

Theme: Thanksgiving in a Land of Plenty

John 6:25-35

And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." 28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." 30 Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? 31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." 35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

The story is told of two old friends who bumped into one another on the street one day. One of them looked very sad, almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What's the matter? What has the world done to you, my old friend?"

The sad friend said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, a long-lost uncle of mine died and left me fifty thousand dollars."

"That's a lot of money."

"But, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me one hundred thousand dollars!"

"Sounds like you've been blessed...."

"You don't understand!" he interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million."

Now he was really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?"

The sad friend replied, "This week... nothing!"¹

What was this man's problem? Entitlement. He began receiving a gifts on a regular basis and instead of seeing them for the incredible gifts that they are, he began to expect them, and even became resentful when he didn't receive them.

This "entitlement mindset" and attitude that has unfortunately permeated American society at almost every level. We have been so blessed to live in a land of plenty and are so used to having so much that we begin to expect it. We begin to think that we are "entitled" to all of it. As a result we become complacent and begin complaining when we don't have all the things we've had before, or even if we *sense* that some of them may be taken away and we may not have things as good as we once did. Perhaps the worst part about having this "entitlement mindset" is that it can cause us to become completely "unthankful" and unwilling to give thanks to anyone for anything.

Can you imagine what people from some of the poorest nations in the world, or from some of the war-torn countries around the globe would think of us if they could hear how much we complain about we have or don't have? When we gripe about the state our country is in? They would probably think we were crazy and the most ungrateful, unthankful people on the planet! "Look at the homes you live in, the cars you drive, the food you eat, the safety you have, and the freedoms you still enjoy!" they might exclaim. "You have every right to be thankful and no right to complain!"

¹ *Acknowledgement: Illustration adapted from a sermon by Joel W. Lohr, SermonCentral.com*

You have probably heard the expression “Attitude is everything.” Well, it is no different when it comes to thanksgiving. The attitude we carry with us through life is extremely important if we are to truly live lives that demonstrate our gratitude towards God for His blessings and His gracious work in our lives. We pray, as we look at our sermon text for this Thanksgiving Day, that God would work a grateful & thankful attitude in each one of us!

In our text for this morning, we find the crowd questioning Jesus as to how He is going to prove Himself to them yet again after He had fed 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two small fish (**John 6:1-15**). They had a need for food and Jesus saw and met the need. They had followed Jesus all the way around the lake and rather than recognizing the fact that they were being offered the solution to their REAL need (forgiveness and salvation for their souls) they were asking yet again to have a “FELT” need met (food for their bodies). It sounds so foolish and so short-sighted to hear that these people had Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Master Teacher, the embodiment of Truth and Life itself right there with them and what do they ask Him for? More food! Jesus had to remind them of the importance of what He was offering them in His teaching and then continued to teach them rather than meeting their perceived need for food.

When the masses demanded food, He pointed them to Spiritual food: the truths about Himself as the Savior from sin God had sent from heaven. **“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (John 6:27)**. When these Jewish listeners asked Jesus to prove Himself by giving them bread from heaven like the manna the children of Israel ate in the wilderness way back in the Old Testament, Jesus again turned their thoughts to spiritual food & the true bread of God: Himself. **“For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33)**. When the people asked Jesus, **“Lord, give us this bread always.” [He] said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”** By having faith in Jesus they would never be hungry or thirsty again—at least not in things of spiritual and eternal significance.

How sad it is when we, God’s children, put our other “needs” ahead of this need for **“the bread of life,”** Jesus Christ! Jesus is the only real need that we have to live a life of eternal blessing, peace, and joy. And yet, we pursue cars and homes, prestige and power, and all kinds of possessions. And in the process we neglect the importance of returning thanks to the giver of all good gifts for the only thing that really matters for eternity: the salvation he has freely given us through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been blessed by God in ways too many to number, and yet, we often feel just like the people in our text for today, don’t we? We too, want Jesus to give us one more thing; to give us one more demonstration of his power. It is almost as if they were viewing Jesus’ ministry among them as some sort of magic show. They weren’t satisfied with the things He had already done to demonstrate to them who He was and what it was that He had really come to do for them. They wanted yet another demonstration of his power. They demanded of him, **“What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?” (John 6:30)**. Are you kidding?!?! Didn’t Jesus just miraculously feed them the day before, and yet they still are demanding more miraculous signs?! Wasn’t it about time they believed in Jesus as the Savior God the Father Himself had sent? Wasn’t about time they started showing Him some gratitude?

Well, how about us? Do we find ourselves falling into an “entitlement mindset” with both the many material blessings God gives us, as well as the spiritual blessings He showers upon us? Do we always look to Him and view Him as our loving Savior and show our thanks and gratitude to Him for the many gifts He has already given to us—especially the gift of eternal life with Him in heaven which He gave us by giving up Himself on that cross?

Perhaps the problem is you aren't feeling too blessed this Thanksgiving. Maybe it's hard to see the gifts that God has given you. Maybe the pain of life has overwhelmed you to the point where right now you don't see—or can't see—how blessed you truly are.

Or maybe our problem is like so many people today: maybe you have been so blessed for so often, that even those blessings don't look all that good anymore.

How, then, can we overcome this "entitlement mindset" and our apathy towards God's gifts? How can we move towards a true spirit of thanksgiving in a society and culture full of un-thankful people that teaches us to always strive and compete for more "stuff" and "status"?

The answer is found in the One who is the Giver of all good gifts. Turn to Jesus! He can and will work in our hearts and minds a better recognition of and a better appreciation for His gifts. He can give us a heart like King David, who wrote in Psalm 103:

**Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
3 who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
4 who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
5 who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:2-5 NIV)**

"Forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2). May the Lord move our hearts to "not forget," but to remember and recognize **"all His benefits:"**

- ✠ To recognize God's blessing in all of their many forms and give thanks to Him even when it seems impossible to do so.
- ✠ To recognize the blessings you've come to take for granted (e.g., running, water, heat, electricity, a vehicle that runs, etc.)
- ✠ To focus on what we have rather than on what we don't have, and see if it doesn't improve our attitude.
- ✠ To be thankful for some of the things you normally wouldn't think of being thankful for.
For example:
 - Be thankful for the difficult times. God will use them to help you grow.
 - Be thankful for your limitations. God will use them as opportunities for your improvement.
 - Be thankful for your mistakes & failings. God will use them to teach you valuable lessons.

It's easy to be thankful for the good things and to be thankful in the good times. But being thankful even for the setbacks? That is an attitude that only God and His Holy Spirit can work in us. Remember: God has promised to work all things—even the "bad" things—out for your good (**Romans 8:28**). As hard as it may be, be thankful for your difficulties, because God can and does turn them into your blessings.

As we look around us at the land of plenty that we live in, may we see through new eyes each day the ways that God has blessed us and may we never take Jesus or those many blessings for granted. This year, as we celebrate Thanksgiving, may we each see Jesus for who he really is and see ourselves as who we really are: People who have been blessed beyond measure and people who should be thankful to the giver of all good gifts. We have been given **"the bread of life,"** Jesus Christ. We know this bread; we have partaken of Him by faith and have had our everlasting hunger filled. May we now be truly thankful to our God and Savior who deserves our thanksgiving for *everything!* Amen.