

JESUS' THANKSGIVING¹

By Pastor Paul Penno Jr.

November 28, 2015

Well, thank the dear Lord, nobody is “abruptly dead,” but on a dark night in early December a violent thunder and hailstorm pelted her humble home at her bedroom window. Fearing the single pane glass might shatter she got up to draw the curtain. Then the lightning bolt struck; she saw the fireball coming at her. The house went dark, filled with smoke. She rushed out in the cold driving rain and hail, then realized her car keys were in her purse in the bedroom. Wrapping her face in a wet towel she groped her way through the darkness to retrieve it.

The volunteer firemen arrived down her winding dirt road within some 20 minutes to put out the flames; but all her personal possessions were finished.

The insurance adjuster declared everything a total loss. Her courage is good; we are thankful that nobody “died.” Eventually the insurance covered the replacement costs of a new home and she was out from under the mortgage that previously burdened her old dwelling. Something to be thankful for!

Too many of our celebrated holidays are of pagan origin and bear those marks even today; but one is free of it—Thanksgiving.

But even that one last touch of national gratitude to God is marred now by the designation “Turkey

Day,” so the Day is marked by indulgence of appetite.

The very idea of saying “Thank you!” is not pagan. Animals don’t know how to say “Thank you!” Give them some food, and they proceed immediately to gobble it up.

In heathen or pagan lands the pagan children grab the food you give them and rush off to gobble it up without so much as a glance, let alone a word, not even a smile, indicating thanks. How do you and I appear before the throne of God? Do we grab all the blessings the Lord has already given us, gobble up our food, enjoy the pleasure of life, without expressing genuine thanksgiving?

The truth is that it’s impossible for anyone, Christian or heathen, to feel genuine thanksgiving unless he has at least some appreciation of what it cost the giver to give. For example, I have observed pagan children gather around us while we were having a picnic; they saw us as being virtually multimillionaires in contrast with their poverty, so whatever we gave them cost us nothing, they felt. So, why say thanks for something that didn’t cost the giver anything to give you?

And that precisely is our spiritual problem. We don’t realize what it cost the Giver to give us the gift of eternal life. So, why FEEL very deep thanksgiving? If a billionaire gives you a dime, do you get ecstatic in expressing thanks?

Actually, we are very much like those pagan children watching us eat our picnic lunch; we have only a childish concept of what it cost the Son of God to rescue us from hell itself. To understand

¹ 2 Cor. 9:11-15. 557.

what it cost Him, to appreciate the dimensions of His sacrifice—ah, this is what the NT means by the word “believe.” And not to believe in that sense is what the Bible calls “unbelief.” And that . . . turns out to be the sin of sins. The remedy? Contemplate that cross where the Son of God died for you.

It was only yesterday that we were discussing here what is that “unspeakable gift” for which our hearts cry out to the Father, “Thanks!”

The angels and the “twenty-four elders” who praise the Lord unendingly are not fanatics (Rev. 4:8-11). There is salvation in comprehending, choosing, expressing, that “thanksgiving”! It’s the only appropriate response to the love Christ poured out on His cross. It’s exceedingly close to a true definition of what faith is.

A popular journal says, “Thanks is Good Therapy.” A university psychologist, Robert A. Emmons, says that “even when the odds are against you, having gratitude can bring many emotional—and physical—benefits. Gratitude, he said, is not something to be kept tucked away until the holiday season.”

He tells of a 56 year old pharmacist undergoing treatment for lung cancer who has learned to be grateful for even one more day given him; the physician sees what he believes is renewed life given the sick man because of his gratitude for even a little life.

How much greater is the life-giving value of faith in Christ if such faith is understood as a mind-stretching, soul-stretching heart appreciation of what it cost Him to save us! Involved intimately in

that heart experience is the conviction pressed upon us by the Holy Spirit that it was our heart “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7) that brought Him to His cross. You will feel like telling Him “Thank You!” forever. Jesus needs to hear that.

Do I dare say it—it’s better to tell Him that today than to wait to tell it to Him in the blessed hereafter. Why? Because telling Him now changes you and saves you for being happy in the blessed hereafter! It delivers you from Old to New Covenant living.

It stuns one to think of the consequences of this question: Does the Lord need us to do things for Him which He cannot do for Himself?

We think of Him as omnipotent—the word means ability to do anything and everything.

But even though that is the meaning of the word “omnipotent,” it’s obvious that there are some things the Lord cannot do, much as He may try: He cannot change the heart of a sinner who refuses His much more abounding grace.

In the beginning when “there was war in heaven [when] Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven” (Rev. 12:7, 8), the “omnipotent” Lord could not change the rebellious hearts of Lucifer and his angels. Neither can He do so today.

It follows that people who choose to obey the fallen Lucifer and his fallen angels also have rebellious hearts that God cannot force; no angel can preach to those people as effectively as can a fallen sinner who has repented and is “reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10).

Such a reconciled sinner can do things for the Lord that He cannot do for Himself. For example:

A prominent Ethiopian was riding in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah but couldn't understand it. The Lord loved him and wanted to help him; so what did the Lord do? He impressed His servant Philip, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot" (in other words, hitchhike; Acts 8:27-30). Philip obeyed.

It stuns one to realize the truth: the Holy Spirit needed Philip! What does He need you and me to do today?

Does the Lord Jesus Christ really need us? Is He not the Omnipotent One? As such, is He not automatically Victor in His "great controversy with Satan"? Does it really matter to Him if we are loyal or disloyal? In the long run will He not win out, irrespective?

Let's back up to the Great Event on Calvary's cross: When Jesus was arrested by evil men, in Gethsemane, we read of His disciples that "they all forsook Him, and fled" (Matt. 26:56).

Let's not forget that Jesus, although He was the divine Son of God, He had laid aside the prerogatives of His divinity, and He was now the "Son of man." He was living our life, as One of us, feeling as we feel.

The pain of those spikes driven into His ankles and wrist bones was horrible, but it was nothing compared to the pain of His soul He felt when His chosen ones, the Eleven (Judas had already forsaken Him) turned away from Him. In the horror of the moment, could He have been tempted to fear

that His mission might ultimately fail? After all, weren't these Eleven a prophecy of the ultimate end of His "great controversy with Satan"?

Wouldn't it have been wonderful if at least one of the Eleven had firmly declared to the Romans, "If you crucify this Man, you crucify me, too!"?

But there is no such story in any of the Four Gospels; there is no such Hero for any of us to exult in.

Whoever you or I could be today, the truth is that the Lord Jesus does need us to be loyal to Him; it's too late in the day for Him to have to feel sad that we too have done what the Eleven did long ago.

It's time for "144,000" of the weakest and most unworthy of earth's inhabitants (in 6000 years) to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Rev. 14:4). That's our glorious opportunity!

When He was among us personally, did Jesus praise anybody for doing something for Him? In His parables, yes, He represented the Lord as saying "Well done, good and faithful servant" to some people, but do we have a record that He actually said that to any human among His contemporaries? He said something nice about the poor lady who gave her "two mites" to the offering in the Temple, that she had "cast in more than they all" because "she . . . hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:2). But He said this behind her back, as it were.

He told Peter that he was "blessed" because he boldly confessed his faith that Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16, 17). But He

seemed very reticent to praise people lest they become vain. That was love!

A notable exception seems to be Mary Magdalene. In her presence, He defended her before Simon and the disciples saying, “She has done a good work for Me,” the word in the original meaning “exquisite” (Mark 14:6). He also said, “She has done what she could” (vs. 8). A classic understatement, for it meant that she had done all she could. He had declared that she had “faith,” for it had saved her (Luke 7:50); now He added this, that her faith had “worked” to the nth degree, being a picture for us of what Paul meant in Galatians 5:6 about “faith working through love.” Faith is not genuine unless it does “work.” A battery is dead unless it sparks.

In the final judgment (that we have all dreaded) is not whether we have a “battery,” but whether it’s alive. God has given to every one “a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3); that’s not the last question—but, is that faith alive and working? Cross the poles of a live battery and it will almost knock you down, even though a dead battery looks exactly the same as a live one.

So let’s not waste good breath praying, “Lord, give me some faith!” because He already has given it. And it’s probably a waste of breath praying Him to charge our “battery” unless we “plug it in.” The Lord is a wonderful Savior, but we must cooperate with Him; there is something sensible we must do.

Have you heard the story of the little boy who fed 5000 men besides women and children? You say,

No; I’ve heard only the story of how Jesus did that. Well, let’s look at the story:

The huge crowd had gathered and stayed all day with Jesus. When the day was far spent, He had compassion on the crowd because they were hungry, and there was no place for them to buy food. Jesus asked Philip, His disciple, what should they do. Philip reasoned that 200 silver coins (each a working man’s wage for a day) would not be enough for everybody to have even a meager taste. “What food do you have?” asked Jesus. Andrew ran to find out, and came back leading a little boy who happened to have five little barley loaves or muffins, and some fish relish to eat with them. “But that won’t go anywhere,” said Andrew. Obviously the little boy was willing to give Jesus what he had, and he did so. Holding the food in His hands, Jesus offered a prayer of thanks for it (John 6:5-13). Think of it, thanking God for a totally inadequate supply of necessary food! Then He broke the bread (those barley “loaves” were never cut or sliced, only broken), gave it to each of the disciples and as He kept on giving, the bread kept on multiplying in His hands as they went—never a great pile of it all at once, only moment by moment as the need became apparent. Thus the 5000 plus were fed.

But the question remains: WHO fed those 5000+? The answer has to be: THE LITTLE BOY. It was his food! Jesus, the divine Son of God, could not have fed those people if the little boy had not given Him his lunch! Why? Because the Father never gave Him the authority to make stones into bread. Creation ex nihilo came to an end on the original

Seventh Day when “God rested from all His work which He had made” (Gen. 2:3). What happened at Bethsaida was that (1) the little boy gave his food and (2) Jesus blessed it. And the point is that Jesus needs what you have if He is to be able to bless people today. You are important! He needs you to give what you have, like the little boy.

Can you conceive of the possibility that God may need someone to defend Him? That He could use a human being for that purpose?

Goliath was an arrogant, blaspheming Philistine giant who not only defied the armies of Israel but also for weeks publicly defied and blasphemed “the God of the whole earth.” Israel and its army were not the primary issue; Goliath was challenging God’s existence and His authority to choose and to bless a nation through whom must come the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Will God suffer this insult in silence, slinking away as it were, leaving Goliath to win the day?

God cannot strike Goliath with a lightning thunderbolt because He does not want to force a subservient worship based on fear. Goliath may himself be a big bully, but God cannot win the day by being a Bigger Bully. He can roar from heaven with a loud voice and frighten Goliath and the Philistines, but again that is not His way of doing things. Actually, as in the days of Job, God needs a human being to defend Him, because the battle is not “with sword and spear” (1 Sam. 17:45). Someone must speak up to maintain God’s honor.

Enter into the arena the stripling, David, clad only in his shepherd’s garb and armed only with a

slingshot and a few pebbles. David was not principally a partisan contestant for national greatness; he had an understanding of God’s character of love and of the sacrifice of Christ for the world. He spoke publicly in defense of the plan of salvation itself. To demonstrate for all time to come how God works in cooperation with man, He blessed David’s skillful aim of a pebble from his sling shot, which caught the giant between his eyes, blinded and stunned him. Picture this lad jumping on the giant’s prostrate belly, wresting from its scabbard his huge sword to use it on him before the giant recovers. A teenager has learned to appreciate the character of God, to trust Him, willing to face eternal death for His honor.

Can you conceive of 144,000 giant “Goliaths” blaspheming God in these last days? And 144,000 “Davids” challenging and conquering them? Get in training today.

The simplest, most common thing you can do for anyone is to pray for him, to get up out of bed when you crave sleep, and pour out your soul for that person, taking the time and trouble to put yourself in that person’s place, to think about him, to share his burdens, to realize your corporate oneness with him.

That’s just a little of what Jesus meant, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, KJV).

When you pray for someone, does it induce God to do something that otherwise He would not do?

Actually, it’s not that God would not do it (He is more than willing all along), but it makes it possible

for Him to do something that otherwise He could not do.

That's the reality lesson that the Book of Job teaches: God cannot save the world without "[His] servant Job" (1:8; 2:3); He cannot win the struggle of the great controversy between Himself and Satan, without that "servant Job" doing something that even God cannot do.

Job was the "servant" that God needed, making a contribution to the divine economy. He had this quintessential part to play in the cosmic war that no angel could have filled, but he himself had no idea who he was. His task was to defend God and be loyal even to the point of enduring the curse of God—yes, going to hell, yet still maintaining his faith in God (cf. 13:15, KJV). The book of Job is full of that truth. He anticipated the sacrifice of the cross.

If the Jews had understood Job, they could never have crucified their Messiah; Job was the biblical Atlas bearing the world on his shoulders. Now today God has 144,000 modern "servants" like Job, each holding the line in one of 144,000 categories of defense that God needs when and where He is on trial (Rev. 14:6, 7). Each would rather perish eternally than bring shame on Christ. Christ is the real One for whom you get up out of bed, to pray (Isa. 50:4, 5).

It's shocking but true: in His incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ needs help.

JACOB REYES' DEDICATION

A popular Bible text for Thanksgiving Day sermons is, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

The one gift above all gifts He has given us is this: "God so loved the world that He gave . . ." It was all that He had in the gift, not the loan, not the mere offer, of His Son (John 3:16). The Son of God is now the Son of man; He is eternally a member of our human race; but that wasn't far enough for the Father to "give." He went further in pouring out the "gift."

The Father gave Him to take seven steps in stepping down lower, itemized in Philippians 2:5-8: [1] He abandoned His high heavenly position; [2] He suffered the loss of His pure reputation, He Himself was covered with disgrace; [3] He took the lowest level of social honor; [4] He became One "made in the likeness" of fallen man (Rom. 8:3, 4); [5] He took a nose dive below that—[6] humbled Himself as low as a human being could go so He could "taste death for every person," [7] which had to be the most horrible death one could know, "even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus needs someone to say, "Thanks for that," says Paul!

But that was not far enough down, as most people understand it: the death which He died was far more than the physical, social agony of His cross. It was what the Bible calls "the second death," the death in which there is no hope of a resurrection (that was the death that Christ saved us from!). He carried with Him that hope of a resurrection all His life, up until when He was "made to be sin for us,

who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), when He cried out in most bitter agony, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). That point there was where the “giving” was the greatest; it was a gift for eternity, an infinite gift.

Contemplating that gift of His love has a subduing effect upon the human soul; no one can be the same after his heart grasps that!

If the idea can be translated and the consciousness of its “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” can be grasped, there is salvation in the very thanksgiving, as there is salvation in faith. Such thanksgiving is close to what faith is! The human heart is moved forever. Those heavenly beings who are still humans (the “24 elders,” see Rev. 4:4; 5:9) never cease to give their thanks; neither will you, once you grasp what that “unspeakable gift” entails.