

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. (Deuteronomy 8:10-18)

Give Thanks to the Lord

How do you say thank you? Obviously, you can just walk up to someone and say the words. But there are other ways. You might write a thank you note. Jimmy Fallon makes a weekly joke out of that. Sometimes, our thank you's are more subtle. A wife might make her husband's favorite dinner to show her appreciation for some project she wanted done. A child might pick flowers or just give mom a big hug to show how much he or she appreciates some gift. There are lots of ways to say thank you. Tomorrow, on Thanksgiving, we will gather with our families and eat a big dinner to celebrate all that God has given us. Today, we gather here to thank him. One of the most important parts of how we thank God is to hear again the story of how much he loves us. Then we go out and live our faith. My friends, **give thanks to the Lord.**

I.

What exactly are we thanking him for? Food and shelter, obviously, and peace and safety and good health. We're thanking him for children and parents and for an endless list of blessings that we encounter every day. This holiday makes us stop and think about how many blessings we really have. But do all those blessings really come from God? I mean, how did you get your house? The keys didn't just drop out of the sky. You saved for a down payment. For years, you went to work every day so you could write a check every month and slowly pay the balance down. You got your car and your clothes and your furniture in the same way. What did God have to do with it? Moses warns about exactly that kind of thinking tonight. He told the children of Israel, **“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.”**

God gave Israel a good and fertile land. In that time and place, farming was the key to prosperity. God warned them what would happen if they didn't recognize that he was the source of all their wealth. He said, **“When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God.”** God gives us wealth. But every time he does that, he's taking a risk because in that wealth lies the temptation for us to forget him. How does that work? Well, we look at all that we have and our hearts become proud. We think of all the hours we've worked and the years in college and the things that we're good at. We say to ourselves, **“My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”** It's a natural thing.

We forget the Lord who gives us the ability to work and to produce wealth. Some of you are engineers or programmers. Some of you are nurses or teachers or business people. Some of you build or repair things. You know what you all have in common? You all do jobs that I can't do! Why not? I haven't had the training but there's more to it than that. Some of your jobs are things that I'm just not wired to do. And I bet a few of you, at least, recognize that there are aspects of my job that would be tough for you to do. God gave us gifts. God made us able to do the work we do. And God blesses our efforts.

But he works behind the scenes. Unbelievers often scoff at our belief that God gives us what we need. I once knew a young woman who had a growing family. She and her husband scrimped and saved and bought a used car. And they felt wonderfully blessed when it ran well. They told people at work how God had blessed them. But some of those people were offended by that. I remember one of them saying, “They just bought a

car that wasn't a lemon. God had nothing to do with it." Unbelievers seem to think that we believe that we can sit in our back yards and all hold hands and pray until God drops a car down from heaven. Certainly, we believe he could do that. But we don't believe he usually does. God tells us to get jobs. He gives us the abilities we need to support our families. Then he works through our efforts and gives us with the exact physical blessings we need. Is it true that my work produced the wealth I need to support my family? Sure. But it's even more true that God gave us that wealth.

When we congratulate ourselves on how well we've done and how hard we've worked and we take credit in our hearts for all the things we have, we forget about the Lord our God. In truth, we put ourselves in his place. That's just sin. That leads us to denying him an even bigger role in our lives. Moses talks about how the children of Israel would forget that God led them through the wilderness for forty years and brought water from a rock and gave them manna. They would forget the miracles God did to save them and make them his own. We can fall into the same trap. Sure, we say the right things at the right times. We go through the motions and show up at church and even write a check. But in our hearts we forget the great things God did to save us and make us his own. Our hearts grow proud and we think we're going to heaven because that's what we deserve. But instead, we'll spend eternity in hell because we've worshipped ourselves instead of the only God who can bring us home. If we're honest, on this holiday in which we turn to God and acknowledge all that he's done for us, don't we have to admit that it's easy to spend the other 364 days a year taking credit for all that we have?

Well, God didn't give us manna in the desert for forty years or make water come out of a rock. He did something greater: he sent his own Son to save us. God the Son, the almighty maker of the universe, made himself one of us. Then he lived a perfect life, a life that always gave credit to God in our place. Then Jesus spread out his arms and let the Romans nail him to a cross. He hung there and endured the shame and the taunting of his enemies. Worse than that, he let his Father in heaven pour out on him all the hell that all the billions of human beings who will ever live deserved. Then he died. Jesus suffered the full penalty for the whole human race. That means he suffered for you and me. And then he rose. And we are forgiven. God drives us back to that cross just when we start to forget it. God points out our pride and sin so that he can point out his love and his miracles. He leads us to remember his love and to thank him in our words and our actions, not just today, but every day. Then, because we know Jesus, we know the things that unbelievers don't see. We know that God truly is the source of all we have, even when he works behind the scenes. My friends, **give thanks to the Lord. He gives you the ability to produce wealth.**

II.

If you grew up going to Sunday school or a Lutheran elementary school, you've heard those stories of what God did for Israel in the desert. Moses struck a rock and water poured forth. God gave them manna. Six days a week, for forty years, they went out and picked these little white flakes up off the ground and ate them. The first time it happened, they said, "Mah-na?" "What is it?" Moses says something very interesting about that gift: **"He gave you manna to eat in the desert ... to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you."** It had a greater purpose than filling their bellies. It humbled and tested them. The testing is fairly easy to understand. God gave rules about when and how much they could gather. When they trusted him and did what he said, they were fed. When they disobeyed, there were consequences. Every day, for forty years, God tested the strength of their faith.

But what about the humbling? How did giving them miracle bread in the desert humble them? They were totally dependent on God's mercy. Do you know how many people God led out into the desert? Roughly two million. There simply was no way that two million people could survive in the desert even for a couple of weeks, let alone for forty years. God made them depend on his grace. God does that for us, too. Guess what? We don't like it. We don't like the testing. We don't like it when God sends pain to test our faith, to prove it and deepen it. Sometimes we moan and complain and ask where God is. But we really hate the humbling. Elderly people absolutely hate it when they can't drive anymore. They hate it when they have to depend on their kids to take them shopping and clean their houses and organize their finances. They don't want to feel helpless. No human being does.

But we're all helpless in a sinful world. That's God's point. Left to ourselves, the devil would eat us alive. The enemies of our faith would wipe us out. Our own sinful hearts would murder our faith. God makes us helpless through illness or persecution or financial disaster to teach us what we really need: him. Then he

comes and promises that he's here. That he will never leave us or forsake us. That he will lift us up and carry us through all the hurts and sorrows of this life. When he tests and humbles us, he's really building up our faith so that in the end it goes well for us. Every hurt and sorrow has a good purpose. Sometimes, it's a good purpose for this life. God rescues us. Sometimes we can look back and see just how much he's done for us. But whether we can see it here or not, all that stuff gets us to heaven. We will rise when Jesus comes back. We will live in a new and perfect world, with him forever.

Thanksgiving Day is a wonderful day to remember that because we might not feel like we have all that much to be thankful for. We don't all own houses. We don't all have new cars. It may not feel like God has given us all that much ability to produce wealth. Remember: every time he gives us wealth, he's taking a risk because a temptation to forget him lies inside that wealth. God knows when to take the risk and when not to. God loves us especially when he withholds blessings. That's when we have to trust him. That's when he builds our faith. Rather than seeking comfort because we don't have what we want, God wants us to thank him for putting eternal life first. He loves us enough not to let wealth and pride destroy our faith. He loves us enough to bring us to the new life where our blessings will be so great that we won't even think about this life. He knows that when we stand with him there we will thank him for all our hardships here. So begin to thank him now. **Give thanks to the Lord. He does all things for your good.**

Today and tomorrow, you'll have that chance. But that chance doesn't end tomorrow when the turkey's gone. Moses told his people to be careful to live according to God's plan so that they did not forget him. The Christian life is not about earning heaven. It's about focusing on heaven. When we live the way God tells us to because he tells us to, we are reminding ourselves that this life isn't the end all and be all of our existence. A far more important life is coming. Live a life that says thank you to God. Remembering why you're saying thank you will remind you of all that he is about to give you. Amen.