

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE THANKFUL?**

November 24, 2013

In September 1620, a small ship called the Mayflower left Plymouth, England carrying 102 passengers which included an array of religious separatists and other individuals seeking the promise of prosperity in the New World. The journey from England took about 66 days. Finally, sometime in November, they concluded their adventure of crossing the Atlantic Ocean and came aground near the tip of Cape Cod ([http:// www. history.com/topics/thanksgiving](http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving)). The first year in their new home was far from what they had hoped, with many of them suffering from exposure, scurvy, and outbreaks of contagious diseases. The future did not look very promising until they formed a friendship with an Abenaki Indian. This particular Indian was fluent in English and introduced them to another English speaking Indian by the name of Squanto, a member of the Pawtuxet tribe who had been kidnapped by an English sea captain and sold into slavery before escaping to London and returning to his homeland on an exploratory expedition ([http:// www. history.com/topics/thanksgiving](http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving)). History tells us that Squanto, along with the local tribe of Wampanoag Indians, taught the Englishmen how to survive in the New World. In November of 1621, the Colonists reaped their first successful harvest, after having implemented the techniques they were taught. Because of their success, they hosted a three-day celebration which is commonly referred to as the first Thanksgiving. For more than two centuries, days of thanksgiving were celebrated by individual colonies and states. It wasn't until 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, that President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day to be held each November ([http:// www. history.com/topics/thanksgiving](http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving)).

Often, we look back on this historic event, and we focus more on the meal and the harvest than we do on the purpose. They were thankful for their bounty, but they were thankful for a reason. They had endured a year of hardship and death because they were unprepared for what lay ahead of them when they embarked upon their adventure.

New Testament Christians are admonished to be thankful throughout the inspired Writings; but exactly for what are we to be thankful? Like the early Colonists, we are unprepared for the journey that lies ahead of us in eternity if we have not turned to Jesus. Heaven is definitely something for which to be thankful, but we should also be thankful for the fact that Jesus prepared the way for us (Jn. 14:6). Through His work and effort He brought us out of darkness into the light of heaven (2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 2:9), even though we did not deserve such acts of kindness.

When we think about what the Father and His Son did for all of us, we need to be thankful, but also to understand the obligation that being thankful carries. It isn't enough to simply feel gratitude toward the Creator of the world; we must also actively be thankful. The Psalmist vowed to Jehovah God that he would, "Publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works" (Psa. 26:7).

Being thankful to God means that one will carry on the work that He has set forth to be accomplished by His disciples. Just being thankful for the salvation that comes with faith through obedience is not what He expects when one becomes a Christian.

Ray Pritchard pointed out some things that almost every person can accomplish. You've got a telephone. Make a call. You've got paper. Write a Letter. You've got a kitchen. Cook a meal. You've got a billfold. Give some money. You've got two hands. Serve others. You've got two feet. Go make a visit. You've got two ears. Listen to the cries of those who are hurting. You've got two

eyes. Look on the fields that need harvesting. You've got two lips. Preach the Gospel of Peace. (Wade Webster, The Searcher, Published by the Southaven church of Christ, pg. 1, 11-17-2013).

Hopefully, we will all look at Thanksgiving just a little bit differently. Instead of it being a noun that identifies a certain day, let it be a verb that depicts the everyday life of faithful Christians!