

Thanksgiving

October 24, 1998:

This year, the Last Great Day happened to coincide with Canada's Thanksgiving Day.

This is very significant. In the United States, however, Thanksgiving does not arrive for another month or so. But this day – October 12, 1998 – is also celebrated as Columbus Day in the U.S., which also has a great deal of topical significance for the Last Great Day. Columbus Day marks the discovery of America: an accomplishment that began a huge change in the history of the world. The Last Great Day also marks a change – a future change – probably the biggest change ever in the history of world!

In this article, I would like to concentrate on Thanksgiving and its relationship to the Last Great Day. Here are a few excerpts from the Canadian Encyclopedia article on the subject of Thanksgiving:

"Proclaimed as a day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed."

We are all well aware that God's people are not to participate in the majority of the world's holidays. But here is one that we can celebrate – if we keep it in the proper spirit. Continuing in the Canadian Encyclopedia:

"Thanksgiving draws upon 3 traditions:

- **Harvest celebrations in European peasant societies, for which the symbol was the cornucopia (horn of plenty),**
- **Formal observances, such as that celebrated by Sir Martin Frobisher [an English mariner and explorer] in the eastern Arctic in 1578; the first North American Thanksgiving,**
- **The Pilgrims' celebration of their first harvest in Massachusetts (1621) involving the uniquely American turkey, squash and pumpkin."**

God's people have used the cornucopia as a form of decoration in our Feast of Tabernacles celebrations. Canadian Feast-goers have frequently enjoyed Thanksgiving dinners together when that day has fallen during God's fall festival. The Last Great Day has traditionally been the day when we say a well-deserved "Thank you" to all those who have worked so hard to make the Feast a success. But the main purpose of this article is simply to tell you why and how God's people should give thanks to Him.

Ingratitude

Why and how should we give thanks to God? These might seem like silly questions to someone who has been a member of God's church for many years. But ingratitude is a disease that has been creeping into our societies, more and more, and there is a real danger that it might be rubbing off on God's children in these last days:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; (II Timothy 3:1-4)

Paul's words are a vivid and accurate description of our western societies today. It is a disgrace to our nations to hear children and adults in restaurants and stores, apparently devoid of the mere elements of common courtesy and, apparently with some idea that it isn't "macho" to say "Please" or "Thank you" to the waitress or store clerk serving them. The average Canadian or American acts today as though all the good things of life are somehow owed to him. His lack of thankfulness to God is manifest by his refusal to offer a prayer of thanks before his meal, and his complete ignorance as to the requirement to pay tithes, to give offerings to God, and to worship Him on His Sabbaths and Holy Days. Even our Thanksgiving Days have lost their real, original meaning for many, and have become mere excuses for partying, revelling and getting.

God takes a serious view on ingratitude. Jesus was dismayed when he had healed ten lepers and only one – a despised, Gentile Samaritan, by the way! – made the effort to thank Him

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:11-19)

Ninety percent of that group of lepers were ungrateful and used God rather than serving Him. What would our percentage be?

Ingratitude and selfishness are bad for us, both individually and collectively. A study of the appropriate scriptures reveals that ingratitude:

Is a major factor contributing to the moral decadence and crumbling culture of our nations,

Produces vain imaginations and foolish hearts,

Is bad for our spiritual, moral, mental and, ultimately, even our physical health,

Wars against the permanent, eternal, spiritual things (the major message of the Last Great Day),

Is part of the reason for the apostasy:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen... Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (Romans 1:18-25, 29-32)

Paul is writing here about a group of people who had known God's truth and had practiced His way of life. But they were not thankful for it. They rejected it and returned to the ways of the world.

Also, God looks upon ingratitude as being a sin that is Laodicean in nature:

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Revelation 3:17)

It is a selfish, thankless and ungrateful person who says or thinks, "I am rich and increased with goods. I am a self-made man. I have earned it all by my own hard work and ingenuity. I have nothing that I should thank God, or anyone else, for."

Again, God takes a very serious view of ingratitude because of what it can lead to.

Why?

We have just seen why we should not have a spirit of ingratitude. On the other side of the coin, why should we be thankful? What are the reasons why we should give thanks to God?

There are lots of scriptures, including many Psalms, which deal with the expression of thanksgiving to God. In this article, I would like to concentrate on just one of them – Psalm 92 – which answers our two main questions:

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: (Psalm 92:1)

We should give thanks to Him, first of all, because it is a good thing for us to do so. Our thankfulness is good for God. Although He doesn't need our thanks, He certainly is glad when His children offer them. And, of course, it is good for us. In contrast with the dangers of ingratitude, here are some of the benefits of a thankful attitude:

- It guards against the dangers, previously listed in Romans 1 and II Timothy 3,
- It subdues what one Bible commentator describes as "man's potentially animal-like nature,"
- It is part of God's "way of give" (we give thanks),
- It promotes good spiritual, mental, moral and physical health.

Such a thankful attitude is good for all of these reasons and, if you think about it, it is common sense to thank God when He has answered our prayers. After all, we undoubtedly will need help again! Continuing in Psalm 92:

To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night, (Verse 2)

We should acknowledge and thank God for His lovingkindness and faithfulness toward us. When you celebrate the Last Great Day and during the rest of the year, please think about the following, be thankful for them, and don't take them for granted:

- The Last Great Day and its wonderful and exciting meaning and future fulfillment,
- The Feast of Tabernacles and its meaning,
- The other Holy Days and their meanings,
- The Truth of God that has been – and continues to be – revealed to His children,
- The gifts of God, both spiritual and physical, that He continually pours out to us,
- The church of God and our part in it,
- Our brethren and the opportunities for fellowship with – and service to – them,
- Loving, faithful spouses and good children,
- God's ministry and their untiring service to us.

For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. (Verse 4)

We should thank God because He gives gladness and even a sense of triumph and victory to those who have an active part in His Work. In one way or another, every single member is able to have an active part in God's Work. Remember that we are all different members of the Body of Christ and that, like the parts of the physical body, we have been given different talents and functions.

The apostle Paul also related thanksgiving and triumph, when he wrote,

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 15:57)

When the fulfillment of the Last Great Day arrives at last, and we see our parents, children, friends, and other loved ones in the Second Resurrection, we will shout with thanksgiving and great joy:

Death is swallowed up in victory! O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:54-55).

Returning again to Psalm 92:

O LORD, how great are thy works! And thy thoughts are very deep. (Verse 5)

We should thank God because His works are great. Just look at His creation! Also, His thoughts are very deep – deeper than any human being can totally comprehend. Consider the microscopic detail He has created in the universe. Think about the individual, loving attention He bestows upon His children.

Verses 6 and 7 interrupt to mention the future of the incorrigibly selfish and ungrateful of the world: the brutish, foolish, wicked, workers of iniquity. Then we return to the list of reasons why we should give thanks to our great God:

But thou, LORD, art most high for evermore. (Verse 8)

We should thank God because, although His thoughts are very deep (as mentioned back in verse 5), He Himself is most high. This is one of His names. He is the Most High. He is the great God of sovereign height. He is the highest of the high. He is the ultimate in height!

The Psalmist inserts another interlude in verse 9, to repeat the fate of God's ungrateful enemies, the workers of iniquity. Then back again to more reasons for God's people to be thankful:

But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil. (Verse 10)

We are to thank God because He will exalt His people. From the weak and simple of the world, He will exalt us. He will raise us up from our lowly beginnings, and will anoint us as kings and priests:

And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:6)

And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:10).

Back again to Psalm 92:

Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies, and mine ears shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise up against me. (Verse 11)

We are to thank God because He will do justice to His enemies: the wicked and the ungrateful of the world: those who have been offered His way of life, have tasted of it, but have spurned it as worthless! Is it right that we should be thankful for God's judgement and punishment upon them? We certainly should not gloat over their fate, but we would be wise to remember the accounts of the punishment of Aaron's wicked sons, and of King Saul in which the mourning of their loved ones was strictly limited by God (Leviticus 10:1-7; I Samuel 16:1). We should beware of thinking of God as harsh for His judgments. God's enemies are our enemies too, as we are members of His Family.

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. (Verse 12)

We are to thank God because He gives spiritual and physical health and growth to His people, according to His will and His great wisdom and mercy.

Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. (Verse 13)

The psalmist repeats the word "flourish" here, a word which was translated from the Hebrew "parach," and can also be translated as bud, blossom, grow, sprout, fly, spring up, and abundantly.

In the Old Testament era, "the courts of our God" referred to an Israelite's presence in God's physical temple, which was a symbol of His heavenly throne room. In New Testament times, the term refers to one's membership in His church and, prophetically, might look forward to the future time when God the Father and Jesus Christ will transfer their thrones from heaven to earth

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. (Revelation 7:15)

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. (Revelation 21:3)

We are to thank God, then, because the spiritual and physical health and growth that He has already given us will increase even more in the wonderful, almost unbelievable future that He has in store for us, which again is pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. God's firstfruits will then have been freed of their old, tired, ailing human frames. God's newly begotten sons and daughters, still in physical form, will enjoy virtually perfect soundness of body and mind in a pollution-free world. Psalm 92 again:

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; (Verse 14)

Fat? Surely, obesity is no valid reason to give thanks to God? At the time of the translation of the King James Version of the Bible, to be fat was to be considered healthy and prosperous. But the word "fat" here was translated from the Hebrew "dashen," which might be better rendered as vigorous or stalwart.

We should thank God because, even in our senior years, God's people are in good spiritual health, most are in relatively good physical health, and are still able to be very active in His Work – bringing forth fruit. This is partly attributable to living God's way of life, which includes obedience to His laws of radiant health that He has revealed to us, and to His blessings, which He bestows upon each of us, individually.

We are, of course, very much aware of those in God's church who are at present suffering from poor health. These statements are certainly not intended to imply that those who are ill cannot be included as God's people because they are not physically flourishing, vigorous, and stalwart – in the peak of health. Although I have no statistics to support this, I would say that if we were to compare the percentage of healthy people within God's church to that of those outside, it is probable that we would find God's people to be in comparatively better overall health. We may sometimes feel that there are so many brethren who are sick. This is because we tend to be more aware of the health problems of our brethren because of the excellent communications within the church and, through God's Spirit, we care more about the sufferings of our brethren (I Corinthians 12:26). Although God, in His great wisdom, has permitted some of our members to suffer with major health trials, His laws of radiant health have, nevertheless, had a very positive effect on His people overall.

Although I do feel very much for those who are chronically ill and, although this may seem easy for a reasonably healthy person to say, it is important for us to remember that all physical healing is, at best, only temporary (Hebrews 9:27). We must keep our minds focussed on the fulfillment of the Last Great Day, when all sickness and disease will be done away forever:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2)

God speed that day!

Also, like that one healed leper mentioned earlier, we must make sure that we take time to thank God when He does answer our pleas to heal us. Remember that the true Miracle Worker – the great God – is more important than the miracle itself. Back to Psalm 92:

To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. (Verse 15)

Last, but certainly not least, we are to be thankful to God because He is totally – one hundred percent – dependable, upright, solid, and righteous.

How?

We now move on to our second question: How should we thank God?

At some undeterminable time in the past, God created some very special spirit beings. They are described in the fourth chapter of Revelation as four beasts (KJV) or living creatures (RSV) and twenty-four elders. Some of their special functions in heaven are to worship, glorify, honour, and to thank Him continually:

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Revelation 4:8-11)

When the Last Great Day is fulfilled, the whole world will be able to see these marvellous spirit beings. It appears that God arranged for many furnishings and procedures in His temple to serve as physical symbols of various aspects of His heavenly throne room. Perhaps as physical counterparts of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, God designated a special group of priests to whom He gave responsibility over the formal and regular thanksgiving ceremonies that were to take place in His temple:

Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, which was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren... For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. (Nehemiah 12:8, 46)

Let us now return to the first three verses of Psalm 92 to find out how God's people should thank Him in these latter days:

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:... Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound. (Verses 1 and 3)

These verses tell us that one of the ways we should thank God is by singing praises to Him. The closest we in today's church of God can come to the thanksgiving activities of the four beasts, the twenty-four elders and the temple's "thanksgiving priests" is through the appointment of men to lead songs, the offering of special music, and the convening of church choirs for God's Sabbaths and Holy Days.

We have our greatest opportunities for singing praises to God during the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. These song services are all the more enjoyable for the members of our smaller groups who meet in homes each Sabbath and, sadly, no longer have the regular opportunity to sing praises to God as part of a large group.

The reference, in verse 3, to ten-stringed instruments, the psaltery (another type of stringed instrument, similar to a modern zither), and the harp, refers to the instrumental accompaniment of songs of worship and thanksgiving. Although we have occasionally made use of other instruments at Feast sites and campouts, the modern congregations of God's church have traditionally used pianos to accompany our hymn singing. Our local congregation does not have the luxury of an accomplished piano player so, like many congregations, we make use of CDs copied from our old Bible Hymnal tapes for accompaniment. These work well for most small groups because our "joyful noise" can be augmented by the excellent voices of the singers on those recordings. Another very pleasant hymn-singing opportunity has been made possible through the wonders of telecommunications, whereby all the North American brethren, including the small "in-home" groups, can sing the final hymn each Sabbath as one united voice of praise and thanksgiving, with the accompaniment originating at our headquarters congregation at Fort Mill, South Carolina.

To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night, (Verse 2)

In addition to our weekly hymns of thanksgiving, we can also thank God for His loving kindness and His faithfulness in our daily, personal, detailed prayers. Through this scripture, God urges us to do so morning and night. In His "prayer outline" (Matthew 6:9), Jesus indicates that thanks should be given right at the beginning of our prayers in the "Hallowed be thy name" portion.

We tend to ask for a lot in our prayers. Again, do we place as much importance on thanking God when He answers those prayers and gives us what we ask for? Some years ago, one of God's ministers in our area suggested the very worthwhile recommendation that, every so often, we should spend our whole prayer time in nothing else but thanksgiving to God.

We do have so very, very much to thank God for. As God's children, let us not be guilty of the great sin of ingratitude. God admonishes us, through the apostle Paul in Colossians 3:15:

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and...

Be ye thankful.

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