

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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Thanksgiving Day

Thanksgiving Day of November 25, 1971, just as was the day of November 24, 1621, set aside by the New England Colonists, is a day to give thanks. It was suggested no doubt by the English Harvest Home and old fashion festivals held to celebrate the gathering of crops or the completion of the harvest season.

The first American Thanksgiving was observed by the Plymouth Colony, November 24, 1621. This was in celebration of the fine harvest the colony had reaped that year. So along with the Indians, the group prepared a great feast and gave thanks to God. This act became a tradition with the people and spread throughout New England. After the Revolutionary War, it spread to the middle states down over the west, as the people themselves spread. Up to the Civil War, the idea of Thanksgiving Day spread slowly throughout the south, the people here being more bound in English customs.

To foster the celebration, the governors of most states issued Thanksgiving proclamations, and Abraham Lincoln set the precedent for the Presidents to do the same for the nation in 1863, using by common consent, the last Thursday in November.

Though the actual namesake day is native only to the United States, mention of the same sort of celebration is made in the Bible and Biblical times when the Pilgrims were rendering celebration for Thanksgiving season in the temple. As they joined in the processional, they played sacred anthems on all types of instruments. The Thanksgiving religious instruments used in the festival are depicted in the 150th Psalm.

In the first American celebration in 1621, there was not the jubilation of the ancient times, but quiet thankfulness that lives had been spared, food was bountiful, friendships flourishing, and freedom at last acquired. It was here perhaps the idea of preparing bounteous supplies of food and inviting friends to partake of the feast originated.

Necessity made hunting an activity of the people of that time and the same goes for friendliness and cooperation. Through the years in America, the people, many of them strayed from the real reason behind the holiday in favor of the more glamorous rituals of modern existence such as football games, parades, ecetra, and the over-indulgence of the body in favor of the intaking of food and drink, so that this day originally set aside for Thanksgiving to God is begun and ended without a single thought of God, even to the extent often that the day following, the person is anything but thankful. The winter scope of activities makes for this lack of time to be allotted to religious activities also. Originally the day was spent in worship and thanksgiving. Now, however, such remarks as "I can't go to the services today; gotta do all this cooking;" "It's the same time as the big TV program;" "I wanna see the parade, movie or game." ecetra; "Be gone all day hunting," are heard, and the modern 30 or 45 minutes of religious service is forsaken.

This Thanksgiving Day of 1971 is a day in which many of us have much to be thankful. At the same time, many of us are sad because of our sons who are behind the line of guns, fighting our enemies in Viet Nam. We should not forget the long, bitter wars and strife that

THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

GOD BRINGS THE WORLD

TO FULFILLMENT

What Is Our Concern

The question of the meaning of life and its boundaries of time and space has always been of profound concern to mankind. The very earliest graves of which we have any knowledge contain such items as food, utensils and weapons. These bear mute testimony to a belief in some kind of existence on the other side of death. Some persons today deny an existence beyond death; but most of us look for some kind of life following this one.

Those who believe life to be limited to our time here on earth find life's meaning in service to mankind and in the effort to leave this world a better place than it was when they came. They expect no immortality but that of being remembered after death through their children or their works.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, however, the attitude is quite different. The Jew looks forward to "the world to come," while the Christian has his hope of heaven.

Christians differ widely in their interpretation of heaven. Usually our idea of heaven is conditioned by our life here. We tend to see in heaven the ultimate realization of the justice and righteousness of God. In other words, that which we lack in this life will be compensated for in heaven.

Our basic justification for this view can be found in the fact that as Christians we have received from our Jewish forebears the idea of purposive history. If we believe, as we do, that God has a purpose for our lives, we will believe also in the fulfillment of these purposes, if not in this life, then in the next. Two major viewpoints grow out of this idea of the future life.

The first of these we may designate as the "pie in the sky" idea. This view is often held by those who in this life feel themselves disinherited and abused. They endure the miseries of their present existence in the faith that they will get their justice after death.

This idea lies back of many Negro spirituals. "I'm gonna put on dem shoes and walk all over God's heaven" is a theme in one of them. This hope does not mean a great deal to those who

have never gone barefoot except by choice, but for those who go through this life without shoes it means a great deal.

Sadly, some persons who are well situated in this world, even at the expense of others less fortunate, have been guilty of encouraging this hope of fulfillment in heaven to keep the poor from demanding justice now and threatening their favored position.

The second main view of heaven sees it less as a radical change from this life than as a continuation of the present life than as a continuation of the present one but without the comparatively minor problems of this life. Life here is regarded as a foretaste of and preparation for that heavenly bliss toward which we look. This view will for the most part be found among those who are fairly well situated in this life. It is especially attractive to those who find deep and genuine meaning in the living of these days.

I once knew an elderly woman who said that if heaven were greater and more wonderful than this life, she did not think she could stand it. This dear woman, whether or not she realized it, was already in heaven, for heaven is much less a place than a relationship — a relationship with God. To be in heaven is to have a genuine, satisfying relationship with God; and this relationship may be quite independent of time and space.

This view is the most biblically defensible. The Bible holds out little hope that a person who does not enter into a meaningful relationship with God through obedience to his holy will in this life will have an opportunity after he dies.

This life is part of eternity. We have the hope of eternal life here and now, and for those willing to enter into it, death is robbed of its terror and heaven has already become our home. **Searching The Scripture**

The Scripture for this lesson is Micah 4:1-7; Romans 8:18-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Revelation 11:15. Selected verses are printed below.

Romans 8:18-24a

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits

with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved.

Revelation 11:15

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Memory Selection: The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

—Revelation 11:15

What The Scripture Says To Us

In Romans 8:18 Paul, having mentioned suffering in the previous verse, is moved to declare that the sufferings he and other Christians must endure are of no account when compared to the glory that is to come. Paul is sure that God will fulfill his promises and is overwhelmed with the thought of the greatness of that fulfillment, in which all of creation is involved. Paul never minimizes the fact of suffering, but he insists that we must find our ability to endure not in a Stoic resignation to the inevitable but in the assurance of the ultimate victory of God.

In Romans 8:18-24a Paul presents the idea of the unity of all nature, including mankind, and thinks of it as waiting with "eager longing" for the fulfillment of God's purposes. He is aware of the apparent futility of nature, which like a great wheel turns and returns always to the place from which it started. Verse 22 speaks of the sorrow of nature, of the suffering of animals (which, incidentally, is a most difficult aspect of the problem of evil), of natural calamities and disaster. In the midst of great travail, argues Paul, we are sustained by hope. To hope means that we look forward to something better than that which we now possess.

Precisely what Paul means by "adoption as sons" is not quite clear, but what is clear is that we look forward to a time when as sons we shall have immediate access to and fellowship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ his Son.

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some member of every family suffered during Thanksgiving Days past. Maybe there has been sorrow, too, for it serves to make us more grateful for the good things in life.

So good an institution as giving thanks should never be turned into a mere commercialized tradition as it is now in the hearts of those who love God, their fellowman, and are grateful for the life they have. No, it should not become filled with hypocrisy that has no meaning, and takes pleasure out of the day, but sometime during the day our thoughts should be sent heavenward.