

Thanksgiving: From a 'Pilgrim's' Perspective

Twice in the Bible believers are referred to as "pilgrims." The apostle Peter wrote, "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

The author of Hebrews also used this term to describe the Patriarchs: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland" (Heb. 11:13).

A pilgrim is "A person who journeys, especially a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion." A pilgrim is also "a traveler, a wanderer, a wayfarer, one who stays in a place only temporarily, but who normally has a set destination."

As pilgrims our motto should be "just passing through." Don't get too attached to the things of this world because this is just our temporary home. Life is a journey and earth is not our final destination. We, like Father Abraham, are looking for our permanent, eternal home—"For he waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

Like fish out of water, pilgrims are misfits. We don't fit the mold of the world because we are not of this world. Everything a true Christian believes runs contrary to the carnal mindset. C. S. Lewis reasoned, "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world." Pilgrims see the temporary nature of earthly things and the permanent

nature of heavenly things.

The Pilgrims of 1620 fame separated from the Church of England due to its compromise. Fleeing persecution, they moved from England to Holland where their congregation grew. Wanting a fresh start free from the loose Dutch lifestyle, they sailed to the New World on a quest to worship God and live based on biblical truth.

Originally, they set sail on two ships: the Speedwell and the Mayflower. Three days later, the Speedwell proved to be unseaworthy. Consequently, 102 pilgrims, plus crew members, were crammed aboard the Mayflower. Imagine a 66-day voyage on rough seas with that many people in the space of a volleyball court. Seasickness was common among these landlubbers who were mostly farmers, merchants and craftsmen. The crew members harassed them for their nausea and singing, and gave them the derisive nickname "psalm-singing puke stockings." The meanest sailor mysteriously died and was buried at sea. Coincidence or Providence?

Their original charter was in Virginia. Storms blew the Mayflower hundreds of miles off course. Most of the coastline was inhabited by hostile natives. A few years prior, a plague wiped out a tribe of Pawtuxet's, so other tribes were wary of the region fearing it was cursed. When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, it was one of the few safe places on the Eastern Seaboard. Coincidence or Providence?

During the first harsh winter, 47 of the 102 Pilgrims died due to exposure, disease and hunger. One author noted, "The Pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts. No Americans have been more impoverished than those—who, nevertheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving." Legend says their rations dwindled to five kernels of corn per person per day. They might have all starved to death if it wasn't for two God-sent Indians.

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In the spring, Samoset showed up speaking English and brought a friend, Squanto, who Governor William Bradford called, "A special instrument sent from God for their good." These Indians taught the settlers how to grow and fertilize crops, hunt, fish and decipher poisonous from edible plants. Squanto also assisted the Pilgrims as a guide and interpreter to help negotiate peace with other tribes.

After the plentiful harvest of 1621, Governor Bradford declared a 3-day feast of Thanksgiving. Chief Massasoit and about 90 warriors brought venison, wild turkeys, hoecakes, cornmeal and maple syrup pudding and an Indian delicacy—popcorn. The Pilgrims pitched in vegetables from their gardens. Between meals they had shooting contests, foot races, wrestling and other activities. Before gorging themselves on the feast, the Pilgrims placed five kernels of corn on their plates as a vivid reminder of how God brought them back from the brink of starvation.

The Continental Congress appointed the first national Thanksgiving Day in 1777. Then, in 1864, President Abraham Lincoln designated the last Thursday of November as the annual holiday. But Thanksgiving should be more than a holiday observed once a year, it should be our lifestyle(1 Thess. 5:18). This holiday season may we realize how blessed we are in America compared to most of the world. Let us remember the true source of our blessings and maintain an attitude of gratitude. Let's be grateful for what we *have* before time forces us to be grateful for what we *had*.

The first baby born on the Mayflower still anchored in Cape Cod was named Peregrine, meaning "pilgrim or one who has made a journey." May we never forget that we too are pilgrims on a journey beyond this temporary, natural world to an eternal,

spiritual world (Heb. 11:16).

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