

Week Three - Physical Blessings

We are the kind of people who need “hands on” reminders.

Take the Thanksgiving holiday coming up. This is one of my most favorite of all celebrations. It happens once a year, every year. It is almost always the same, a delicious dinner of turkey, dressing, cranberries, gravy, mashed potatoes, salads and pies of various kinds, and comes complete with a room full of people to consume every bite. It rivals every other day of the year because it allows us one day to dismiss the cares of mundane work life and replaces it with great food, football games, parades, and the most wonderful part of it all - being with family and friends.

It is a “hands on” reminder that happens once a year. Eating food and being with friends and family reminds us to be thankful.

God is all about giving several “hands on” icons to remind people of His blessings as well. In the Old Testament, people were constantly building altars to remind them of the great acts of God. In addition, there were sacrifices, rainbows, offerings, tents, tabernacles, pillars of clouds, staffs, phylacteries, stones, holy wear, and many other visual symbolisms that were given to remind God’s chosen people that He was still involved in their lives.

God loves “hands-on” reminders.

There was one festival every year packed full of hands-on reminders for Israel as well. This festival reminded Israel to give thanks to God for His blessings (much like our Thanksgiving!) The festival of Succoth, celebrated around September/October each year, reminded the people to give God thanks for His goodness in the annual harvest. It was also a festival that highlighted their continued thankful hearts for their rescue from Egypt. God had brought them out of 400 years of slavery to lead them to the Promised Land.

Israel celebrated Succoth each year by building booths in their backyards where they would stay for 7 days and nights. Succoth actually means “booths” in Hebrew. Usually, these tents looked a lot like their tents in the wilderness after they exited Egypt. Tarps and blankets were usually used for walls and foliage for the roof. It was important to see the stars through the roof to remind them of the immenseness of this liberating God.

By the time Solomon comes around, Succoth is still being observed. Solomon chose to dedicate his great Temple during this festival. He had been tasked with the job of building a permanent Temple and it took him 20 years to do it. It was magnificent! There was gold throughout, incredible tapestries, and a Holy of Holies that contained the Ark of the Covenant. Even though it was destroyed during the siege from

Babylon later in Daniel's time, the Jewish people still talk about the beauty of this ancient building to this day.

Solomon was so thankful for this Temple blessing that, on the final day of Succoth, he sacrificed so many animals they could not be counted (1 Kings 8:5). Solomon stood before the Great Altar, stretched out his hands, and prayed:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" -1 Kings 8:27

Did you catch it? This great Temple was simply a "hands on reminder" of the incredible greatness of God. The building was breathtaking...but God was even more so. This building was a reminder for the Jewish people that God had chosen to dwell among them when they lived in booths and His presence was still with them, seen in the Temple, and it was their greatest joy.

Succoth was their time to remember to thank God for all their blessings. But, their greatest joy was in their best hands-on reminder that God was still with them. They were overwhelmed with joy because of one main reason – they were with their God, and He was with them.

I am grateful at Thanksgiving for so many things. God has given us so much. But I am reminded that the greatest thanks anyone could ever give would be that God is still with us. In this increasingly confusing world, that may be what gives us the most joy as followers of God.

What an irony that immediately following Thanksgiving every year, God gave us our very best visual "hands-on" reminder of this truth at Christmastime.

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). -Matthew 1:23

John the Apostle later wrote, "our eyes have seen and our hands have handled" this great blessing from God in the person of Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-4)

Take heart and give thanks. But remember to give thanks for the greatest hands-on reminder that our world has ever received that can bring peace in the middle of chaos, joy in the middle of pain, and love in the middle of hate.

PRAYER

Each day this week, choose one of the following topics and make it central to your prayer time with God

1. Thank God for providing for your daily needs, whether it be through employment, emotional support, family or church blessings, daily protection, or financial.
2. Give thanks for the health and well-being you enjoy. Acknowledge God's provision in sustaining your physical and mental health, and express gratitude for the ability to live a life that can bring Him glory no matter where you are.
3. Thank God for the relationships in your life, including family, friends, and community. Express gratitude for the love, support, and companionship that these relationships bring and acknowledge God's provision in connecting you with others.
4. Thank God for those who are tasked with guiding you or watching over you. Whether it is first responders in your community or church leaders or ministry directors, remember that they are put in their position by God and need your prayers to lead well.
5. Express thanks for the spiritual growth and the journey of faith you have experienced. Acknowledge God's provision in guiding you, providing wisdom, and sustaining your spiritual journey. Ask Him to do amazing things in your walk with Him in 2024.
6. Give thanks for God's provision of comfort and strength during challenging times. Reflect on specific situations where God's grace and provision were evident, and express gratitude for the resilience and peace that comes from relying on Him.
7. Thank God for the unique gifts, talents, and creative abilities He has provided you. Acknowledge His role in shaping your skills and passions, and express gratitude for the opportunities to use them for personal fulfillment, the benefit of others, and serving His church.