

THANKSGIVING MENU

Introduction

This coming Thursday is Thanksgiving Day. What are some of the Thanksgiving Day activities you're looking forward to?

Time off from work & school, visits with family & friends, football games on T.V., sales, naps

Thinking about the food, what would you consider a traditional Thanksgiving menu?

Main Course: turkey, ham

Side Dishes: mashed potatoes & gravy, yams, green beans

Trimminings: stuffing, dinner rolls, cranberry sauce, deviled eggs, olives & pickles, etc.

Dessert: pumpkin pie, carrot cake, sugar cookies

May I suggest another Thanksgiving "menu"? First, the "Main Course."

THANKING GOD FOR WHO HE IS—THE "MAIN COURSE"

In order to truly appreciate all God has done for us, we must have a sense of who God is. We exist because of God, who created us and sustains us. For that alone, He deserves thanks!

In the O.T. there were those assigned to praise God, not just for what He's done or for what is hoped He will do, but simply for "the splendor of His holiness." (2 Chron. 20:21).

Realizing that we exist because of God is essential to having the right perspective of reality. Paul says the wrath of God is coming on those who suppress the truth of reality by their wickedness in not glorifying God or giving Him thanks. The thinking of these is futile and their hearts darkened.

When we pray, Jesus said we should begin by acknowledging God: "Our Father in heaven." He is the "main course," we should always start with that, and we should thank Him for being who He is!

THANKING GOD FOR ALL HE'S DONE—THE "SIDE DISHES."

After we thank God for who He is we can have a greater appreciation for all He's done and promised to do. These we might call "side dishes."

The psalmist wrote, *Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. 2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits--* (Psalm 103:1-2).

He then goes on to list those benefits:

\$ forgiveness
\$ healing
\$ redemption
\$ love and compassion
\$ all good things
\$ renewal of strength
\$ righteousness
\$ justice
\$ mercy and grace
\$ sympathy

No feast has ever had so many side dishes!

James tells us that everything that is good comes from God. So, if we have anything good in our life, we need to thank God for it.

But what about the bad things?

THANKING GOD FOR ALL HE'S PROTECTED US FROM—"THE VEGETABLES."

How many of you, when you were a child, hated vegetables? But our parents fed them to us because they were good for us. And as we matured we developed a taste for them and even like them now.

Can we ever mature to the place to where we thank God for the bad things in life? Apparently so because Paul says we're to give God thanks *for* everything and *in* all things.

Why can we thank God for the bad things? Because they're good for us! David understood this and wrote, *It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.* (Psalm 119:71) And Paul encouraged us when we are disciplined by the Lord, even though it's not pleasant at the time, it produces a harvest of righteousness. (Heb. 12) So we can—and should—thank God in and for the bad things.

But how about all the bad things that *don't* happen to us? Only eternity will allow us to see all that God protected us from. But we can thank Him for His protection now, and this alone could occupy hours of prayer!

THANKING GOD FOR ALL THE "LITTLE THINGS"—"THE TRIMMINGS."

At our Thanksgiving dinner there are what I call the "trimmings," the "little" things: dinner rolls, cranberry sauce, deviled eggs, olives, pickles, jello salad, etc. These are things we don't ordinarily have; they are usually reserved for special meals.

And there are the "little" things in life too: a parking space, a green light, a stranger's smile and greeting, a beautiful sunset, etc.

The other day I had to leave my truck at the dealer for service and I decided to walk part-way home. Along the way I was thanking God for my two good legs and my good health that allowed me to walk.

We so often focus on the problems and challenges we have that we totally overlook the “little” blessings in life. But if we would begin to thank God for all the “little” things, the problems and challenges that seem so “big” would probably get a lot smaller!

So we should thank God for the “main dish”—Himself. We should thank God for the “side dishes”—all His blessings, and even the “vegetables”—the problems and challenges that inevitably come. And we can thank God for the “trimmings”—all the “little” things in life that He “serves” us in love and wisdom.

But after the main dish, side dishes and “trimmings,” there’s what? The dessert!

THANKING GOD FOR THE HOPE OF HEAVEN—“DESSERT”

The sound of Martha’s voice on the other end of the telephone always brought a smile to Brother Jim’s face. She was not only one of the oldest members of the congregation, but one of the most faithful.

Aunt Martie, as all the children called her, just seemed to ooze faith, hope, and love wherever she went.

This time, however, there seemed to be an unusual tone to her words. "Preacher, could you stop by this afternoon? I need to talk with you." "Of course. I'll be there around 3:00."

As they sat facing each other in the quiet of her small living room, Jim learned the reason for what he sensed in her voice. Martha shared the news that her doctor had just discovered a previously undetected tumor.

"He says I probably have six months to live." Martha’s words were certainly serious, yet there was a definite calm about her. "I’m so sorry to . . ." but before Jim could finish, Martha interrupted.

"Don’t be. The Lord has been good. I have lived a long life. I’m ready to go. You know that." "I know," Jim whispered with a reassuring nod.

"But I do want to talk with you about my funeral. I have been thinking about it, and there are things that I know I want."

The two talked quietly for a long time. They talked about Martha’s favorite hymns, the passages of Scripture that had meant so much to her through the years, and the many memories they shared from the five years Jim had been with Central Church.

When it seemed that they had covered just about everything, Aunt Martie paused, looked up at Jim with a twinkle in her eye, and then added, "One more thing, preacher. When they bury me, I want my old Bible in one hand and a fork in the other."

"A fork?" Jim was sure he had heard everything, but this caught him by surprise. "Why do you want to be buried with a fork?"

"I have been thinking about all of the church dinners and banquets that I attended through the years," she explained. "I couldn't begin to count them all. But one thing sticks in my mind. At those really nice get-togethers, when the meal was almost finished, a server or maybe the hostess would come by to collect the dirty dishes. I can hear the words now. Sometimes, at the best ones, somebody would lean over my shoulder and whisper, 'You can keep your fork.'"

"And do you know what that meant? Dessert was coming! "It didn't mean a cup of Jell-O or pudding or even a dish of ice cream. You don't need a fork for that. It meant the good stuff, like chocolate cake or cherry pie! When they told me I could keep my fork, I knew the best was yet to come! "That's exactly what I want people to talk about at my funeral.

Oh, they can talk about all the good times we had together. That would be nice.

"But when they walk by my casket and look at my pretty blue dress, I want them to turn to one another and say, 'Why the fork?'"

"This is what I want you to say. I want you to tell them that I kept my fork because the best is yet to come."

However good—or bad—life is, if you have trusted in Jesus Christ to be your Savior, "the best is yet to come!" And for that we can be especially thankful!

Conclusion

A child's prayer: "Dear God, I don't know what that is, and I don't really like the vegetables I have to eat, but I thank you for it—especially the dessert!"

When I was young we had to eat everything on our plate—without complaining about it—before we could leave.

Paul's advice for being thankful: "***Be thankful IN all things,***" (1 Thess. 5:18) "***Be thankful FOR all things.***" (Eph. 5:20) That pretty much covers everything!

So, what's on your "menu" for Thanksgiving?

Let the "main course" be thanking God for who He is.

Then the "side dishes" can be thanking God for all He's done and promised to do—including the "vegetables" or "all things."

And don't forget to thank God for the "trimmings"—all the "small things we overlook or take for granted.

And, of course, there's "dessert"—the hope of heaven!

This is a Thanksgiving we should have every day!