Thursday is Thanksgiving in America!! Why do we celebrate?

On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, I thought it best to re-orient ourselves as to why our country celebrates this magnificent day that is often identified by family, food & football.

On Friday, April 12 1861, Confederate soldiers bombarded Union soldiers at Fort Sumter, in South Carolina.

This began the American Civil War that lasted almost 4 years to the day… It ended on Sunday, April 9, 1865, after 620,000 American lives had been lost.

The war’s purpose? It varies by the person you ask…

Constitutional rights…, southern states seceding from the Union so they could continue to own slaves… who could keep the money rolling in from the cotton trade.

What was the turning point in the war? Many scholars have said it was the battle at Gettysburg in July of 1863…

I believe it was President Lincoln’s proclamation made on October 3, 1863, of which I will share a portion of this morning;

**Says Lincoln,**

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown.

**But we have forgotten God.** We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied, enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that [God] 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 as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who [dwells] in the heavens.

Signed Abraham Lincoln, October 3, 1863.

The purpose for Thanksgiving? For American people to join together with one heart & voice to solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledge God, for the great things He has done.

It’s impossible to fight your neighbor when your joining hands with them and verbally praise the Lord.

Lincoln didn’t use his office or his proclamation as an opportunity to slap his political opponents verbally… He used it to help a broken nation that was destroying itself, re-focus & remember God. **The giver of all good gifts.**

**Little more than a year after Lincolns proclamation…** the Civil War ended when General Robert E. Lee surrendered his troops at Appomattox.

I believe the Holy Spirit of God anointed our 16th President of the United States with words to speak on October 3rd, 1863.

Words that **challenged**, **convicted** and ultimately **changed** hearts by turning them back to loving God and neighbor.

When people yield to this work of God’s Holy Spirit, the world around us becomes a better place.

As we turn our attention now to God’s Holy Word, may is that we too will be **challenged**, **convicted** and **changed to bear the image of God that He has created mankind to bear**.

We will start in 1 Thessalonians 4:1 and a letter that Paul had written to the believers at Thessalonica…

A letter that was intended to help them **refocus** and **remember…**

The Christian’s purpose is to “live in order to please God” and “to do this more & more.”

This is the on going, sanctifying work of God’s Holy Spirit in the life of the believer…1 Peter 1:2

Turn with me to Ephesians 5:1-4…

Because we’re human, we need to be reminded of these daily… which is, in part, why it is critical that we attend church and read our Bibles.

Paul goes on then to give instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5…, that when followed, reveal the life and the characteristics of one whom God has adopted into His family.

1. V16 - Joyful people
2. V17 - Prayerful people
3. V18 - Thankful people

Now, this **isn’t** all they are. **1 Opinions 1:1** says they’re also a rough, tough, prideful bunch…

A know it all, complaining people, that have to have their way or they will gossip & stir up trouble…

Aren’t you thankful that you’re not like that any more? Those old things that you sought God to deliver you from are proof that you have been “born again”.

God’s will is that His people be **more than** Joyful, Prayerful & Thankful…, but at the very least, God’s people should be distinguishable by a spirit of thankfulness… **because thankfulness is a mark of grace.**

**Paul reminds them; Be thankful people all the time.**

**Synonyms**

Appreciative

Contented

Grateful

Indebted

Overwhelmed

Pleased

Relieved

Beholden

**Antonyms**

Critical

Thank-less

Un-appreciative

Un-grateful

Un-beholden

When people think of you and me, which list do they think of; Thankful or Thankless?

God’s children, of all people should be really thankful. Why? **Because they have so much to be thankful for.**

So we’re going to hit the pause button and afford you the opportunity to express thankfulness in God’s house.

Psalm 7:17, “I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness.” Psalm 35:18

Jeremiah 30:19

So in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul wasn’t introducing some new concept of “being thankful”…

He was simply adding his voice to the great chorus of God’s people who’s lives gladly testify and bear witness to the greatness of God.

In Colossians 2:6-7, Paul wrote about the believers there “overflowing with thankfulness.”

The Greek word for “overflowing” used there is *perisseuō* and it simply means “to superabound” or to be “excessive”.

With Thanksgiving coming up this Thursday, a good analogy may be that some of you (like Dee) like a lot of gravy, overflowing onto everything,

Some of us are more conservative gravy users, we don’t like to drown our turkey in gravy!! He’s been through enough already!

But that is what the word perisseuō is all about! To excessively overflow… **not with gravy…** but Thanksgiving…

Paul is saying that God’s people should be **(dare I say)** liberal with their Thankfulness!!

* Giving thanks to the Lord because His love endures for ever…
* Counting the many blessings that God has given each of us…
* Because there is power in the blood of Jesus to save…
* For God sending His only Son to die on the Cross for our sin…
* For raising Him to new life on the third day
* Raising those who receive Jesus as Savior & Lord to a NEW & BETTER LIFE!
* For the fact that Jesus is coming back!
* That His people will live with Him eternally in the New Heaven & the New Earth forever & ever (Rev 21-22).

Think for a moment about Paul and/or other people that you see as hero’s of the Christian faith. **Do you look up to them because of their:**

* Size or Capabilities?
* Possessions or wealth?
* Or is it more for their humble/thankful/entirely sanctified/surrendered attitude toward God that keeps them faithful and serving God… building His Kingdom no matter what life throughs at them?

If you look closely at their lives, you will likely find a moment in time when…,

**like a key being turned to the on position,** they became “born again believers in Christ” who “overflowed” with thankfulness for all that God has done and is doing.

To which someone may say; “I understand what you’re saying, but you don’t know my circumstances…,

**and if you knew my circumstances,** I’m not sure you would stand there telling me that I should “overflow” with thankfulness…

To which I would respond; “God has covered your circumstances as well in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. It says, “Give thanks in **all circumstances.**”

That’s the struggle, is it not? Not all of our circumstances seem to be are immediately conducive to giving thanks.

Especially when we focus on what **we’ve lost**, what **we don’t have** or **what others have that we don’t**.

For many, the holidays can be the loneliest times of our lives.

Some of us may have a spirit of disappointment because we feel like a failure…, and we’ve come to worship today, hoping to find a way out of the pit we’re in.

The answer has and always will be Jesus…

We are going to pray and then remember what Jesus has done for us by giving you the opportunity to participate in Communion.

Pray & thank God for:

* His forgiveness made available to us through Christ
* His eternal presence & peace
* His purpose in our lives
* The amazing future and hope that He has waiting for all who will make Jesus the Lord of their life.