

Six Kernels of Thankfulness Psalm 103:1-18

Portions adapted from "Five Kernels of Corn," by Bruce Howell @ SermonCentral.Com

A little girl asked her mother, "Mommy, why do you cut the ends off the roast before you cook it?" The girl's mother told her that she thought it added to the flavor by allowing the meat to better absorb the spices, but perhaps she should ask her grandmother since she always did it that way.

So the little girl found her grandmother and asked, "Grandma, why do you and Mommy cut the ends off of the roast before you cook it?" Her grandmother thought a moment and answered, "I think it makes the meat more tender allowing it to soak up the juices better, but why don't you ask your Nana? After all, I learned from her, and she always did it that way."

Getting a little frustrated, the little girl climbed up in her great-grandmother's lap and asked, "Nana, why do you cut the ends off the roast before you cook it?" Nana answered, "I had to - my cooking pot was too small."

The Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock now almost 400 years ago knew nothing of the affluent times we enjoy. **They could never imagine** the availability of such modern technology, the abundant prosperity encompassing our entire nation and the awesome freedoms, resources, available to every citizen... **nor the current divisive spirit** and lack of gratitude that is apparently driving our country apart these days.

The next time you and I are tempted to complain about the state of our economy, or our politics, or our modern inconveniences (like traffic jams and long checkout lines) remember this story about the first years our Pilgrim forebears in this land:



After two months of such a stormy passage across the Atlantic that their companion ship had to turn back, the Mayflower reached the American coast 220 miles north of Virginia where the Pilgrims had intended land. The Ship's attempt to sail further south being thwarted by strong headwinds and dangerous shoals, the captain was forced to turn into a bay near present-day Provincetown Massachusetts, where the Pilgrims first made landfall on November 11, 1620. The following month, the beginning of December, the Pilgrims crossed Cape Cod Bay and began to construct their permanent settlement in Plymouth. 50 out of the 102 settlers died that first winter due to disease and exposure to the weather.

Their first crop in the Fall of 1621 was good but only provided half the provision they would need for the next winter. Then in November the shortage would be compounded by another ship arriving with 35 more settlers but no additional supplies, further reducing everyone's ration of food.

When the 1622 crop failed they were forced to beg for provisions from another settlement up the coast, and live on whatever they could barter with the Indians, or hunt, or gather by hand (ground nuts, shell fish). According to Governor Bradford, by the Summer of 1623 the colonists were living four to five days at a time on a few grains of corn. Thankfully the crop of 1623 was bountiful and that Fall two more ships arrived bringing 60 more settlers and plenty of provisions. After that the Plymouth colony thrived. But from 1620 to 1623 were thereafter remembered as “the starving times.”

I have shared a copy of their story with you today, hoping that we might all resume an old Thanksgiving tradition of sitting around the dinner table, retelling the story of the Pilgrim’s faith during “the starving times,” using five-kernels of corn to remind us of how much we have to be thankful for. Especially these days when our country at large seems to want to forget the Christian faith that originally brought so many of our parents to this land. And this coming season that wants you to be anything but thankful and content with what you have.

I am half surprised that we haven’t cancelled Thanksgiving as a national holiday; a day established by the Government for its citizens to be thankful ... to whom? For their part, the retail industry has just decided to ignore Thanksgiving. Have you noticed that “Black Friday” commercials have been running since the beginning of November? And how many Thanksgiving commercials have you seen? (I rest my case).

Being thankful and content with what we have is very contrary to the American dream as it is currently represented. But being thankful and content is one way that American Christians must be dramatically different from the crowd around us. As Rosaria Butterfield noted, *“living according to God’s standards is an acquired taste. We develop a taste for Godly living only by putting into place practices that equip us to live below our means ... in God’s economy what we love we will discipline... undisciplined taste will always lead to egregious sin – slowly and almost imperceptibly”* – but surely ([the Secrets of an Unlikely Convert](#), page 30).

For us, a surprising warning against today’s thankless, consumerist culture can be had from the ancient city of Sodom. **Did you know, according to the prophet Ezekiel, that the sins we traditionally associate with Sodom were actually at the bottom of the list of reasons for which God removed them?** Here is that list:

This was the guilt of your sister Sodom ...

1. **pride,**
2. **excess of food,**
3. **prosperous ease,**
4. **did not aid the poor.**
5. **haughty,**
6. **did abominable things**

Ezekiel 16:49-50

This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. Ezekiel 16:49-50

1. It is not surprising that **Pride** heads this list. It is at the base of most all other sins. *Proud people always feel they can live independently of God ... and do what they want when they want to* (ibid.).
2. Next is **undisciplined wealth**, (*excess of food*). They had a surplus of everything they needed, which, rather than putting to a generous use, instead they spent on their personal pleasures.
3. they developed an **entertainment driven lifestyle**. They lived in "*prosperous ease*," concerned only for their own well being and amusement.
4. And because of this **they lacked mercy**. While having an abundance of resources, nevertheless, they *did not aid the poor or needy*).
5. In their greed, **they lacked discretion and modesty** (*they were haughty, self-absorbed, unconcerned with other people's needs or opinions*)
6. And this lifestyle eventually brought them to **Sexual sin**, (*they committed abominations before God*).

I know this sounds like a strange theme for a Thanksgiving sermon, but think about this for a moment. This is exactly the "thanksgiving" message we – our nation – desperately needs to hear and be responding to today! **How many of Sodom's sins do you see reflected in our current culture!**

As Rosaria perceptively noted in coming out of her own lesbian lifestyle: *sexuality is more a symptom of our life's condition than a cause, more a consequence than an origin...* **God's warning [is that] if you indulge in sins of pride, wealth, entertainment-lust, lack of mercy, lack of discretion, you will find yourself deep in sins – and the type of sin may surprise you** (page 31, c.f. Romans 1:18-32).

More surprisingly as she also pointed out, both Ezekiel and Jesus declared that the sins being committed by those claiming to be God's people were, in God's opinion, worse than those committed by Sodom. **Because God is more greatly grieved by the sins of those who know him than by the sins of those who know him not** (page 32, c.f. Ezekiel 16:48-50, Matthey 11:23-24).

Thus we who now live in this proud unthankful culture desperately need to remember how blessed we truly are so that we might live a life that reflects our gratitude to God. We need some token to remind us to be humble, generous, self-disciplined, modest and moral; all characteristics that come from a consciously thankful heart.

Which is why I hope you will share the story of the "*The Starving Time*" around your Thanksgiving table and take the time to tell one another of those things for which you are thankful; and also why you might want to carry 5-6 kernels of corn around in your

pocket as a reminder of who you are and ought to be while traveling through this coming thankless "Thankmas" season.

What is it that we Christians specifically have to be thankful for? This question brings us to the 103rd Psalm where King David listed out six things that God had blessed him with for which he was thankful. As David said

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and **do not forget all his benefits**

Psalm 103:1-2

But also notice which blessings David gave highest priority to. These blessing that can be what our six kernels of corn remind us of.

1. He forgives all our iniquities
2. He heals all our diseases
3. He redeems our life from the Pit
4. He gives us His steadfast love
5. He satisfies us with good
6. He works justice for the oppressed

1. *God forgives all your iniquity*

Are you surprised that David, the original rags-to-riches hero who had everything he could want, listed FORGIVENESS as the first thing for which he was thankful?

Think about this reply to a modern truism: **he who dies with the most toys, still dies.** There is one thing that is way more valuable than anything else in your life, which is to be living in a relationship with God during and especially in your next life. When the rich young ruler chose his lifestyle over following Jesus, Jesus remarked that *it was easier for a camel to crawl through the eye of needle than for a rich person to be saved* (Luke 18:24-25). Because no amount of wealth can save any one of us, but it can blind us to our need for God in our life, especially our need to be forgiven by God.

As Jesus taught...

those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake ... will save it. For **what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?**

Mark 8:35-36

Our greatest need for both living now and for the life to come is to know that we have been forgiven. That is why these verses on vastness of God's forgiveness from Psalm 103 are some of the dearest to my heart.

God does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
(103:10-12)

How far is the east from the west? The answer is, that they never meet! That's what it means to live with God's forgiveness both in and guiding your life. Without forgiveness everything else in life is just vanity and in the end: despair.

To be forgiven is the promise of the Father and the provision of the Son, sealed and now being perfected within us by the work of the Holy Spirit. **Forgiven and forgiving is the lifestyle required of all who follow Christ.** How many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? – was Peter's question. "*seventy times seven*" was Jesus reply, in other words endless, for that is the measure by which we have both been forgiven and are now called to live just as we pray, *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*. Aren't you thankful that God forgives those who call upon Him for such and for that reason, don't you think you should be more forgiving.

2. *God heals all your diseases*

This verse gave me trouble for a while, because I couldn't reconcile it with the fact that God apparently doesn't heal everyone who has a chronic or incurable disease in this lifetime. Even though we still don't know all the various diseases – mental as well as physical – and the ways that God does heal us of them. Even so, we can still see two important truths contained in this promise.

a. First, all healing is divine healing. All recovery from sickness, injury and surgery is the result of the healing properties that God has built into our bodies. All our advances in medicine, surgery and therapy are merely extensions of God's healing ministry in our lives

b. This verse doesn't say that God heals everyone's diseases, but that He heals all diseases. Ultimately there is no disease or sickness that lies beyond His healing power—

not even what we call "incurable." God is the Great Physician. And He has promised that whatever disease may plague us in this life will all be gone in the next as *God Himself comes to dwell with us. We will be his people and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes; death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more* (Revelation 21:3-4). That is what our eternal life offers us, even if we must suffer for a little while in this one (c.f. 1 Peter 1:3-6).

3. "God redeems your life from the Pit..."

The London Times publishes the prices paid for art objects in all of the salesrooms of the world. If a painting is sold in New York or Paris or Rome or London, The Times gives the full details of the sale. You can judge the value someone has placed on that the painting by the price paid for it. We can also judge the value of our life by the price Jesus paid for us.

What if God did set a financial price on your eternal life and entry into heaven? How much do you think it would cost? How much would you pay? Well God did set an entrance price - a perfect life lived, or death - that is the only cost and the consequence of failure. But then God himself, as Jesus of Nazareth, lived that life and paid the price for the rest of us. Christ died in your place so you might live! Shouldn't you be very thankful that your hope of Heaven is not anchored in your good life or your wealth, but instead in Jesus Christ's completed payment?

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-11). As the old hymn says, "*Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; sin has left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.*" How have you lately shown your gratitude for having your life redeemed from the eternal pit.

But realize that Lord not only saves our souls from Hell, He also redeems our lives - right now - from the clutches of the devil. Satan is bent on damning our souls and destroying our lives. But thanks be to God who redeems our lives from Satan's grasp. All one has to do is take a look at our penitentiaries, sanitariums, hospitals, and half-way houses. They are filled with people whose lives are being destroyed by our enemy. As Jesus said, "*the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.*" (Matthew 7:13)

This is what we receive by grace from God right now: a sanctified life that supports and carries us safely through the world until we reach our eternal heavenly home. Should we not daily be expressing our gratitude for this. As Jesus said,

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| <p>in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!' John 16:33</p> |
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I am so very thankful that for this life and the next Christ has redeemed my life from the pit.

4. God crowns you with steadfast love and mercy ... Don't miss this next point. Not only does God save and sanctify our lives – keeping us out of the pit both now and for eternity. But also while we are here and I am sure when we are there as well, God relates to us, loves us, cares for us, and understands our weaknesses as only a parent can for their child – especially their struggling child – *not dealing with us according to our sins*, but continuing to extend His love and mercy.

Compared to what we will become, our life here is so short, so undisciplined, so feeble an attempt at everything; our loves, interests, commitments so transient. Only with a parents heart can God see what we will become beyond what we currently are. For His love and patience with me, I am in awe struck gratitude. As David said,

God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. ... For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, (Psalm 103: 9-17)

How else can I respond to such love but by crying out in gratitude, "Abba," God my Father.

Verse 5: God satisfies you with good as long as you live

There is an interesting prayer that comes out of the book of Proverbs:

give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God. Proverbs 30:8-9

Sufficiency and **contentment** – these are two basic Christian qualities that our consumerist culture has worked very hard to make unpopular. As the Apostle Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.

If we have food and clothing,
we will be content with these

1 Timothy 6:6-8

But those who want to be rich
fall into temptation and are trapped
by many senseless and harmful desires ...

**For the love of money
is a root of all kinds of evil**

1 Timothy 6:9-10

there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ☐ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, 1 Timothy 6:6-10

As the young couple were moving into their new home, one day they were greeted by their Amish neighbor. Then After a pleasant visit, his parting remarks were, *If you find yourself in need of anything, just ask me. And I will show you how to live without it.*

We think of the Amish, and the slightly less stringent Brethren families as strange in their choice of plain clothing and refusal to adapt all our modern conveniences. It's not that they eschew modern technology – they use such as they need for work in our world – but in their personal lives they intentionally strive to live out this Christian principle of Godliness and contentment, by insisting that all their members dress and possess the same. Yet if you think them a bit extreme, look at how our culture has fared without recognizing any such disciplines on our own desires.

A more literal understanding of the Lord's prayer is *give us this day the bread we need today*. It is a prayer for sufficiency, not abundance but enough, based on our reliance upon God's provision for every day of our daily life. As Jesus taught in his sermon on the mount, God our father, who wants to give us good things, knows our need for food, clothing, shelter, and He has promised that if we spend our desires and energies on living within and expanding His kingdom, then He will take care of all the other necessary stuff. **This is perhaps the most unclaimed Biblical promise – by Americans at least – we who having so much cannot imagine living with less;** in this we also share the rich young ruler's dilemma. I just do not see how daily life in these weedy overgrown fields of our abundance has not in some way crippled our spiritual life. The only antidote I know of is a daily attitude of gratitude and leading a disciplined life of focusing on generosity out of our sufficiency.

6. Finally there is verse 6, which is more of a warning to us than a blessing: *The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed*. Sodom was removed because in their wealth and self-absorption, they neglected the poor and needy. Israel was also

removed from the Promised land for similar reasons (c.f Isaiah 58:1-11). In multiple places throughout our Bible, God declares His utmost concern for widows, orphans, the poor, the needy, and the stranger: the last, the least, the lost. And God warns us, that though we may deny them justice now, it will not be forever. To those of us who have been given much, much more will be required. This is what Jesus' beatitudes are all about, not what you have or don't have, but your attitude about these things.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
those who mourn, the meek,
those who hunger for righteousness,
the merciful, the peacemakers,
They will be comforted and filled,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(List from Matthew 5:1-11)

What is our take home from all this?
Simple, compare these two lists:

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| 1. pride, | forgiven |
| 2. excess of food, | healed |
| 3. prosperous ease, | redeemed |
| 4. did not aid the poor. | loved |
| 5. haughty, | satisfied |
| 6. did abominable things | justified |

Which do you want on your plate this Thanksgiving?

As you sit down to your Thanksgiving meal this coming Thursday, may these six kernels remind you to thank God for all your blessings.