

Pastor Matthew Ude
November 28th, 2019
Thanksgiving Day

Giving Thanks to the Lord

What do we have to be thankful for?

Thursday morning is usually confirmation recitation day. Normally the confirmation kids would be reciting memory work about now. So that's one thing they are thankful for anyway.

Thanksgiving day is supposed to be a day of national unity. A day of prayer and thanksgiving for the nation. It became especially important during the civil war. This is an important part of Thanksgiving Day and of our daily prayers. The Lord has blessed us through our nation with an incredible amount of prosperity, and peace. We certainly never want to take that for granted or forget to thank the Lord for what he has given us. Even if we aren't particularly happy with our current leaders we still pray for them and thank the Lord for the blessing he has given us through them. So that is another thing to be thankful for.

But if we go back even further in history we find that God commanded the Israelites to have not one day of thanksgiving but three. Three times a year they were supposed to give thanks.

For What Is To Come

Leviticus 23:10-11 ¹⁰ "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: `When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹ `He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

The first of these celebrations was the festival of the first fruits. It took place in the spring, the day after the Passover.

As its name suggests this day of thanksgiving happened *before* the harvest. At this time of year the barley was just beginning to ripen. But before they harvested anything from the field the Israelites were supposed to take the first fruits and bring them to Jerusalem as a thank offering to the Lord.

This might seem a bit backwards to us, to have a festival thanking God for what He has not yet done. Usually we celebrate after the harvest, thanking God for what He has given us.

But God's promises are so sure and certain that we can always respond with thanks and praise even before we have received His gifts.

The story is told of a pastor years ago who had no food for his children. His youngest said to her father let us sit down and give thanks and the Lord will provide. So they sat down and gave thanks and there was a knock at the door, some members had brought food.

In 2 Chronicles 20 we hear the story of when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. Three armies, the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, joined forces and came up against the people of Judah. So Jehoshaphat called all the people of Judah together, but they didn't prepare for battle, instead they assembled together before the temple of the Lord and cried out to God.

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah. And the Lord spoke through Jahaziel saying, "**Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's**" 2 Chronicles 20:15

So Jehoshaphat and all the people of Judah went down to meet the enemy. But again they did not go down ready for battle. They did not go down with swords and spears and armor. They went down singing and praising God and giving thanks for the victory that was not yet theirs but which God had promised. And when they came to the place where the enemy armies were, they found that they were all dead. God had caused the Ammonites and the Moabites to betray the people of Mount Seir and they had killed one another.

This first day of thanksgiving, the festival of the first fruits was as I mentioned the day after the Passover and was therefore closely associated with the Passover. The Passover was a remembrance of God's deliverance from Egypt but it was also a looking forward to the coming of Christ. And so by teaching them to be thankful for what God had not yet given, He also taught them to look forward with confidence and faith to a salvation that He had not yet accomplished but which was as good as done.

We too offer up prayers of joyful thanksgiving for what we have not yet seen but what we know will be ours because of God's promises. We give thanks for all the harvests that are not yet in our barns, for He has promised to provide. We give thanks for the salvation which is promised but not yet seen. We give thanks to you O Lord.

For The Law of God

Leviticus 23:15-16 NKJ ¹⁵ `And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven

Sabbaths shall be completed. ¹⁶ `Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

The second day of thanksgiving was called the *Festival Of Weeks*. It was called this because it was seven sevens plus one. Seven weeks, or 50 days after the Festival Of First Fruits. Because it was 50 days after the Passover in the New Testament it received the name which we are familiar with, "Pentecost." Pentecost is Greek for fifty days.

By this time the barley harvest was in and the Israelites were thanking God for this. But also the wheat was just beginning to ripen and once again they brought the firstfruits of the grain offering thanking God for the harvest they had not yet received.

Even more importantly however it was fifty days after the Passover that the Israelite arrived at Mount Sinai and God spoke to them from the mountain and gave them his law.

So Pentecost was not only a celebration of the wheat harvest but also of the giving of the Law. Again what??

Since when do we thank people for giving us rules? Imagine a father says, "Son no TV until you finish your homework." And the son says, "thank you father I will celebrate this moment forever. Thank you for giving me your rules." You see I can't even say it without sounding sarcastic. It is such a ridiculous thing.

And yet that is exactly what is going on here, and not only that but we should thank both our fathers and our Father in heaven for giving us laws. Laws keep us safe, laws give us guidance, rules shape and mold us as children into good productive people. It is unloving and wasteful for a father to let his children do as they wish.

Consider all the false gods. All of them without exception did not give their people laws and rules but simply punished those whom they wished to punish and reward those whom they wished to reward, whatever took their fancy.

Our God the true God teaches His laws, not so that we can learn to please his changing whims. But so that we can learn to grow into the people we ought to be. God's laws are His way of saying this is who I created you to be, a holy and righteous people. This is indeed something to be thankful for.

Considering the history of Pentecost, it is no wonder that it was this day that God choose to once again reveal himself in His Holy Spirit. Just as he revealed himself on Mount Sinai in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament He reveals Himself through the Apostles when He poured out His holy Spirit up on them. And although we fail to be the people we ought to be

through studying the law, on the new Pentecost we receive the forgiveness of our sins through the proclamation of the death of Christ.

For The Land That Is And That Will Be

Leviticus 23:33-36 NKJ ³³ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁴ "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: `The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for seven days to the LORD.* ³⁵ `On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work *on it.* ³⁶ `For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It *is* a sacred assembly, *and you shall do no customary work on it.*

Finally the third thanksgiving festival, the *Feast Of The Ingathering*. This is the one that is probably closest to our own harvest festival. In our calendar it would have taken place around the beginning of October. At this time all the harvest had been gathered in and the Israelites went to Jerusalem for eight days of celebration.

While in Jerusalem the Israelite all lived in tents made from tree branches. These tents were all over the roofs and gardens and roads of Jerusalem so that the entire city was green with tents. For this reason it was also called the *Feast Of Booths* or the *Feast Of Tabernacles*.

It was a full fledged rejoicing in the bounty of the harvest, yes, but the living in tents was there to remind the Israelites how they had lived in tents for 40 years in the wilderness and how the Lord had brought them finally safe to the promised land.

Now we have not yet reached our promised land, although we know it is waiting. Certainly we can and should rejoice and thank God for the land we have now, and the peace and prosperity he has given to us. But also as we wait for true rest, the true promised land, the return to Eden. We wait and give thanks for the land which will be ours, as we wait consider this;

God commanded the Israelites that on each of these three festivals they were to leave their homes and go to Jerusalem. Now some might think, "what will happen to our farms and our homes if all the men leave and go to Jerusalem?" So the Lord gave his solemn promise that no one would steal or invade the land while the men were in Jerusalem celebrating these festivals. And for 1500 years from the time of Moses to the time of Jesus there is no recorded incident of any man or army taking advantage of the fact that all the men of Israel were in Jerusalem celebrating the feasts, for 1500 years the Lord kept that promise.

If the Lord kept that promise for 1500 years, we can be confident that He will keep those he has given to us as well. Therefore today we can give thanks not only for the nation we have but for the land that we have not yet seen. For the Lord's mercy endures forever.

Amen