

## **“Thankful for What?”**

**Rev. Lee F. Veazey**

*“Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor – and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness . . .”* These are the first words of the proclamation made by President George Washington on October 3, 1789 from New York City designating Thursday, November 26, 1789 as a national day of thanksgiving. Presidents and Congresses of the United States have continued this precedent set by Washington, and since 1942, Thanksgiving as a national holiday has been observed on the fourth Thursday of November.

Washington’s proclamation drew heavily upon what is found in the Bible about giving thanks. Indeed, the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, has much to say about who is to give thanks, for what to give thanks, when to give thanks, where to give thanks, why to give thanks, and how to give thanks. However, in the Bible there is also a particular story in which giving thanks is more than just not recommended; it is condemned.

In telling the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, Luke, the writer of the third gospel, likes to tell the story in two’s for the purpose of comparison and contrast. For example, in Luke we read of two women expecting a baby, two old saints waiting for the Messiah, two sisters welcoming Jesus into their home. In particular, Luke likes to compare and contrast how two people respond to God. A good illustration of how people respond to God can be found in what is known traditionally as the Parable of the Prodigal Son: *“There was a man who had two sons . . .”* (Luke 15:11).

Another example of how people respond to God is found in Luke 18:9-14 where we read: *“[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Here are two prayers so fundamentally different that it reasonably could be concluded that God hates one prayer and loves the other. The prayer of thanksgiving made by the Pharisee was evaluated by Jesus and condemned. It is a prayer of thanksgiving that God hates. However, the prayer made by the tax collector, a plea for mercy, was evaluated by Jesus and commended. A Christian is, among other things, someone who (to borrow a title from Motown’s The Temptations) *“Ain’t Too Proud to Beg”* for God’s mercy. A prayer of thanksgiving that God loves is one in which God is recognized as the giver of something that is not deserved – His mercy and His grace. Christians are people who recognize their own sin first and foremost, repent of their sin without excuse, and receive the assurance of forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ with great joy.

Thanksgiving Day is the opportunity for citizens of our nation to slow down and remember to give thanks for the blessings of *“Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”* (Declaration of Independence) and to remember the challenge before us *“to form a more perfect union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity”* (Constitution). And for those people who are able to acknowledge *“the providence of Almighty God”* in their lives, Thanksgiving Day also presents a good opportunity to ask this question: *“For what am I thankful?”* The answers will be revealing and may even become life-changing.

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