



Thanksgiving...No Matter What

By

Bryan Craig

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

If you are like me, when you think of Thanksgiving, your mind goes to a happy idyllic place in your imagination that looks something like the picture above. As we drink our coffee and watch the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade in our pajamas, the smells of wonderful foods fill the house and we anticipate a joyful gathering with family and friends. This one day a year, all of America takes time to be thankful. This is the one American holiday which seems to capture the hearts of all people, regardless of race, religion, social status or any other demographic. The airlines say the Wednesday before Thanksgiving is the busiest travel day of the year, as collectively, millions of Americans make journeys to be with those they love.

So, what makes this holiday so celebrated and special. I believe God has written gratefulness and praise on our hearts. We were made in His image, and He is a God of praise and a God to be praised. Throughout Scripture, God’s people have offered thanksgiving to Him. From the early ancestors, offering their thanksgiving sacrifices in Leviticus, to Paul’s letters of thanksgiving, God’s people have had a desire to give thanks to Him. It is an act of recognizing the blessings we have in Him, no matter how

undeserved, and giving Him our hearts in response. Even those who do not know Christ know how good it feels when they show gratitude to someone. Just look at the number of “Thank You” notes sent each year. These hearts God gave us were made for gratefulness.

What about during those seasons of life when times are tough and gratefulness eludes us? This is when our hearts seem hardened, almost incapable of thankfulness. At this time, more than any other, we should give thanks. This counterintuitive act of praising God in the midst of storms is a secret to great blessings. Paul knew this. I have come back to his admonition above in Philippians time and time again in my life. No matter what is going on, he encourages us to pray with thanksgiving and God will give us a peace which is beyond understanding. This is an amazing promise. In Hebrews 13:15, we are also encouraged to *“continually offer God a sacrifice of praise.”* A sacrifice is something given of ourselves. A sacrifice is usually difficult. We are instructed to give praise for the difficulties in our life. This seems like such a strange concept.

However, our forefathers of this country understood it. George Washington established the first Day of Thanksgiving...offering a day of praise to God. Yes, from the very beginning of this country, we were a God-honoring society with a God-honoring government. But did you know that the national holiday of Thanksgiving was birthed out of the Civil War? Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a Day of Thanksgiving in the midst of the most horrible time in our nation’s history as Americans were killing Americans, all in a battle over the most brutal social injustice this country has ever seen...slavery. This hardly seemed like a time for thankfulness. Yet, in 1863, the President issued this proclamation:

By the President of the United States of America.

A Proclamation.

The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of

military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-eighth.

By the President: Abraham Lincoln

The President wanted the people to look around them at the bountiful blessings the Lord had bestowed on our country in prosperity of natural resources and abundant harvest, in population increase and border expansion, in peace with other nations. He says, "They are gracious gifts from the Most High God." He wanted us to remember how God does not treat us as our sins deserve and how we should offer the same mercy to our fellow man. He wanted us, especially in a time of turmoil and civil unrest, to give thanks to God.

When we pause to bow our heads and pray in humility to our great Creator, the One Who holds all things together, we become united as God's people and as a nation under God. We come into His presence with thankfulness and we find forgiveness of our sins and peace in the presence of trouble. Most of all, we find Him. This is what all those Thanksgiving travelers are really looking for as they gather in the name of food, football and family. As President Lincoln knew, God is the only One truly worthy of our thanksgiving, and He is the One Who makes this country great.