A Time for Thanksgiving

Abounding in Gratitude

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."
—Colossians 2:6,7

THIS SCRIPTURE WAS AD-dressed to the brethren at Colossae by the Apostle Paul. He urges those who have come to a knowledge and appreciation of our Savior, and the wonderful blessings that we have received through his ministry and sacrificial death, to become rooted, grounded and well-established in the Truth. Those who do so will have developed hearts overflowing with love, and will always abound with thanksgiving to God for his great love and mercy.

Our offering of love and thanksgiving to God should become the ultimate desire of every well-rooted and established child of God. The word 'thanksgiving,' and the spirit in which it is used by Paul, points to the level of gratitude and thankfulness that the Lord's people should have for all the

many rich blessings that we receive at the hand of our loving Heavenly Father. The apostle has further explained that this is done in the name and merit of our Lord Jesus who has made it all possible for us to have this special relationship with God.

Paul also addressed the brethren at Corinth with a message in which he used the same Greek word from which thanksgiving has been translated in our English Bibles, and which we find in our featured text. He encouraged them, "Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God."—II Cor. 9:11,12

The loving spirit of thankfulness within the fully consecrated followers of Jesus is received by God as sweet incense, and is a reflection of the growth and development of the one offering up that service. John the Revelator speaks of this incense in the vision of the opening of the seventh seal where he said, "Another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."—Rev. 8:3,4

ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH

The process of rooting and the establishing of faith largely takes place in the heart. It may, therefore, develop for a time under the surface and be largely undetected by others. In time, the results of

this process will more readily be seen when the outward manifestation of that faith has flourished with the fruits of righteousness and Truth. Once that faith has been firmly established, no wind of doctrine will be able to uproot that well-grounded faith that is the evidence of the Lord's grace and providential care for his people.—Eph.4:14

The sealing of the New Creature is the working and possession of the Holy Spirit, and is thus manifest by evidence of love and thanksgiving to God. It will be shown in our love for the brethren who have accepted the Gospel Age calling, and love also for the poor groaning creation. This sealing is made clearer by the apostle in his words to the Corinthian brethren. "He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."—II Cor. 1:21,22

A DAY FOR THANKSGIVING

Each year, on the fourth Thursday of November, the citizens of the United States are invited to pause from their ordinary pursuits of everyday life and to enjoy a special day of thanksgiving. This day has been set aside for all Americans to turn their attention toward God, and give thanks to him for the bountiful blessings that they have received during the past year. In the hearts of many people there is doubtless a sincere feeling of appreciation to God for every good gift, and they are happy to have this special time for reflection and thanksgiving.

It is a special day that is generally marked by family gatherings, along with a bountiful meal which likely includes turkey as the centerpiece,

along with cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, and all the trimmings. In earlier times, the day usually centered around some kind of religious service which included moments for Bible readings, reflection on the Scriptures, as well as time set aside for prayer, the singing of hymns, and offering thanksgiving to God for the season's harvest.

In more recent times, however, Thanksgiving Day has given way to having a longer weekend away from one's place of employment, or perhaps the day is consumed by watching parades, or sports events, on television. Because the holiday occurs at the very end of the month of November, it also serves to usher in the more extensive festive holiday season that soon follows. The origin, purpose, and meaning of having a special day of thanksgiving, therefore, has become somewhat obscured by many Americans because of increasing commercialism and widespread pleasure-seeking that has come to characterize our modern society.

THE PLYMOUTH COLONISTS

John Carver was a merchant and pilgrim leader who became the agent for the pilgrims in arranging financial support, and chartering the Mayflower ship for the trip to America in 1620. He had also organized the establishment of the Plymouth Colony in New England, and became its first governor. He and Massasoit, who was the native chief of the Wamponoag Indians, had signed a treaty of peace that provided the way for the new Plymouth Colony. Massasoit was the chief over what is now the greater part of the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The Puritans, because of religious persecution, were among those who joined the group in 1620. The early seventeenth century had seen a continuation of the great religious reformation and upheaval which had begun in Europe a century earlier. There were various separatist groups that had broken away from the established Church of England and the term 'Puritan' suggests their radical attempt to purify themselves by further removal from the church system's control. They thus prepared themselves for the 'holy pilgrimage' to America, and left England on the Mayflower from the port of Plymouth on September 16, 1620.

Nearly four hundred years have passed since land was sighted off what is now the coastline of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, after the Atlantic crossing in the autumn of 1620. It had proven to be an extremely difficult journey for the pilgrims who had left England sixty-six days earlier. For two months, about one hundred people had been wedged into what was then known as the 'tween-decks'—which was essentially a cargo area of the boat that had barely more than five feet of headroom. The passengers were mostly confined to their quarters for their own safety because of sudden storms that arose. After arriving in the New World, and with the bitter experiences that were encountered on their ocean crossing and first winter in America, the Plymouth settlers would hardly have survived except for the help given them by some of the local Indians.

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING

William Bradford was also one of the organizers of the expedition of pilgrims to America, and while

aboard ship he had helped frame the Mayflower Compact, which became the governing foundation of the Plymouth Colony in the New World. He was chosen as the second governor of the new settlement in 1621, to succeed John Carver who had died suddenly, and he remained in office nearly all of the rest of his life.

In 1621, Governor Bradford proclaimed that a special day of thanksgiving be set aside after the autumn harvest so that the settlers could offer gratitude and prayer to God for their blessings and well-being. The event proved to be a blessing for the pilgrims and their Indian friends, and Chief Massasoit was among the guests. The idea of having a special day for thanksgiving was well received, and it soon spread to other parts of New England, as well as other settled areas of the New World; but at that time each region chose its own date for the occasion.

ESTABLISHING A DATE

When George Washington became the first president of the newly formed United States, he proclaimed November 26, 1789 as a day of national thanksgiving as well as to honor the new American constitution. But the different colonies and regions of the country still continued to set their own times for the event. During the 19th century, many new states joined to observe the annual celebration, but many carried on with the tradition of setting their own dates.

During the American Civil War in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln appointed the last Thursday of November for the occasion largely as a result of the untiring efforts of Sarah Hale, who was editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, and had worked diligently towards the establishment of a special date for Thanksgiving

Day. Lincoln, therefore, called on the whole people of America to unite together with one heart and with one purpose to observe a specific time, and urged prayer meetings to be held in the churches and that all should "express their heartfelt thanks to God for the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies."

From that time forward, each succeeding president made similar proclamations until 1939, when President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the change to the third Thursday in November instead of the long-held fourth Thursday. But this change was not well accepted and, in 1941, Congress by joint resolution reestablished the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day, and it has remained a national holiday ever since.

OTHER OBSERVANCES

Because of the earlier harvest season, Canadians observe Thanksgiving Day on the second Monday in October, but there have been many changes throughout the years. Although there had been harvest celebrations held by some of the native peoples who were living in this area of North America before the white man came, the first documented Canadian Thanksgiving occurred in 1578, when Martin Frobisher proclaimed a formal day of thanksgiving in the settlement he had established in what is now Newfoundland. During this same period of time, French settlers arriving in Canada with Samuel de Champlain had formed what they called "The Order of Good Cheer," in which they also gave thanks to God for their blessings and well-being in the New World.

In 1879, the Canadian Parliament declared November 6th as a national day of thanksgiving, but

the third Monday in October continued to be the more popular and accepted date. After World War I, both Armistice Day and Thanksgiving were celebrated on the Monday of the week in which November 11th occurred. This was the accepted time until, in 1931, the two days became separate holidays, and Armistice Day was renamed Remembrance Day. In 1957, Parliament declared the second Monday in October to be "A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed."

THANKSGIVING EVERY DAY

To whatever extent the people of America may take the opportunity to offer thanks to God for their well-being, happiness, and the extensive freedom they enjoy by living in this great nation is, of course, commendable. The Lord's people also receive and appreciate these same blessings. However, they daily reflect on his goodness toward them and, throughout their consecrated walk in life, they esteem every day as a special time for thanksgiving to God and not merely one day in the year.

The child of God is thankful for the temporal food they receive, but are most thankful for the spiritual food that has been provided for us—the "meat in due season." (Matt. 24:45; Rev. 3:20) Eating of the spiritual food is how we become strengthened and enabled to grow as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

We, too, are thankful for our earthly families and friends, but especially appreciate those of "like precious faith" (II Pet. 4:1), and enjoy the wonderful circle of our larger spiritual family. We enjoy a higher calling and an association with other brethren who

also share as workers together with God. (II Cor. 6:1) As the sons of God, we are thus members of his spiritual family, and together we are blessed with a common bond of love, fellowship, and thanksgiving.

A MEDITATION OF THANKSGIVING

The psalmist wrote, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High." (Ps. 92:1) As we reflect on these words, we acknowledge that it is truly a 'good thing' to always give an offering of thanksgiving to our loving Heavenly Father every day during our consecrated walk in newness of life. It is a good thing to give thanks unto God because to not do so would be an indication of our lack of love and appreciation for all that he has done for us. It is a good thing, the psalmist also says, to sing praises unto the name of the most High. This is profitable therefore, for those who sing these praises, as well as for those who may hear them. The harmonious melody of singing praises to God fills our hearts, and the hearts of others, with loving-kindness and a spontaneous spirit of thanksgiving.

A VOW OF THANKSGIVING

One of the marks that identifies the consecrated child of God as having been rooted, built up in Christ, and well-established in the faith, is the level of commitment we desire to fulfill, and the evidence that this Spirit of Truth is our heart intention.

We often turn to the wonderful words that are recorded by the psalmist in which our attention is focused on our desire to offer a "sacrifice of thanksgiving" to God. "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and

call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. In the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD."—Ps. 116:12-19

THANKSGIVING IN THE KINGDOM

The great hope for the whole human family will be realized during the future thousand-year kingdom of our Lord. At that time, all will be given full opportunity to be uplifted from the miry pit of sin and death in which they continue to be condemned because of Adam's transgression. The psalmist, looking far down the stream of time, symbolically points to this time when mankind will bring offerings of thanksgiving to God. "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing."—Ps. 107:21,22

THE PRAISE OF THANKSGIVING

As we approach another annual observance of Thanksgiving Day, let us abound therein with heartfelt thanksgiving—"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."—Eph. 5:19,20, *New American Standard Version* ■