

Thanksgiving 2022 – Blessed to be a Blessing

1. Thanksgiving is an exciting time of year - what do you think of when you think of Thanksgiving?
 - a. Wonderful time when we get together with family or close friends, eat too much, maybe argue a little, watch some football
 - i. Maybe you think of it inaugurating the season up to Christmas – I did, still do, it is my favorite time of year.
 - ii. But of late it's become something different – whereas there were memories of family, friends, togetherness it's been overshadowed by commercialism.
 - iii. When I grew up, I wasn't even aware of Black Friday, I'd never heard about that until college. Now Black Friday has become a weeks' long event, stores opening on Thanksgiving to cash in on Christmas fever.
 - iv. Have we lost something of Thanksgiving?
 - b. As you may know our celebration dates back to the 1600s when the Pilgrims celebrated their good harvest and the help they had received from the Indians in learning to plant corn, etc
 - i. It was meant to be a time of reflection for the gifts God has given
 - ii. However, lately rather than a time of thankfulness for what we have it's all about the greedy expectation of what we're about to get
 - iii. The question is - **Are you thankful for what you have (content) or greedily anticipating what you might get (covetous)?**
 - iv. Because when that focus shifts from rejoicing for what we have to only thinking about what we're about to get we forget about the giver (God) and focus on the receiver (us) – we become the center of our universe...what we want...what we desire
 - v. Our blessings aren't given for us alone – we are blessed so that we can be a blessing
2. That's what God was telling the nation of Israel in our OT lesson.
 - a. Our reading is part of a larger admonition to the Israelites just before entering the Promised Land
 - i. The Lord promised great provision to His people, **“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land...of fountains and springs...wheat and barley...olive trees and honey...in which you will eat bread without scarcity...you will lack nothing.”** (Deut 8:7-9)
 - ii. The Israelites weren't going to be just scraping by when they came into the Promised Land - the Lord promised an overabundance
 - iii. While I know this isn't about America you can't help but see that we too have been greatly blessed by an overabundance of good
 - b. But the promised abundance came with a warning not in our reading
 - i. **“Take care lest you forget the LORD your God...lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses...and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God...Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’”** (Deut 8:11-17)

- ii. As Israel's abundance increased it became a snare to them, they forgot that their wealth had come as a blessing from God not to be hoarded for themselves.
 - iii. Israel had been blessed by the Lord that they could be a blessing to others that was part of the promise given to Abraham when God called him in Genesis 12, **"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Gen 12:2-3)
 - iv. Ultimately, that blessing for all families of the earth would be the Messiah, Jesus, but Israel was also materially blessed that they might use their abundance to benefit the poor in their own land as a witness to God's grace and mercy to the world – they were blessed to be a blessing to others
- c. As God's children today, we in the church, like Israel, have often forgotten that with our great blessings we have the opportunity to be a blessing for so many
 - i. The warning that God gave Israel could be equally given to us, **"Take care lest you forget the LORD your God...Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'"**
 - ii. In a land of abundance, where our needs and most of our wants are met, it is easy to forget to be thankful to the source of that abundance, to think that maybe we did this on our own
 - iii. It's easy to become hesitant to share that great blessing with others
- 3. But we have been blessed that we may be a blessing, that is what we remember on this Thanksgiving
 - a. Look at what Paul says in our Epistle lesson, **"And you Philippians know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again."** (Php 4:15-16)
 - i. The Philippian church was blessed so that through their generosity the Gospel continued to spread.
 - ii. They gave generously and with thanksgiving knowing that they would not lack any good thing because of their generosity as Paul concluded, **"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** (Php 4:19)
 - iii. The Philippians knew that they were blessed in Christ
 - iv. They knew that their most important need, forgiveness and eternal life, had been secured by Christ and given to them through faith – they were without need!
 - b. On this Thanksgiving Eve, we too are reminded that the measure of our existence is NOT our things
 - i. You've heard me say before, "He who dies with the most toys still dies," and then what?

- ii. We put stock in the greatest blessing of all, eternal life – we are rich beyond measure
- iii. As Paul tells us, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”** (2 Cor 8:9)
- iv. The ultimate source for our Thanksgiving as Christians has its source in the cross and what God has done for us through Christ.
- c. And out of that great gift that we have received from Christ we recognize that our material blessings have been given to us to be used for Him
 - i. We use our gifts joyfully for the benefit of our neighbor and for God
 - ii. My brothers and sisters God has provided overabundance in sending His Son
- d. We are freed from the endless pursuit of next best thing because we already have more than enough - we can REST
 - i. We can say with Paul, **“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”** (Php 4:12)
 - ii. We give thanks that we have been blessed that we might be a blessing.
 - iii. That we might use our time, talent and treasure for the sake of God’s Kingdom in the service of His people.