

The History of Thanksgiving & God's Will

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A Grateful Present and Future

All right, fantastic. Thanksgiving reminds us to be grateful for the things in our present and the things in our future. And so this week's message, even though Thanksgiving as a federal holiday is over, I felt it was appropriate because we've carried the spirit of Thanksgiving forward to today's services, right? I mean, we have the turkey and it's going to be great. So yeah, I know last week we spoke about generosity and gratitude. Today, other leadership in the fellowship thought it would be appropriate if we kind of review what Thanksgiving is really about. The history of Thanksgiving. What it is, what it isn't, and how, based on the history of American Thanksgiving this day, how should a believer respond to that?

And so the main resource that I've used for this message is America's Favorite Holidays by Dr. Bruce Forbes. He holds a Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary with a focus on Christian history and popular culture. He's a great author. It's amazing. But the history. Matt, we know the history. In 1621, some pilgrims wanted to show gratitude towards God for a successful voyage on the Mayflower Island. Just as the year before, the Indians taught them how to plant crops. And so they made it through their first winter and summer and harvested the crops.

The Story We Know

And so they invited the Indians to sit at this magnificently made, hand-built farmhouse table with a cornucopia, and they ate turkey in celebration. We know the history of Thanksgiving. They all went around and said what they were thankful for. Are we the only ones that do that? Really? No one? Okay. Yeah. Isn't that what caused us to have the holiday that we have today, that we hold every single year where we replicate these traditions around the table with our

family? And the answer is, as with history, complicated. It's kind of yes and no. It's a bit more complicated than that when we look into it, just like all things history are.

History Is Complicated

Just like the national holiday of Christmas. You can't just pinpoint something that may or may not have happened a long, long, long time ago and say that's the origin. Christmas does not have one. So many things have evolved through the centuries, especially in this country. You can't just do that. History doesn't remain static, nor should it. Sometimes history is complicated and we tend to become restless with it. And I know even in my own past that, instead of facing the reality of history, we inject our own assertions into history because that's what we want to be true. I've seen people do it with Easter, Christmas, and Passover.

We love to project our ideas about history onto these holidays. It's a big thing now to blanketly assert that pilgrims kept Sukkot with the Native Americans, or the Native Americans kept Sukkot, and they all came together at this time of year. And there's no recorded evidence of this. That's just not something that happened.

Every Culture Celebrates the Fall Harvest

What did happen is every single culture in the world celebrates a fall festival. Everybody celebrated the fall harvest. Israel did, Babylon did, Egypt did. Who else does? Oh, we do. We do as well. Do you guys enjoy going to annual fall festivals when they pop up? Don't look at me like that. Most of us have never stepped foot on a farm, but on this day we will go to a farm and we'll drink hot apple cider and we'll get some face paint and we'll get a picture inside of a combine harvester like we know how to drive the thing for our Instagram feed. We love it, right? We all do it. Pictures in front of the hay bales with the pumpkins with our kids. Everybody does this at this time of year. It's our tradition as Americans, and it's beautiful. It is what it is.

Everybody celebrates and celebrated the fall harvest because that's the final harvest before winter. And so as far as Thanksgiving goes, well, we know the Puritans.

The Puritans Bring Thanksgiving to America

The Puritans were the ones who brought special, dedicated days of Thanksgiving to America. Dr. Forbes points out the irony here—this was a group of Christians who opposed static annual celebrations, who opposed Christmas and Easter as state and church-directed holidays, but laid

a foundation for Thanksgiving as a state and church-directed holiday. This is the history. So if you don't know, we have kind of a quick overview. I'm geeking out because I love history. So bear with me if you don't.

The English Reformation

In the 1500s, England was officially Roman Catholic. And there was King Henry VIII. He wanted Pope Clement VII to annul his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon. This was the first of six marriages that this king had. And he wanted to get hitched up with this nice young girl named Anne Boleyn. And guess what the pope said? He said no—he wasn't going to.

And this story, even though we've heard it many times, is much more complex than this. But this is the gist of it. The result being that Henry and Parliament decided, you know what? We're separating ourselves from the Catholic Church. It's the English Reformation. And they formed their own church. As far as churches go, this is a classic move. This resulted in the Church of England, the Anglican Church being formed. Again, it's not that simple. It's much more complex, but that's what happened.

Rejecting Catholic Traditions

The king replaced the pope as the head of the church in England at that time. But in most other ways, it still reflected Catholic tradition, practices, and values, just with new leadership. Classic move. Some dissenters known as Puritans were influenced by the theology and the passion of a reformer named John Calvin. You may have heard of him. And they thought that the Church of England didn't go far enough to separate themselves from the Roman Catholic Church. They were still too much like the Roman Church.

So they were critical of the Church of England, which they felt mimicked too many of the Catholic practices they deemed non-scriptural and the traditions of men. And as a result, their main focus really became the ritual calendar that includes Christmas and Easter, Saints days, and much more. Again, their drive was very much focused on not being like them over there. That was really the foundation of their passion, because the Church had too many traditions added to the Bible. So any type of static days that recurred on the same day in the calendar? No, not at all.

Responsive Days of Thanksgiving

However, Puritans did participate in days of fasting and days of thanksgiving. Some were declared by the Church of England, but the Puritans developed them further. What's interesting is that these days weren't static days on the calendar. They were responsive days. So when a military victory happened or everyone made it through the flu season without dying or whatever, they would hold a responsive, dynamic day of Thanksgiving. Seems pretty neat. Everybody with me? Good. Awesome.

They would have a special church service and then afterwards they would go home and have a big family dinner. But if you were particularly pious at the time, if you wanted to show just how dedicated you were and grateful you were to God, you would stay in church all day and skip the family meal—is what it is.

The First Recorded Thanksgiving in America

While these days likely existed prior to this, the first recorded instance of a responsive day of Thanksgiving by the Puritans was in 1623 here in America. After following a day of prayers, a drought ended with days of rain. So the Puritans held a day of Thanksgiving as their tradition. Responsive days of Thanksgiving triggered by events deserve responsive gratitude. So yeah, we're good. That's the history there.

And the thing is, people are really interesting. I have a good friend, Matt Knapper, he's going to be at the conference. He's pursuing his doctorate degree in Bible right now, focusing on ancient Near Eastern studies. He's convinced that people over time don't change. People, mankind, humans, we're still the same people. The only thing that's changed is technology.

Human Nature Across Time

We still laugh at the same kind of jokes. We still say, hey. We have manuscripts from the ancient Near East. Right now we send someone a PM on Facebook. Yo, what's up? Back then they'd carve it in a stone, send it with a messenger. That's what they say. Hey, how are you? I'm well. 4,000 years ago. People are the same.

And there comes a point where the human impulse kicks in and we yearn for some type of structure and predictability in our lives. We humans don't like complete chaos. We want to expect something. At the end of fall, the harvest is over. Does that sound like a good time to give thanks? Does it? Yes. That's what Israel did. It's hard carrying all those pumpkins after the fall harvest. When the community's done harvesting, you sit down, shrug your shoulders, and you, what do you say? Yeah, no big deal. No, you have a party. You have a party. All the work is

done. Everything is stocked away for winter. We're good. Celebrate. It's time to reflect on the past year, give thanks, and encourage one another.

Even Puritans Succumb to Human Nature

Through this annual work-and-rest cycle, even the Puritans, when we look back, were not immune to this basic human impulse. Sometime in the 1640s, about 20 years after they landed, community leaders in Connecticut began to declare annual fall days of Thanksgiving that they would anticipate and observe on the same day every year. This quickly spread to all of the New England colonies. Some ministers were completely opposed to it. Man-made invention, man-made traditions, we don't want to have anything to do with it. They deemed it an insult to God to standardize a day of Thanksgiving. Nevertheless, the fall celebrations were popular. And as we know today, we still got them. It was a finish line that helped them look forward to at the end of the year. A goal to be reached every single year that they could work towards. By the 1700s, annual official days of Thanksgiving had been declared by the governors of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.

Although not on the same dates, these days tended to be more in early December, late November. Commonly held on Thursdays. Anybody know why they were commonly held on Thursdays? Well, they spent the latter part of the week preparing and getting everything done for their Sunday holy services. So they wanted to nail a day of Thanksgiving in the middle of the week, somewhere around there, so it wouldn't interrupt their preparation days. I appreciate that, I get it.

Early Days of Thanksgiving

These days, celebrations across different states consisted of special worship services and dedicated family dinners, repeated every year. The colonists, after a few generations, came to assume that they had always celebrated this way. In fact, when we take into account that it was the Puritans that were the ones so against Christmas when they came over on the boats, it seems a bit ironic that this is where they ended up, banning one winter holiday and replacing it with another.

There's a historian named James Baker. I have a quote here from him. He notes Thanksgiving took the place of Christmas in New England, acting as a seasonal break of meeting and feasting before the worst winter weather and gloomy day set in. Thanksgiving was the major early winter holiday for the Puritans, for the colonists. The celebration only deepens in the roots and

expectations of all American colonies until finally, on December 18th, 1777, the Continental Congress of America enacted national days of Thanksgiving.

A Changing Holiday Under Government

The government actually stepped in to enact these days of Thanksgiving to show gratitude, to celebrate the defeat of the British in Saratoga, New York. You realize how this Congress came to be, right? Because that little thing that was signed a year earlier, that's where we are in time. Declaration of Independence. It was a big deal. You have these British elite soldiers coming over and these unseasoned colonists fighting and winning. It was very unexpected. We are going to celebrate a day of Thanksgiving.

It's fascinating because Samuel Adams made a comment about this. He wrote that when they declared this day of Thanksgiving and what it's going to include, this is very much like a traditional proclamation for New England's annual holiday that we already do every year. Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. The one they'd been keeping all this time.

The very next year, Congress declared Thanksgiving Day on December 20th, 1778, in gratitude for the treaty alliance with France that supported them in the American revolution against the British. We're still in wartime here. What's interesting, though, is the peace treaty with France took place in the spring, and they waited to the fall season, which was the anticipated time of Thanksgiving. They waited to blend the two events together.

We as humans love redundancy. We love structure. We love expectations. After the Treaty of Paris concluded the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress declared Thanksgiving on December 11th in 1783 and October 19th in 1784 in gratitude for peace. What are we going to celebrate Thanksgiving? Peace! We're not fighting anymore. This is good. These were the last of the eight consecutive days set forth by the Continental Congress.

Why did it stop? I'm glad you asked. Colonies began to rise up and complain. Why are you forcing this New England tradition on all of us? Ah, people being people. Stop forcing your New England traditions upon us.

Presidents Handle Thanksgiving Differently

As time went on in the United States, each president handled Thanksgiving days differently. George Washington proclaimed two days of Thanksgiving during his presidency. The first one was on November 26, 1789, to celebrate the adoption of the Constitution. Not all states

appreciated this. Good old South Carolina Congress delegate Thomas Tucker was outspoken, saying that the government had no right to force this religious holiday on all of the states, is what it is.

In February of 1795, Washington proclaimed his second National Day of Thanksgiving. And this wasn't just like, hey guys, we're going to celebrate. This is, guys, I'm the president. Today, we're going to take a day off. Today, we're going to go to church. Today, we're going to praise God. So this wasn't just a suggestion, if you can appreciate that.

The president at the time was proud that he put down the Whiskey Rebellion and that he had maintained kind of a neutral standing in the raging war that was going on in Europe. Did you notice what time of year he made that Thanksgiving day? It was February. February. This didn't sit well with people that were celebrating Lent that year because this took place the day after Ash Wednesday, the solemn day of reflection and repentance. Nah. I'm the president. We will praise God and celebrate and eat some food. Go, George.

John Adams, the very next president, proclaimed no national days of Thanksgiving. The next two presidents, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who were anti-Federalists, did not feel like they had the right to impose that on the states. So they refrained. Madison did recommend days of prayer and Thanksgiving with no requirement to worship so it could include Christians and non-Christians alike. He did this three times during his presidency, but again, you don't have to do this. Politically correct.

After this, no presidential Thanksgiving proclamations were made for the next 48 years.

Spreading the Tradition Westward

In the early 1800s, New Englanders began to settle all across different sections of the United States. They were coming out of the north and they were settling out west and to the south and just everywhere. Many of them were educated. They held influential positions such as editors, teachers, and ministers. In 1868, the editor for the Milwaukee Sentinel paper wrote this: "Why can't we have Thanksgiving out west like we used to in New England? We wish the governor to think on this." You see the pushing out. Wisconsin had its first Thanksgiving in 1839, the very next year.

As the New Englanders spread around the country, so did their tradition spread to other states at a very grassroots level. Thanksgiving became familiar throughout the U.S. because of them. Not officially, not until Sarah Joseph Buell Hale became popular.

Sarah Hale's Vision

Sarah Hale was a passionate author in the 19th century. She was highly esteemed, highly educated. She wrote many books geared towards women and education. She believed women should prioritize becoming as educated as, if not more educated than, men. And so that was her main niche. That's what she pushed for. She changed many lives. I guess you could say she was a mix between Martha Stewart and Oprah Winfrey. She's very popular, very popular. Wrote many books, including one that I think we've all read, *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, in the children's genre.

She was the one to argue that America had too few official holidays. She argued that Thanksgiving should be adopted nationally as the third official American holiday at the time, in addition to the birthday of George Washington and Independence Day. We should add Thanksgiving to that. That's what she pushed. She wrote personal letters to governors of every U.S. state and to United States presidents annually, pleading for this type of reform.

Abraham Lincoln received letters from her every single year, pushing that the last Thursday of November should be this national holiday. Protestant churches began to join the campaign. Then magazines began to publish stories about this movement to make Thanksgiving great. The idea exploded through, I guess you could say, the social media of the time. Man, states began joining in.

New York had celebrated since 1817, Michigan since 1824, but most states joined in celebrating Thanksgiving in the 1840s. The Civil War may have complicated matters just a little bit, but even then, both North and South issued Thanksgiving proclamations. Of course, for them, it was more about military victory, and thanks for letting us kick tail on this battle or that battle, or we won or we gained this. Regardless, this continued until finally, in his speech in 1863, Lincoln proclaimed a national day of Thanksgiving on the last Thursday of November.

Lincoln Transforms the Meaning

What was different about the previous days of Thanksgiving is that I think he did one for military victory. This one wasn't about military victory. This one wasn't about "oh, we made it through this catastrophe." No, guys, let's just take a day and be thankful for what we have today. Revolutionary, Abraham Lincoln.

The next year, he did the same thing, but he was assassinated before he could reach the day. The dream that Sarah Hale had was being fulfilled, pushed, furthered by Abraham Lincoln. The

following presidents followed Lincoln's path. Maybe not on the same date, but they followed the principle every single year. Andrew Johnson moved it to the first Thursday in December, then back to the last Thursday in November, as did every president until 1939.

From Tradition to Law

Now, at the time, these are still annual traditions. These are not put into law yet. This is not officially recognized. Just traditions. Before her death in 1879, Hale was not satisfied with it just being a tradition. She wanted Thanksgiving to be a national holiday, federally backed, written into law. Half a century later after her death, her wish came true.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was president. In the first year of his term, November had five Thursdays, though. That creates a problem. We're just going to push it back. It's going to be a little bit colder. That's fine. Guys, we've spoken about American Christmas, how the American Christmas that's common here was really invented in the early 1900s, right? When you see Santa Claus, this is not an ancient image. This is something that was produced by Coca-Cola, right? Through commercialism, not so much about ancient stuff here. We've adopted our own thing.

Thanksgiving and Consumer Culture

Christmas shopping was as popular during his presidency as it is now. People were anxious to kick off the Christmas season just like everybody did yesterday. That's what Black Friday is about. Christmas shopping, go, go, go, go, go. As a nation, that's what we do. Christmas season, everybody's anxious to get into it, which really just meant drinking and shopping. But this was kicked off the day after Thanksgiving. This was a problem because holding Thanksgiving this late in November would shorten the Christmas shopping season.

The 1939 Thanksgiving Controversy

And Christmas season couldn't be kicked off until the president proclaimed Thanksgiving because it wasn't quite written into law yet. Retailers appealed to the president to move Thanksgiving up a week. And he denied them. However, in 1939, the Great Depression wasn't as impactful as it had been. The economy was flowing a little bit more. Retailers got their foothold. And in 1939... November once again had five Thursdays, and President Roosevelt agreed to move Thanksgiving. Oh, the controversy. Can you imagine? Okay, calendars had already been printed, school schedules, football schedules—everything had already been put

into place. And here, this guy decides, oh, this is going to be appropriate to do. Look at this, the controversy. Oh, man. Okay. The whole nation was split. This was a big deal.

23 states said, okay, we're going to move Thanksgiving a week up. 23 states said, no, we're not going to do that. Man, good old Texas and Colorado, we're going to take advantage of this situation. We're going to celebrate both, right? I mean, this was chaos. It was a mess. Republican mayor of Atlantic City called this new date Roosevelt's Franksgiving. Right? I mean, this is a big deal. I have a newspaper: "Lighter Thanksgiving Market Forecast by Turkey Purchaser." This was great. Here's some more stuff. So, the top left corner is a snippet from a cartoon that was made with a turkey wondering which date he's going to fall on. This was nationwide. Teddy, happy Thanksgiving to you. Happy Thanksgiving to you. Happy Thanksgiving, dear Misguided, who chose today. Happy Thanksgiving to you. This was savage what was going on. Right? He did not know what he was getting himself into.

This mess caused confusion for about two more years until 1941. Congress passed an FDR-signed legislation to declare the fourth Thursday of the month Thanksgiving from now on. It was signed into law now. It wasn't the last Thursday. We saw how that messes things up. Fourth. Deal, deal, deal. Sarah Hale's dream came true. I love that. What's interesting, though, is the bottom line is that the date of Thanksgiving was clarified and made legal mainly for economical reasons, not out of any sense that this is a good date. No, this is going to mess up Christmas shopping. It's just fun history about the country we live in. And there we go. That's Thanksgiving history in the United States, a gradual, slow-moving evolution of one tradition that can be tracked and was passed on to another generation, living in a little bit newer world. Stuff added on to it, and then another generation passed on, and another generation passed on. And that's how we got Thanksgiving.

The Pilgrims and the Real History

Does anyone want to point out the elephant in the room? Matt, where are the pilgrims and Indians? Well, that's the thing. Throughout all of the written and documented history of Thanksgiving, from the New Englanders to Sarah Hale, all of her books and writings and magazines, to all of the church sermons and proclamations, all of the official state and presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving, almost no one referred to the pilgrims and Indians having gathered to give thanks in Plymouth in 1621. And the reason is they didn't know about it yet. They didn't know about it yet.

The story that is now considered the central Thanksgiving narrative for Americans everywhere was not what the promoters had in mind when they pushed and championed to make Thanksgiving a national holiday. The national holiday came first. Then we discovered the Pilgrim Indian story and kind of injected it after the fact. We can't find anything in Sarah Hale's letters, books, and magazine articles that remotely refers to the first Thanksgiving being related to this magnificent meal of pilgrims and Indians. In Hale's Northwood novel, one of her characters said that the beginning of Thanksgiving was birthed in 1631 in Boston when a ship arrived to save the colonists from starvation. In one of her official editorials, Hale said essentially the same thing. I have the quote here from her. Other than that, she made almost no historical references at all. This is the woman that we can thank for Thanksgiving today. This is who she was.

Why? Because we celebrate Thanksgiving is not based on something that happened a long, long, long time ago, lost in history and culture. No, Sarah Hale and all of the supporters of Thanksgiving celebrated because they were thankful for the blessings in the present now. They were thankful for the reunification of the nation now, something extremely important before, during, and after the Civil War. Thanksgiving was going to awaken in American hearts the love of home and country. She continued, stating that Thanksgiving Day, revolving around worship and family dinner, would awaken in American hearts the love of home and country, of thankfulness to God and peace between brethren, uniting all Americans as one great family republic. That's good.

To further this point, historian Robert Tracy McKenzie writes this: "Out of the 223 colonial state proclamations I have located from the years 1676 and 1840, not a single one refers to pilgrims being associated with Thanksgiving, even euphemistically." None of the presidential proclamations explicitly refer to the pilgrims until FDR's declaration in 1939 when he changed the date of Thanksgiving. That's interesting.

The Contested Origins

In addition, the first celebration occurred in Boston either in 1630 or 1631. At least 10 other claims have been made for the first Thanksgiving from as early as 1513 to 1619 and in locations from Florida, Texas, Virginia, and Maine. Some were simply mass and worship services. We come into an issue because after the story of Thanksgiving began to spread to all the colonies, all the colonies started holding their first Thanksgiving. So we have notes and letters saying, oh, this is my first Thanksgiving. Oh, here's my first Thanksgiving. It was really neat, a little mish-mash of history.

How did the story of pilgrims with belts in their heads and Indians with feathers in their heads and displayed with loincloths in winter gain traction? Well, we have a single letter that led to this conclusion and this result. We have a letter written by Edward Winslow, and he was a key leader who assisted Governor Bradford in the new colony. And in 1646, he returned to England to work for the government and never returned to Plymouth. But this is a paragraph. Here's the paragraph from Winslow's letter. And this is the only narrative we have of what happened in Plymouth in the fall of 1621. You guys ready? This is neat for me. I hope you guys find this neat. Here we go.

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling so that we might, after a special manner, rejoice together after we had gathered the fruits of our labor. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, playtime, we exercised our arms.

Guys, give you a moment to picture this. Amongst other fun times, they played with their guns. Okay. Quite the opposite. No, this is describing a bunch of dudes playing with guns and eating steak, which sounds amazing. Right? Guns and recreation would not have been part of a religious holy day for the Puritans. No. Feasting and fun. This was a party.

The Lost Context

And there's almost no indication this event was ever repeated. They were celebrating their first winter and summer. We have no background for the Native American guests. Were they invited ahead of time? We know from other history they were from the Wampanoag tribe. But how did they get involved? We have no clue. Did they crash the party? No. All these guns going off. Guys, maybe you know. You're out in the woods. You're hanging out or whatnot. And your neighbors, you hear the guns. You perk up. You get a little excited. Maybe go over and see what's up. Hey, what's up? I got some deer. We don't even know what month this was in. Was it December? Was it September? November?

But look, it already fits the narrative of Thanksgiving starting in New England. And later in the 1800s, Plymouth was already rising as a beacon of newfound courage and hope and honor reflecting the tradition of the first settlers, the landing site of the Mayflower. After this letter was discovered in the mid to late 1800s, after Thanksgiving had already been established as a national tradition, then it began its journey of becoming more and more well-known until finally by the 1890s, schools began doing Thanksgiving plays where the kids dressed up as pilgrims and Indians, big belt buckles on their heads, feathers coming out of their hats.

Building the Narrative

We wanted to give a sense of civic virtue and patriotism because of the large influx of European immigrants that followed the Civil War. If we start to teach what Americans stand for in the school system, we can help these immigrants learn what it means to be American. Remember, the cycle of holidays included at this time Washington's birthday, Lincoln's birthday, Memorial Day, Flag Day, and Independence Day. All except for the last occur during the school year. Thanksgiving played a vital role. It made its way into the school books, school supply companies got on board, and of course, the Thanksgiving pageant. Who was in one? Oh yeah.

As if the pilgrims in the 1600s, the year after they landed, would be dressed so nicely in their black formal wear with Indians in feathers. No, it's cold. So, recap.

The Puritan Tradition

Puritans who detested any form of annual or static holidays—that's why they didn't celebrate Christmas and Easter, because the Catholics did and they didn't like that. They brought their tradition of holding impromptu days of Thanksgiving whenever a good event happened. After years of surviving each winter, summer, and bringing in a new harvest, these impromptu Thanksgiving days began to recur around the same time of the year. It became standardized and expected in the following generations, and so the colonies began standardizing them. Sarah Hale petitioned and influenced an entire nation to make it legal, and in 1941 it happened. And that's the history of Thanksgiving from what we know based on documents that we found.

The History and Present of Thanksgiving

In the 1800s, a letter was found with one paragraph description of a three-day party, not eight, three, between pilgrims and Indians eating steak and shooting guns, and that became the creative new backdrop for the day that was so easily implemented through history and storytelling into the culture of Thanksgiving for a new generation into the 20th century.

Guys, we celebrate Thanksgiving because it reminds us of God's goodness, of God's blessings now in the present. And it prompts us to move into our future as a grateful God-fear. Not on an event that happened sometime in the past that we're just kind of rehearsing over and over again. No, no.

Now, that's what came to mind when the Puritans held Days of Thanksgiving. The reality that we live in now is what we're thankful for. The colonies, when they gathered in a Thanksgiving

tradition, the presidents, when they made their proclamation, be thankful now for what God has done for you.

Gratitude in the Present Moment

As we sat around our tables last Thursday, looking at our family, the young ones in our families playing, the older ones, the seat of honor on the couch, that one corner that they always go to, right? The bountiful food, right? The wine, the spiced apple cider, that bird. Man, this is what I am thankful for. This reality that God is a good, good God and has blessed me.

That is the history and the function and the purpose of Thanksgiving. Not celebrating an event that just took place a long, long time ago. No, just like the Puritans intended, we celebrate in God's goodness in our present. That's what we do. The now.

Embracing Gratitude Every Day

And as we're gathered together today, a fellowship that orbits around the message, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Yeshua, our King, I beseech you to continue to embrace gratitude everywhere that it exists. Not everywhere that you see it. Everywhere that it exists. Embrace it. Don't let go of it.

As we sit and we have a meal today with each other, our brothers and sisters in Yeshua, embrace gratitude now. When you're at home with your family and you're just watching TV or doing this mundane activity, like the thing that you always do, and so you pull out your phone because you're bored, embrace the gift that God has given to you. Look around the room. Look at the gift.

This is not a common event. This is not common. This is the gifts of heaven, watching your children and your family sit together on the couch, just hanging out, watching whatever, TV. Embrace the gift of blessings of our God in the present. Don't take it for granted. Man, embrace gratitude every day. Embrace gratitude and joy will follow. That's the recipe.

The Kingdom and God's Love

Promote a lifestyle of gratitude. As Christians, sometimes we say this verse so many times. Growing up, we go to Iwana's and we just wear it out as if it's not relevant anymore. No, John said, what has God given to you? See, because John says that God has given his love to you.

John says that he has given his love for you. He has given you life, a life that starts now and surpasses death ever after.

This is the life that we live out as believers. This is the life that testifies of a kingdom not of this world. We are citizens of another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom where God's reign is poured out through us. The kingdom where God reigns, the kingdom where God's justice and mercy and forgiveness and love has no bounds through us being given his spirit.

If we're a part of that kingdom, then we live out that kingdom now. And that's something to be thankful for.

The Ten Lepers

There's a story about Yeshua. And he comes across ten lepers. You guys know it. It's Luke chapter 17, verse 11 through 19.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee as he was going into a village. Ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and they called out with a loud voice, Jesus, Yeshua, Master, have pity on us. When he saw them, he said, go show yourself to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them. When he saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him, and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? Then he said to him, rise and go. Your faith has made you well.

So notice, Yeshua healed everybody there. He healed everybody. His healing, his gift was for everyone, all ten of them, and only one came back. And Luke points out that he was a Samaritan. Why does Luke point out that he was a Samaritan?

The Significance of the Samaritan

Well, because Samaritans were kind of like—they were viewed as—the half-breed Judeans that didn't worship on the Temple Mount. They had their own mountain that they worshipped on. They didn't come to the temple. They had a different Torah, right? Whole different theology.

Gosh, the Samaritans hated the Jews, and the Jews hated the Samaritans. Josephus records one year that the Samaritans, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they snuck into the Temple Mount and started dropping human bones, human body parts, all around the Temple Mount to try to make it unclean. Like this was a terrorist act. I mean, think about it.

I want you to think. Think about randomly paying off thousands of dollars of medical bills for ten people. Let's just put it in our perspective. Who has the medical bills? Who's seen the volume? Medical bills are a burden sometimes, just sometimes. So let's say that you decide to pay off medical bills, the steep ones, for ten people. Most are Christians, and the atheist comes back to say thank you.

Okay, let's put this in perspective. One returns, and Yeshua is stunned, and he asks a question. Where are the other nine? Where are the ones that have given the one thing they themselves cannot obtain? Where are they? I haven't heard from them. Only one has given gratitude. Where are the others?

Which are you? Do you live out your gratitude to God in the form that is seen and proclaimed? Or do we fall in the trap of becoming one of the nine that Yeshua wonders, where are we?

Paul's Teaching on Gratitude

Paul, in his letters to the Thessalonians, he's speaking of how a Christian should live out their life, and I'll conclude with this.

But we ask you, brothers, [1 Thessalonians 5](#), 17, to acknowledge those who work diligently among you, who preside over you in the Lord and give you instruction. In love, hold them in the highest regard because of their work. Live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brothers, to admonish the unruly. Encourage the faint-hearted. Help the weak and be patient with everyone. Make sure that no one repays evil with evil. Always pursue what is good for one another and for all people. Rejoice at all times. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in every circumstance. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Worship team, you guys can come up. Look what he says there in verse 18. This is God's will for you. That's a big statement. This. Live gratitude. Live it out.

Conclusion: A Lifestyle of Gratitude

When we enter into the Thanksgiving season, we look just like the Puritans, and we celebrate and we rejoice and we accept the gifts that God has for us in the present and moving forward in our lives. That is what Thanksgiving is all about. And I found that so amazing.

Are you in God's will? Are you living out God's will for you? Live out gratitude. And that can look different in a lot of different situations. Embrace gratitude in all circumstances and joy will follow. That's the message of the blessing that God pours out through us.

So please stand. We'll go ahead and conclude services. If you need prayer today, for any reason, we have a prayer team that's dedicated to standing with you and lifting you up and walking beside you into prayer.

Closing Prayer

Alvina Malkinu, our Father, our King, Father, we thank you for our life. We thank you for our blessings. We thank you for our community. We thank you for our children. We thank you for every blessing that you've poured out. Just like David prayed, all the things that exist are from you, not from our own. And we thank you for just allowing us to receive the bounty of your gifts and blessings in our lives. That through your spirit, you would guide us on how to live out gratitude. And how to show the joy of thanksgiving to the world that can only be found in you.

We thank you, Father. In the name of your Son, Yeshua, we pray. Amen.

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