

Good morning! Let's pray.

The scripture I'll be preaching from this morning is Hebrews 13:5&6 if you want to open your bibles in preparation.

I want to thank you dear brothers and sisters for prioritizing corporate worship on what has become a very busy holiday. No doubt it is heavy on the minds of each homekeeper present with us that much remains to be done in preparation for the meal ahead. Your presence here this morning says that you have not lost the sense of why Thanksgiving is a national holiday.

Our culture leads people to forget, twist, or pervert the true meaning and purpose of the holidays that we celebrate. Take Easter, for example. The day we set aside to celebrate the resurrection of our Savior has been turned into a day of candy, of rabbits, and of eggs. Or Christmas, the day we celebrate the greatest gift - the incarnation of our Savior - has become a day of extreme commercialism. Children across our country may not even understand the birth of our Savior, when you mention Christmas - their minds go immediately to presents.

Thanksgiving is no different. What we are charged to do on this day is in the name, but I do not believe most American families truly understand what this day is for. Ironically, It has become a day of extreme burden. Our culture sees Thanksgiving as a day full of meal preparation and purposeful overindulgence. It's as if our culture cannot be thankful for something unless it is way over the top. Is this what Thanksgiving was intended to be?

In the midst of the Civil War, on October 3rd 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation inaugurating the celebration of Thanksgiving as an annual holiday. I would like to read his proclamation for you all. I considered only including portions of it due to its length, but I could not find any appropriate parts to leave out. Here it is:

October 3, 1863

By the President of the United States

A Proclamation

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and provoke their aggressions, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict; while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for

such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Much has been written about Abraham Lincoln's faith - both that it was genuine and that it was not - but it can't be denied that every word of this proclamation is consistent with scripture. I trust that as I read, your minds compared his day to ours and found many similar things to praise God for.

Today is intended to be a day of Thanksgiving and Praise. A day to recognize that all of the blessings we enjoy come from our Father's hand. A day to celebrate His mercy and tender care for us.

The reason I selected Hebrews 13:5&6 to preach on this morning is because in these verses we see the greatest threat to our thankfulness. Look with me.

5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we may boldly say:

**"The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?"**

Some of your translations may render "covetousness" as "the love of money". The message is the same either way. The reason men are prone to love money is because with it they can purchase the desires of their heart.

The title of the message this morning is *Covetousness Kills Thanksgiving*.

This brings me to Lesson 1 on your bulletins:

The covetous man:

Lesson 1: focuses on what he wants, not on what he has.

Verse 5 says, **“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.”** By definition a covetous man is discontent with such things as he has. His attention is on what he craves, not on what God has provided. Actually that’s not quite right, there IS an amount of attention paid to what he has, but it's negative. Covetousness causes us to look at what we have with derision.

Contentment and thankfulness, on the other hand, spring from a reflection on God’s goodness toward us. More than that though, there is also an element to thankfulness that recognizes we aren’t worthy of receiving God’s goodness. It can’t be presumed upon. For this reason, the prayer of a thankful person can sound as if they are accusing themselves before God.

They might say to God:

- “I don’t deserve all that You have provided.”
- “I am a sinner, I don’t understand Your loving kindness toward me.”
- “Why do you keep blessing me even when I continue to let you down?”

Covetousness kills our ability to give thanks because it turns the accusation in the other direction.

Have you ever considered that discontentment is an accusation against God? It is. Now these accusations may go unspoken, but they are very real nonetheless. Let me give them a voice.

- Discontentment accuses God of being a bad provider.
 - It says, “I must have this and You haven't given it to me.”
- Discontentment accuses God of being unloving.

- It says, “God if you really loved me, you would give me this.”
- Discontentment accuses God of bad judgment.
 - It says, “God, I deserve this.”
- Discontentment accuses God of giving bad gifts.
 - It says, “God what you’ve given me isn’t satisfying.”

Do you see how covetousness drives a wedge of animosity between God and man?

One incredible illustration of this occurred with the Israelites in the wilderness. Numbers 11:4-6 says:

4 Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; (Gave themselves over to covetousness) so the children of Israel also wept again (They grew discontent) and said: “Who will give us meat to eat? (God is a bad provider) 5 We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; (God is unloving for bringing us here, we deserve better) 6 but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!” (God’s provision isn’t satisfying.)

Just because the food we eat doesn’t come down from heaven like manna, does not make it any less from the Father’s hands. The same can be said for all that we have.

Matthew 6:25&26 says:

25 “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

Our clothing, our homes, our income - all of it is a gracious gift that deserves our sincere gratitude.

That covetousness can kill our thankfulness for physical blessings is terrible enough, but it gets MUCH worse.

Look at the end of verse 5. **“For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”** That word “for” is so critical. Why is it there? It points back to what was just said. The reason we must keep our lives free from covetousness and discontentment is this: the weight of blessing that has already been supplied by God renders all earthly treasures as meaningless by comparison.

This brings me to Lesson 2 on your bulletins.

The covetous man:

Lesson 2: Demands physical blessings and disdains spiritual blessings.

How many parents here have given their small children a gift in a large box? What happens? They often turn away from the gift in favor of playing with the box, don't they? If you're anything like me, you probably don't get too worked up about that. It's kind of cute, but only because they don't know how to properly value the gift. The box appears to have a greater value to them.

Ok, but let's change the story a little. Imagine a young man proposing to a young woman. He gets down on bended knee and dramatically opens the lid of a box containing a beautiful wedding ring. Imagine now the young woman with tears in her eyes, joyfully taking the box in her hands, but casually discarding the ring to the ground....

What's the difference between the two illustrations? The woman is much different than a child, she should know how to properly value such a gift.

As absurd as that illustration is, it doesn't hold a candle to what man is capable of when it comes to disdaining God's greatest gift to us.

Just as covetousness kills our thankfulness for physical blessings, it also kills our thankfulness for spiritual blessings. We have God's promise that He will never

leave us or forsake us, but we depart from HIM, we forsake HIM, when we become captivated by some earthly thing.

Man's greatest need - his greatest deficiency and shortcoming has nothing to do with what he may lack physically; it has everything to do with his spiritual condition. It's his spiritual poverty that threatens him most.

- He is burdened - Crushed under a heavy load of sin that he cannot remove.
- He is condemned - Every passing moment brings him closer to the day when God will pour out His stored up wrath upon him.
- He is lost - Not merely separated, not merely alienated, but he is the enemy of God.
- He is unholy, unworthy, unrighteous, rebellious, and perverse.

He is everything that God is not.

Now here is why this is so terrible. Verse 5 tells us that we should be content with what we have because what we "have" is God with us. He said, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

Brothers and sisters in Christ that promise is only possible because He sent His Son to die for you! Through that gift He has lifted your burden, pardoned you, and has restored you into an eternal, inseparable relationship with Him.

God has given the world the greatest gift imaginable. He has given His Son and has opened the way of salvation for all who believe. Based on this verse, He intends the magnitude of this spiritual treasure to sustain us through any earthly lack.

When we give ourselves over to covetousness, we make ourselves like a simple-minded child who departs from the intended gift and becomes captivated by some lesser thing. Actually it's worse, because we aren't simple-minded children who are incapable of understanding. We are more like the young woman who disdained the wedding ring. And we give great insult to our Lord.

It comes down to this: How do you define what it means to be rich? Do your minds go to earthly things? Homes, cars, wealth? Or do your minds go to spiritual things - forgiveness of sins, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and a permanent inseparable relationship with our Heavenly Father?

In Philippians 4:12&13 Paul said: **12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

It's amazing how often you see this verse completely ripped from it's intended meaning. If you've spent any amount of time competing in any sport, you probably know what I'm talking about. It may be one of the most terribly misused verses in the bible.

When it's abused in the context of sports, people are saying, "I can win this event through Christ who strengthens me." It would be more appropriately used if athletes said, "Whether I win or whether I lose I can be content and thankful through Christ who strengthens me."

Paul is saying that he could be content with much, and he could be content with little because of the sustaining and strengthening presence of Christ.

Is that true for us? Can we say the same?

Our thankfulness for the spiritual blessings we possess in Christ should spill over and cover every covetous desire for physical things that may come along. And if that's not the case, it may very well be that you do not trust the Lord like you think you do.

This brings me to Lesson 3 on your bulletins.

The covetous man:

Lesson 3: seeks confidence in things rather than God.

Look with me at verse 6.

6 So we may boldly say:

**“The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?”**

If our trust is truly in God to be our helper, then we can have confidence - indeed boldness - despite any perceived lack. If God is all-powerful, and He is - If God is all-knowing, and He is - If God loves us, and He does - Then we can have great boldness that nothing can happen to us contrary to His will. Where covetousness creates inner turmoil and discontentment, this truth creates peace. This is what we must preach to ourselves whenever the circumstances of our lives begin to overwhelm us.

The sin of covetousness not only kills our ability to give thanks by focusing our attention on what we don't have and causing us to value physical blessings over spiritual blessings, it also kills our ability to give thanks by leading us to pursue self-sufficiency.

This has been a difficult year to say the least. Amen? Lockdowns, potential food shortages, unrest in the streets, all these things have the potential to create anxiety that stirs our hearts toward covetousness. What do I mean?

- Some might be tempted to pursue a large store of food.
- Some might be tempted to store up a large supply of weapons and ammunition.
- Apparently many are tempted to store up large hoards of toilet paper.

I'm not saying that laying aside extra is unwise - it's biblical. Proverbs 6:6-8

**6 Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be wise,**

**7 Which, having no captain,
Overseer or ruler,
8 Provides her supplies in the summer,
And gathers her food in the harvest.**

So how do we know if we are sinning in this regard? Are you motivated by biblical wisdom to prepare during times of plenty, or are you motivated by fear over your circumstances? Be honest.

If you were anxious about the state of the country, and that led you to run out and purchase large amounts of food or weapons, and now you feel at ease.... Where is your confidence coming from?

When a man interrupted Jesus and tried to persuade him to instruct his brother to divide an inheritance with him, Jesus rebuked him saying, **“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”** (Luke 12:15)

And then he taught The Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:16-21.

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ 18 So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

21 “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

The covetous man cannot thank God as his helper, because he actually pursues freedom from reliance upon God as his helper. He is attempting to gain control of his own circumstances and become self-sufficient. How foolish to attempt to remove ourselves from a dependence upon God when He has numbered our days.

All of the lessons this morning have been in the negative sense - showing what a covetous unthankful man is like, but today is Thanksgiving.... Now let us conclude by considering what a thankful man is like.

The thankful man reflects often on what he has. He sees all that he has as blessings from the Lord and this leads him to praise. The gratitude he feels springs from an understanding that God is good to him despite what he really deserves.

The thankful man is not prone to covetousness because God is his greatest treasure. He knows how to properly value the gift of salvation that God has given - no earthly treasure can compare.

Lastly, the thankful man recognizes the Lord is his helper - that God is sovereign over what he has and what he doesn't have. He is not prone to anxiety or fear over his circumstances, because God is his helper and confidence.

In a few moments, we are going to leave this place and go back to our homes where it may be very easy to forget about these things in the busyness of the preparations for the meal ahead.

I want to charge you to examine yourselves.

- Are there any covetous desires in your hearts that are killing your ability to thank God for what you have?
- Are you showing disdain for God's greatest gift to mankind by allowing some earthly treasure to consume your thoughts?
- Are you relying on God as your helper, or are seeking to free yourselves from that reliance?

Please pray with me.