

Rejoice? Always!      Philippians 4:1-9      Thanksgiving Eve, 2009

### Thanksgiving Trivia Power Points

I doubt that very many Turkey's are thankful today, except for the turkey that received the Presidential Pardon and it on the way to Disney. So what makes "Thanksgiving" Thanksgiving? That may be a very good question for us to ask ourselves tonight as we gather on the Eve of Thanksgiving Day. What kind of "Thanksgiving" will this be? I know a lot of people are glad to have the holiday, but are we really thankful? What do we have to have for a great Thanksgiving? Think out it as you watch this:

Play "Would it Be Thanksgiving" by Bluefish TV

They didn't play football at the first Thanksgiving. But we do know that the men arm-wrestled, had footraces and even held a little shooting competition. They didn't get ready to go shopping the next day because their Thanksgiving celebration lasted for three days. (Talk about being lucky!) They probably didn't have turkey leftovers to deal with. They may not have even had turkey at all since the wild fowl they shoot could have been geese instead of turkey. They certainly didn't have as many family members around as they would have liked. Not only had they made the long voyage across the Atlantic a year before, but they had also lost 46 people to illness since landing.

But still they celebrated thanksgiving. Why? God had blessed them with a good harvest and they wanted to give him thanks. They may have had a tradition of giving thanks from their days in Europe. But I think there was more to it than just that. The Pilgrims were people of faith who came to the "New World" search for religious freedom. They knew that the root of thanksgiving wasn't happiness. Happiness is temporary, influenced by the circumstances of life.

The root of thanksgiving is joy, the joy that comes from the Lord. One of the best ways of expressing that joy is by giving Thanks and Praise to God. That is what the Pilgrims were doing that first Thanksgiving. And that is why we can give Thanks to God today. We can rejoice even in the tough times of life because our joy is in the Lord. It is easy to get caught wrapped up in the difficulties of life. I don't need to go into the tough things that we've been facing this year, we all know what they are.

But we are not the first people to face tough times. The Prophet Habakkuk wrote about how tough life could be for the people of his day. But he also wrote about how to face tough times.

***"Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the***

***God of my salvation!***” (Habakkuk 3:17-18 NLT) The Joy that we have in the Lord is not influenced by the circumstances of life because it is God’s gift, it is the Good News that God Saves us, Restores us to His family, and Makes us His own.

The Apostle Paul, who wrote to the Philippians from prison, knew that. Paul had been thrown in jail for preaching the Gospel. He knew that if the verdict came back the wrong way, he could even lose his life. But that did not put a dent in Paul’s joy. Paul wrote, ***“Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!”*** (Philippians 4:4 NLT) Paul knew that He could count on the Lord, that the Lord always keeps His promises. Paul knew that every good gift comes from God. We can count on God, too, because He has given us the perfect gift of His Son.

When we have a foundation in the Lord, then the circumstances of life can’t take away our joy. Paul tells us, ***“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.”*** (Philippians 4:6 NLT) Thank God for all that He has done. If we were to take the time to do that, we would be amazed at all the good things God has done and continues to do in our lives. I’m not saying that God will make everything easy for us. I’m not saying that God is going to give us everything that we want or ask for. But I am saying that God has done the impossible for us. He forgives us and gives us a new life in Christ. He has given us the one thing that we need the most, His love.

God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus are the key to life. An amazing thing happens to us when we rejoice in the Lord and give Him our thanks. Paul’s letter continues with these words, ***“Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”*** (Phil 4:7 NLT) God’s peace can and will guard, protect our hearts. God’s peace can protect us from fear and anxiety. Then we can face life’s challenges with God’s help.

There is one more key to rejoicing in the Lord and giving Him thanks. That is to focus on the good things in life, the good things that He gives. Paul tells us, ***“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”*** (Phil. 4:8 NLT) If we spent more time thinking about the good than worrying about the bad, if we filled our lives with good and positive things rather than evil and negative, we would be so much better off. We would have thankful hearts, that rejoice in the Lord and know the Peace that only He can give.

It’s Thanksgiving. So give thanks to the Lord for His goodness and love that last forever. Don’t worry about the Lion’s game tomorrow, or shopping on Friday, or family members who are far away. Give thanks to the Lord with a joyful heart because He is the source of everything that we have to be Thankful for. Rejoice? Always in the Lord! Amen. Happy Thanksgiving!