**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Thirty-Third Week Since the Resurrection

***Thanksgiving Freedom - Acts 12***

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November 29nd In the Year of Our Lord 2020

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS quoted.)

It is not hard to see that the American Thanksgiving has its origins in the Old Testament. The Pilgrims (November 1621) are observed to have made the connection to the Hebrew Feast of the Harvest and Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16) that took place at the end of the harvest. This is a time of thanksgiving and prayer for a good harvest. America’s first President, George Washington, made a Thanksgiving Day Proclamation.

This is an easy question. See if you can find the answer to this question. What is the duty of all Nations?

**George Washington’s Thanksgiving Proclamation October 3, 1789**

By the President of the United States of America, a Proclamation.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor-- and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be-- That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks--for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation--for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war--for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed--for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted--for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions-- to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually--to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed--to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shewn kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord--To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease of science among them and us--and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

Go: Washington

https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources-2/article/thanksgiving-proclamation-of-1789/

 Seventy-four years later, Abraham Lincoln, on October 3, 1863, set the precedent for America’s national Thanksgiving Day proclamation. Prior to this, each state scheduled its own Thanksgiving holiday at different times, mainly in New England and other Northern states. (See link for Proclamation.)

<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/thanks.htm#:~:text=George%20Washington%20was%20the%20first,day%20of%20Thanksgiving%20and%20Praise.%22>

**What Biblical Origins Can Do for a Young Nation**

 **So, for what are we thankful?**

The right to be a Christian? The right to pursue our dreams? The right to vote? The right to marry and have children? All of these are rooted in freedom. Freedom starts with God and is extended to us through godly government. Remember that government’s role is to be an administration of good (Romans 13:3,4). With this good comes freedoms.

As evident in the American Civil War, and amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the reality of freedom for all is a work-in-progress. The Founders of America laid the foundation for a citizen’s individual freedoms. From the Founding era to today, our American experience has revealed to us that freedom is rooted in God. Mankind has not always had God’s Word, which is a gift to us in our time. However, we know that our freedoms are self-evident in the soul of man as ordained by God. America’s Declaration of Independence to the world *claimed the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them*. In addition, America also stated that *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

We are thankful for these Declarations. With these Declarations and following the War of Independence and Constitution, America was on its way to an *experiment,* as we have been called. To secure and maintain the ideas and hopes for a new nation, the Founders immediately attached a Bill of Rights to the Constitution.

 There is a good reason America’s founding Fathers agreed that the state could not establish a religion and, at the same time, guaranteed freedom of speech and association. In time, the 1st Amendment guarantees, along with the whole federal Constitution, applied to the American states after the Civil War.

**1789 Amendment I- enforced upon States by 14 Amendment 1868**

**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.**

**Civil Rights Under Roman Rule**

As we continue our sermon series in the book of Acts, we see that the Disciples didn’t have any civil right guarantees. They were on their own with God’s Holy Spirit guiding them. Roman citizens had some civil rights, as we see Paul used his in appealing to Caesar. We see that the Jews were to have some rights, but they did not always follow them, exampled in Jesus’ trial. Therefore, the Jewish Kings did whatever they wanted.

**King Herod Kills James, brother of John, and arrests Peter -**

**Fallen Man’s Theocracy Kills**

**Acts 12**:1 Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church (Ekklesia) in order to mistreat them.

 2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

Reference to identify James

21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them.

22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. (Matthew 4:21-22)

 3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews,

he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

(8-day period before Passover, remembering the hurried Exodus from Egypt.)

 4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison,

delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him,

intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

[What – no taking before a magistrate, Miranda rights reading or a phone call to an attorney?]

**Prayer for Peter**

 5 So Peter was kept in the prison,

but **prayer** for him was being made fervently

 by the church to God.

Believers pray for many things. We pray for healing, for safety, and in this case, for a friend and loved one who has been arrested.

**Angelic – Miraculous Release**

With the known history of Jesus’ tomb being found empty, Herod wasn’t taking any chances. Reviewing the description of the closeness of the guards to Peter who had two chains affixed to him, there could not have been more security.

 When Satan sees that he has Believers, one of God’s children in chains, or nailed to a cross, expired and entombed in rock – When Satan is gloating and wallowing in his false victory – that is when miraculous things can happen and have happened. The Psalmist writes - *But no Lord, you are not that far off* (Psalm 22:19). *Then, upon our release we will tell of God’s name to our neighbor; In the midst of the assembly we will praise Him*. (Psalm 22:22). This means we continue. This means we survived. This means that God’s witness cannot be cut-off, over-shouted or defeated. The enemies of God can only have short-lived victories. Their temporal winnings will not survive this life.

**Acts 12 Angel & Light**

6 On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward,

Peter was sleeping between two soldiers,

bound with two chains,

and guards in front of the door

were watching over the prison.

 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared

 and a light shone in the cell;

 and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying,

"Get up quickly."

And his chains fell off his hands.

 8 And the angel said to him,

"Gird yourself and put on your sandals."

 And he did so. And he said to him,

"Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

 9 And he went out and continued to follow,

and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real,

but thought he was seeing a vision.

 10 When they had passed the first and second guard,

they came to the iron gate that leads into the city,

which opened for them by itself;

and they went out and went along one street,

and immediately the angel departed from him.

**Freed Peter visit Mary’s house**

Acts 12:11 When Peter came to himself, he said,

"Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

 12 And when he realized this,

he went to the house of Mary,

the mother of John who was also called Mark,

where many were gathered together and were praying.

 13 When he knocked at the door of the gate,

a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.

 14 When she recognized Peter's voice,

because of her joy she did not open the gate,

but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

 15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!"

But she kept insisting that it was so.

They kept saying, "It is his angel."

 16 But Peter continued knocking;

and when they had opened the door,

they saw him and were amazed.

 17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent,

he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said,

Report these things to James and the brethren."

Then he left and went to another place.

**Herod’s Revenge – God’s Judgement**

 Acts 12:18 Now when day came,

there was no small disturbance among the soldiers

as to what could have become of Peter.

 19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him,

he examined the guards

and ordered that they be led away to execution.

Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea

and was spending time there.

 20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon;

and with one accord they came to him,

and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain,

they were asking for peace,

because their country was fed by the king's country.

 21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel,

took his seat on the rostrum

and began delivering an address to them.

 22 The people kept crying out,

"The voice of a god and not of a man!"

 23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him

because he did not give God the glory,

and he was eaten by worms and died.

**The Lord’s Word Spread**

Acts 12:24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem

when they had fulfilled their mission,

taking along with them John,

who was also called Mark.

**Thankful for Miracles**

Miracles, like what happened to Peter, are throughout the Bible. These miracle accounts defy materialistic reasoning and explanation. We know that just because we do not have a materialistic or naturalistic explanation for something that doesn’t mean the event did not happen. There aren’t any scientists in world history that can materialistically explain the origins of life from primordial-soup or macro evolution. However, the last time I checked; we are living beings looking at each other on daily basis. Just because we cannot materialistically explain how we arrived and/or were created does not mean we do not exist. The same can be said of morality, or feelings and emotions. These human attributes and characteristics cannot be derived from formulas in secular science. Those of us who think of such things know that science can tell us how something works but not what to do with our lives or what to do with the mechanism we derive from the natural world.

**God is Atomic**

We can harness the forces of nature into an atomic reaction; but then who tells us what to do with the energy? The catalyst in WWII to produce atomic reactions was war. The first thing for which the atomic reaction was used was to make a bomb to kill people and win the war. This was to save more lives that would have been lost in a continuing war. It is sad that the fallen affairs of humanity facilitated the use of atomic weapons.

Atoms that cause an atomic reaction cannot be seen with the un-assisted human eye, but that does not mean the reaction does not exist. It was not until recently that microscopes were developed to actually see an atom. In WWII, in the development of the A-Bomb, we could only see the outcome of the reaction, but not the atoms themselves. Just because we could not see the atom did not stop the development of the Atomic bomb. The Bible tells us the same thing. Here we see that real science supports God’s declarations in His Word. We see the outcome of faith, but we cannot see the atoms-of-faith in a test tube.

From Hebrews 11:1-2 we read, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”* (NAU)

**Peter Freed by What Is Not Seen**

We have the account of Peter being freed from chains, and an Angel walks him past the guards. Without seeing the forces undetected by the human eye, or knowing what forces are present - is it harder to present an explanation for the miraculous release of Peter or the atomic reaction? Until the last decade of the 19th century (1890’s), the product of an atomic reaction could not be seen, manipulated or explained by man. However, atomic reactions were/are happening every day. For example, the sun’s atoms are squeezed together so tightly they combine hydrogen nuclei to form a helium atom – creating “nuclear fusion.” This atomic reaction produces light, heat and other elements. Again, until recently in human history, was this process understood? But it was happening all the time.

 It is reasonable to foresee that one day we will also have more information concerning how God works, what we call miracles, in the Bible. God is the God of Nature and the Laws of Nature. Meaning that God is the God of nuclear reactions. What we once could not see or understand has now become known.

**Believer’s Overcome Opposition**

We know that we live in a H.A.S. society that has many who are opposed to God. The H.A.S. (Humanist, Atheist, Secularist) are enemies of God. I know, at times, it may seem that the enemies of God have chains around our ankles and media guards keeping the gate of information flow. Many are blinded by their lies and false teachings, thus, held captive in social and cultural prisons.

But, with God’s Holy Spirit indwelling us, we can get-up and walk past these enemies of God any time we want. This is the power in the Believer’s freedom. We can choose to turn-off the media voices from the electronic devices we have at the disposal of our listening ears. We are not addicted to their theme music and constant chatter. We are not blind. They may seem like a majority, but they are not. They may, at times, have the largest megaphone. We know that many, unknowing sheep, follow them. These are held captive. But we are free. The Lord placed us here to be His witnesses to His freedom. In reality, our witness doesn’t have any end in this fallen world.

**Why are Believers Free?**

We are free because the living God indwells us - Who doesn’t have any borders. The borders, fences, bars or social barriers the enemies of God install are only temporary. They are not barriers at all. They cannot keep God from joining a person in their heart. They cannot kick God out of a person’s heart. They have not stood the test of time. Believers have victory in life regardless of where they are or the condition in which they may find themselves. We have the testimonies of prisoners of war who were Christians. From the Louis Zamperini story in the movie Unbroken to the "Corrie" ten Boom’s account chronicled in the book and movie The Hiding Place, we have miraculous accounts of Christians relying upon God to survive and live to tell their stories. God’s Spirit indwelling a person is victorious. The unique element in both Corrie and Louis is that, in contrast to the fallen world, they live long enough to forgive their prison guards. Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Matthew 5:43-44)

Not all Christians survive their imprisonment. Many have died, but they died in the Lord to live eternally with Him. The important element is not dying, but in what spiritual condition are we in when we die.

 We are thankful to God that the Christian witness and experience transcend this life. Meaning that the power of *love* goes with us to be with God. I have often said that *love* is the only thing we take with us to heaven. God is love (1 John 4:8), Who indwells the believer and remains with us upon temporal death. Many of us know Romans 8:35-39 by heart. Consider in our times that we should tell others who may be in distress about life these eternal words. This is why we are free. We are free to be with the Lord and His witness.

 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

 What Can Christian do without American Constitutional guarantees of Civil Rights?

With God’s Holy Spirit will & purpose indwelling us, we, like Paul, Luke, John, James, Peter, Timothy, Matthew, Mark, Martha, Priscilla, and all the women named Mary who followed Jesus - can change the world. AMEN