

Squanto and the Pilgrims

Every time I return to American history, whether casually or in depth, I see the hand of God. As our hearts and minds have been drawn again to the Pilgrim's story, we are reminded of the incredible providence of God that led, guided and directed our forefathers to this part of the world. The Pilgrims landed in America on December 21st, 1620. The people were dying from disease and others were soon to follow from starvation, had it not been for a Patuxet Indian named Squanto. He had been captured a few years earlier by Englishmen, then, sold to some monks who gave him his freedom. When he finally returned home from Europe he discovered that his home was full of empty huts and there was not even a sound of a barking dog to be heard. His family and every member of his tribe had died from disease. History tells us that close to one hundred thousand Indians died during this time. Had Squanto not been captured and enslaved, he would have died with his entire tribe.

That spring and summer Squanto proved himself invaluable. He led them to brooks brimming with herring beginning their spring migration upstream. He showed the Pilgrims how to fish with traps. He taught them where to stalk game in the forest. The children learned what berries they could pick for their families. Twenty acres of corn grew tall after Squanto showed the Pilgrims how to plant fish (as natural fertilizer) with the native corn seeds from a local tribe.

Historians have conjectured that had not Squanto been at that right place at the right time, the early Plymouth settlement would simply have not been. The people would have starved to death and the America as we know it today would have been drastically different. Appropriately, at this time of the year we give thanks.

1. We give thanks for God's providence.

Although God does not orchestrate human bondage, He worked all things, including Squanto's brief slavery, for our good and His glory. Squanto was bought at a slave auction from a tyrant by some Spanish monks who greeted this bound young Indian with the words, "Estas libre," meaning "You are free." So Squanto's introduction to Christianity was a positive one. One biographer said he began to love Jesus at this time. After Squanto went back to England he began searching to find a way to go back home to America. Having mastered the English language and discovering Christianity he was now set up to be a blessing to the Pilgrims when he found them. One reason he was staying around the area now known as Plymouth was because this was the original home of the Patuxet tribe, his people now extinct. If Squanto had not been captured and carried away, he would not have been available to come to the aid of the Pilgrims. Governor William Bradford wrote, "Squanto is a special instrument sent by God for their good beyond their expectations."

I am reminded of William Cowper's poem, a portion of which says, "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face." The Bible says, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

2. We give thanks for God's provision.

Jesus said, "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:26). We observe Squanto's helping hand in the lives of the settlers in the new world as he teaches them how to farm, fish and hunt. Even more conspicuous was the providential hand of our providing God.

It would serve us well to be still and know that God is God (Psalm 46:10). We should always remember, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). The Psalmist said, "Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes" (Psalm 119:68). "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). With all these promises we should be filled with great expectations of not only what God is willing to do, but what He wants to do for His children.

3. We give thanks for God's power.

While enroute to the new world, the Mayflower was hit by a cataclysmic storm that nearly sank them. The main mast was broken and they were helpless, doomed to drift until the inhabitants of the ship died and the ship became a ghost ship, lost at sea. But alas! A long bolt was taken from the Bible and book press being brought by the Pilgrims to keep them in the Word and in good reading. The massive bolt secured

the broken main mast and soon they were on their journey again. Imagine it, saved by a single bolt! We observe God's providence, we appreciate His provision and we bask in God's power as we witness how the Pilgrims conquered their environment!

Squanto, the Pilgrims and other Indians celebrated the first fall Thanksgiving festival with venison, roast duck and goose, turkeys (or whatever qualified as "fowl"), shellfish, bread, and vegetables, with woodland fruits and berries for dessert. Before they ate, the Pilgrim men removed their wide-brimmed hats and Indians stood reverently as the governor led them in solemn prayer.

Two years later we find Squanto, still in his 30s, had become mortally ill and lay dying. In the formative days of our country, his value and worth under God is inestimable. Dr. Ralph F. Wilson said, "The first time he was captured he learned English. The second time, he was freed by gentle Christians who taught him to trust in Jesus. And though his own people had died of sickness, God had sent him to a new people who built their colony where his old village once stood." The capstone of our story lies in Squanto's final moments. We are reminded of God's greatest display of His power in salvation, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*" (Romans 1:16).

Pilgrim leader William Bradford later recorded that as he knelt beside the dying Indian, Squanto whispered, "Pray for me, Governor, that I might go to the Englishmen's God in heaven." Squanto breathed his last in November 1622, gone from the new world for the last time, now captured by the loving arms of his Savior, forever set free. "*But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*" (Hebrews 11:16). Squanto had truly become a pilgrim in the new world, now at home in the heavenly world.

-Pastor Pope-