

The Most Important Ingredient

IN YOUR THANKSGIVING FEAST

PSALM 92:1-4

Wednesday, November 19, 2008 | Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Have you ever stopped to consider how many things have changed from the First Thanksgiving celebrated by the pilgrims to our celebrations today?

Just think back for a moment. At the first gathering, their turkey (if they had turkey) did not come in a pre-wrapped package with "Butterball" stamped on it with a neat little pouch of giblet goodies on the inside. They did not have pumpkin pie, and as unthinkable as it may sound, there was no canned cranberry sauce. There were no parades, no football games and no rush for Christmas shopping. What an unusual thanksgiving!

Yet for all the things that have changed in the celebration of this great tradition, one thing that hasn't changed is the central ingredient in the celebration. You may or may not eat turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, pumpkin pie, cranberry sauce, watch football or go shopping, but if this one "ingredient" is left out amid all the other activity, you will miss Thanksgiving. What is it? Thanks. Gratitude.

It is vital you and I gain dispositionally what traditionally may be expressed differently. If there is anything we could easily leave out Thanksgiving Day and every day in our lives it is a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.

I want us to turn to the songbook of the Old Testament. The Jews were challenged to be a thankful people because of their special relationship with God.

Psalm 92:1-4

This is a good place for us to focus our thought today. As I read, I find this was a sabbath psalm—something to be shared among God's gathered people. It is a call to worship. I don't know about you, but the worship leader who penned this psalm sounds like someone I would have enjoyed meeting. He discovered that each day needs to begin and end with praise, regardless of the things that transpire in between.

There is an Israeli folktale about a king named Shah Abbas who wanted to get to know his subjects. At night, he dressed as a monk and mingled among his poorest subjects to see how they lived. On one occasion, he went to the humble hut of a hardworking cobbler. This man was a low-wage earner—barely getting by—but he praised God mightily even in his lowly circumstances.

Impressed and curious by this man's most positive disposition, the next day the king issued a decree that no one could repair shoes without a costly cobbler's permit. That night the king visited again. He found the cheerful cobbler praising God. Since the cobbler could no longer continue to repair shoes by law, he spent the day carrying and delivering water to his neighbors. The king heard him say, "Bless be God, day by day."

The next day the king made another decree that no one could

draw water for another. Again in the disguise of a monk, the king visited the cobbler, and once again the cobbler greeted him with the words, "Blessed by God, day by day!"

The cobbler now hand-chopped wood to earn his daily bread. So the next day the king ordered that all woodchoppers join the king's royal guard. The cobbler joined and was given a shiny steel sword. The cobbler had no money for bread to feed his family that evening, so he sold his sword for bread and made a sword of wood to carry in his sheath.

When the "monk" visited again, the cobbler explained what he had done. The king asked, "What if there is a sword inspector tomorrow?" The cobbler answered, "Blessed by God, day by day."

The next day at the king's command, the chief guard ordered the cobbler to execute a prisoner. The cobbler could never harm another and he grasped the handle of the sword and said, "Almighty God, you know I am not a murderer. If this prisoner is guilty, let my sword be of steel; if the prisoner is innocent, let the blade be of wood.

The cobbler pulled his wooden sword from its sheath and showed the guard and the king.

Shah Abbas came and hugged the cobbler and told him of the events of the past few nights. He then

named the cobbler his newest court advisor and proclaimed, "Blessed by God, day by day."

From his poverty to the palace, the cobbler learned the path of fullness in life was thankfulness.

The circumstances of our days are ever changing, yet the disposition of our hearts must remain unchanged: "Thanks be to God, day by day."

"From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised!" (Psalm 113:3 ESV).

In Psalm 113, we are called to give thankful expression to the Lord for His kindness, goodness and faithfulness in our lives.

How can *thankfulness* become a vital ingredient in your holiday celebration and daily circumstances?

1. Reflect on God's faithfulness at the beginning of each new day.

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23 ESV).

Every morning. Don't allow yourself to get up on the wrong side of the bed, grouchy and discordant.

A thankful spirit is a daily decision. You must rise and report in as a vessel of praise. Register your heart with His goodness. You register your car and register your presence at a doctor's office. Likewise you must register your heart with Him each new morning and thank Him for His faithfulness to you.

Today, nothing will come your way that has not been filtered by His

grace, approved in His love, and provided for in His power. He is faithful.

2. Rejoice in the little things.

Don't make a habit of only thanking God for big things. Give thanks for the little things too: letters, parking places, friendly smiles, reports of prayer, meals, bed, shoes, etc. Life takes on a whole new meaning when you quit living as though you are deserving of all you have and start remembering how good God has been in the little things.

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV).

3. Resolve to pray through adversity until you experience God's peace.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7 ESV).

Prayer and praise are linked to supply peace through prayer. Our sense of peace—and thus gratitude—comes not from our outer circumstances, but from our connectedness to God. If we live close to the Lord, we will be thankful. If we drift from Him, we will be discontented.

4. Recognize that you owe God a debt of thanks.

Thanksgiving is one of the most important attitudes any person can develop in life. Its absence is indicative of a flaw in character. Thanklessness is symptomatic of smallness, shallowness and selfishness.

"For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:20-21 ESV).

When you forget (as many do) that God is the fountain of blessing in life, you are substituting SELF for God.

5. Remember Christ who is the focus of your thanks toward God.

Hebrews 13:5-6, 8, 12-15

"Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name" (Hebrews 13:15 ESV).

When all else here fails us and frustrates us, we must remember that Christ is our cause of joy and thanksgiving—the One who promises the life that is to come.

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