

I.N.I.

Thanksgiving Eve 2017
November 22, 2017
Deut. 16:13-15

In Christ Jesus, who is the reason for our contentment and the purpose for our Thanksgiving, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In 1789 President Washington issued a general proclamation naming Nov. 26th a day of national Thanksgiving. But it was not a national holiday. Some states had a yearly Thanksgiving holiday, others did not. In 1863 President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as “a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father.” For the next 75 years, the President of the United States formally proclaimed that Thanksgiving Day should be celebrated on the last Thursday of November. But in 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt set it one week earlier. He wanted to help businesses by lengthening the shopping period between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Then in 1941 Congress ruled that from that year on the fourth Thursday of November would be observed as Thanksgiving Day and would be a legal, federal holiday. This year, due to November beginning on a Wednesday, Thanksgiving is quite early.

So we in America, have a mandated, official, legal, government holiday of Thanksgiving on this one day. But God in the Old Testament declared not a day, but a week of thanksgiving for the Israelites. We read our text for this evening: **YOU SHALL OBSERVE THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES SEVEN DAYS, WHEN YOU HAVE GATHERED FROM YOUR THRESHING FLOOR AND FROM YOUR WINEPRESS: AND YOU SHALL REJOICE IN YOUR FEAST, YOU AND YOUR SON AND YOUR DAUGHTER, YOUR MALE SERVANT AND YOUR FEMALE SERVANT AND THE LEVITE, THE STRANGER AND THE FATHERLESS AND THE WIDOW, WHO ARE WITHIN YOUR GATES. SEVEN DAYS YOU SHALL KEEP A SACRED FEAST TO THE LORD YOUR GOD IN THE PLACE WHICH THE LORD CHOOSES, BECAUSE THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL BLESS YOU IN ALL YOUR PRODUCE AND IN ALL THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS, SO THAT YOU SURELY REJOICE.**

This Feast of Tabernacles was also called the Feast of Ingathering and the Feast of Booths. This last name helps describe this festival. From Lev. 23 we learn that all native-born Israelites were to go to a place where God directed them and to live in booths for seven days. Why? So that they would be reminded that the LORD had their ancestors live in booths when He brought them out of Egypt. So this Thanksgiving celebration of Booths was for a two-fold purpose. As the people thanked God for the completion of the summer harvest and for providing for them in a natural way, they could also thank God for preserving their ancestors through the wilderness in a supernatural, miraculous way.

Jewish guidelines called for the people to build booths or lean-tos. These booths must have at least three walls and a roof, constructed with tree branches, bushes, vines, cornstalks or any other plants that grew out of the ground. The booths were to be open enough that rain could drip in and the stars could be seen at night. Such an audio-visual reminder must have surely helped the later generations of Israelites appreciate how their ancestors lived as they traveled through the wilderness in tents and temporary shelters, especially if there was inclement weather during that week-long ceremony. They were pilgrims, wanderers, the desert was not their home. They were traveling through the wilderness on their way to the promised homeland in Canaan. These simple booths also were a testimony to the Lord's unfailing protection and care given to the people as they wandered with no permanent homes of wood or brick.

So also the declarations of past U.S. Presidents for a day of thanksgiving were to remind everyone in America of the first thanksgiving of the pilgrims. These first New England settlers called themselves pilgrims emphasizing the fact that even in this new land they were just traveling through life here on earth looking for their permanent home in heaven. On Thanksgiving Day we Americans are to remember and give thanks for past blessings that God has bestowed upon our land, upon our nation, upon our church, upon our families and upon us individually. We thank Him for the produce and the crops. Stores are filled with food of every kind and variety because of the

blessings of God.

We thank Him for His protection. Even though there were more threats of terrorist's attacks and mass murders on our homeland the Lord God continued to protect and care for the people of this nation. He has given us police, armed forces and governmental leaders to protect and guide us.

We thank God for the spread of His Word. Even in the face of hatred and opposition of the world the Gospel message is able to be preached unmolested by us in our worship services and is able to be proclaimed by you and me as we speak with neighbors and friends.

We thank God for our family and our individual blessings. The Lord has blessed us with an abundance of good things, again providing for all of our needs during this past year.

Living in these temporary lean-tos reminded the Israelites that their own situation here on earth was temporary, they too were pilgrims and that they, like their ancestors, needed God's gracious provision and protection daily. When we look at our life over the past year we are keenly aware of the fact that we too are but pilgrims and foreigners even in our own country, for our real home is in heaven and we need God's provision and protection on a daily basis as well.

Another reason for this Feast of Booths was to emphasize the need the Israelites had in their constant daily communion with the LORD. They needed to be found in the Word, the Old Testament Scriptures, hearing His promises and receiving the spiritual blessings of His grace and mercy. They needed to have the opportunity to publicly praise and thank Him for all that He had done for them. The annual harvest also reminded them of the final harvest of souls when the Lord would come and remove His own from this temporary shelter called earth to His eternal home.

So also our Thanksgiving worship should remind us of our constant and daily communion with God. We need His Word on a daily basis. We need to be found in His house of worship, not just on holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Easter, but every Sunday and in our other special services, for without God's Word our faith dies and our love for and our service to the Lord diminishes. We need to be reminded that we have a daily need to give thanks for the Lord's rich and abundant blessings. It is also very appropriate that our Thanksgiving falls at the end of the church year when our emphasis is also on the great and final harvest of souls when Jesus will come again and take with Him only those who with repentant hearts trust in Him as their Lord and Savior.

It is interesting that the Great Day of Atonement preceded this Feast of Booths. The Day of Atonement, also called Yom Kippur, was observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. The Feast of Booths was celebrated from the fifteenth to the twenty-second day of that month. On the Day of Atonement the people were somberly reminded of their sins and the awesome price of their forgiveness, the blood of the Lamb of God. Then five days later, the Israelites celebrated the joyous reminder of the Lord's great and loving care for them. This was done to demonstrate the sinner's need to be restored to the Lord through the Messiah before offering thanksgiving to Him.

So also only through Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that He has earned for us can we properly come before our Heavenly Father in thanksgiving and praise. Only after the Gospel works in your heart and mine do we truly realize how our great need of forgiveness has been filled by Christ and then have the desire to give thanks and praise our Triune God for all that He has done for us.

Each day the Feast of Booths began with sin-offerings. Seventy bullocks were offered during the week. Two rams and fourteen lambs were offered daily as a burnt offering and a male goat was offered daily as a sin offering. During the day the people sang songs of praise and thanksgiving. The people cut down branches of palm trees, willows and myrtles and tied them together with gold and silver ribbons. They took them into the synagogues and walked around the altar singing, "Hosanna!" which means "Save, we pray." Trumpets were sounded all around the temple. On the seventh day of the feast the people walked around the altar with their tied up branches seven times in remembrance of the fall of Jericho and God's miraculous deliverance. One of the most exciting and joyous times of the feast was when the priest on the eighth and last day drew some water out of the pool of Siloam in a golden vessel and brought it to the temple. At the time of the morning sacrifice he went up and poured this water mixed together with wine upon the altar. In later years the people would sing the words of Isaiah 12: **O LORD, I WILL PRAISE YOU; THOUGH YOU WERE ANGRY WITH ME, YOUR ANGER IS TURNED AWAY, AND YOU COMFORT ME, BEHOLD, GOD IS MY SALVATION, I WILL TRUST AND NOT BE AFRAID; FOR YAH, THE LORD, IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SONG; HE ALSO HAS BECOME MY SALVATION. THEREFORE WITH JOY YOU WILL DRAW WATER FROM THE**

WELLS OF SALVATION. AND IN THAT DAY YOU WILL SAY; PRAISE THE LORD CALL UPON HIS NAME; DECLARE HIS DEEDS AMONG THE PEOPLES, MAKE MENTION THAT HIS NAME IS EXALTED. SING TO THE LORD, FOR HE HAS DONE EXCELLENT THINGS; THIS IS KNOWN IN ALL THE EARTH. CRY OUT AND SHOUT, O INHABITANT OF ZION, FOR GREAT IS THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL IN YOUR MIDST!"

How joyous is our thanksgiving? We too begin every service, as we did this one tonight, by confessing our sins and receiving the assurance of God's forgiveness in Christ. Then we are truly ready and able to celebrate with joy and thanksgiving our God's goodness and mercy toward us.

We too thank and praise the Giver of all good gifts for our produce and food.

We too sing songs of praise as we bring our offerings of thanks before the Lord's altar, offerings of blessings given to us by God.

We too praise God the Father for sending His Son into this world to take our place.

We too rejoice in the announcement of full and free forgiveness alone through the sacrifice of Jesus, the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

We too rejoice in His resurrection back to life and the assurance of our own resurrection to everlasting life.

We too rejoice that we are but pilgrims headed for an eternal home of joy and peace.

May our Thanksgiving be filled with joy and praise to our Triune God who lives forever and ever and whose mercy endures forever and ever.

Amen.