

Godly Heritage



Thoughts for Thanksgiving (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our special theme of study and meditation for this week, "Thoughts for Thanksgiving." Today, of course, is actually celebrated across this nation as Thanksgiving Day, so our theme is particularly appropriate for today.

Each day this week I have been sharing with you some lesson from Scripture on the importance of thankfulness and thanksgiving. Then I've followed that up by a practical application to our situation in the United States at this time. Each day I've focused on some particular aspect of American life for which we need to thank God. The particular subjects which I chose as themes for Thanksgiving in my previous three talks this week were: religious liberty, gospel outreach and limitless opportunity.

Today, Thanksgiving Day, I feel that the most appropriate theme for Thanksgiving would be our Godly heritage.

Our minds go back today specifically to the Pilgrims. Rather than read direct from the Scriptures today, I'm going to quote from a book by William Bradford, the leader of the original Pilgrim settlement on this continent at Plymouth, Massachusetts. The title of his book is, Of Plymouth Plantation. It's an eyewitness account of the origins of the Pilgrims in England, their journey to this continent, and their hardships and struggles and ultimate triumph. As you will see, Bradford himself quotes frequently from the Scriptures.

Perhaps I should explain how I first became interested in the Pilgrims. I'll do this by reading a portion from my own book, Shaping History Through Payer and Fasting.

> "In 1970 and 1971, the city of Plymouth, Massachusetts celebrated the 350th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims at that point on the coast of America. A special committee was appointed by the city to organize various kinds of celebrations that were appropriate to the occasion. This committee paid me the honor of inviting me to give a series of addresses in the Church of the Pilgrimage in the city of Plymouth. During my visit to Plymouth, two members of the committee were kind enough to show me the main places of historical interest and also to introduce me to some of the original

records of the period of the Pilgrims. In this way I became acquainted, for the first time, with the book Of Plymouth Plantation by William Bradford. Having been educated in Britain, I do not recall ever having learned anything in school about the Pilgrims. The phrase 'Pilgrim Fathers' commonly used by Americans had created in my mind a vague impression of severe old men with long white beards, probably attired in dark formal clothing similar to that associated with ministers of religion. I was surprised to discover that the majority of the Pilgrims at the time of their arrival in America were still young men and women. For example, William Bradford was 31 years old in 1621 when he was first appointed governor of the colony. Most of the other Pilgrims were of about the same age or younger. As I studied Bradford's own firsthand account of the founding of Plymouth Colony and of its early struggles, I developed a strong sense of spiritual kinship with him and his fellow Pilgrims. I discovered that their whole way of life was based upon the systematic study and application of the Scripture. With the main conclusions and convictions to which this study led them, I found myself in complete accord."

For this reason, I feel that I need offer no apology from quoting from Bradford's book various passages that relate to the theme of our present study and, specifically, to Thanksgiving Day. Let me read a passage now from Bradford's book, describing the motives which caused the Pilgrims to set out on their history-making journey. In his fourth chapter, Bradford writes this:

> "Lastly (and which was not least), a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation [that's the Pilgrims]—some good foundation... for the propagating and advancing of the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work."

Looking back over more than three centuries of history, we have to say their motives and their desires were fulfilled. They became major instruments of God in promoting the kingdom of God throughout this world. And then, let's read briefly, the account that Bradford gives of the arrival of the Mayflower at Cape Cod, in chapter nine of his book.

> "What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not the children of these fathers rightly say: 'Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity.' [This is Bradford's own paraphrase of Deuteronomy 26:5, 7. He continues,] 'Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good: and His mercies endure forever. Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how He hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them. Let them confess before the Lord His lovingkindness and His wonderful works before the sons of men.'" [This is Bradford's own version of Psalm 107:1–5, 8.]

I think it's clear that the whole of their way of life and thinking was based directly on the Scriptures. Finally, in my extracts from his book, let me read to you the description of the saving of the harvest in the summer of 1623. In the summer of 1623, the Pilgrims' carefully planted crop of corn was threatened [now I'm quoting from Bradford]:

> "by a great drought which continued from the third week in May, till about the middle of July, without any rain and with great heat for the most part, insomuch the corn began to wither away... it began to languish sore, and some of the drier grounds were parched like withered hay... Upon which they [the Pilgrims] set apart a solemn day of humiliation to seek the Lord by humble and fervent prayer... And He was pleased to give them a gracious and speedy answer, both to their own and the Indians' amazement... For all the morning, and greatest part of the day, it was clear weather and very hot, and not a cloud or any sign of rain could be seen; yet toward evening it began to overcast, and shortly after to rain with such sweet and gentle showers as gave them cause of rejoicing and blessing God ..."

My comment then, normally if rain had fallen at all in such conditions, it would have been in the form of a thunder storm, which would have beaten down the corn and destroyed the last hope of a harvest. But on this occasion, Bradford goes on to relate:

> "It came without either wind or thunder or any violence, and by degrees in that abundance as that the earth was thoroughly… soaked therewith. Which did so apparently revive and quicken the decayed corn and other fruits, as was wonderful to see, and made the Indians astonished to behold. And afterwards the Lord sent them such seasonable showers, with interchange of fair warm weather as, through His blessing, caused a fruitful and liberal harvest… For which mercy, in time convenient, they also set apart a day of thanksgiving."

So, that's an account of the origin of this great nation. You see, it was founded by men of firm conviction in God and in the Scriptures. Of course, there have been many other influences and streams in this nation since that time, some good and some not good. But that original stream of faith and commitment to God is still flowing. I believe this radio ministry today is one of many, many channels today through which that stream is flowing. Therefore, today particularly, I want to thank God publicly for making this radio ministry possible. Will you join with me?

"Father, we thank you again today for our heritage, for our liberty, for the privilege we have of propagating this glorious truth of your Word. Accept our thanks, in the name of Jesus."

All right. Now, just to give you an idea of what this ministry is doing, I'm going to read some letters that I receive each week from listeners. Here's a letter from a new widow:

> "Today I heard your thoughts on how to face the death of a loved one. I just lost my husband of 43 years and have had a difficult time adjusting to the loneliness and the feeling of guilt. However, through programs like yours, I'm beginning to realize that I must not question the Lord's judgment."

And then from the state of Florida:

> "Your broadcasts this week have really blessed me. I'm a baby Christian and I've been trying to eat meat before drinking milk, and your book sounds like just what I need."

And finally, from a lady in Virginia:

> "This is a note of sincere thanks for the way that you teach and promote the Lord's Word. I was especially blessed by your talk on faithfulness. I used to be chronically late for work because I wasn't especially looking forward to the job. I was prompt for places that I wanted to be, though. Your talk on faithfulness in relation to being on time helped immensely. Now I have almost completely corrected this problem of tardiness."



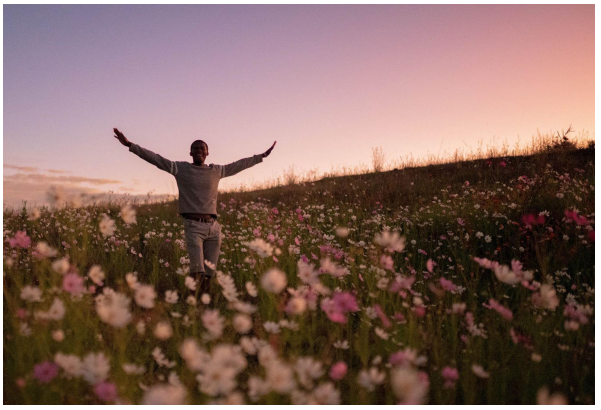
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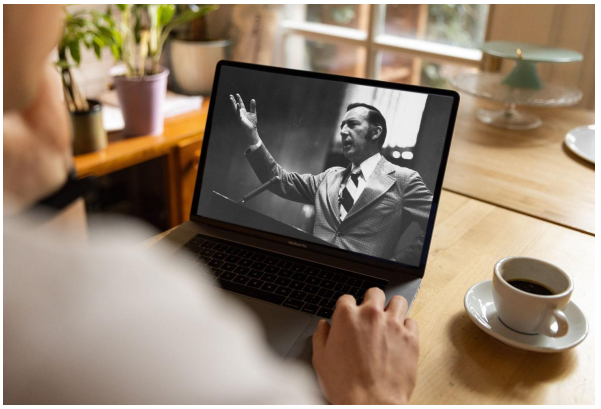
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