

Thanksgiving Sermon

THANKSGIVING: A TIME TO REMEMBER THE LORD ~ DEUTERONOMY 8:10-18
PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ NOVEMBER 27/28, 2013

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us give thanks, and be glad in it,

A week ago, I was up past my 10:30 bedtime and I happened to watch an episode of *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno. One of the segments he does is called “Jay Walking” – where he goes around the streets of Los Angeles and interviews random people about current events and other interesting topics. This particular episode, he took the time to ask people questions about Thanksgiving trivia. Some of the questions he asked were: When was the first Thanksgiving celebrated? Where did the pilgrims land? What president made Thanksgiving a federal holiday? Some of the answers he received were “1966,” “Hawaii,” “Benjamin Franklin.” It was a humorous segment, you can catch clips of it on NBC.com

In addition to hearing from some of the products of our fine education system, it also made me realize how little people know about Thanksgiving. From the name “Thanksgiving” people can make a good guess at what the holiday is about, giving thanks, but there is not much more people know or remember about Thanksgiving. There are certainly a lot of things that we are able to give thanks for in this country, common thanks are given for family, friends, food and freedom. But it seems that people have a little bit harder time thinking to whom they are to give thanks. After parents, siblings or friends, the list dries up pretty quick. While it is important to remember to give thanks, it is just as important knowing to whom we can give thanks. The Old Testament writer Moses gives us a great way to celebrate Thanksgiving. **THANKSGIVING – A TIME TO REMEMBER THE LORD**

1. In Plenty and
2. In Want

Picture the scene, the nation of Israel, conservatively estimated around 2 million people, is mingling on the eastern edge of the Dead Sea, where the Jordan River flows into it. The Israelites as a nation had been here before, on the precipice of the land God had promised them, only to be turned away by their own fear. But that generation had all died off, God allowed the nation of Israel to wander in the desert for a total of 40 years, just waiting for the elder generation to die off. Now they had once again returned to the edge of the promised land, and they were eager to enter it, they were eager to stop wandering.

But before they can enter, Moses, the leader of the Israelites, reminded them of the laws and decrees of God, the covenant of God. Because while they had heard it repeated every Sabbath in the tabernacle, it had been 39 years since God had given it to the people on Mt. Sinai. Moses' speaking to them also served a secondary purpose. It allowed Moses to address the people for a final time. Moses was the leader of the Israelites from the time they left Egypt until now, and he would not be entering with them into the promised land. And so throughout the whole book of Deuteronomy, Moses gives the people three farewell sermons.

The theme of all of these sermons fits well with the theme we have for THANKSGIVING – A TIME TO REMEMBER THE LORD. Moses reminded the people of all that the Lord had done for them in leading them out of Egypt, he also gave them a warning as they entered the promised land. The promised land of Israel was described as “a land flowing with milk and honey.” It was a breadbasket of the Middle East (no offense to Egypt). Moses knew the Israelites would have agricultural success there like the nations before them, not only because God was on their side, but because the land was so fertile. The warning Moses gave to the people again was REMEMBER THE LORD!

Moses knew the temptations the Israelites would face with success, he predicts what will happen right here in this section of Scripture as they entered the promised land, **“When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down...and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God.”** He repeats it at the end when he says, **“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’”** Not only would the foreign nation's idolatry be a distraction for the Israelites, but so would their own success, their own success that God himself would give them.

So Moses says, REMEMBER THE LORD in times of plenty. By forecasting the success of the Israelites, Moses told them when they get there, don't forget God. Don't forget the God who brought you out of Egypt, don't forget the God who led you through the desert wilderness, and now don't forget the God who has given you this land. Your ability to produce wealth is the mask behind which God works. So instead of forgetting about God in times of plenty (as people are apt to do), REMEMBER HIM. Remember him for the land you enjoy, remember him for the material wealth he has given you, remember him for his promise to save you. REMEMBER THE LORD, and thank him.

I have to say, when I read this section of God's Word I had to do double take. I did a double take, because I was wondering if Moses was actually speaking to me. There are just certain sections of God's Word that seem to apply more closely, they seem to hit closer to home, and this is definitely one of them. Here are the very words Moses penned over 3,000 years ago, **“When you have eaten and are satisfied, when you are lounging in your *Lazyboy* recliner watching the football games, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you”** OK, so maybe I added that part about the *Lazyboy* recliner and

football, but it fits with what he is saying, right? So as you sit down to your Thanksgiving meal tomorrow, remember the Lord.

Remember the land you live in, the United States of America, and what a blessing that is, it will never be perfect, but it is a great land with opportunities and freedom. Remember the other blessings from God – your house, your family, your job, your church, warm weather in the winter. One thing that I have taken to doing before many of my Bible Classes is to ask if there are any special prayer requests – both asking God and thanking him. This is a reminder for me and those in attendance, to give thanks to God at all times and in all places.

I do that, because I know how easy it can be to not give thanks when success crowns what we do. A busy schedule can distract us from these blessings – I don't have time to spend with my family, I don't have time to spend in God's Word or God's house. And just like the Israelites, our own successes can be our spiritual downfall. Remember, Thanksgiving is not just about giving thanks for what we have, it's giving thanks to who deserves it, and the most deserving one is God. REMEMBER THE LORD in times of plenty.

(2)

But is that the only time to remember the Lord? How many of you here listen to country music? I have grown a little fond of country music, and one of the bands I like is called Rascal Flatts. A few years ago they recorded a song called "Bless the Broken Road." (Which was actually first recorded by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1994) In the song, it describes the journey taken by a man in search of his true love. Along the way, all of the disappointments and heartbreaks were leading him somewhere, like a broken road, leading him to his true love.

Now what does a country song about love have to do with a sermon about Thanksgiving? I'm glad you asked. The singer of the song could have given up hope whenever anything didn't go his way, but he kept pressing through, he knew those things served a purpose. So in the life of a believer, we are not to give up hope the second anything doesn't go our way. Because even these difficult times serve to move us forward and grow. Not only are we to REMEMBER THE LORD in times of plenty, but in times of want as well.

For the Israelites those times of want were when they were wandering through the desert. They didn't know where their next meal was coming from, they didn't have a ready supply of water, the critters of the desert were dangerous and deadly. And all of this served to humble and test the Israelites. Not only did their years wandering in the desert toughen them up to battle the Canaanites, but it also reminded them to rely on the Lord, to completely trust in him and his promises.

We too have our own times of want, sometimes it may seem like your times of want are never ending. And just so we're on the same page, times of want are not times where you "want" the latest smartphone or gaming system and you can't have it. I think you know the different times I'm talking about. When nothing seems to be going your way. When your marriage is on the rocks, your job is stressing you out, your car just broke down, you missed a mortgage or credit card payment because you just didn't have the money. When you can't remember the last time you didn't feel sick, sore or depressed. Those are also times that we are to thank our Lord and remember him.

Because it's times like these that drive you to your knees, it makes you realize how out of control you are in so much of life. It can remind you of our unfaithfulness to a faithful God, and the devil will use all of this to drive you to despair, saying "God doesn't love you." But nothing is further from the truth, he wants you to reach out to him. And do you know what, when you're on your knees, you are in the perfect position to pray, in the perfect position to hear God's Word. To hear his word that says, "**I will never**

leave you or forsake you," "I forgive your wickedness, and remember your sins no more." For not only does God have a plan for your life and every event that happens in it (some are to humble and test you), God also has a plan for your future, and that plan includes an eternity by his side in heaven. A plan that works out just perfectly because of what Christ has done. What a wonderful thing to be thankful for.

So as you sit down this Thanksgiving REMEMBER THE LORD. He knows if you are in a time of plenty, and he knows if you are in a time of want. Be thankful if you have family surrounding you this holiday, be thankful even if they're not. Be thankful if you have a bountiful feast set before you, and be thankful if you don't. Be thankful if your football team wins this Thanksgiving, but be thankful even if it doesn't. We can be thankful, we can remember the Lord in all of these things, because they are a confirmation of his everlasting covenant of grace with us. Amen.