

SERMON November 24 2019, Occasion: Thanksgiving Sunday:

“Celebrating Thanksgiving” By Pastor Ed Terry

Mark 10: 17 – 31; 1st Thessalonians 5: 16 – 24; Matthew 6: 25 – 34; Leviticus 23: 9 - 14 & 33 - 43(Sermon)

Today is the Sunday before Thanksgiving.

The United States is one of the few nations of the world that has a national day that is set aside to give thanks to Almighty God.

The reason is that the United States was established as a Christian nation and we as Christians have the most to be thankful for.

Thanksgiving in America began with the Pilgrims In New England.

Of the original 102 Pilgrims who sailed on the Mayflower only 46 survived the first winter.

The Pilgrims were so thankful for their first crop in 1621 and that they had survived that first winter that they celebrated with prayers and a feast that included 91 Native Americans who had helped the Pilgrims survive their first year in America.

In 1787 President George Washington proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving.

There is a copy of President Washington’s 1787 Proclamation in your bulletin.

As I read President Washington’s Proclamation I could only think that America needs to be reminded that all that we have is a gift from Almighty God.

Then in 1863 that President Lincoln declared the 4th Thursday in November as a national holiday in order for us to properly observe Thanksgiving.

But Thanksgiving goes all the way back to Old Testament times.

In our lesson from Leviticus 23 we read about The Festival of First Fruits and The Festival of Tabernacles.

I am sure some of you are wondering what in the world an ancient Jewish ritual about first fruits and tabernacles has to do with us today.

After all, we are not Jewish, we are not farmers, and this scripture was written thousands of years ago.

But in 1st Corinthians 10:11 we are told that the events in The Old Testament were written down as examples and warnings for us so that we would not make the same mistakes that The Children of Israel made.

So if we will meditate on this passage from Leviticus and if we will ask the Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes we will begin to see many applications for us today.

This morning I would like to begin that process of meditating on Leviticus 23 with you.

Please remember that each individual Israelite was commanded to bring the first fruits of their labor to The Lord God Almighty.

In an agricultural society the first fruits were the first picking of a crop.

Their first fruits were to be brought to God.

It was clear their offering was not to be given from or if anything was left over.

Each individual was to bring the first fruits of their harvest to acknowledge that it was God who caused their seeds to sprout and it was God who caused the plants to bear fruit.

Bring their first fruits acknowledged their dependence upon God and acknowledged that God is the giver of everything we have.

Bringing the first fruits also symbolized the consecration of their whole harvest to God.

The Israelites gave their first fruits to God because they trusted God to provide a bountiful main harvest.

Since most of us are not farmers our first fruits are the first part of every paycheck we get.

In verses 10 & 11 we read that each person was to bring a sheaf of grain to the priest and they were to ***“wave that sheaf before The Lord”***.

Waving a sheaf of grain before The Lord was a way of celebrating because God had provided a harvest and thanking God for their harvest.

It is crystal clear that bringing their first fruits to The Lord was an act of worship.

Therefore our thanksgiving offering today is to be brought to The Lord as an act of worship.

I trust that you noticed in verses 12 & 13 that in addition to the offering of first fruits every Israelite was to bring a burnt offering, a grain offering, a food offering, and a drink offering. That tells us that our annual thanksgiving offering is to be in addition to our tithe, in addition to our weekly Sunday offerings, and in addition to any other special offerings.

That also tells us that our thanksgiving offering is a sacrifice and our thanksgiving offering is to represent our gratitude for all The Lord has done for us in the past year.

Remember the word thanksgiving is a combination of two words; thanks and giving.

It is not thanksgiving unless both components are present. You see bringing God the first fruits of our labor is a matter of trusting God.

Every farmer has a choice to eat the seed or to plant the seed in the ground and trust God for the harvest.

In the same way you have a choice.

You can spend the first fruits of your pay check on yourself or you can choose to bring the first fruits of your paycheck to The Lord and trust The Lord to give you a bountiful harvest. Bringing God the first fruits of the harvest is to be a reminder of our total dependence upon God.

A farmer puts the seeds in the ground and he depends on God to provide the sunlight and the rain at the right time for the seed to grow and produce a crop.

The farmer invests all that he has and the farmer trusts God to provide a harvest.

Farmers are people of faith.

In the same way we demonstrate our faith in God when we invest the first fruits of our paycheck in The Lord's work and we are acknowledging that we are totally depending on God to provide for all of our needs.

When we invest the first fruits of our paycheck in The Lord's work we are acknowledging that God has given us the mental ability, the physical ability, and the opportunity to earn money.

These are three gifts from God and these three gifts can be taken away at any moment.

It is only by God's grace that we have any money, that we have any talents, and that we have time on this earth.

Verse 14 is a clear warning to us.

“You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God.” (Leviticus 23:14)

This was a command and was to be a lasting ordinance.

This means we should not spend any part of our paycheck until we have brought the first part of our pay check to The Lord.

1st Corinthians 16:2 is crystal clear; as Christians we are to set aside the first part of every paycheck each week as our offering to The Lord.

Please remember 1st Corinthians 16: 2 said every week.

1st Corinthians 16:2 does not say to only bring your offering on the Sundays you attend worship.

In Deuteronomy 26:11 we are told that the whole community of God's people was to rejoice with the person bringing their offering of first fruits.

So it is very appropriate that we are here today as a congregation to celebrate God's blessings and to give thanks to Almighty God for providing for us.

Also in our lesson from Leviticus 23 we read that The Festival of Tabernacles was much more than a prayer of thanksgiving.

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The Festival of Tabernacles lasted for seven days and it was to be observed each year at the end of the harvest season. *"after you gather your crops from the fields."* (Verse 39 & 41)

The Festival of First Fruits was celebrated at **the beginning** of the harvest season and The Festival of Tabernacles was celebrated at **the end** of the harvest season.

In verse 36 we read that The Israelites were to bring an offering on each of the seven days during The Festival of Tabernacles.

Again this stresses that our thanksgiving offering is to be a sacrifice.

The purpose of the Israelites living in temporary shelters during The Festival of Tabernacles was to remind The Children of Israel that after God freed them from slavery in Egypt they spent 40 years in the wilderness, where they had no land, no houses, and no crops. For 40 years God provided for all of their needs. During this 40 year period they were totally dependent upon God.

God knew that after they were comfortably settled in The Promised Land it would be easy for them to take their prosperity for granted.

So God instituted The Festival of Tabernacles to remind them of all that God had done for them.

Today it is easy for us to take our prosperity for granted, to think we earned our success and our paycheck, and to forget it is only by God's grace that we are what we are and we have what we have.

In Leviticus 23:35 we read that work was prohibited on the first day and the last day of The Festival of Tabernacles.

Meaning this festival is also to be an act of worship.

To us that means that we are to refrain from working on Thanksgiving Day.

Thanksgiving Day is to be set aside for worshipping The Lord and for thanking The Lord for all He has done for us.

Sadly today many people only see Thanksgiving as a day off from work, a day to stuff themselves with food and drinks; a day to go blind watching television, and / or a day to spend all their money at Black Friday sales.

Sadly these people have missed the point because Thanksgiving Day is a day set aside each year for everyone to remember what God has done for them, a day of worship, a day to give thanks to Almighty God, and a day to bring a special sacrificial offering to The Lord.

In verse 36 & 37 read that each day the Israelites were to bring an offering to The Lord; the burnt offering, grain offerings, sacrifices, and drink offerings were required each day of The Festival of Tabernacles.

And Verse 38 tells us that these offerings are to be in addition to their Sabbath Day offerings, their gifts, and all of their free will offerings.

Again these verses tell us that our Thanksgiving offering is to be a sacrificial offering.

Verses 39 & 40 tell us thanksgiving is to be a joyous celebration.

Remember first fruits and tabernacles were called festivals. The word festival speaks of a joyous celebration.

Verse 39 & 41 say; ***“Celebrate this as a festival to The Lord.”***

Giving thanks to The Lord is to be a joyful celebration.

That is why you are invited and encouraged to dance up as you bring your Thanksgiving Offering to The Lord this morning.

You see Thanksgiving is about acknowledging that God is the source of all that we have.

Thanksgiving is about worshipping God.

Thanksgiving is about showing our appreciation to God for all He has done for us.

Thanksgiving is about being a joyful person.

Thanksgiving is about showing our appreciation to The Lord no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in because without The Lord you will never be a joyful person, you will never be satisfied person, you will never be a fulfilled person.

The reason is because without The Lord you are an incomplete person!

Remember God created you in His image so you could have a personal relationship with our creator God.

The amount of our thanks and the frequency that we give thanks to The Lord each day is a true reflection of our relationship with The Lord!

Giving thanks to God should be a way of life for all of us; not just on the 4th Thursday of November but every day throughout the year.

The amount of our thanks and the frequency of the ways we show our appreciation to The Lord each day are a true reflection of our relationship with The Lord!

AMEN