

## **THE PILGRIMS, SQUANTO AND THE PLAN OF GOD**

Every time I return to American history, whether casually or in depth, I see the hand of God. The Mayflower, the ship that brought the Pilgrims to America measured about 100 feet in length from the forward end at the beak of her prow aft to the tip of her stern superstructure. She was about 25 feet at her widest point, with about 12 feet of keel below the waterline. William Bradford estimated that the Mayflower had a cargo volume of 180 tons. There were 102 passengers, approximately 30 crewmembers, numbering about 132 total. Only 41 were considered Puritans or Pilgrims. Others onboard called the Pilgrims "saints," while the Pilgrims called the others "strangers." The voyage on the Mayflower took 66 days. While in the journey, 2 died and 1 was born. It was not a comfortable trip; during the first portion of the journey most everyone was seasick. Any person over five feet could not stand up straight when below the deck. Some of the families built makeshift apartments with board dividers. They ate salt fish, salt beef and cheese. There were no rest room facilities. They used wooden buckets to take care of their personal needs and nausea. There was no bathing or ability to change clothes even after they were torn or soiled.

As our hearts and minds have been drawn again to the Pilgrim's story, we are reminded of God's providence, provision and power that led, guided and directed our forefathers to this part of the world.

### **1. We give thanks for God's providence.**

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 and taken to Spain to be sold by the tyrants who kidnapped him. Fortunately, some Spanish monks purchased him with the intent to free him. After making the purchase, they 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 was liberated from bondage he went to England hoping to eventually find a way to go back home to America. When he

finally returned home from Europe he discovered that his village was nothing but empty huts and there was not even the 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 100,000 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 the Pilgrims 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 simply would not have 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. Although God does not orchestrate human bondage, He worked all things, including Squanto's brief slavery, for our good and His glory. If Squanto had not been captured, carried away and mastered the English language, 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 tells us, "*A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps*" (Proverbs 16:9).

## **2. We give thanks for God's provision.**

We read of the prayers of the Pilgrims in those early Thanksgivings and that custom of giving thanks for our provision is biblical. When our Lord fed the 4,000, He taught us to be thankful before we eat and for what we ate: "*And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude*" (Matthew 15:36). Christ did it again in John 6:11 before he fed the even greater multitude, "*And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples,*

*and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would."*

Our Lord seems to set a precedent to give thanks before we receive. Our Lord's act of thanksgiving for the meal stands out, for after he fed the multitude the Bible says, *"Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks"* (John 6:23). Paul followed the same pattern in Acts 27:35: *"And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat."*

It is only appropriate to attribute all our blessings to God. 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). Not only at Thanksgiving, but at every meal we need 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).

### **3. We give thanks for God's power.**

While enroute to the new world, the Mayflower was hit by more than one storm. One day in the 66-day trip they were hit by an extremely cataclysmic storm that nearly sank them. The main mast was broken and they were helpless, doomed to drift until the inhabitants of the ship die and the ship become a ghost ship, lost at sea. But alas! A great iron screw was taken from the Bible and book press being brought by the Pilgrims to keep them in the Word and in good reading while in the new land. The massive screw secured the broken main mast and soon they were on their journey again. Imagine it, saved by a single iron screw! We observe God's providence, we appreciate His provision and we bask in God's power as we witness how the Pilgrims (through their Lord) conquered their environment!

The Pilgrims, their great friend, Squanto 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. His value and worth under God in the formative days of our country is inestimable. 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 like his Christian counterparts from England.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.