



## *From the Heart of the Pastor*

### **The (Gospel) Truth of Thanksgiving**

This Thursday, November 26 is our national Thanksgiving celebration. The original 1676 proclamation framing this event defines it as "... a day of Solemn Thanksgiving and praise to God for such his Goodness and Favour, .." How many of us are aware of the origins of this national day of observance, and of this number, what percent actually keeps this truth in mind during its celebrations? In other words, what bearing do the circumstances giving rise to the passing of legislation instituting the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of every November as a day of national observance have in our celebration?

Above all others, Christians have the most, greatest and deepest reasons to be thankful. To them, Thanksgiving is not an annual activity and a seasonal celebration enjoined by government legislation. Rather, believers understand Thanksgiving to be their willing duty and joyful response to the Triune God's Person and work in their lives. Believers rejoice in the fact that God has condescended to create them in his own image and likeness. This truth establishes that our dignity, significance and worth do not originate within us but that they are benevolently granted to us by God the Creator. In addition to this biblical affirmation and even eclipsing it is the reality that, although man was made in the image of God, he was also born in sin. Every human being was born in the sin nature that was imputed to him from a fallen, sinful Adam. As a result, his entire being is sinful, Ps 51:5; etc., and from this font of iniquity come actual transgressions and lawlessness. **The Westminster Shorter Catechism #18 summarizes this condition in this manner: "The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it."** It is a condition that requires the just condemnation and eternal wrath of God. However, the good news is that for his own glory and in according with his sovereign purpose that he established from eternity past, the Lord God has graciously decided to save some through faith alone in the sinless life and atoning, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ His Son.

Thus, from a biblical perspective, gratitude is our continuous response to the gracious saving initiatives of God to fallen man, redounding to the praise of God's own glory, Eph 1:6, 12. When Christ comes the second time to gather up the elect of God and to present them to the Father, God's people will experience the immeasurable blessedness of beholding (t)his glory, Jn 17:24. Indeed, Christ will be glorified in his saints 2 Ths 1:10, and further, God's people **are** his glory, Isa 46:13.

To the Christian therefore, thankfulness is not a seasonal activity, a sporadic acknowledgment, a sentimental affirmation or even a special attestation. It is a continual disposition that proves its genuineness in joyful submission to God and in acts of sacrificial love to our neighbor. In the lives of those whom Christ has purchased by his blood from the grave of sin, death and Satan and whom he has elevated to the redemptive heights of incalculable splendor, thankfulness is not a stagnant condition or an unexpressed emotion. Its presence in our lives is marked by continual praise to God and in love for our neighbor. These expressions grow in intensity and hope as the day of Christ's return draws near. God's people are keenly aware that the Christian life is always moving forward towards its glorious eschatological consummation.

Thankfulness, therefore, is the ongoing joyful response as well as the delightful responsibility of the sinner to whom God has imputed by faith alone, the alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for that sinner's acceptance before God. Sinners respond faithfully by resting in Christ, that is, by trusting in his saving grace in all ways and in praise for a salvation that is authored by God, accomplished by Christ and applied to their hearts by the Holy Spirit. There is an inseparable link between the cross of Christ and our thankfulness. There is an indivisible connection between the truth of the gospel and its implications in our lives, between the truth of God's grace to us and our thankful reception and reflection of this redemptive reality in our walk of faith. **The truth of the gospel necessarily brings forth the thankfulness of life.**

Those who have received the blessing of Christ's obedience, Gal 3:13 -14, and those who have been declared righteous by God the Father after believing on the Person and on the redemptive, substitutionary work of Jesus Christ alone for salvation, Rom 4:2, 5; 10:10; Gal 2:16; etc., uphold Christ and his gospel as the fountainhead and the central dynamic producing gratitude in their hearts. **Gratitude therefore confirms the centrality of the Person and work of Christ in his saving and sanctifying efficacy in the life of the believer.**

In an age of the selfie, an age in which abject exhibitionism (ineffectually posturing as authenticity) is ruthlessly lodged in the self which self-glorifies in its self-proclaimed sovereignty, the notion of gratitude that looks vertically to God claiming the alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground of acceptance before him, and horizontally to neighbor in good deeds, is intrinsically subversive. Our times are indelibly stamped with a pervasive psychology of presumptuous entitlement and uniquely marked by a warped temperament that does not conduce to gratitude. In this iniquitous milieu, thankfulness is on a precipitous collision course with the culture of the self that champions its own concerns, sings its own praises, affirms its goodness and that delights in the sovereign choice of the individual who is irretrievably entangled in the stifling web of relentless narcissism. In this iniquitous milieu, gratitude is an alien concept and a foreign language.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving with our family and friends, let us remember that our thankfulness is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ who has paid the debt for our sin. Let us be thankful to God for all of his benefits towards us and cry out with the psalmist, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!" Ps 115:1. Lastly, let us share our joy with our loved ones "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Col 1:12-14. Thankfulness is rooted in the truth of the gospel.

Happy Thanksgiving.

*Pastor Mike*