

Thoughts & Themes for a Thanksgiving Talk  
Mitchellville, MD, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Part 1: The Easy Part

- A. It is easy to be thankful when we get what we want!
1. In our lesson the Lord promised to give the people what they wanted...
    - to make them great
    - to conquer their enemies
    - plenty of goods: children, cattle, crops, rain as needed, etc.
  2. All they had to do was obey the Lord – “diligently obey” and “carefully observe” His commandments.
  3. And sure enough, when they did this they were blessed....
  4. And then, of course, they were thankful – at least for awhile.
  5. So in our lives if/when we do the right things WE can be blessed, eg: -
    - good grades if we work hard in school
    - good skills if we practice what we are trying to learn
    - good times with other people if we’re nice to them, etc.
- B. Examples of all the good things here on the chancel – just samples of much, much more.
- C. We may not always get just what we want, but we’ll get good things, and it will be easy to be thankful for these things; we just need to remember to do so, which is one reason we have this special day of the year, THANKSGIVING DAY.... a day to remind ourselves that ALL GOOD THINGS COME FROM THE LORD and not from ourselves or from others without HIS help.

Part 2: The Hard Part

- A. The lesson we read about Joseph and his brothers may seem unusual for Thanksgiving, but it makes a VERY IMPORTANT POINT about the way the Lord provides for us, namely, that He does not always give us what we want, and *sometimes He lets bad things happen to us – so that we can learn and get something much better in the long run.*
1. In the story Joseph reminded his brothers about how they had mistreated him, and he never said that was OK – because it’s never OK to be mean to our brothers – but he said that God used their meanness to make something very good happen.
  2. He was able to do this because JOSEPH continued to be a good person, to trust the Lord, to have a positive attitude, and to do what was right even though he had been a slave in Egypt. (He helped the butler and the baker... He refused to misbehave with Potiphar’s wife... He even offered to help the Pharaoh himself.)

3. So he told the brothers not to be angry with themselves (or afraid of him, now that he had power over them). The Lord had used their evil to make something GOOD happen, namely the storing up of grain for use in the great famine.... And for THAT they could be THANKFUL - esp. since the famine was going to continue for another FIVE YEARS.
4. So the Lord also can bring something good out of every bad thing that happens to US, if we will only remember not to give up, but to continue to do the right things: - to keep His commandments, to stay positive, to help one another, and, yes, to be THANKFUL for everything that happens to us, knowing that the Lord CAN turn it to good even if it isn't good to start with.

B. Let's think of some **examples**: –

1. Let's say you fall and hurt yourself. What good can come out of that? (Ideas?)
  - teaches you to be more careful next time?
  - makes you take time off, rest, read, think, etc...?
  - helps you understand & be more helpful to other people who get hurt
2. Let's say someone you love dies.
  - maybe that person will be happier in heaven?
  - maybe that person can be more useful in heaven - to more people?
  - remember, the whole purpose of life is to prepare for heaven!
3. But let's say you are the victim of some terrible crime, or an international war.
  - First of all, no matter how bad it is you have to remember that the Lord has given all of us a certain amount of freedom to make bad or good decisions. This is VERY IMPORTANT... and it not only means that we have the ability to do bad things; we also have the DUTY to see bad things coming and to try to stop them. Most wars and crimes could be prevented if we were all more careful and willing to take action....
  - In any case when bad things happen you can see the harm that selfishness and evil do... and seeing that, you can learn not to be that way yourself.
  - And even if you are a victim you still have a choice: you can be miserable or you can make adjustments in your life and learn how to do things differently. It may sound silly but it's really useful to remember that if someone gives you lemons, you can still add sugar and make lemonade!

C. The purpose of all the troubles we have is to inspire and strengthen us to be better people, and for that we should be thankful, no matter what. But how does this work?

1. Well, when bad things happen to us we naturally get upset, esp. if we can't have or do the things we are used to. But after a while, when we think about it, we may realize that the things we used to have or do are not really the most important things anyway. We can get along without them. In fact, the most important things are the way we think and the way we feel – because these make our minds or spirits, and only our minds or spirits live forever, not our bodies.

2. Another way bad things can be used to make us better people is by making us stronger. You see, when we have problems – no matter what kind they are – we have choices: we can either GIVE UP or we can TRY HARDER in spite of that problem. If we try harder we get stronger, and more determined, and then if we continue to have problems we are prepared, and we can not only help ourselves but we can help OTHER PEOPLE, too.
  3. One more way the Lord can use bad things to make us better people is by letting us experience the consequences of our own bad decisions. After all, we may not always know our decision are going to be bad, but when we see the consequences then we can learn to do better. And we can certainly thank the Lord for THAT.
- D. THIS Thanksgiving let's practice being thankful for everything the Lord not only gives us but allows to happen in our lives. We're NOT saying that everything that happens is good! MANY things that happen are really, really bad, and hurtful, and sad. But the point is that if we are willing and stay positive – like Joseph in Egypt – the Lord can USE even the bad things for something good.
1. He can use bad experiences to help us learn better, more heavenly things.
  2. He can use bad experiences to help us become stronger and more useful to others.
  3. He can use bad experiences to help us learn how to be better people.
- E. So we have the words of the recitation the children in school here learned last week, and that reminds us of the Lord's care and providence in ALL things, whether good or bad: –
- 1 Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
  - 2 Serve the LORD with gladness;  
Come before His presence with singing.
  - 3 Know that the LORD, He is God;  
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;  
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
  - 4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,  
And into His courts with praise.  
Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.
  - 5 For the LORD is good;  
His mercy is everlasting,  
And His truth endures to all generations.
- ~ Psalm 100.