

THE REAL THANKSGIVING

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Lessons: Psalms 117, 118, Apocalypse Revealed 249.

“It is good to give thanks unto the Lord”, every day the whole year through. For the Lord works every day to provide us with things to eat and to wear, doesn’t He? But we often forget this. So it is good that we have one special time in the year when we will be sure to remember His kindness and mercy to us, and to thank Him for them.

The Children of Israel were commanded by the Lord to have a thanksgiving time once a year. This was called “The Feast of Tabernacles”, also “The Feast of Ingathering”, because it was held each year at the end of harvest-time, when everything was gathered from the fields for the winter’s food. At this time the Children of Israel would all come together and camp in tents for a whole week. This was to remind them of how they had lived during the forty years in the wilderness on their journey from Egypt into the land of Canaan and of how the Lord had led and helped them. During these seven days they would offer animals to the Lord as a sign of their thankfulness that He had given them so much food and clothing and shelter. The priests would roast the offered bullocks, lambs, kids and rams on the altar of the tabernacle.

Like the Children of Israel, it is good that we, too, have a time like that in our year, even though there are other occasions, which remind us to be thankful to the Lord, such as church services, worship at home, and even saying a blessing at mealtime. But there are more important things for which we can thank the Lord. And there are other ways of thanking Him—ways that are even better and mean much more than giving thanks with our lips.

What could be more important than food and clothing? We must have food and clothing in order to live in this world. But what about the other world? The Lord teaches us that there we shall live forever. We shall need things in order to live in that world, and especially first we are to live in heaven. And we shall need those things before we go there, so that we can get used to them, and love them. What are those things for which we should be even more thankful than for our earthly food and clothing?

One of them is the Ten Commandments. The Lord gave them to us. And what do they do for us? Why, they teach us how to live so that we may be ready to enter heaven, where the angels live in the way taught by the Commandments. Besides this, the Lord gives us the whole Word, which shows us the way to heaven. Yes, those are some of the things, which are much more important

than our food and clothing. They are the things for which we should thank the Lord the most.

But there are still other things that He gives us. After the Lord gives us these teachings, then it is for us to obey them. Yet we could not even do this, if the Lord did not, all the time, give us the strength to do His Commandments. So we should also be grateful for that strength. But, when we begin to obey the Lord's Commandments, we do not really love to obey them. It is like the way we obey our parents or teachers or government. We do it because it is more pleasant; if we do not obey, we will have trouble; or, perhaps, we know that if we obey, we shall be rewarded.

The Lord teaches us, though, that we are not really on the way to heaven unless we do His will because we really love to do it. And what is wonderful is that if we try hard to love to obey Him, He will give us that love; He will cause us to love His Commandments, and to love obeying them. And this is really the greatest gift of all from the Lord: the love of doing His will. For it is hard to obey when we really don't like it. But it is easy when we have a real love and wish to do it.

What are some other ways in which we can thank the Lord, ways that are even better and more important than saying thanks with our lips? The Lord teaches us that, when we receive a gift, we should thank the one who gives it, but more than that we should show our thankfulness by using it well and by being careful of it so that it may not get broken and be wasted. So it is with gifts from the Lord. The best way we can thank Him is by using His gifts and by using them carefully and well. This is why we try not to waste food, why we eat everything set before us on the table; and it is why we are careful with our clothes and games. But greater than all these, we can also show our true thankfulness for those other gifts, which help us to live in heaven, by using them well.

Now, it is a strange thing, but there are many people in the world who do not use these gifts. They do not care anything about the Word. They do not read it. They do not believe it. They do not obey it. Think of that—all those wonderful things that the Lord has given us to help us to live so that we may come into heaven—and such people do not use them!

We are grateful that the Lord has given us this Word. But we show Him we are truly thankful only by using the Word to make ourselves better people. As we do that more and more, we can really mean it when we thank the Lord at meals or at Thanksgiving time. Then, when we sing songs of praise to Him, when we bring an offering to Him, when we say, before our meals, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy is forever" (Psalm 118:1), we really mean it, for we have done what is commanded. *Amen.*