

BENEFITS OF THANKSGIVING

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." Psalm 92:1.

There are very few duties which the Bible enjoins in terms in so large a requirement as the duty of thanksgiving. Under the watchful care and guidance of the Lord we have been carried safely through another year. God has graciously opened His hand and dealt bountifully with us, far beyond what we deserved. Consequently, we should bow in gratitude to Him for His many favors and blessings. As children of God we have so much to be thankful for. It is a duty that we be thankful every day. We simply cannot crowd sufficient gratitude for a whole year into any single day. Neither can we be thankful in everything unless the Lord fully controls our hearts and lives.

A genuine Christian has three indubitable marks:

- (1) He rejoices in the mercies of God.
- (2) He is fervent in prayer.
- (3) He gives thanks to God in all things.

Paul wrote the Thessalonians to the effect that whether in sickness or in health, in prosperity or in adversity, in prison or at liberty, in the full exuberance of life or in the bitter pangs of death, whatever their outward circumstances, whatever the outward surroundings of their lot, they were to be thankful.

Our most common notion of thankfulness is of gratitude for some obvious benefits bestowed upon us. We are thankful for food when we are hungry, for kind words when we are sad, for money when we are poor, and for health when we have been sick.

Now we all know that to give thanks to God is a duty. It is a duty that is not only inculcated in the Bible, but it is felt by every man to be right in itself. If anyone bestows a gift on us, the least we can do is to thank him for it. Since we believe in a personal God, and that from Him we receive every good and perfect gift, it follows; naturally, that we are bound to give Him thanks for that which He bestows upon us. It is a duty incumbent upon all to render thanksgiving unto God for mercies received and enjoyed. We are to be thankful in the midnight darkness as well as in the bright sunshine. "In every thing give thanks."

If there is one thing lacking today more than any other in the realm of religion it is the spirit of gratitude. The beautiful note of thanksgiving is too often silent in many of our religious services. We accept the manifold gifts of God, but how many times do we fail to recognize the Giver? Many people eat and drink, enjoy good health, boast of their possessions, revel in their liberty, glory in their land, etc., but never stop a moment to render thanks to the Giver of all these good and perfect gifts.

The recurrence of the day for our special national thanksgiving reminds us once again of the blessings God has bestowed upon us as individuals and as a nation. Our material blessings have been abundant, and our spiritual blessings have had no limit except that of our willingness to receive them. If we have neglected to give thanks during the remainder of the year, let us now say with the Psalmist: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

A life that does not have in it a feeling or an expression of thankfulness is missing one of the sources of spiritual strength. Thanksgiving and gratitude go together. They are the natural expression of the heart that is surrendered to Christ. Therefore, at Thanksgiving time, and at all other seasons, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." This is true for various reasons.

I. It is right.

God deserves our thanksgiving.

1. He created us.
2. He has preserved us.
3. He has redeemed us. John 3:16.
4. He has saved us.
5. He sustains us.
6. He guides us.

II. It is pleasant.

When we bless God for His mercies, we prolong them, and when we bless Him for miseries we usually end them. Gratitude is joy. Had we no other motive but our own personal happiness, we should find it "a good thing to be thankful." When we have reviewed the mercies of past years, traced the hand of Providence in all our course from infancy onwards, and seen goodness following us all of the way, and then have fallen down before our God, with melting hearts and tender eyes, or have poured forth our feelings in some sacred hymn of praise, have we not at such times known the highest luxury this earth can afford? "Is any merry? Let him sing Psalms." Luther used to say, "Come, Melancthon, let us sing a psalm, and drive away the devil." Praise to God is His due. We defraud Him of that which He has a just claim to, at our hands, if we hold it back.

III. It is winsome.

It is a good thing to be thankful because such a spirit exhibits Christianity in a beautiful form to others. We have read of instances of great thankfulness in the midst of great privations, and we have seen some of them. We may have gone to some wretched abode of poverty, where it seems, that had it been our lot to dwell there, we could discover nothing but occasion to murmur at our hard fate, and we may have heard there expressions of gratitude and acknowledgments of God's goodness that have amazed us. Have we not gone away with a real love for such a spirit, and ashamed that we did not possess more of it? "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord."

IV. It is pleasing unto God.

God loves the returns of gratitude. It is true that our returns of praise can add nothing to God's glory or happiness, and yet He has declared that "whoso offereth Him thanks and praise, he glorifieth Him." Thankfulness opens the heart to God, and God's blessing fills the open heart as the fresh air rushes through the open window, and the light of heaven fills the unshuttered room. When the heart is thankful for past mercies, new mercies are not far away.

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Psalm 116:12. We cannot purchase His blessings, to be sure, nor can we in any sense pay for them. But there are many things we can do that will be well pleasing unto Him.

1. We can give Him our hearts.
2. We can praise Him, remembering that "praise is comely for the upright."
3. We can love Him.
4. We can dedicate ourselves fully to the doing of His will.
5. We can let our gratitude to Him so overflow our lives that it will not rest until it finds satisfaction in helping others in His name.

Doing these things, Thanksgiving will be to us, not a season of the year, but a perpetual attitude of mind and heart and life that will make our lives well pleasing unto Him.