

“Being Thankful For The Little Things In Life!”

By Bob Heitzler

Sunday, November 10th, 2013

I am so thankful to be here today. I am so thankful for a peace in God that helps in every situation in our lives. He's always there. He's always faithful; He's *always* faithful.

I want to give honor where honor is due; I want to give honor to my family member: His name was Hugh McGuire. He was a lieutenant in the American Revolutionary war. He was my (however many greats) grandfather, and he was very instrumental in stopping the enemy from advancing so that we have our freedom today. According to all the family trees that my cousin and my uncles worked on, we had somebody in the military since that time. All leaders. Every war, I had family there, involved. I want to give thanks to the veterans here today that served. Because of you, the freedom to worship, as the prayer went today, is awesome. Also, I wanted to give honor to those that are in the military now, that you have a lot of people backing you up, supporting you and praying for you. There's a lot of retired military people to walk you through things here. I want to give honor also to God that saved me, a little over thirty-four years ago. There was a prayer that I prayed, “God, if You're real, there has to be more than this, getting married, having kids, and dying; I need You to show me.” that was December of '78 that I prayed that, and in October of '79, I got saved. God was faithful with my prayers. I want to give honor to the person who shared with me, my pastor. It's kind of funny, where I was raised, you weren't allowed to read the Bible, the pastor had to read it to you, and when he turned the Bible (I think this was the Bible, I still have it), when he turned the Bible and faced it to me, he said, “Read it for yourself.” I said, “Really?” When I read baptism in Jesus' name, I said, “Wow. I never saw that before.” I want to give honor to the person who shared with me that day. I want to give honor to the person that baptized me, a couple of days later. All the years of being part of this ministry, seeing this ministry grow from a Fellowship Center on Sheridan Road—that's all we had at the time—We didn't have an international ministry, Sri Lanka or Haiti or any of the other places, not even Norfolk was around yet. I thank God for all that. I thank God that I've seen prayer, and I've seen people work hard, and I've seen this ministry grow to where it is today. We have a lot of history, here, even though we were in a building like this, this ministry has a lot of history. It is up to us to keep writing that history, until God takes us all home.

The theme of the month, that Parrish shared last week:

Ephesians 5 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

It's telling us to give thanks always. Always. Not just Sundays, Friday nights and Wednesday nights; always. Even if you get pulled over and get a ticket. Give thanks that someone stopped you, before you drove into something that you might not even be aware of. Yes, I've gotten tickets.

I posted a question on my FaceBook page: Can you all share a brief testimony about how you were thankful for a little thing that happen in your life that made a BIG difference in your life, or share something that you are thankful for!!!! I'm going to read some of them.

Patrick T. was the first one to respond: In 1983, I got temporary orders to the USS LaMoure County. It was the ugliest ship in the Navy out of Norfolk, Virginia, the one place I didn't want to go. But it was just for a few months until it was time for school. No big deal. But that's where I heard the gospel, and it changed the course of my life.

Jeff: Thankful to have my Saturday nights off. It feels like a mountain got tossed in the sea

God answers every little thing.

Beverly S (She's out of Nigeria): Thankful for Cancer Services Program of Niagara... (no Health Ins). I was able to have a surgical procedure I needed to remove a cancerous tumor. Praise God!

Stacey A (sister of Ken): I am thankful for my job working with special needs children. ..My one child I work with love's music and as soon as it's turned on she can belt out a song and her whole altitude changes. I tell you it's the little things but it blesses the socks right off me.

Marianne (High School Friend): I am thankful for friends like you who always post positive things on here...everyday there is always an inspirational message to remind me of what is really important in life...family and friends.

The list goes on and on:

Margi: I'm thankful to be able to wake up to a nice hot cup of coffee, until you really think about it how simple it is, but yet how many don't wake up in a nice warm home and a nice hot cup of coffee! Makes you appreciate the simple things in life

Bill B: I'm so thankful for the volunteer opportunities I have in the community. One in particular is at a horse farm where they have riding therapy for special needs children. Last Saturday I helped out in a show held for them to showcase their skills learned and practiced in the last year. Watching the love and passion they display for their horse/pony and practice learned responsibility, even with special needs, has caused me ask the question 'What IS normal?' I see the grace of God in a brand new way!!!

Johanna: I am thankful every second God gives me to guide me to be a better person for him and putting amazing people in my path to him. The teachings he gives, knowing what and when to take and give, his forgiveness, never leaving me alone, allowing me to be humble for he is my strength, for being a perfect father I've never had in this world. Through all the sad and angry experiences of kidnapping, sexual abuse by those I loved and trusted, physical abuse, near death experiences (severe allergic reaction shut down my liver and digestive system-blood poisoning was told if I waited another hour I would have died-my heart stopped for 3 minutes at the hospital during a test-and there is more), and the list is longggg, but God's love is endless and longer than any sad or angry list I could make out. I do not worry or concern myself with those experiences or those to come, because they were of the flesh. My spirit is intact because I have chosen God to lead me. My flesh is scarred immensely, but again I chose my spirit to lead, and not the flesh. I have so many things to be thankful for, but overall without him in everything in my life I couldn't do or be anything. I survive these seconds only because of him, and I could never thank God enough for being in my life. (Sorry if too long, started to get passionate. God bless all of you!

Beverly: Thankful for the loving-caring staff at the home where Charles and I reside; there is always a smile on their faces and a hug if needed!

Roger M (Kayla's grandfather): I am thankful I met my wife of 50 years on May 3rd, 1950.

The list goes on and on.

Jeanne M: Bob. I am so thankful for modern medicine. My wonderful niece was diagnosed with two types of brain cancer in 2007. She has had brain surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. She then had two children who bring such joy to our lives. Although she has been out of remission for about a year and a half, and she is back on chemo. She is fighting to beat this. Every day she survives gives me hope that a cure can be found. I am so blessed to have her in my life. She is a real hero

Sonja: Bob, I am going to make this story short because it could get lengthy.

I was forced homeless when one of my ex's was "extradited" to another state for a crime I was un-aware of. At the time I was not working and had no money. Within a couple of days I was literally on the streets of downtown Seattle.

I was carrying everything I had with me. Two medium suit cases and one very large one that was as big as I am. I walked and walked looking for a place someone told me about for women that were homeless.

I was exhausted and said to myself if it is not the next block I am going to turn around.

I see two women on the corner talking so I decided to cross over and ask them, if they knew of the place I was looking for.

One of the women said "Yes I know where it is". I said "I'm lost and she said "You are at the right place" I didn't understand what she meant. She said "Let me carry these for you and she took the huge suitcase and one of the medium ones and carried them both for me for hours that day until we arrived at our destination. She was a "true God send". I would have never made it there on my own. I had blisters on my hands and feet. She didn't have to carry my heavy luggage for me or spend the day with me. It was a beautiful selfless act.

Little things; acts of kindness.

Linda A: Hey Bob....I'm big at little things....but what came to my mind was one day I was teaching at the church school and it was nap time. Debbie came in and said Linda, mom bought you a Christmas gift! We were having a ladies Christmas dinner at a restaurant. She bought me a complete outfit, including the nylons. skirt, shiny jacket, and it was the one time in my life that I was speechless. I found out later that Sis did this every year for somebody and it is probably something nobody ever knew. So the next year a sister said she needed her hair done for the Christmas party but she couldn't afford it. This sister had children to take care of and made a huge salary sacrifice to work at the church school. So I later surprised her and I told her about the outfit that Sis had given me and that I wanted to do something for someone else. Now the popular term is pay it forward I guess. How it changed my life? Well, in moments like now it is making me smile and I have that warm fuzzy feeling! LOL
When I surprised her I gave her the money for her hair...I didn't make that clear....

The little things that we do encourage people. The list goes on.

Ashley B.: God is willing to bless us all the time.

We just came through the 61 days of sanctification and I can strongly say that this was a great time for myself and for all of us here...to me, today is day number 71!! We're still going.

There were a lot of baptisms, a lot of healings, there was stronger faith, here were answered prayers, there was shaking off the old ways and putting on God's way, there were people getting jobs, there were unspoken prayer requests answered, and the list goes on and on of all the things that happened since September first. There are some people that say God doesn't still live, today; where's He at? They're not seeking for Him. He's not in a building, He's not in a statue, He's not in a flag, He's within us; He's with His people. I remember sitting out in a hallway—I decided to take my lunch breaks in the hallway, just to talk to people. When I first started this, everybody was doing this down the hallway (walking while making motions as if texting). That's the only place we had a signal in the building, was the hallway. They'd come out from their—it's a huge complex in Kemper Woods, it's a thousand and some-odd people there—they'd come out, "No signal!" and they'd get frustrated. I started saying, "Good morning!" "Good afternoon!" "How you doing?" Now, they're looking for me out in the hallway. "Are you the keeper out here?" "Well, I feel like my high school days when I got kicked out and had to sit in the hallway the whole time." This past week, I asked someone, "Hey, can you keep in prayer our co-worker just took her ninety-year-old mom into the Philippines to visit family, and she's in the midst of this storm." I asked another person—he preaches Jesus' name baptism, some of us know him, his name is

Chris A.—okay, let's keep that in prayer. We prayed for that real quick. What the blessing was, the sister, that works there also, asked, "Hey, can you keep my mom and my sister in prayer?" I said, "Amen!" I said to Chris, you know... we received an E-mail, to hours later, that this lady made it safely to the Philippines with her mom. God answered prayer, but she was thankful for the prayers of everybody there. Prayer does change things. You don't have to be here, you'll notice as I'm talking today, there are things that happen outside of the building.

Reminds me of a person in the Bible that kept pressing unto she received a healing..... people here kept coming back to the altar for prayer until God answered the prayer!! I kept seeing that, people kept coming here, asking for prayer. Two people that come to mind is Delmy, that God healed her shoulder, and the other one was Marita, God healed her. I've heard of other people getting healed here, too. They kept pressing through until God answered prayer. Brother Parrish said something to me, years ago: I said, "You know what? I gave up praying on that. God just wasn't answering." Parrish said, "Why'd you stop praying?" I said, "Whoa! He's right! Why did I stop praying?" I gave up on God, but God didn't give up on me.

So, as we go into the scriptures, here, about a woman that kept pressing through the crowd. All these three people that we're going to be talking about had three things in common (we'll get to that at the end).

Mark 5:24-26 *And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,*

This person tried everything; this young lady tried everything for twelve years and nothing got better.....then she heard good news!!

Mark 5:27-29 *When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.*

I remember people sharing testimonies right here, people knew that God had healed them; they felt it. So, this is two thousand years ago we're reading, but this still alive and kicking today.

Mark 5:30-31 *And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, **Who touched my clothes?** And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, **Who touched me?***

So, they're like, "Really? With all these people here, and You want to know...?" It's like the quarterback getting sacked, "Who touched me?" It's like, "They got through that wall of people and got to me?" So, I don't know if they were supposed to be His bodyguards or whatever it was, or not keeping an eye on Him, but somebody got through and touched Him.

Mark 5:32-34 *And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, **Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.***

Something so simple—the Lord was just walking through the crowd. What comes to my mind is, she just needed to touch His garment. Which makes me think that she kept pressing until she touched God. This takes endurance until you receive an answer—regardless of how long it takes. Jesus Immediately knew in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him—God knows our needs and what we are praying for. God knows exactly what we need, He just wants us to ask Him. He knows what we need in the morning, in the night; He knows our meals, He knows when we get in the car, He knows our income, He knows all our needs. The next part I liked, point 3. Jesus asked: “**Who touched my clothes?**” We don’t realize—and someone shared this, this morning—of all the people that our lives touch. We won’t even know until we get on the other side. Something that they hear about someone’s story, here in this room, “So-and-so did *this*, and, man, it just changed their lives.” They are now going to wake up to you or I in Heaven and say, “Remember when you in that meeting in North Chicago (or Lake Forest, wherever that meeting was), and you shared this in your speech (or your testimony). That changed my life.” So, we don’t know who we’re going to touch. What we do know is that we need to stay faithful until the end, as the brother shared in his testimony this morning. Amen?

The next story is:

Acts 3:1-11 *Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.*

I was told that’s about three o’clock in the afternoon.

Acts 3:2-4 *And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.*

You notice Peter didn’t say, look at me? He said, “Look on us.”

Acts 3:5 *And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.*

So, what do you think he was expecting from them at that time? Money. Maybe a sandwich from their basket, or something, but, money. But what did Peter say after that?

Acts 3:6-8 *Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.*

So, we have something in our lives to give to other people. “Bob, that was two-thousand years ago.” Well, some of us will remember this: we had a man who came to our services when we were over on Belvidere. He came in some days with a wheelchair, some days with a walker; it came to a point where he couldn’t walk at all. His wife had a gait-belt attached to his back, to hold him steady when he did stand. In that service, God challenged someone to step out by faith. He was in the back row, at the time. He got up, stood up. Now, his wife was teaching Sunday School at the time. He took his first step, he took his walker, and moved it to the side. He took his second step; he took his third step; on his fourth step, he was running for the altar. He was leaping and praising God for a miracle that had just happened. That wasn’t two-thousand ears

ago, that was just recently, in our town. His wife, that was in Sunday School, so him up there leaping for joy about hat just happened, and she thought maybe he was going to fall, and she was trying to catch him. He was running back and forth, praising God... That was just recently. Then, after service, we were outside, and one of our fastest runners at that time was Alonzo, he raced Alonzo, and beat him to the fence and back. Remember how big that paring lot was? He outran them all. Then he played basketball and beat everybody. He knew that God healed him. That healing is happening today, still. That hasn't gone away; that wasn't just two-thousand ears ago.

But this man, leaping and praising God, walked into the Temple. It was just a little thing for God to do, but it was a big impact for him.

Acts 3:10-11 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. 11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

So, a miracle happened outside of the temple. If you read on in Acts, the next two chapters, then you will realize that Peter and John did not take credit for that at all; they gave it all to Jesus. We have something to give to others that are in need, which is worth more than silver or gold that we have. We can pray for people and see things come to pass. A lame man immediately was healed—leaping and praising God.—the people knew who he was. —this man was in about 40 years old. So, how long was he laying out there? I don't know, it doesn't say, but he was laying out there long enough for everybody to know who he was. They realized something had happened. Now they're running to Peter and John, "What happened?" Peter and Jon got to share.

The next story that I have here is in Matthew, chapter 8: The centurion, that was beseeching him.

Matthew 8:5-7 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

So, Jesus was taking care of the needs, right off the bat. But:

Matthew 8:8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

I hear people share up here, "Just speak the word, only." God honors that. If you're walking a tight walk with God, and God is moving in your life, you can speak things to God and it will happen. You just have to have faith that it will happen. If you have half-faith, then it's not going to happen. You have to believe that it's going to happen.

Matthew 8:8-10 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

There's a man with great faith. Just say it, I know it's going to happen.

What I got out of here was, sometimes you just have to speak the words. People come to us, and want to know about God, we've got to speak the Word!! We can't quote some man; we've got to quote the Word of God. That's where the authority's at. "Brother Parrish said in service, three days ago, he said..." Brother Parrish, A) would shoot you for saying that, and B) it's the word of God that he preaches. We've got to share the Word of God. Not Sears catalog, Bass Pro Shop catalog, but the Word of God. What I like here, was that somebody else came and spoke on behalf of somebody. This man came to God on behalf of somebody else. We see that here when we pray for our families. We pray for our loved ones; we bring them to the altar. It still happens today, and then the praise reports come back that... My dad had cancer, and he had part of his intestine removed. The doctor came to us, my mom, my two sisters, my brother-in-law, and myself, "The cancer's still there; I couldn't get all of it out." "Okay, mom, we'll just keep this in prayer." I remember calling the church for prayer. When the doctor came back, the cancer was gone. It had disappeared. It was not to be found. It was gone, and my dad *knew* that God had touched his body. My dad knew. To take this one step further, my aunt heard this story about my dad being touched and the cancer disappeared. She was having cancer surgery to have part of her stomach removed. She passed every test for cancer, but when the doctors opened her up, there was nothing there. It had disappeared. So, my dad's doctor, and my aunt's doctor, wrote on their charts, "Miracle from above." So,, a testimony of somebody can encourage somebody else. We've got to live right.

Who likes going to work on Mondays? I hope we all do. It encourages everybody else there, you know? You walk in with a big smile on Monday, they know what you did. They come in hung-over on Monday morning; I know what they did. They stay away from me until... One lady goes, "Give me a moment, Bob." You know? They know that I've been with Jesus. They know That all of us have been with Jesus. Make sense? I know the flesh don't like Mondays. I don't like the alarm going off on Monday mornings, but we have to be that example wherever we go. The other part here is, He said, "**Go thy way, and as thou hast believed...**" So, the centurion came there, said, "I need You to take care of this," Jesus said, "Go thy way, it's taken care of." "Okay, it's taken care of." Then he went, and he found out that the man was healed at the same hour, the same time (Matthew 8:13). He was healed right on the spot. What do you think the guy laying in bed was thinking? "What just happened? Whoa! What just happened?"

What all three of these stories have in common is:

1. They all happened outside the temple, out and about in the community places and it never mentions these peoples names. It never said what their names were. They were just everyday people like us. God answers prayer, and, I don't want them to remember my name, I want them to remember the One I serve. His name is Jesus. "He talked about Jesus all the time. I don't remember his name, but he talked about Jesus all the time." That's the way we should live; it's about Jesus. It's all about Jesus; it's all about the Word of God. I used to say, "God did this..." or "My God did this..." but then I realized, there's so many gods in this world. My God has a name; that's when I started saying Jesus.
2. They were drawn by the Spirit of God in their lives. People might give us a hard way to go, but when they have a need, they know h=who to go to. I thought about that lady in the hallway, "Man, I'm glad you're here." She asked me for prayer. Just be faithful. Do I like sitting in the hallway, staring at the wall? Nope. But, god's opened so many doors, and not too many people are walking down the hallway testing or talking on the phone any more; now they're looking for me. I'm nobody special. If you want to have friends, you must show yourself friendly. If you want to share with somebody, you have to find something in common first, so you build things in common. Make sense? I mean, there's the old way, where you just blast the doors down and preach Jesus when they say hello, and you tell them they're going to Hell because they're not baptized in Jesus' name—they'll slam the door shut pretty quick. I've seen that happen. We have to become friends first. Build something in common. If they like fishing, for example, and I do, I might have a fishing trip and invite them. Why? so that I can have some of you guys help me, work with that family that comes out. If they love Puerto Rican food, I'm going to

say, either Jimmie's family or Andy's family, invite them over for that. Get them something in common, Puerto Rican food, you know? and then share with them. There's so many doors that we can use to share with people, and some of them are right here and we don't even see them. We just don't realize that they're right here in front of us. Every little thing that God's given us a talent to do, that can be a door. It's like my tackle box. When I go fishing, I don't use the same lures all the time; it depends what kind of fish I want to catch. I'm not going to use this kind of lure if it's meant for Bass Pro Shop, and I'm over here at work... I'm going to use different lures to minister to different kinds of people. Or, use the analogy of the tool box: Some people here probably have tool boxes that are as big as mine, but they don't use all the tools all the time—they're there when it's needed. God has given us tools in our lives to use to reach out to people. It could be cookware, it could be pots and pans, anything that you're good at doing. It can be a tool to be used. Are you happy with the size of the crowd that we've got now, or do you want more? Okay, are you ready to work with more people coming? Are you ready to work with Andy and Parrish to make sure nobody falls through the cracks, that we can reach out to everybody? There's a few people looking to see who's not here today, but, if we all take that responsibility... That's what we want to do, right? reach out to people? You know what? God's got a calling on our lives, right here in Lake County. Yes, it's a Navy base, but it's much more than that. The Navy base is not just the boot camp side and the school side, the Navy families have communities, too. Where I live at, there's a lot of military. I can't catch them, because they keep leaving before me, but I caught two of them already. I think they're second-classes, if I remember right. I think there's a Chief, there, too. It's kind of cool; I just talk, say hello, see what I can do. I'm not trying to preach Jesus the first day I meet them, but, just establish a friendship, you know?

3. All their needs were met by God. God met all their needs. Was that man that was laying in bed needed a healing, or the lame man at the Temple, or that woman living in sin? it doesn't say. It rains on the just and the unjust; it doesn't mean that they were bad people. Things happen for the glory of God to be manifested. Things happen in our lives sometimes that we don't like where we're at, but think about why God has you there. Pat T. shared that he was on the ugliest ship in the Navy, but it was there that he met somebody that could share the Gospel with him. Maybe where you're at, there's somebody that needs to hear the message. God's got a calling on your life—I know I say that a thousand times, but it's got to sink in. I know it is. I see all of you nodding your heads and it's like a crock pot; today's not a microwave meal. It takes time to cook, and to tenderize the meat, and make the vegetables soft, and things like that. God got something for us.

Now we're going into Thanksgiving. My last point here is a little history about Thanksgiving:

George Washington's 1789 Thanksgiving 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 and 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 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 has been pleased to confer upon us.”

He gave thanks for what God has done for us.

I found an article, years ago, that I kept, about the Biblical Roots of Thanksgiving from November 10, 2007 by Robert Hutchinson. It said that there were three Scriptures that the governor at that time, William Bradford, used to mandate Thanksgiving:

“Unbeknownst to many Americans, Thanksgiving is yet another legacy of the Biblical heritage that shaped American law and culture over the centuries. There is at least some evidence that the deeply pious Pilgrims—who, as Puritans, believed the Old Testament law was binding on Gentiles as well as Jews—may have been partially inspired by the Jewish harvest festival of Booths (Sukkot). Sukkot is a week-long celebration, mandated in Leviticus 23, in which the Jewish people remember and give thanks for their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. It is usually observed in October—as was the original Thanksgiving in 1621. At the very least, the concept and duty of thanksgiving is deeply rooted in the Biblical tradition. Indeed, you can actually see much of the Torah’s ceremonial commandments as being nothing less than institutionalized thanksgiving: The Sabbath, Passover, the Festival of Weeks, The Festival of Booths, the entire sacrificial system, seeks to inculcate among the people the awareness of divine graciousness. ‘He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel,’ says Chronicles. ‘O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people.’ sang the Psalmist. The apostle Paul, in the earliest book in the New Testament, makes thanksgiving a virtual commandment: ‘In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.’ (1 Thessalonians 5:18) It’s hardly surprising, then, that the Pilgrims set aside a special time to give thanks to God for his mercy. Thanks to contemporary accounts written by Edward Winslow (in his 1621 A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth) and Governor William Bradford himself (History Of Plymouth Plantation), we have a pretty good idea of what happened 386 years ago. As most people know, the first winter was devastating: Of the 110 Pilgrims and crew who left England, only about 50 survived the cold and hunger of that first winter. But then, on March 16, with freezing winds still blowing across the Atlantic ocean, a seeming miracle occurred. An Abanki Indian named Samoset strolled right into the Pilgrim settlement and announced, in English, ‘Welcome!’ Samoset had learned English from British fishermen along the coast. Samoset brought his friend, Squanto (Tisquantum), who not only spoke better English but had actually lived in England for nearly a decade. He had been kidnapped from the Plymouth area in 1608 and had traveled back and forth. It was Squanto who taught the Pilgrims how to grow corn, how to catch fish and eels, how to tap maple syrup—and basically how to survive in this harsh Massachusetts winter. By the time fall arrived, the Pilgrims meager barley and wheat crops were offset by a bountiful supply of corn, fish and wild turkeys. For that reason, the deeply pious Puritan Governor Bradford, reflecting on the ancient Israelites’ thanksgiving for their deliverance from Egypt, proclaimed a day of thanksgiving. Squanto, the local chief Massasoit and 90 Indian braves came to the three-day celebration—and brought most of the food!”

In New England, it stays cold until Memorial Day, basically. So, Thanksgiving was built on being thankful. Today, it’s built on what’s on sale. I remember, as a kid, we went to Grandma’s house for Thanksgiving, and we were there for three or four days. we celebrated; we weren’t out going shopping. I’m not against that, but, I’m just saying... The meaning of this has turned around so big. Now they’re having Veteran’s Day week-end sales everywhere and taking credit away fro the veterans. Our society has changed a lot, but the true believers, like we are, as we go through Thanksgiving, think about who doesn’t have a meal—maybe drop a meal off. I’m not saying that’s a commandment, I’m just saying think about people that need something, you know?

He goes on to say:

“Thanksgiving has evolved into a secular holiday in the United States, shared by people of all faiths and no faith, but we should remember that our Pilgrim forefathers and foremothers looked to Biblical precedents for their inspiration. Plus, it bears remembering whom the early Pilgrims were thanking as

they enjoyed the unexpected bounties of nature and the equally unexpected kindnesses of America's native people.”

What's neat about that, the 'native people,' is that I had family on both sides of that. On the Indian side, and also, John Alden, who was on the Mayflower, is art of my family. He survived that winter. My cousin told me, "Hey, our family was there!" I said "Really?" "Yeah, Squanto was part of our family, and, also, John Alden was part of our family." Wow. That's kind of neat. Not too many people can say that. That's powerful.

I want to thank you al for listening to me today. I love you all; I appreciate you all. Let's do something great and powerful together. Let's work with each other, like a big family; let's look out for each other. God bless you. Amen.

