

America Needs to be Thankful

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The longest prayer recorded in the Scripture was offered by Solomon at the dedication of the temple.

And he stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands; for Solomon had made a bronze platform, of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the center of the court, and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven, and said, O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; who keepest covenant, and showest mercy unto thy servants, who walk before thee with all their hearts, thou who hast kept with thy servant David, my father, that which thou hast promised him, and hast spoken with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. Now therefore, O Lord God of Israel, keep with thy servant David, my father, that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel, if only thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me. Now then, O Lord God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou hast spoken unto thy servant, David. But will God really dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! Have respect, therefore, to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee, that thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place of which thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there, to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place. Hearken, therefore, unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people, Israel, which they shall make toward this place; hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive. If a man sin against his neighbor, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house, then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head, and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness. And if thy people, Israel, be defeated by the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house, then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people, Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers. When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee, yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them, then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people, Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance. If there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blight, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars, if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is, then whatever prayer or whatever supplication shall be made of any man, or of all thy people, Israel, when every one shall know his own plague and his own grief,

and shall spread forth his hands in this house, then hear thou from heaven, thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men), that they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, as long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. Moreover, concerning the foreigner, who is not of thy people, Israel, but is come from a far country for thine great name's sake, and thy mighty hand and thy outstretched arm; if they come and pray in this house, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calleth to thee for, that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people, Israel, and may know that this house, which I have built, is called by thy name. If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name, then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. If they sin against thee (for there is no man who sinneth not), and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near, yet if they take it to their hearts in the land where they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly; if they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people who have sinned against thee. Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attentive unto the prayer that is made in this place. Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength; let thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. O Lord God, turn not away the face of thine anointed; remember the mercies of David, thy servant. Now when Solomon had ceased praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshiped, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever. (2 Chronicles 6:12 – 7:3)

Perhaps no man on this earth ever had so much to be thankful for as Solomon did. That was true on the material plane and certainly in the spiritual realm as well. This man had things for which to be thankful that very few people up to his time had. Actually, the majority of the world's population, even up to this present hour, have not had what Solomon enjoyed.

Material Blessings

There is a word that's used (and probably abused) today, but it's a word that certainly is applicable to Solomon's reign; and that is, *fabulous*. The wealth of his kingdom was fabulous. It absolutely beggars description. Adjectives are inadequate. He was as rich as Croesus – or richer!

It's difficult for us to estimate the value and the luxury of his court and his kingdom. Scripture makes several suggestions in this particular connection. I'd like to turn to just a few of these intimations that let us know something of the material wealth of this man's kingdom.

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold....

If I knew how much a talent was, I could tell you how much came to him. We cannot know exactly, but, may I say to you, in my arithmetic it's a whole lot of money. It's unbelievable, no matter which way that you want to evaluate a talent.

...beside that which traders and merchants brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon. (2 Chronicles 9:13, 14)

Arabia, noted for its wealth, was among the kingdoms subject to Solomon, and they brought their wealth to him.

Will you notice verse 20:

And all the drinking vessels of King Solomon were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. None were of silver, which was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon.

Evidently he had a little camp, you know, sort of a little bungalow, a little hideaway in the forest of Lebanon, and the vessels there were all of solid gold. None were of silver. Silver was next to nothing in the days of Solomon. Gold was in such abundance that he made everything of gold. It was the metal that he had the most of.

But it doesn't end there. Notice verse 22:

And King Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.

That's enlightening, is it not?

And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 9:25)

Solomon would make Santa Anita Race Track here in Southern California look like a tenant farmer's barn in Georgia. This man had wealth in abundance. He could have bought out Rockefeller, Ford, and Paul Getty and still had some change left in his pocket. There was nothing, my beloved, in the material realm that he could not procure and secure if his little heart

wanted it. Money was no object to him. He never looked at the price tag of anything, and “economy” was not in the vocabulary of his kingdom at all.

And the king made silver in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the Shephelah [low plains] in abundance. (2 Chronicles 9:27)

These things that other people valued and considered as being precious and scarce were commonplace in the kingdom of Solomon. There has probably been no ruler that has ruled with such fabulous wealth as this man did.

Yet, my beloved, the average American has more things and “stuff” in the material realm to be thankful for than King Solomon had. We have more comforts today than he did; we have more devices, more gadgets, more buttons to push – things that are functional and utilitarian – than this man even dreamed of. Solomon never had air conditioning. He never had central heating. He never had electric cooking, nor did he have an electric blanket or a toaster.

It’s true that Solomon had iced drinks in the summer-time. But in order to have them, he had to send a crew to the top of Mt. Hermon, and they were busy all summer bringing down the ice and the snow in order that this man might have cool drinks. The average American can wander into the kitchen morning, noon or night, open a refrigerator, and have cool drinks.

Solomon had fresh meat all the time, but he couldn’t preserve it in the deep-freeze. He had to keep a retinue of servants who continually killed animals so that they might furnish his table with fresh meat. An army was kept busy bringing foodstuffs from all over the earth. A navy was kept busy bringing costly and delectable morsels from many Mediterranean ports for the taste of the most fastidious gourmet. This man ate well.

My beloved, we Americans can go today to the supermarket, push a cart down an aisle where the shelves are groaning under mountains of foodstuffs, and we can get anything in the world that we want – much of it brought from the four corners of the earth. It’s true that when we pay at the cash register, we’ll groan. But the foodstuffs are there, my beloved, in packages, in cellophane, canned, frozen, dried, any way. We have spices from India, fruits from Hawaii, coffee from South America, and fish from Scandinavia. The average American has more today to be thankful for than did Solomon.

Entertainment for Solomon was extravagant. But have you ever stopped to think of the difficulty he had in getting his entertainment?

For the king’s ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram; once every three years came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. (2 Chronicles 9:21)

Those apes and peacocks were for entertainment. Almost any American can click a button on the television and the world will go across his living room in parade, including advertisements for beer and sunglasses and deodorants. It’s true that Solomon didn’t have to look at the commercials. It’s also true he didn’t have a freeway to go on, but he never had a smog problem or a traffic problem either, because he had no car; he went by camel. There were no lovely motels where he could “rough it” along the highway, but he never saw a “no vacancy” sign that forced him to keep on traveling past his bedtime.

For the most part, Americans today live like kings. No person since Solomon has as much to be thankful for when it comes to material benefits as the average American. Yet there

has been no one on top side of this earth who has been as unhappy and dissatisfied as the average American. He's tormented today and goaded to get more. He's frustrated in his efforts to try to get for himself every material thing and "to keep up with the Joneses." Subjected to subliminal commercials and to wholesale tranquilization, he finds life senseless and meaningless today. He's taking "happy" pills by the millions because he's unhappy and dissatisfied with everything that the world has to offer.

But did you know that Solomon was also unhappy? Solomon never found any satisfaction in the material things of this life. He lets us in on that. That's the reason he wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes, to let us know that the one man who had access to everything material never found happiness in those things. Notice one or two things that he said about it.

And whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11)

Solomon said, "I never found fulfillment in these things that I gave myself to, I never found a satisfaction."

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance, with increase; this is also vanity. (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

The word *vanity* means "empty." These things were just empty. They were like bubbles that looked so colorful and attractive but were really just made out of air. Solomon said, "I found that I was out chasing bubbles, and they all burst in my hand, empty. All is vanity."

My beloved, the Pilgrims who started this matter of having a special Thanksgiving Day had very little to be thankful for. When Governor Bradford set aside that first Thanksgiving Day in 1621, he said it was just a day on which to give a special thanks for all the mercies they'd experienced. And then he went on to say that the peas had not been worth gathering "for so we feared they were too late sown." All that they had to eat was barley and Indian corn. Yet they thought that was enough to warrant a special day of thanksgiving. If you think they had a table like your Thanksgiving table, you're dead wrong. They had very little, but they were thankful to God for that which had been given to them.

Benjamin Franklin said that there was once delivered to his home a barrel of pork, and he found that his dad every morning would return thanks for the amount they were eating that day. He made a suggestion, saying, "Why don't we just go out to the barrel of pork and thank the Lord for all of it, and have it done right now, and not have to say thanks every morning?" But there came a time in Franklin's life when he put up in his office this motto:

Some persons grumble because God placed thorns among roses. Why not thank God because He placed roses among thorns?

He found that you had to be, and needed to be, grateful to God. It was what Milton called a "besetting sin," this matter of being ungrateful and not being thankful to God for those things that He gives us. We today have so many material things, but are we thankful for them?

Spiritual Blessings

Will you notice that Solomon had spiritual blessings for which he was thankful. And today also we have untold spiritual blessings that we should thank God for.

And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honor, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king, wisdom and knowledge are granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like. (2 Chronicles 1:11, 12)

Solomon was to be unique, not only in material things but also in wisdom. I'm perfectly willing to grant that the wisdom God gave him was primarily a human wisdom.

And he spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five.
(1 Kings 4:32)

Although he spoke three thousand proverbs, we have only about one thousand of them. He wrote a profusion of songs – “His songs were a thousand and five.” But we have only one of them.

And he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fish. (1 Kings 4:33)

Solomon was an authority on many different subjects. He spoke of trees (he was a dendrologist), from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to hyssop that springs out of the wall. He spoke also of animals (he was a biologist), of birds (he was an ornithologist), of creeping things (he was a bug-ologist), and of fish (he was a pisca-tologist).

And there came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. (1 Kings 4:34)

Although it was a human wisdom that he had, may I say that he also was given a spiritual discernment that you find in the Book of Proverbs where he repeats this or a similar statement again and again, for it's the primary lesson of life:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....

He stresses that axiom over and over. He says it to the adolescent being prepared to leave home; he says it to the young man entering school; he says it to the mature man involved in business; he says it to the old man in the sunset of life: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

I wish I could say today that the average American is endowed with this same kind of spiritual discernment, but I'm afraid I can't say it. This Thanksgiving season has a hollow sound. It's a sort of mockery. In fact, it's a form of hypocrisy in America today.

Have you noticed in recent years how quickly we are bypassing Thanksgiving to get to Christmas? You see, the cash registers ring more often at Christmastime than they do at Thanksgiving time, so most are just overlooking Thanksgiving today. After all, they have no one to thank. They accomplished all this themselves, and America is not recognizing God. Instead, this nation is becoming a godless nation.

Now, my beloved, this just doesn't happen to be the estimation of a preacher. One of the most worldly writers of my day, Ben Hecht, in an article entitled "A New God Is Needed for this Space Age," wrote about "the petering-out of Christianity" over the past fifty years. He said, "Religion today is a touchy subject, not because people believe deeply and are ready to defend such belief with emotion, but because they do not want to hear it discussed." In his opinion, religion seems to be swiftly disappearing. This comes from a man who is definitely an agnostic and who is antagonistic to the church. He says, as he looks at it, that America does not have anyone to thank today!

Our language is no longer filled with sound words. No longer do you hear men thanking and praising God. Instead, you hear men asking God to damn everything in sight. Profanity fills the air. We are not a thankful nation; we're a greedy and grasping nation. We are not a nation filled with goodwill, but a nation filled with ill will. One section is set against another section, one party against another party. Immorality runs rampant in America today. Oh, the little church around the corner is as lively as a Mexican jumping bean on Sunday morning at eleven o'clock, but it will be dark the rest of the week, and nothing significant will take place there.

We have a great history as a great nation. America is a nation that came nearer to being Christian than any other nation, a nation that even in its Constitution has vouchsafed that freedom to worship God. America is a nation where Protestantism, though born in Europe, flourished. It gave us the church and the school, which were at one time put side by side.

Do you know the reason education was brought to America? It was brought here by the Protestant church to teach the common people how to read the Bible! You'll discover this when you read what the early founders of this country said when they established the schools. But now you can't get the Bible into the schools of most states.

May I say that our so-called Judeo-Christian heritage produced an enlightened and civilized and Christian citizenry – to a certain extent. Oh, I know we've had our imperfections, and it's easy for the critic to censure America, but during those early days a real foundation was put down.

You and I today are skidding on that foundation. Everything that we have come to us through these men and women who believed mightily in God and came to this country for that reason.

Right now education is used to train minds to make missiles capable of destroying civilization. I believe if we would make a careful examination of this earth and look at little man, we'd agree with Paul, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). Instead of being a wise nation today, we have become the most foolish people on topside the earth, spending billions to destroy people. God have mercy on this nation that thinks it's so smart today! If you could look at us from God's vantage point, I'm convinced you would suggest that we have become insane.

Solomon's Prayer

Let's look at two or three things out of a wise man's thanksgiving prayer.

For Solomon had made a bronze platform, of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the center of the court, and upon it he stood....

Notice, first of all, the statement, “For Solomon had made a bronze platform....” That bronze platform, by the way, was a basin that acted as a laver. That laver speaks of the cleansing of sin, and that’s where we need to stand today, at the place where God cleanses sin.

...and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven. (2 Chronicles 6:13)

Here is a posture of prayer that’s given to us. Solomon got down on his knees before God. It was a prayer primarily of confession, and then he recognized God:

...O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; who keepest covenant, and showest mercy unto thy servants, who walk before thee with all their hearts. (2 Chronicles 6:14)

How we need a recognition of God in America today – in politics, in business and in every walk and department of life. America not only needs a recognition of God, but people also need to learn to praise Him instead of asking Him to damn everything and everyone. We need to utter thanksgiving to Him.

Did you notice something else for which Solomon was thankful? It’s “mercy unto thy servants.” My beloved, it’s mercy that America needs. It’s mercy that the church needs today, and it’s mercy that the individual needs. God alone is prepared to extend mercy to us. Notice the way Solomon saw that God could extend mercy:

Thou who hast kept with thy servant David, my father, that which thou hast promised him, and hast spoken with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. (2 Chronicles 6:15)

The thing Solomon recognized was that God had shown mercy to him and his people, that God had blessed them in such a wonderful way – not because of who they were, but because of another. That other was David. He says, “It’s because of David, my father, that You blessed us!”

My beloved, today God is prepared to bless us and extend mercy to us, not because of who we are, not because of what we’ve done, but because of Another. In fact, that’s the only way God can extend mercy to us. God has handed in His decision concerning us, and His decision is going to stand – not the popular thing of the moment. You see, people down through the ages have had their viewpoints, and those postulations always pass away. But this viewpoint is the one that shall abide. God says,

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

God says that America today is a nation that has come short of His glory; this country has not measured up. And God says to you and me as individuals that we have come short of His glory, that we’re sinners today.

But God doesn't leave it that way. He also says, "Being justified freely...." In other words, "I'm prepared to make you right before Me without a cause; that is, I won't find any explanation in you because there's nothing in you that will cause Me to make you right with Me. You have no goodness before Me. You have no righteousness before Me. You have nothing that can stand the acid test of heaven. You have no works, nothing with which to pay that's considered legal tender in heaven."

Because of that, God says salvation is by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. (Romans 3:25)

Propitiation is a big word, but all it means is "mercy seat." God has set forth the Lord Jesus Christ to be a mercy seat. Today there is a mercy seat for any person to approach through faith. There is a place like Solomon's laver, a place where God deals with sin and sinners. There is a place for any man, woman or child to come.

The interesting thing is, you will have to come there if you come to God. He hasn't any back door. He hasn't any side entrance. God has only one way by which He's being approached, and that is the mercy seat that He has established by the death of His Son on the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins, and that makes it possible for lost sinners to find mercy with God.

You see, God isn't just big-hearted. He isn't just a big sob-sister. His love doesn't "slop over" on the side. God is holy and God is righteous. When He saves sinners, He doesn't slip them in the back door; He doesn't let down the bars of heaven. God can bring sinners into heaven openly because He made a mercy seat! He says this is the way you and I can come to Him, and this is the only way we can come. We have access to God, not through a church, not through an organization, not through a ceremony, but we come to God through Christ, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation," a mercy seat.

The only way we can come is by faith. We can't pay for it. We can't work for it. We can't earn it. We can't offer ourselves. A sinner gets God's mercy as a gift, by faith. And when we come to Him through faith, then we begin to recognize all there is to be thankful for. Then we can join Solomon in his prayer of thanksgiving, and then we can say with Israel that the Lord "is good; for his mercy endureth forever" (2 Chronicles 7:3).