

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Nehemiah 8:1–18; 9:1–38.

LESSON 99 -- Primary Course

MEMORY VERSE: “With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

God’s Chosen People

One day the Children of Israel gathered before the water gate in the street of the City of Jerusalem. They asked a man named Ezra to bring the book of the Law that God had given to Moses. So Ezra stood on a pulpit of wood and read to the people from this Book, their Bible. When he opened the book, all the people stood up, lifted their hands toward Heaven, bowed their heads and worshiped God.

The people wept when they heard the man read from the Bible. But some of the men told them not to be sad. They told the people to rejoice and eat and drink. They were told to share what they had with those who had nothing. God always blesses people who are willing to divide what they have with others.

Perhaps not everyone was able to read in those days and they did not each have a Bible. They were very happy to find someone who could read to them. Then they made booths, or tents, from olive, pine, myrtle, and palm branches, and sat under the booths. They held a great feast and were very happy. The booths were to remind them of the days when they lived in tents in the wilderness as they travelled from Egypt to the Promised Land, their new home.

After the days of rejoicing and feasting were ended, these people again gathered. This time it was to pray to God and confess their faults and their sins. They realized that they had not been as thankful to God for His blessings as they should have been. They had forgotten to say “thank you” to God for watching over them for so many years. They were sorry that they had not kept all the commandments.

God’s Kindness

Shall we try to remember some of the times that the Lord had helped these people? Many years before, as the Children of Israel came to the Red Sea, Moses had held his rod over the water and the people passed right through on dry ground. As they walked on and on, God had watched over them. He knew when they were tired; when they were thirsty, He gave them water out of rock. When they were without food, God had sent bread from Heaven, which they called manna. All they had to do was to gather it from the ground every morning. During the night, God had sent a pillar of fire in the sky to show the people the way to go; and in the daytime, a cloud in the sky led them along the way and kept the hot sun from them.

Instead of being thankful to God for all these wonderful blessings, these people had murmured against God and against Moses. One time they even worshiped a golden calf instead of God. Many times God had punished them because of their sins. In this lesson the people once more promised to obey God and do what the Bible told them to do.

The First Thanksgiving

A few hundred years ago in a land across the sea there was a smaller group of people than the Children of Israel. These people decided to come to America so they could worship God in freedom. God protected them on the long voyage across the ocean. When they reached this land they built log houses and planted crops. Although they had some hardships, God was very good to them and protected them from danger. Sometimes the Indians would come and fight them, but God helped the Pilgrims. They harvested their crops in the fall and stored away food for the winter.

They were not like the Children of Israel who forgot to be thankful to God. They remembered to say “thank you” to God for His goodness to them. A little less than a year after coming here these Pilgrim Fathers held a feast of thanks to God for His many blessings to them. This was in November of 1621 and was known as the first Thanksgiving Day. Even the Indians were friendly to the Pilgrims at this time and brought five deer to the feast.

Two years later, when rain came just in time to enable them to raise a crop of corn, they again had a time of thanksgiving to God. Three years later as their supplies were running low, one day a ship arrived bringing them just what they needed. Again they remembered to give thanks to God by

settling aside a time to worship God. They had a great feast at this time, but they also prayed and sang song and thanked God for bringing them to this country where they could worship God as they wished.

Years later, when George Washington was president he told the people to have a day of thanksgiving once every year. But it was not until 1863 that Thanksgiving Day was held on an appointed day of every year. The last Thursday in November has been our Thanksgiving Day.

God's Blessing to Us

What should Thanksgiving Day mean to us? Most of us enjoy a good dinner on that day; but to a Christian, Thanksgiving Day means much more than eating a dinner. In fact, every day is a day in which to give thanks to God. Let us try to count our blessings.

Do you know that you should thank someone besides your mother for the meals she fixes for you? Of course, you should thank Daddy, for he works hard to earn the money to buy the food. But you should surely thank Jesus who makes the food grow. Before people can make bread, God must make the wheat grow, for bread is made of wheat that has been ground into flour. It was God who made the little grain of wheat in the very beginning. He sends the sunshine and the rain to make the fruit and vegetable grow. He gives us the animals, the fishes, and the fowls for food. That is why we return thanks at the table before we eat our meals. God knows what we need, and if we are willing to work a little to get it He gives us what we must have.

God also gives us our homes; soft, warm beds in which to sleep; and clothes to wear. Think of the many children in other countries who do not have warm beds or enough clothes to keep warm. Some of them have no homes.

Besides all the things we need, God give us many, many things to enjoy. God made the beautiful flowers that bloom for us, the butterflies, the bees that buzz near the sweet flowers. God made the lovely birds that fly through the air and sing their cheery songs for us. Very early in the morning the bright sunshine peeps through the window telling us that it is time to get out of bed. The sun climbs higher into the sky – it is time for work and play. In the evening, when Daddy comes home from work, the sun slowly goes out of our sight. Sometimes we see the beautiful sunset with colours of red, purple, and gold in the sky. The birds stop singing and fly to their nests in the trees. Children come in from play, and the day is over. Then at night God gives us the moon to light the sky, and the little stars that shine. That is the time to sleep.

Thankfulness

Let us try to be thankful, not only on Thanksgiving Day but every day of the year. Let us not do as the Children of Israel did after God had been so good to them. But let us be thankful as were the Pilgrims who remembered to thank God for His kindness and blessings. When things are not going as we should like, and we feel like complaining, let us stop and count our blessings. Soon we shall feel like singing a song of praise to God for giving us all that we need and a great deal more.

QUESTIONS

1. How long did Ezra read to the people? Nehemiah 8:3.
2. What did the people do when Ezra opened the book? Nehemiah 8:5, 6.
3. How had God fed these people at one time? Nehemiah 9:15.
4. Had they been thankful to God for all His blessings? Nehemiah 9:17.
5. Does the Bible tell us to be thankful? Colossians 3:15; Psalm 100:4.