

“Thanksgiving Training”

1 Chronicles 16:8-34 • 1 Thessalonians 5:1-25

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 18, 2018

This week we celebrate Thanksgiving and you know what that means. Eating. A lot. More so than any other holiday, Thanksgiving seems to be mostly about food. That’s why it’s often called “turkey day.” There’s turkey, dressing, green bean casserole, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, rolls, and then all those pies! Well now you’re all thinking about all the food over in Kleberg Hall. We better make this quick.

It’s estimated that the average American will consume over 4500 calories from their Thanksgiving meal. That’s twice as many calories as the average person should consume in an entire day. The result is that you end up feeling sick and you wish you hadn’t eaten that much. So this year I want to help you out. It occurred to me that the problem is that you’re just not prepared to eat that much. You’re not just magically able to eat that much at once. Just like athletics you have to *train* your body to eat like that.

I’m sure you’ve seen food eating contests where the goal is to eat as many hot dogs, or something else, in a short amount of time. The people who compete in those contests spend weeks training for them. As a result they can eat far more than they normally could. Here’s a great example that you may have seen in the news a couple of years ago. Up in Amarillo there’s a famous restaurant called the Big Texan. What has made the Big Texan famous is their offer that if you can eat a 72-ounce steak plus the baked potato and other sides in less than an hour it’s free. If you can’t it will set you back 72 bucks. A couple of years ago Molly Schuyler, who only weighs about 120 pounds, went to the Big Texan and ate not just one, not two, but three 72-ounce steaks with all the fixings in 20 minutes. Not only did she set a world record but she won \$5000 for doing it. How did she do it? She’s a professional competitive eater. She trained.

Here’s the thing. Thanksgiving is not really about food. It’s about, well, giving thanks. Specifically it’s about thanking God. And we don’t magically become thankful. We have to train. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Give thanks. Most of us, I suspect, are pretty good about saying thank you when we receive a gift or when someone does something for us. But then we forget to tell God thank you. We don’t realize how much He’s given us. And if things are going badly you may not even think there’s anything to be thankful for. But we are told to give thanks to God in ALL circumstances.

This morning’s Scripture readings give us two main reasons why we should give thanks to God in all circumstances. First, God *deserves* our thanks and praise because of who He is. 1 Chronicles says, “great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised.” Over and over in this passage, and throughout the whole Bible for that matter, we are told that God deserves our praise and thanksgiving because He is holy. Verse 29 says, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.” The Scots Confession puts it this way: “We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust. Who is eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By whom we confess and believe all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, to have been created, to be retained in their being, and to be ruled and guided by his inscrutable providence for such end as his eternal wisdom, goodness, and justice have appointed, and to the manifestation of his own glory.”

The second reason God deserves our thanks is because of what He’s done for us. Paul tells

the Thessalonian Christians, “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep (meaning whether we are living or have died) we might live with him. One day Jesus will return to earth as king and judge. The first part of our passage describes what that will be like for those who reject God. “While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” But in Christ we have the assurance of salvation. Colossians 1:13 says, “God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” And in 1 Chronicles King David tells us over and over to “remember.” We are to remember what God has done, remember the way He protected His people from people who wanted to destroy them, remember God’s covenant, which is forever.

So that’s *why* we should give God our thanks. But maybe more important is *how* we should give him thanks. That’s why I love these two Scripture passages. They are both full of practical ways we can thank God. King David says: Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. Sing to the LORD. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. That means you should think about God’s glory. Think about what God is like. Seek his presence. Tremble before him. Remember the wondrous works that he has done. Tell others what God has done. Bring an offering. That one is especially important. When you bring your offering you are making a tangible declaration of thanks to God. When you give to God it should be a significant sacrifice.

The Apostle Paul tells us some other ways we express our gratitude to God: Encourage one another. Build one another up. Be at peace among yourselves. Admonish the idle. Encourage those who are afraid. Help those who are weak. Notice that all of these involve your relationship with other Christians. Paul is

saying that thanksgiving to God is expressed in the way we get along with other people. This is why we say that the church is like a family. Our relationships with one another matter and the effort you and I put into these relationships is one of the ways we express thanksgiving to God. In 1 John 4 we’re reminded, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

Finally, we need to remember to thank God in ALL circumstances. We need to remember to thank God when things are going well. I think too often we get used to things going well and forget that it’s a gift from God. Perhaps we think, “things are going well because I made it happen. I did the right things. We forget to see how God is the one who arranged our circumstances and guided our steps.

We also need to remember to thank God even when things are not going well. This one’s hard. Whatever you’re going through remember that God is right there with you. He is carrying you through it and He understands the pain. Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Not only that but God is working to bring good out of whatever you’re going through. He loves you that much. And we can certainly thank God for that.

This Thanksgiving, go ahead and enjoy the turkey and everything else – in moderation. More importantly, use this holiday as the starting point of training to live a thankful life.

Amen.