

Ever Thankful – 1 Thessalonians 5:18

I. INTRODUCTION – Read Psalm 136:1-5 / 26 • 1 Thes 5

A. The First Thanksgiving

1. It was a bitterly cold Dec. 21, in 1620 when the 102 passengers of the *Mayflower* set foot on the shore of what they would soon call Plymouth.
2. They'd just spent 3 months at sea, crammed into the hold of a ship tossed to & fro by storms.
3. They came to the New World because their native England didn't want them.
4. They were **Christians** who took the Bible seriously & wanted to live in uncompromising obedience to it.
5. They sailed to the New World to start a new life; to build a society shaped by Scripture.
6. Winter in New England is rarely easy; that December was especially cold.
7. Though not a single one of them had been lost on the journey across the Atlantic, **half** of them died that first winter of fever.
8. At one time, only 6 were well enough to take care of the rest.
9. In March, while gathered for a meeting, a lone native American walked into their settlement.
 - a. His name was **Samoset**, & to the Pilgrims great surprise he spoke English, having learned it from the English ships that fished the rich waters off the coast further north.
 - b. Samoset introduced the Pilgrims to **another** English-speaking Native American named **Squanto**.
 - c. Squanto's story is an amazing journey & record of God's providence.
 - d. He'd **been to England** & belonged to the nearest tribe - the **Wampanoags**.
 - e. Squanto then introduced the Pilgrims to **Massasoit**, chief of the Wampanoags.
10. While many of the later European settlers were brutal to Native Americans,
 - a. The Pilgrims saw them as human beings created in God's image, whom God loved & Christ had died for.
 - b. They were concerned to have not **just** peaceful but good & healthy relations with the Wampanoags.
 - c. They tried to purchase the land they'd settled on from Massasoit.
 - d. But the Native Americans had no concept of the **ownership** of land & told the Pilgrims they were free to live there & build all the homes they wanted.
 - e. Still, the Pilgrims wouldn't just **take** the land without giving something in exchange & persuaded Massasoit to take some trade goods.
11. Relations between Plymouth & the Wampanoags grew.
12. The Native Americans taught the Pilgrims how to plant & harvest native crops & by harvest time, there was a surplus to last them through the next Winter.
13. As the Pilgrims reviewed their first year, they could see how though it had been hard, God had preserved them.
14. There were **dozens** of miracles that had occurred, showing God's favor.
15. As they listened to Squanto's story, they realized that years before they arrived in the New World, God had been getting things ready for them.
16. So, **seeing God's grace so clearly**, their hearts overflowed with **appreciation**.
17. And being a people who sought to literally & simply do what God's Word said, they decided to hold a special feast & commemoration of Thankfulness to the Lord.
 - a. They knew several of the Feast of Ancient Israel were holidays commemorating God's faithfulness to His people.
 - b. The Pilgrims saw themselves as a **New Israel**, living in a **New Promised Land**.
 - c. So they called for a special time to give thanks to the Lord.
18. Since the Wampanoags had been instrumental in their success, they invited Massasoit to join them.
 - a. When he arrived, bringing a long line of his own guests, the Pilgrims feared they'd eat everything & leave nothing in store for the coming winter.
 - b. But the guests brought their own food with them.
 - c. For 3 days they all feasted on turkey, venison, pumpkin, & corn.
 - d. It was the first time Europeans had ever had **popcorn**.

B. More Thanksgiving

1. In the years that followed, the Pilgrims celebrated many more Thanksgivings; & not just in the Fall or only once a year.

2. They paused to give thanks to God **whenever** His favor was seen.
3. You see, for the Pilgrims, thanksgiving wasn't an event; it was a **way of life**.
4. They'd read Psalms 92, 105, 106, 107 & others which say –

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

His mercy endures forever & His loving-kindness to all generations.

Lift up your voice; make known His deeds among the nations.

5. It was this **attitude of gratitude** that moved the Pilgrims to set aside special times to gather & celebrate God's goodness.
6. Over the next 200 years many Americans celebrated an annual Thanksgiving but it wasn't until 1864, during some of the darkest days of the Civil War, that President Lincoln declared it an ***national holiday***.

C. Our Thanksgiving

1. As we prepare to commemorate Thanksgiving this week, I thought it would be good for us to remember how it began.
2. Let's look beyond the feast on the table before the Pilgrims –
3. And let's consider the **reason** for their celebration.
4. What were they **thinking**? What **truth** did they live by?

5. It was this –

II. TEXT

A. 1 Thess 5:16-18

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

1. Paul is putting the finishing touches on this letter to one of his favorite churches.
2. As he does, he jots down several quick, bullet-point exhortations. He says –

- a. **Keep** rejoicing,
- b. **Keep** praying,
- c. **Keep** thanking;
- d. For these 3 are the **essence** of God's will as we live & grow in Christ.

B. First - Keep Rejoicing

1. We **can** always rejoice because God Now, get ready for this!
 - a. It's profound.
 - b. We can rejoice always because God – is GOD!
2. He's seated on His throne, over-ruling in the affairs of Earth.
3. Nothing can come into our lives that doesn't first pass through His hands.
4. There's no need to worry or fret. There's no place for despair.
5. Now of course; because we live in a fallen world, we suffer the pain of occasional loss.
 - a. Bad things happen.
6. God's Word is realistic when it says, "Weeping lasts for a night, but joy comes in the morning." [Psalm 30:5]
7. There's a lot going on in the world & our nation right now.
 - a. A lot of folk are worried; concerned about the direction we're headed.
 - b. If you listen to or read the news, not much there to be encouraged by.
 - c. I'm teaching world history at our school to 9th & 10th graders.
 - d. We just finished the Roman Empire.
 - e. I couldn't help but see how our country is marching down the same sorry path as Ancient Rome.
 - f. The names have changed but the lines are all the same.
8. But you know what? The Church of Jesus Christ **survived** the fall of Rome.
9. In many ways, the Church **thrived** as Rome fell!
10. I love my country & pray for it every day.
11. It hurts to watch it crumble, but I don't despair!
12. Because MY ruler isn't a president, He's a King.
 - a. He doesn't sit in a **White House** in Washington DC
 - b. He sits a **White Throne** in Heaven.
13. His kingdom **WILL** come; His will, **WILL** be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.

14. So we can rejoice – always!

C. Keep Praying

1. When Paul says we are to **pray w/o ceasing**, he doesn't mean we should drop to our knees, fold our hands, bow our heads, close our eyes & stay there.
2. He means we're to **STAY** in constant communication with God;
3. To live in the **conscious presence** of the Lord.
4. I went to get coffee the other day & as I parked my car, there was a guy standing out front by himself, carrying on an animated conversation with someone I couldn't see.
 - a. It was a cellular call & he was using his hands-free device.
 - b. He wasn't trying to be sly about it; he had the hands & the voice going full tilt.
 - c. As I got closer it was obvious it was an important business call.
 - d. I guess he didn't care what anyone else thought – that conversation was important.
5. That got me to thinking – Even if you don't have a cell phone, you can get one of these little deals, stick it in your ear – and pray out loud all day long.
 - a. No longer do you need to worry people are going to think you're crazy.
 - b. Driving along in your car, talking to the Lord, people driving by & laughing thinking you're a loon.
6. To pray without ceasing means to dwell in the conscious presence of God, never losing the sense of His immediate, intimate presence.

D. Keep Thanking

1. Then Paul says, "In everything give thanks."
2. Note he didn't say, "**FOR** everything, give thanks." It's "**IN** everything, give thanks."
 - a. There are some things we can't give thanks **for** –
 - b. But we **can** be still be **thankFUL** in spite of them.
3. The key is to realize that thankfulness isn't something you hand out when you get a goody.
4. Thankfulness is an attitude, a frame of mind by which we look at life.
5. The **reason** we can be FULL of thanks is because God is **bigger than our circumstances** & has promised to work all things together for good.
6. Gratitude is an **attitude** we choose to look at life through, not a response we give now & then to stuff we like.
7. Thankfulness isn't determined **by** our circumstances; it's how we've chosen ahead of time to react to them.
8. Gratitude is how we treat life, not how life treats us!
9. Life for the Pilgrims was hard that first year.
10. Every family had lost at least one of their own.
 - a. Their days were filled with long hours of back breaking labor as they carved their settlement out of the wilderness.
 - b. But they were driven by the vision of forging a society totally devoted to & governed by God.
 - c. They knew what they were doing was His will & rejoiced in Him, were thankful to Him.
11. We live in a different time when many people, including many Christians have **more** an attitude of **Entitlement** than thankfulness.
 - a. They see themselves as having a right to an easy life.
 - b. Many sociologists have written on this recently; remarking that young adults are especially prone to an attitude of entitlement.
 - c. They shun work but think they're owed an income.
 - d. They're the product of an educational system that gave them B's & C's just for showing up at class & told them they were wonderful, marvelous, fantastic geniuses.
 - e. They graduate from college & can't understand why corporations won't hire them as vice-presidents with a 6 figure salary.
 - f. At home, many parents fail to give their children chores or put any kind of requirement on them because they don't want their child to be upset & not like them.
 - g. They buy their child whatever toy or game he/she wants and they spend endless hours entertaining themselves.
 - h. Then when the turn teenagers, surrounded by dozens of expensive gadgets, they say, "I'm bored!" And blame WHO? Mom & Dad because after all, isn't it their JOB to make life fun?

12. Sadly, many of these young people never grow out of that attitude of entitlement.

a. They think life owes them – God owes them!

b. And if the expected goodies aren't forthcoming, they **complain**.

13. Entitlement is the opposite of being thankful.

14. And being thankful is the evidence of a converted heart.

15. I say that because the grace of God is unearned, unmerited, undeserved!

a. There is no entitlement to Grace!

b. So where grace has gripped a life – there is only one response = Thanks, Praise!

E. All Three; God's Will

1. Look at it again –

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

2. Keep rejoicing, praying & thanking, because this is God's will for YOU & ME.

3. This is where our faith in God is **translated** into daily living.

a. Because we **know** He's present with us, we stay in constant communication with Him.

b. Because we **know** His power, grace & wisdom, no matter what happens we rejoice & give thanks.

4. Shouldn't **every believer** be marked by this?

5. Let's each stop right now and do a little internal inventory.

a. What's your attitude right now?

b. Are you full of thanks because you're saved & going to heaven?

c. Or do you see thanks as something you reserve until you get a goody?

6. If the Spirit is convicting you about this – here's a way you can turn things around –

a. Choose to be thankful to God IN everything; not for, but in everything.

b. Start **practicing the giving** of thanks by opening your mouth & speaking it to those around you – specially those who serve you in ANY capacity.

c. Find people doing good – look for it – then make it a point to go thank them.