

## Sermon: Thanksgiving Versus Thanksliving

Psa 69:29-34

Most of us know the story of the first Thanksgiving—at least, we know the Pilgrim version. But how many of us know the Indian viewpoint? No, I'm not talking about some revisionist, p.c. version of history. I'm talking about the amazing story of the way God used an Indian named Squanto as a special instrument of His providence.

Historical accounts of Squanto's life vary, but historians believe that around 1608—more than a decade before the Pilgrims landed in the New World—a group of English traders, led by a Captain Hunt, sailed to what is today Plymouth, Massachusetts. When the trusting Wampanoag Indians came out to trade, Hunt took them prisoner, transported them to Spain, and sold them into slavery.

But God had an amazing plan for one of the captured Indians—a boy named Squanto.

Squanto was bought by a well-meaning Spanish monk, who treated him well and taught him the Christian faith. Squanto eventually made his way to England and worked in the stable of a man named John Slaney. Slaney sympathized with Squanto's desire to return home, and he promised to put the Indian on the first vessel bound for America. It wasn't until 1619—ten years after Squanto was first kidnapped—that a ship was found. Finally, after a decade of exile and heartbreak, Squanto was on his way home.

But when he arrived in Massachusetts, more heartbreak awaited him. An epidemic had wiped out Squanto's entire village. We can only imagine what must have gone through Squanto's mind. Why had God allowed him to return home, against all odds, only to find his loved ones dead? A year later, the answer came. A shipload of English families arrived and settled on the very land once occupied by Squanto's people. Squanto went to meet them, greeting the startled Pilgrims in English. According

to the diary of Pilgrim Governor William Bradford, Squanto “became a special instrument sent of God for [our] good . . . He showed [us] how to plant [our] corn, where to take fish and to procure other commodities . . . and was also [our] pilot to bring [us] to unknown places for [our] profit, and never left [us] till he died.” When Squanto lay dying of a fever, Bradford wrote that their Indian friend “desir[ed] the Governor to pray for him, that he might go to the Englishmen’s God in heaven.” Squanto bequeathed his possessions to his English friends “as remembrances of his love.” Who but God could so miraculously weave together the lives of a lonely Indian and a struggling band of Englishmen? It’s hard not to make comparisons with the biblical story of Joseph, who was also sold into slavery—and whom God likewise used as a special instrument for good. Squanto’s life story is remarkable, and we ought to make sure our children and grandchildren learn about it. While you’re enjoying turkey and pumpkin pie tomorrow, share with your kids the Indian side of the Thanksgiving story. Tell them about Squanto, the “special instrument sent of God”—who changed the course of American history. Charles Colson, BreakPoint Commentary, November 25, 1998, (c) 1998 Prison Fellowship Ministries

Text: I Thessalonians 5:18

*“18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

Introduction: I believe Scripture substantiates the fact that God expects us to thank Him for His blessings in our lives.

This is evidenced in the words of Jesus to the one lone ex-leper who returned to thank Him

Luke 17:15-17:

*“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he*

*was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”*

God not only deserves our thanks, but I believe He also desires it.

He wants us to be grateful for His goodness rather than just take it all for granted.

How many of you took time out this past week just to re-count your blessings and thank God for everything He’s done for you?

As we prepare to have Thanksgiving this week, let us understand that God doesn’t want our thanksgiving to be limited to one Thursday in November. God wants us to continue to thank Him.

He wants us to live a life of thankfulness.

Let's Look back at what Paul has to say about it all in our text this morning

*“18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

In Ephesians 5:19-20, he say's

*“19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In Philippians 4:4, he writes: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”*

Paul made it clear that our giving of thanks is to be continual...not dependent on our situations.

It is to be ongoing in spite of our circumstances, not just when everything is going good.

Even though Paul faced some very devastating circumstances, Paul was able to maintain an attitude of gratitude because he held onto a proper perspective of both God and His circumstances.

He knew that God was good all the time and consequently, he knew that a good God would only allow circumstances that would ultimately result in something good.

Paul's attitude toward his circumstances and situations mirrored that of Joseph in

Genesis 50:19-20 where Joseph said:

*"But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."*

You will remember that Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery.

But this situation was just a part of God's bigger plan of protecting His people and Joseph recognized that rather than wallow in self-pity over the tough times he had to just endure and trust and be thankful to God.

Joseph's attitude basically says: "Since God is good, then this bad circumstance must be meant to bring about some further good in or through my life or else God would not have allowed it."

What an accurate picture of the pain and suffering, and all the negative stuff, that we all have to face in this life.

It all originates from satan, who intends to harm us, but when God allows it to happen, it can only mean He has something good in store.

Knowing that God expects us to live a life of thanksgiving rather than offering limited thanks, and knowing that we must never lose sight of God's goodness and God's hand at work in everything we face –

I want to share with you three reasons why our thanksgiving must be continual no matter what are circumstances may be

## I. BECAUSE THE WORLD IS WATCHING AND LISTENING

A. The world seems to ignore the good news we try to share with them, but they become all ears when negative circumstances befall us.

1. Consider the situation Paul and Silas found themselves in

in Acts 16:22-25:

*"The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."*

2. When our circumstances turn from good to bad, when the flow of God's blessings seem to be temporarily turned off in our lives, what we tend to forget is that it is at these moments that the world is most likely watching our lives.

They want to see how we will react.

"And I'll praise You in this storm  
And I will lift my hands  
For You are who You are  
No matter where I am  
And every tear I've cried  
You hold in Your hand  
You never left my side  
And though my heart is torn  
I will praise You in this storm

B. Times of suffering and hardship often provides you and I the greatest opportunity to demonstrate the validity of Christianity.

1. If we are only grateful and joyful when things are going good then how are we any different from the rest of the world?

What do we have that they would want?

2. Peter said in I Pe 2:12:

*“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*

Simply put Live such good lives that even though people accuse you of doing wrong or things go wrong people may see your good deeds and glorify God

3. Jesus speaking in Mt 5:14-16 said:

*“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Application: If you want to be used of God to bring your unsaved friends family and co-workers to Christ, then you must learn to continually praise God, even when things aren't going good for you – because it's then, when you've got their attention.

We must offer continual thanks:

## II. BECAUSE SATAN IS WATCHING AND LISTENING

A. Peter says: 1 Peter 5:8-10

*“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”*

Think about this question

1. What kind of animals do lions most often devour?

The weak, the injured and the sick.

*2. What tips Satan off that we might be at a point of vulnerability, that our suffering has weakened us?*

***When he hears our praise turn sour and our thanksgiving disappear.***

3. Peter warns us to be careful, to be on our guard, to watch out for Satan’s attempts to devour us.

Resist Satan by standing firm in the faith.

There is no better way to do this than to thank God, even when it looks like there’s nothing left to thank Him for.

*B is for body. Thank God for physical health and the ability to walk, run, play, breathe, and think. Pray for people who can’t enjoy these things.*

*L is for labor. Praise God for jobs and income that help to meet your needs. Thank God for your employer and the people you work with.*

*E is for emotions. Thank God for joy, peace, contentment, and more.*

*S is for social. We are blessed with relationships. Thank God for parents, grandparents, siblings, children, friends, and all relationships in the church.*

*S is for spiritual. Thank God for all the gifts of salvation in Christ. Praise God for forgiveness, prayer, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of eternal life.*

May each of us learn to say, “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”

Lord, what a great God you are! Your blessings overflow to us. May we be a blessing to others. Amen.

B. When Satan sees our thanksgiving disappear during times of suffering, I believe he turns up the heat even more.

1. Like a lion listening for the sound of a wounded animal, Satan listens for us to gripe and complain.

2. He listens for the sounds of us accusing God of being unfair or unfaithful because of our circumstances.

3. When we allow our circumstances and situations to overcome us, our thanksgiving is often overcome also and this opens up the opportunity for Satan to step in and fuel the fire.

Application: We need to learn to continually offer thanks to God regardless of our current situation not only because the world is listening and our witness depends on it, but also because Satan is listening and our Christian walk depends on it.

We must offer continual thanks:

III. BECAUSE GOD IS WATCHING AND LISTENING



A. Asa, King of Judah, had been confronted by a mighty army. Rather than rely on God, he made an alliance with the King of Aram.

God said to him: II chronicles 16:9

*“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.”*

- What God was saying is – I’m looking for people that I can demonstrate my power and strength through.

I’m looking for people whose hearts are fully committed to me and trust me through the good, the bad and the ugly.

B. A few chapters later, King Jehoshphat came along and he did just that.

1. When God saw the commitment of his heart, He released His mighty power to deliver Jehoshpat from his impossible circumstances.

2. Look what God said to him: II Chronicles 20:17-24

*<sup>17</sup> You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.’”*

*<sup>18</sup> Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. <sup>19</sup> Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.*

*<sup>20</sup> Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.” <sup>21</sup> After consulting*

*the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his<sup>[a]</sup> holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:*

*“Give thanks to the LORD,  
for his love endures forever.”*

*<sup>22</sup> As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. <sup>23</sup> The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.*

*<sup>24</sup> When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.*

C. Thanksgiving opens the door to God’s power which opens the door to victory.

1. God is looking for people in whom He can show Himself strong, but those people have got to be people whose hearts are fully committed to God.

People who are willing to thank Him even when face to face with difficult circumstances.

2. Acts 16:25-26:

*“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose.”*

3. In Paul’s situation, thanksgiving brought them freedom - suddenly their chains came loose as God shook the foundation of the prison.

Application: Thanksgiving doesn't always bring an immediate end to our adverse circumstances.

However, it will bring an inner freedom in the midst of them.

God is listening.

God is watching.

He sees much more than we see.

He views the whole picture.

Thus we must understand that as we thank Him and praise Him our adverse situations will begin to fade behind the truth of the greatness of our God.

Conclusion: The circumstances won't end until God has finished the work that He has begun. But, if we will learn to give thanks and praise in the midst of it all, we will learn that God will grant us His inner peace and assurance.

Phillipians 4:4-7 encourages us by saying:

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

I wish I could say that I've done well when it comes to thanks-living, but I have to be honest, as I reflect on my Christian walk, more often than not my thankfulness has not always been continual.

But the deeper I go into God's Word, the more evident it becomes that I must truly possess an attitude of gratitude.

God help me and you to not just be hearers of His Word, but to be true doers of His Word.

Let's pray!