

Thanksgiving – Heart and Soul

☆ Harvest from God’s Word (vv.9-10)

☆ So near at hand to bless (vv.10-14)

In the Name of the LORD’s Messiah, Jesus Christ, you are dearly redeemed, thankful servants of God:

One of the great mysteries of the Christian faith is thankfulness. In the Bible a mystery is something we could never see ourselves, but which God wants to reveal to His people. Isn’t it strange and mysterious how the Lord’s Apostle Paul can write some of his most joyful words from prison. Today’s Second / Epistle Lesson is one of four Captivity Letters. Our last verse reads: *“always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Ephesians 5:20 NIV84)

Really? *“always...for everything...”*? Paul’s thankfulness rested on something much higher and deeper than human happiness. Happiness depends on happenings – which aren’t always so pleasant, such as when a Christian suffers for his faith under a tyrannical government like the Roman Empire. Far stronger than happiness is Christian joy, thanksgiving’s closest cousin. Through Paul God reveals the mystery of His purpose, His plan for all our trials: *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”* (Romans 5:3–5 NIV84)

And that, my dear Christian friends, is a brilliant clue to what God wants to give us today. On this national holiday when most Americans seem fixated on politics or purchases for Black Friday, God wants to give us His great gift of **Thanksgiving – Heart and Soul**. Bump crops in the fields picture this....

☆ Harvest from God’s Word (vv.9-10)

When Moses preached his final sermons collected in the Bible’s 5th book, Deuteronomy, God’s chosen nation of Israel was about to cross into the Promised Land of Canaan. They would conquer nations of idolaters who worshiped false gods as an international demonstration of the power and love of the LORD God, the one true God. But before they could enjoy the bursting wine vats and fields of ripened grain, God commanded them to carry out a unique ceremony. Six of the twelve tribes of Israel were to stand on Mount Gerizim and call out God’s blessings while the other six tribes gathered on Mount Ebal to call out God’s curses – blessings if they would guard and treasure God’s Word, curses if not.

Moses kept warning them because he knew they were headed for disaster. If one of your kids wrecked every bike, trike and hot wheels he ever rode, would you give him the keys to the car? The Israelites wrecked everything for forty years in the desert while Moses was alive! What could he expect from them when he was gone? Sadly, it’s the same for all of us. We have so many blessings from God we can’t fit them into our closets and garages, even with storage units and a place up north. And what does this sinful heart do no matter how much God gives me? It always wants more....!

So before Moses finished preaching God made sure He communicated through His prophet a way back to God. It’s like something my Dad told me when I was a grade schooler who kept sleep walking. One morning he said he caught me on the back porch ready to head outside. I couldn’t even remember. So Dad said if woke up outside and couldn’t get back in, to come to their bedroom window and tap on it or toss little pebbles so he could get up and let me in. Having a plan makes a huge difference.

So God had a plan to keep sending His holy prophets and calling His people back the way faithful pastors keep calling us back to God these days. Even in a distant land God would restore their fortunes and gather them with great compassion back to the Promised Land. Most importantly, God would work a miracle on the inside which He describes like this: ***“The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”*** (30:6) Cutting out the pride and healing the heart is like God’s laser surgery, cutting and cauterizing, hurting and healing in the same operation. God’s blessings on medical technology give us insights for what He does to heal our souls because God’s plans are big and beautiful for His people: ***“Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers...”*** Our gracious God loves to bless!

Where the NIV says, ***“If you obey...”*** it would be better to translate like the ESV or HCSB: ***“when you obey the LORD your God by keeping His commands and statutes that are written in this book of the law and return to Him with all your heart and all your soul.”*** That’s what happens when God uses His law to cut out our pride and heals that cut with His Gospel of forgiveness. We have **Thanksgiving – Heart and Soul** as a glorious **Harvest from God’s Word**. Long before there was ever a “Cable Guy,” the skillful and life-giving Holy Spirit was determined to “get-er done.” God is....

☆ So near at hand to bless (vv.10-14)

To paraphrase the last few verses: *Don’t feel like God is far away. You don’t have to be a deep sea diver or a space explorer to find Him. You don’t need to consult mediums or Bhagwans to find out how God feels. No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to do it.*

A wise man once said: “Sitting in church does not make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car.” Or quoting the Lord’s Apostle James: ***“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*** (James 1:22 NIV84) God’s Word works when you work God’s Word.

Take the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony for instance. After so many died that first winter, some colonists wanted to hold a fast to plead with the Lord for help. But they had been doing that all along. So one old man stood up and pointed out how they had been blessed with freedom in the New World. The streams were full of fish and the forests with trees and game. Why not hold a day of thanksgiving instead? Have you discovered this too? Often the best way to conquer trouble and heartache is to praise God and give thanks in the middle of it. Remember Paul giving thanks from prison?

How about that widow Sarah Hale. Do you know she’d been writing in her magazine and pelting politicians for nearly twenty years to have a national day of Thanksgiving? How could it be that President Lincoln made the declaration in 1863, the darkest days of the Civil War? The beleaguered President was reading his Bible more and more as the war dragged on. Giving thanks to God always makes sense.

Remember Pastor Martin Rinkart’s story? He served in Ellenburg, Saxony, during the Thirty Years War in Germany. Deadly pestilence and famine wracked the city, overcrowded with refugees and overrun by armies three times. Rinkart was the only pastor. His home became refuge for victims and his work turned more and more to funerals, sometimes fifty a day. He buried his own wife, several children, 4000 funerals that year. Was his the house that burned down before he wrote one of our favorite hymns? We sang it again today: “Now Thank We All Our God.” (wikipedia.org/wiki/Now_Thank_We_All_Our_God)

God’s Word is that powerful. God plants it in your heart and soul from worship and Bible Class. When losses are extremely painful, God gives us special banquets of overflowing grace in services like “Blue Christmas” coming up on December 14. In the midst of any and all suffering and trial, God’s grace in Christ shines more brightly than ever. Your sins are forgiven – even any complaining and lack of thankfulness – all forgiven. This is the grace of God in which we stand. This is **Thanksgiving – Heart and Soul**. “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good for His mercy endures forever.” Amen.

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