Lincoln encouraged people to look beyond the hostilities in order to discern the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God."

Some of the circumstances of our lives are not wonderful. And when things are tough it's easy to become miserable and bitter. But when we can find something to be thankful for in every circumstance then we are able to be joyful always because joy and thankfulness are not dependent on our circumstances but rather on where our hearts and minds are at - Joyful and thankful.

* "Lord, help me to not forget about you when times are good."
* "Lord, help me to find something to be thankful for in this situation. Help me to see how it could've been worse and then thank you that it wasn't."
* "Lord, help me to maintain my joy around difficult people and help me to find something positive to say about them."
* "Lord, give me strength because right now I'm feeling weak and vulnerable."

In order to keep Thanksgiving from becoming a forgotten holiday, we need to develop a mindset of thankfulness and praise and cultivate an attitude of rejoicing and put things in perspective. We need to remember all that God has given us and done for us rather than focusing on what troubles have happened to us and the things we feel God hasn't done for us.

We can become distracted by the spirit of complaining and doubt to where we feel there is nothing to be thankful for and no reason to praise God because nothing ever goes right for me. That negative spirit can be wrapped up in the spirit of demandingness, expectation and entitlement. None of these are conducive to a thankful, praising spirit.

But that can change if you want it to. First, acknowledge that this attitude is wrong and then, ask the Lord to show you the things you should be thankful for that you are currently blind to. That's something we all can do. Make a list of everything you're thankful for; nothing is too small.

We should never hold back on giving thanks. Remembering daily will helps to keep Thanksgiving not only a remembered holiday, but a dearly treasured one as well.