

hollow words, bereft of any commitment on our part. As the common proverbial phrase suggests, those who are sincere are the ones who put their money where their mouths are. And when we do put the coins in our oral cavities, that also reminds us very strongly of who it is to whom is due the real praise thanks and glory.

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for Special Occasions* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Deuteronomy 8:1-11, 17-20 (KJV).

³ I Thessalonians 5:12-23 (KJV).

⁴ Deuteronomy 8:1 (KJV).

⁵ "We are not to *pre* scribe, but *sub* scribe to God." MATTHEW HENRY, COMPLETE COMMENTARIES at Matthew 6:7.

⁶ Genesis 1:26 (KJV).

⁷ Genesis 6:1—8:22.

⁸ St.Luke 12:16-21.

⁹ BONNELL SPENCER, SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING 18 (Holy Cross Publications 1965). Spencer's YE ARE THE BODY is still one of the best -- that is, in terms of simplicity combined with accuracy -- introductions to the history and nature of the Church.

¹⁰ *The Order for Daily Morning Prayer*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 10-11 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹¹ Deuteronomy 8:12-14 (KJV) (emphasis supplied).

¹² Deuteronomy 8:17-18 (KJV).

¹³ Malachi 3:10; *cf.* Numbers 18: 21-24.

¹⁴ Malachi 3:10 (KJV).

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SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Thanksgiving Day (USA)

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.²

"All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.... And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant

which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians.³

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophecies. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that

come the effective owner of the property by what are colloquially called “squatter’s rights” or, more technically, “prescriptive title”. However, in secular law, no one may acquire such a prescriptive title against the state or any governmental subdivision because the state is itself the sovereign that creates and protects property rights.

If that be true of a mere secular sovereign, how much more true must it be of the One True God? We can never actually defeat His lordship over all creation, no matter how long or how fervently we seek to deny it.

So if we fail to acknowledge God’s rights by paying Him His tithe, we are impiously setting ourselves up on the same level as He.

Conclusion:

We read earlier the part of the First Lesson that states that we cannot be sure of enjoying what God has given us unless we comply with the commandments He gave us along with those good things. And as we see in Malachi, one of those commandments is to pay Him His tithe:

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*”¹⁴

However, we cannot truly give thanks to God while, in a very real way, we deny that He is the one to whom we owe those thanks. Of course, we also cannot truly worship Him so long as we deny His Godship and an essential aspect of that Godship is His lordship over all creation.

Therefore, so long as we fail to pay God the rent we owe to Him, any thanks we purport to offer Him are merely

tiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, **and thou forget the LORD thy God**, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, and from the house of bondage.....”¹¹

This warning against our natural forgetfulness gives important emphasis to the Verses from the end of Chapter 8 that pick up after that strange hiatus in the lectionary: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand that gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.”¹²

3. The best corrective to our tendency to forget that it is God who gives us all we have is for us to *tithe* to Him.

Does that startle you? It should not, for Scripture expressly enjoins us to tithe, that is, to give to God one-tenth of all we possess or gain: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*”¹³

The reason for this is very simple. Our tithes are the rent we pay to God in return for what we enjoy here through His sufferance. Whether in theology or in secular law, one who pays rent to another thereby acknowledges that the landlord is the true owner of the property the tenant occupies. When the tenant stops paying rent, he ceases to acknowledge the landlord’s ownership and instead sets up against his landlord a claim of “adverse possession”, that is, a claim to be himself the true owner.

In secular law, if this claim lasts long enough without being successfully contested, the defaulting tenant will be-

ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers.”⁴

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Theme:

As today’s Text makes clear, our obedience to God’s commandments is a condition of our survival and prosperity. This is because it is by submitting ourselves to God’s plan for us that we acknowledge His sovereignty over us. We cannot truly worship Him so long as we reserve, even if only deep in our hearts and never to be spoken aloud, a claim to make ourselves His equals.

As Matthew Henry, a famous late 17th Century and early 18th Century Biblical commentator, put it, we must not try to *prescribe* to God what we wish from Him, we must always *subscribe* to what He has prescribed for us.⁵

Development:

- 1. Ever since God gave mankind lordship over His creation, that status constantly tempts us to believe it comes of our own deservings and merits, not of His gift.**

The first Chapter of Genesis contains one of the critical creation accounts in which the ancient Hebrews stated their belief that the entire universe is God’s own property because it is His creation. And an integral part of this account is the statement: “[L]et [man] have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”⁶

The problem with this privilege of dominion or lordship is that our innate human sinfulness easily leads us to believe that we have this special superior status because we deserve it, not because God, in His gracious care for us, gave it to us – and, as we learn from the account of the Great Flood,⁷ God can revoke that dominion whenever He wills.

Our Lord gave a compelling example of this tendency to forget God’s part in our prosperity in His parable of the rich man who was congratulating himself on the bounty of the harvest and was planning new barns and storehouses to hold it, only to be told by God that his time on earth was up that very night and that his heir would enjoy all those good things he had amassed.⁸

That rich but foolish man had forgotten the vital truth that a great teacher of the Episcopal Church of the 1950s and 1960s stated in these words: “Man’s primary obligation is to recognize his status as a creature, to express his grateful dependence upon God through obedience, and thereby to fulfill his vocation as priest of nature by offering himself and the universe in sacrifice.”⁹

2. The good and proper impulse to give thanks to God for His many benefits to us is, among other things, a way for us to remind ourselves of that basic truth: that all we have comes not from us but from Him.

It is a normal civic impulse to give thanks in a public fashion, as is demonstrated by just two examples out of hundreds. One of these is the public singing of the *Te Deum*¹⁰ that for centuries marked wartime victories and treaties of peace in Great Britain. Another is the “First Thanksgivings” at the Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts that, depending on one’s interpretation of the histories, took place in 1621 or in 1623.

Theologically, one of the most interesting examples is that of Abraham Lincoln’s presidential Proclamation of a national day of thanksgiving on the last Thursday of 1863, to celebrate the relative state of peace and prosperity that, despite the War of Southern Secession, prevailed throughout the Union other than in the actual areas of military combat. This is the true origin of our present national holiday, which has been celebrated every year since that time.

President Lincoln’s Proclamation not only detailed many aspects of God’s bounty that were then evident at that time but expressly reminded the populace that these benefits were due solely to Him and not to their own efforts:

“No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.”

Regrettably, this important theme, that we owe to God the benefits that we enjoy, is somewhat obscured in today’s First Lesson. This is because, as is true in all too many instances, the Prayer Book’s 1943 Table of Lessons omits a significant part of the Chapter from which that First Lesson is taken. Thus the official passage for use today runs from Verse 1 through Verse 11 of Chapter 8 and then picks up again at Verse 17 and continues on to the end of that Chapter in Verse 20.

Thus the important injunction of Verse 11, “Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day” continues with this important explanation which we did not read just now:

“... Lest when thou has eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is mul-