**Sermon- Thanksgiving Eve 2023**

**Title: “God’s Provision”**

**Text: Phil. 4-13-20**

**Salutation**

**Prayer**

**Bridge**

 **Today, we look back. Because of this we will always get a history lesson, but not merely a worldly, kingdom of the left history lesson, but also one of the kingdom of the right wherein we see not only history but a secret in God’s Provision.**

 **When we Americans look at the history books, we encounter a romanticized version of the first Thanksgiving Day in 1621. The pictures show Native Americans and Pilgrims sitting down to a feast of every imaginable delicacy on an enormous table. We know that was not the case even though 90 were in attendance. My wife Shirreen’s ancestors sat at that table and probably would congratulate the advertisers of Butterball turkeys, Ocean Spray cranberry sauce, Stovetop Stuffing, Idaho Potatoes, and the likes of them for offering us such an idea to believe. In fact, it took almost a year before they were to have Thanksgiving occur. The time after their landing was a time of little provision. They had left England in a time of religious persecution. So many died on the trip from the old country. So many died when they arrived. So many died the first winter and thereafter. And the reason that Shirreen’s family can now say they can trace their family back to the Mayflower was because Mr. Palmer their direct ancestor who came over on the second ship, The Fortune, married the widow of a man that came over on The Mayflower. And then they worked hard. They had become more like friends with the natives and harvested their first good crops. God blessed them and they celebrated joy even in times of hardship. Even at that, the first Thanksgiving still would not have been anywhere near the caliber of our feasts today where literally everything we would like to eat is readily available to be on our tables. For us, God’s Provision is not only good, but it is, on this side of heaven, heavenly. We Americans enjoy God’s abundant provision whether we know it of not.**

**Law**

 **But the Pilgrims weren’t the first people on earth to experience hard times while under religious persecution. Paul’s letter to the Philippians speaks of such a circumstance. He describes for the church how he had experienced both good times and bad, now that he was imprisoned there. For him, these were not good times. His accusers said he had stirred up trouble and he was flogged and thrown into the city prison for preaching the Gospel. And because he claimed Roman Citizenship, he would be held there until being shipped off to Rome. But in this hardship, he related some interesting things about his past and his present to his contemporaries and to us.**

 **Paul grew up in Tarsus in Turkey. He was a Diaspora Jew, living in a Greek world. And his family did very well there. When he was young, he liked tents and therefore, later he became a tentmaker in order to earn a living. But along his path of being a devout Jew, he went to live in Jerusalem and study at the feet of the well know Rabbi, Gamaliel. It was in that vein of thought he came to hunt the first believers in Christ and persecute them. He was a Jew’s, Jew. And for him at that time, he probably thought that these were the best times of his life. Until, that is, until he met Christ one day on his way to kill more Christians.**

 **We see, therefore, that religious persecution is no new thing. It happened to the early Christians at the hands of Paul, It then happened to Paul at the hands of the Romans that lived in Phillippi, and it happened 1600 years later to Christians fleeing the hands of an English King. In all these circumstances, it was an evil thing, causing death and destruction. And today, the persecution of Christians continues to occur, no matter what the news media tells you. According to current stats, followers of Christ die at a rate of almost 6000 deaths per year. The devil will not stop this evil until Christ returns.**

 **I feel guilty about this. I have been blessed to live in a land where, up until this point and to my knowledge, I have suffered just minimal inconveniences to my life because of my faith. That may change, of course, but until then I have been tremendously blessed. I suspect that you might say the same thing. These are the best of times, even amongst all of the things we have had happen to us in our economy and other social, kingdom of the left circumstances we are in. And we should reflect on that deeply.**

 **Why? Because of what I have already said. We ARE blessed more than anyone. And we should be helping others. When the Pilgrims needed food after they arrived, the Natives gave them food. When Paul was imprisoned, the church of Phillipi gave him food. This is not a guilt trip I’m laying on you. It’s an appeal to you to reflect upon the blessings of God in your life and act upon them out of thankfulness for God’s provision and joy that He has done so. To His glory. There are so many opportunities that you could literally give away everything you possess and still not have enough. For example: Who knows who Samuel Wondemu is?**

 **We are not to cling to every dime we have ever made and worry that we will die with nothing. I worry that I will die with too much.**

**Gospel**

 **The good news is that in the past, God’s Provision for His people has come at God’s perfect time. It’s often forgotten when that happens. When it happens to us, we continue to go on with life, maybe thanking the Lord, but most times just going on like before. At the beginning of my message, I said that there was a secret to this. And here it is: Paul said, “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the *secret* of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” And *this* is the secret my friends, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”**

 **For us who know, this is not just a platitude that doesn’t mean anything. It is the Gospel truth. The example given by Paul is for us to understand, follow and emulate in our lives, to honor God and man. We can, indeed, do all things through Him who strengthens us. And this is not a prosperity Gospel I preach. Oh no, you will not become wealthy if you do good works. But you will glorify God. Giving is another blessing that God provides for you at this time and this place. I’d take advantage of that while you can. You never know when you will be in Paul’s or the Pilgrims shoes. For you see, in Acts 20:35 it says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” We can do all things through Him who strengthens us.**

**Conclusion**

 **To leave you with those last few Words of Christ would seem like heaping coals upon your head on Thanksgiving. In any other context that would be true. Today on Thanksgiving Day, we remember that God gives us all things. And He is pleased when we give thanks. It is a fragrant odor to Him because Christ has satisfied our debts, and He receives our praise. This, because we are His and have received more than just all our things, but salvation through His death and resurrection. We receive what we do not deserve and what we deserve He withholds. No other God is like Him. No other God cares that much. To Him we give the glory and to him we give Thanks and praise. That is what we do on this Thanksgiving Day. We give Him the glory for all things through His Son our Savior, God’s Provision to us, Jesus Christ. Doxology…**

**“Thank God from whom all blessings flow, thank Him all creatures here below. Thank Him above ye heavenly Host, thank Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”**