

PSALM 100 & EPHESIANS 1:15-23

THERE WAS A MEETING OF CLERGYMEN IN BOSTON IN THE AUTUMN OF 1929, AT THE START OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION. THEY HAD GATHERED TO DISCUSS THE COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING SERVICE, AND IN FACT WHETHER IT SHOULD EVEN BE HELD THAT YEAR.

THEY THOUGHT IT SHOULD BE HELD BUT IN DEFERENCE TO ALL THE MISERY AROUND THEM, THEY SHOULD ONLY TOUCH UPON THANKFULNESS, SINCE THINGS IN THE NATION WERE SO BAD.

AFTER ALL, MANY WONDERED WHAT THERE WAS TO REALLY BE THANKFUL FOR. THEN ONE PASTOR RALLIED THE OTHERS.

HE EXPLAINED IT WAS A TIME TO LEAN ON THEIR FAITH, AND TO THANK GOD FOR THE BLESSINGS ALWAYS PRESENT, EVEN WHEN MANY OF THEM SEEMED TO BE SUPPRESSED DUE TO THE INTENSE HARDSHIP THE COUNTRY WAS ENDURING.

THANKSGIVING 2020, IS ANOTHER YEAR OF HARDSHIP, BUT OF A DIFFERENT KIND.

THIS YEAR IS ALSO THE 399TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PILGRIM'S FIRST FEAST HELD TO GIVE THANKS FOR THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE HORRIBLE WINTER, WHICH KILLED OVER HALF OF THEM.

IT ALSO CELEBRATED AND GAVE THANKS FOR THE BOUNTIFUL HARVEST THEY HAD, AND THEIR FRIENDSHIP WITH SOME OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE.

SO WHAT IS "THANKSGIVING"? IS IT A DAY FOR GATHERING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, A DAY FOR FEASTING, A DAY FOR PARADES AND FOOTBALL?

YES IT CAN BE VIEWED AS THOSE THINGS ALONE. BUT IF WE DO SO WE SET OURSELVES UP FOR DISAPPOINTMENT WHEN SOME, OR ALL, OF OUR IDEALS ARE NOT FULFILLED.

WE ALSO DRAW OUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE PILGRIM'S INTENTION FOR THE DAY-TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD.

SO WHAT IS THANKSGIVING REALLY? IT IS AN ATTITUDE. IN FACT, THE ENGLISH WORD: "THANK" HAS THE SAME ROOT AS THE WORD "THINK".

FROM THIS WE ARE REMINDED THAT GIVING THANKS IS RELATED TO THINKING ABOUT OUR BLESSINGS.

THERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS ATTITUDE IN THE NOVEL "ROBINSON CRUSOE", WHERE THE SHIPWRECKED MAN MADE A LIST OF HIS PROBLEMS AND HIS BLESSINGS.

HE FOUND FOR EACH DIFFICULTY THERE WAS A COUNTER POINT TO BE GRATEFUL FOR, LIKE: BEING SHIPWRECKED-BUT ALIVE, AND LOOSING ALL FOOD SUPPLIES-BUT BEING ON AN ISLAND WITH PLENTY TO FORAGE.

SO WHAT IS THANKSGIVING DAY? THIS YEAR, MORE THAN ANY OTHER FOR MANY OF US, IT CAN BE A DAY TO LOOK AT OUR BLESSINGS-WHAT WE HAVE INSTEAD OF WHAT WE MISS.

THIS DOES NOT DISCOUNT THE UNFAIRNESS LIFE SOMETIMES BRINGS, OR OUR CURRENT NATIONAL AND WORLD TROUBLES.

BUT IT STILL IS A DAY TO REMEMBER THAT, LIKE FOR THE PILGRIMS, THERE ARE REASONS FOR US TO BE THANKFUL.

PSALM 100 IS ONE OF MANY PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE THAT CALL GOD'S PEOPLE TO GIVE THANKS AND WORSHIP THE LORD.

NOTICE THE VERBS THAT INSTRUCT US TOWARDS GOD: SHOUT FOR JOY, WORSHIP THE LORD, COME INTO HIS PRESENCE WITH THANKSGIVING, AND KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GOD.

THUS THE PSALM TEACHES AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE, AND PRESENTS US WITH WAYS TO SHOW OUR LOVE TO THE LORD.

THE APOSTLE PAUL, HAD THIS SAME ATTITUDE OF THANKFULNESS, AND EXPRESSED IT OFTEN IN HIS LETTERS.

TO THE EPHESIANS, HE DRAWS HIS READERS' ATTENTION TO: THANKSGIVING, PRAYER, AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

IN TODAY'S READING PAUL GIVES THANKS FOR THE FAITH OF THE CHRISTIANS IN EPHESUS, WHOM HE HAD NOT YET MET, BUT HAD HEARD ABOUT.

HERE HE TEACHES US TO GIVE THANKS FOR THE FAITH OF FELLOW BELIEVERS, INCLUDING THOSE WE DO NOT KNOW.

HIS WORDS ALSO DRAW OUR ATTENTION TO THE FOCUS OF OUR FAITH AND THANKFULNESS AS CHRISTIANS, WHICH IS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST-OUR KING.

TODAY IS NOT ONLY THE SUNDAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING, IT IS ALSO "CHRIST THE KING" SUNDAY.

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY FIRST OCCURRED BY PAPAL DECREE IN 1925, AND WAS LATER PICKED UP BY MANY PROTESTANT CHURCHES.

IN THAT YEAR POPE PIUS THE NINTH SOUGHT TO COMBAT THE GROWING SECULARISM OF THE WORLD.

HE ALSO SOUGHT TO PRESENT AN ALTERNATIVE FOR CHRISTIANS TO TRUST IN, BESIDES THE MANY DICTATORS THAT WERE COMING TO POWER IN THE WORLD AT THAT TIME.

IT IS SAID POPE PIUS HOPED THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION WOULD ENCOURAGE CHRISTIANS TO TRUST IN THE SAVIOR, AS THEY REMEMBERED AND CELEBRATED THE MAJESTY AND POWER OF JESUS AS THEIR KING.

HE ALSO HOPED THE FAITHFUL WOULD GAIN STRENGTH AND COURAGE FROM THE CELEBRATION, AS THEY ARE REMINDED THAT CHRIST MUST REIGN IN THEIR HEARTS, MINDS, WILLS, SOULS, AND BODIES.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE BELIEVERS IN EPHESUS HAD A SIMILAR MESSAGE.

THE APOSTLE SOUGHT TO EMPOWER AND ENCOURAGE THE CHURCH THERE AS THEY CONTINUED TO WITNESS TO THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST, IN THE MIDST OF A PAGAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE.

MORE SPECIFICALLY, HE DESIRED TO CALM FEARS AMONG THOSE WHO FELT THREATENED BY THE CULTURAL TEACHINGS ABOUT SPIRITUAL POWERS AND PRINCIPALITIES, WHICH MIGHT ATTACK THEM BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST.

REMEMBER, THE WORLD OF PAUL AND THE FIRST RECIPIENTS OF THIS EPISTLE WAS ONE IN WHICH MAGICIANS WERE NOT HARMLESS PRACTITIONERS WHO ENTERTAINED WITH TRICKS AND ILLUSIONS.

INSTEAD MAGICIANS WERE BELIEVED TO PRACTICE REAL MAGIC BY CALLING UP AND CONTROLLING SPIRITS- EITHER BENEVOLENT OR MALEVOLENT.

AND SO PAUL REMINDED THEM THAT JESUS IS NOT SIMPLY POWERFUL OR GREAT- BUT ABOVE AND BEYOND ANY AND ALL SPIRITUAL BEINGS.

EVEN HIS NAME IS GREATER AND MORE POWERFUL THAN ALL OTHER NAMES.

CONSEQUENTLY THOSE WHO ENTRUST THEMSELVES TO CHRIST- CAN CALL UPON HIS NAME AND RECEIVE HIS POWER TO OVERCOME ANY SPIRIT OR OTHER ENTITY.

FURTHERMORE THEY CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT THE BENEFITS OF THE SUPREMACY OF THE RISEN AND GLORIFIED CHRIST IS THEIRS, BY THE GRACE AND WILL OF GOD.

PAUL'S WORDS TO THE EPHESIANS ABOUT THANKSGIVING AND JESUS ARE JUST AS RELEVANT FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY.

WE NEED TO REALIZE AND BE THANKFUL FOR THE IMMEASURABLE GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER FOUND IN JESUS THAT GIVES HIS CHURCH ITS LIFE AND CALLING.

THIS INCLUDES REALLY ENTRUSTING OUR PRESENT LIVES TO CHRIST'S CARE, AS WELL AS BY CONTINUING TO LIVE IN HOPE OF THE FULFILLMENT OF ALL GOD'S PROMISES THROUGH HIS SON.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE POWER OF CHRIST AS THE FORCE THAT UPHOLDS INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS, AS WELL AS HIS CHURCH, IS FOUND IN AN OLD NEWSPAPER PHOTOGRAPH.

THE CAPTION BELOW THE PHOTO, OF WHAT APPEARED TO BE A SINGLE MAN LIFTING UP A PIANO, SAID- "STRONG MAN".

HOWEVER, IF YOU LOOKED CLOSELY AT THE PHOTO, YOU COULD SEE THE FAINT PRESENCE OF A CABLE THAT WAS WRAPPED ABOUT THE LARGE INSTRUMENT, LIFTING IT UP.

IT WAS INDEED THE CABLE THAT WAS BEARING THE WEIGHT OF THE PIANO, THE MAN WAS MERELY GUIDING IT AND HELPING TO STEADY IT.

SO, ALSO WE CAN SEE THE IMMEASURABLE POWER OF CHRIST WITHIN HIS CHURCH AND INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLES.

IT IS THE SAVIOR WHO LIFTS US UP, WHILE OUR JOB IS TO GUIDE HIS POWER THROUGH OUR LIVES AS THE SPIRIT LEADS US.

PERHAPS IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL, THEREFORE, FOR US TO LOOK A LITTLE MORE CLOSELY AT CHRIST'S POWER.

THE MAIN ATTRIBUTES OF GOD'S POWER, MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO BELIEVE IN JESUS AND GIVE THEIR LIVES BACK TO HIM, ARE:

A POWER THAT IS BEYOND OUR IMAGINATION, AND BEYOND MEASURE.

GOD'S POWER IMPLANTS WITHIN US THE ABILITIES WE NEED TO CARRY OUT HIS WILL.

GOD'S POWER IS MANIFESTED IN THE GIFT OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST, FOR WHICH WE CAN ALWAYS BE THANKFUL.

HERE IS HOW SOMEONE ELSE EXPLAINS THE MEANING OF GOD'S POWER AS RECORDED IN THE EPISTLE:

"PAUL TELLS US THAT THIS POWER IS FOR US...WHO BELIEVE. ALL OF THIS DIVINE POWER IS CONCENTRATED INTO ONE PURPOSE- THE SALVATION OF HUMANITY.

THE POWER OF GOD IS SET ASIDE FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST. GOD DESIRES AND PLANS TO WORK IN YOUR LIFE THROUGH THE REALITY OF HIS POWER.

GOD'S POWER AND ABILITY IS AT YOUR DISPOSAL AND HE IS WAITING FOR YOU TO TAP INTO IT. GOD'S POWER CAN BE THE SOURCE OF YOUR STRENGTH... YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT... YOUR LIFE...."

CONSEQUENTLY THE BIBLE TEACHES US TO STAY FOCUSED ON JESUS AND TURN TO HIM FOR HELP AND STRENGTH AGAINST ALL WORLDLY: POWERS, AUTHORITY, AND TEMPTATIONS.

SCRIPTURE ALSO CALLS TO US GIVE THANKS TO GOD IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, ESPECIALLY FOR HIS LOVE SHOWN TO US THROUGH KING JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOR.

THE WORDS OF A HYMN EXPRESSES OUR THANKS BY ITS CALL TO PRAISE: "COME CHRISTIANS, JOIN TO SING, ALLELUIA! AMEN! LOUD PRAISE TO CHRIST THE KING. ALLELUIA! AMEN!

LET ALL WITH HEART AND VOICE, BEFORE HIS THRONE REJOICE. PRAISE IS HIS GRACIOUS CHOICE. ALLELUIA! AMEN!

COME LIFT YOUR HEARTS ON HIGH; ALLELUIA! AMEN! LET PRAISES FILL THE SKY, ALLELUIA! AMEN!

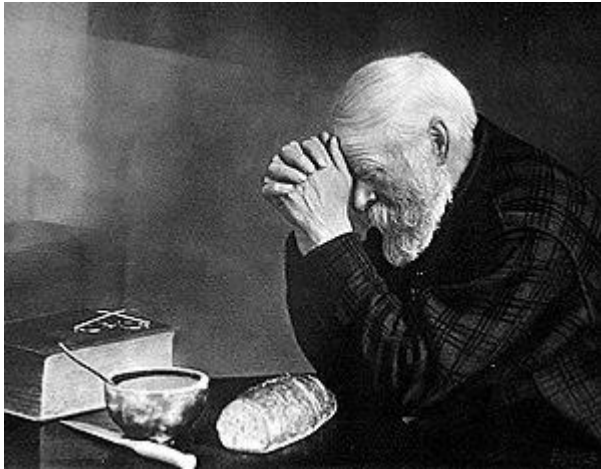
HE IS OUR GUIDE AND FRIEND, TO US HE'LL CONDESCEND. HIS LOVE WILL NEVER END, ALLELUIA! AMEN!"

SO WHAT IS THANKSGIVING? IT IS ANY DAY WE PAUSE TO MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE LORD, AND COME INTO GOD'S PRESENCE GIVING HIM OUR THANKS AND PRAISE.

THERE IS A FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPH, TAKEN BY A MAN NAMED ERIC ENSTROM. THE SUBJECT WAS A DOOR-TO-DOOR SALESMAN NAMED CHARLES WILDEN.

THE TITLE OF THE PICTURE IS SOMETIMES CALLED "DAILY BREAD", BUT ENSTROM SIMPLY CALLED IT "GRACE".

IT CAPTURES MR. WILDEN GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR HIS SIMPLE MEAL OF BREAD AND SOUP. YET, THE FOCUS IS NOT ON THE FOOD, BUT ON THE MAN'S GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR IT.



THIS ALSO IS ANOTHER WAY TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD. IT REMINDS US THAT OUR DAILY BREAD, THAT WHICH IS FOOD, AND THAT WHICH ARE OTHER BLESSINGS, COME FROM GOD.

IT ALSO SHOWS THAT GRATITUDE FOR THE ORDINARY THINGS OF LIFE IS A WITNESS TO OTHERS OF GOD'S GRACE.

I CLOSE WITH IS A PRAYER FROM THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND THAT SUMMARIZES THE ESSENCE OF REAL THANKSGIVING.

LET US PRAY: LORD, WHEN WE GET COMPLACENT OR DOWNHEARTED TEACH US TO COUNT OUR BLESSINGS. AND WHEN WE COUNT OUR BLESSINGS, TEACH US TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO NEED YOUR BLESSINGS. IN THE NAME OF JESUS WE PRAY. AMEN

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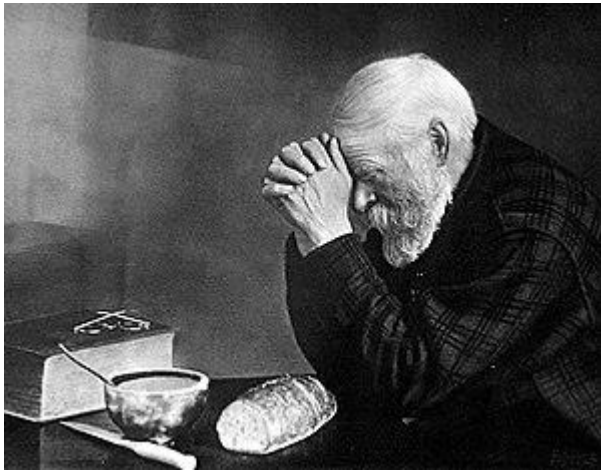
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