

25.4 The Pilgrims and Thanksgiving 2

If you are listening to our podcast this Thanksgiving Day I hope you are enjoying family and recounting the blessings of God. I want to speak a little more about the Pilgrims today. I want to begin with a reading from the Geneva Bible to remind us of them. **Hebrews 11:13** (GNV) reads:

All these died in faith, and received not the promises, but saw them afar off, and believed them, and received them thankfully, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The providential hand of God had been with the Pilgrims all along. There are several stories that, in spite of all of their troubles, God was with them. Maybe one of the most dramatic was with the Indian named, *Squanto*.

After the Pilgrims had landed there was an incident with the Indians. They had wanted to make contact with the Indians but kept their distance due to their apparent hostility towards the Pilgrims. Finally an Indian walked into their camp who spoke English. His name was Samoset. He did not speak English well, but he knew a little. He told them of his friend that spoke better English than he. That friend's name was Squanto.

Squanto had been captured by the British about five to ten years before the Pilgrims had arrived. The English were there before them, kidnapping natives and selling them into slavery. That is what happened to Squanto.

He went to Spain and learned about Christianity from two Catholic friars. They gave him freedom. He then went to England where he learned English. Eventually he made his way back to Massachusetts where his tribe had been. When he got there, he found that they are all dead or gone due to a plague brought to the land by the English. He got in touch with another tribe that was close by and stayed with them.

When the Pilgrims came, he became the interpreter that they needed to be able to communicate with the Indians and work out agreements with them. Squanto became this providential placement for the people that had traveled all the way from England.

Because of Squanto, they had an abundant harvest. He taught them how to plant corn and there was a great abundance of it. In the fall of 1621, they had the first Thanksgiving celebration. Many scholars believe that the Pilgrims had met some Jewish people in Holland who taught them Jewish practices such as the Feast of Tabernacles. It may be that they patterned this Thanksgiving banquet after that Feast.

You will recall that nearly half of the Pilgrims died during the vicious winter that met them on their arrival to Massachusetts. At the time of the Thanksgiving feast, there were fifty-three Pilgrims and ninety or more natives present. There were only four women to take care of nearly 150 people. Think about all the cooking in those days that would have to go on for such a party. They played many games and had various contests for recreation that day. It was a time of peace between the Indians and Pilgrims. Because of Squanto, they had opportunity in making treaties with the chief and to introduce the gospel to the natives.

I want us to take away from this the need to stay focused on God. That is what the Pilgrims did. They saw the sovereignty of God and focused on Him. They kept going, even when it was hard. As you know, it is not always comfortable, and it is not always easy to be a Christian. The Pilgrims proved that. But they stayed dedicated to God and firm on their faith and perseverance in God's providential care for them.

The Pilgrims came to America under God's sovereignty. They did so to advance the Christian faith. The questions I want to leave us with are, "*If God is sovereign and if God put those Pilgrims in America to further the Christian faith then, why did He put us in America at this time? Why are we here? What is our purpose?*" I hope it is the same purpose they had, to further the Christian faith in a country that desperately needs it.

The Pilgrims are a great story and far more in depth than I understood for many years. They are an example for us, which is what they intended to be wherever they lived. They saw themselves as "steppingstones" for future generations. They came to America to establish a colony, and spread the gospel in America. They were laying themselves down so that others could come along behind them and go a little further than they did. Their vision was generation to generation. They were just the pioneers, the ones breaking ground, for others to follow them.

The Pilgrims live on when we study their story. We can see the hand of providence and their trust in the sovereign God. We can see their perseverance and their faith in all these things.

Faith drove the Pilgrims in every aspect of life. Everything involved their faith in a sovereign God. **Hebrews 11:6** (GNV) says:

"But without faith, it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God, must believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek him."

God is sovereign and we have faith in this sovereign God in every part of our life. It is easy to try to compartmentalize faith, but it does not stay in one category. It is in every part of life, according to scripture. This is what the Pilgrims tried to embrace.

I hope we can imitate the faith of the Pilgrims. They were tremendous people of faith. I hope that faith is in us so that we, too, will rise up to persevere and advance the Christian faith.

Keep The Light of Persevering Faith Burning!