



President Walton's November 2019 Message

A Plentiful Harvest



Today is YOUR day of celebration as a believer in Jesus. Luther reminded us that we are at the same time saint and sinner, and while the world all too quickly reminds us of our sinfulness, today, celebrate the fact through the blood of Jesus you are a saint! Happy All Saints Day!

As saints of God, we have so much, for which we can give thanks, especially at this time of the year. In 1844, Henry Alford wrote an English Christian harvest festival hymn, still sung today, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come." It was an outpouring of praise expressing the joy of God's constant and continuous provision for His people. Recognizing the abundant, gracious gifts of God is something we often neglect in a world filled with feelings of self-sufficiency.

Yet, it is God who supplies our needs, sometimes in unique and unexpected ways. Read the words to the first stanza of the hymn: *"Come, you thankful people, come; Raise the song of harvest home. All is safely gathered in, Ere the winter storms begin. God, our maker, does provide; For our wants to be supplied."* What a simple song of thanksgiving!

We are blessed to live in a nation filled with a rich supply of resources. This, of course, does not mean that we each have everything we want. My parents used to remind my siblings and me regularly that while we may not have everything we *want*, we do have everything we *need*. Growing up I learned there is a huge difference between wants and needs. All my needs were met, even if, at times, I did not wear the latest sneakers or have the most up to date electronics. I never starved; I never worried about having clean clothes, unless I could sneak past my mother; I always had a place to sleep; I never found myself sick without someone providing medication; and we had plenty of toys, even if some were hand-me-downs.

As a child, I could have resented the fact that my family did not seem to have things that other families did. The one thing that we did have was an abiding love, and a deep sense of faith that has followed me all my life. It is still a joy to get together with my siblings, and I am grateful that my parents, though elderly, are still with us. I try to speak with them weekly, not out of a sense of obligation, but rather out of a deep sense of thankfulness for the values, they instilled in me, and the love they have showered on my family and me.

My parents are a living example of the love of Jesus being visibly seen in another. They faithfully took my siblings and me to Sunday School and Church, even when we didn't want to go; they did family devotions, and I can't remember not having an Advent Wreath and

taking turns to light the candle—and even more importantly, putting them out! For some reason that always seemed to be the more coveted honor. We said grace at meals, even when we were on vacation or at a restaurant. Why is that significant? Because it wasn't always that way.

My parents were nominal church-goers when I was a small child, meaning the Christmas and Easter kind, and occasionally, when my grandparents on my mother's side would prod them. At the time I was the youngest child, and the main chore was keeping me quiet. When my younger twin sisters came along, it just became too daunting for nominal believers to make the effort. They would still take the older three to Sunday School, but we were dropped off and picked up afterward, usually late.



Something happened along the way that changed the course of our lives. My parents had what I can only explain as an encounter with the living Jesus that changed them. They moved from being occasional church attenders to excited believers. The change was radical, and noticeable. It was seeing the difference that Jesus made, especially in my father's life, which had an impact on my faith. Things began to change and it seemed that every time the church was open we were there. It was my father's faith, in particular, which had a profound influence on my decision to enter into ministry. He let Jesus be seen in his life—and still does. I am so thankful for those who prayed for my parents, who told them about Jesus, and reached multiple generations for the sake of the gospel. God will mightily use one person on fire for Jesus! It is not about being thankful for possessions as much as it is about being thankful for those God has placed in our lives.

I love the story of Mordecai Ham, an itinerant preacher in North Carolina who traveled about preaching revivals in tents. Ham was not successful by human standards. However, it was at one of these gatherings that a young man, who had grown up with the Bible but was reluctant to make a commitment, came to know Jesus in a powerful way. It was in this revival that Billy Graham gave his life to the Lord at 16 years old, and he never turned back. Moreover, while Mordecai Ham never reached more than a few hundred folks with his ministry, he reached Billy Graham, and God used him to reach thousands upon thousands of people for the sake of Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2 states, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* God has placed in each of our lives people who have, or maybe even will, influence us positively for the sake of the Gospel. Personally, countless people have helped me grow in my faith and life. It is likely the same for you. Alex Haley, author of *Roots*, kept on the wall of his office a picture of a turtle sitting on a fence. To him, the image held a powerful lesson. His explanation: "If you see a turtle on top of a fence post, you know he had some help." Who have been the spiritual giants in your life for whom you give thanks?

At the very same time, you also have the potential to be a witness to someone else. You may never even be aware of who or how, but God will use you as part of that cloud of witnesses. This is why I encourage people to let Jesus be seen in their life. It may be the inspiration for someone to grow in their faith and be a witness to another! This is your calling, saint of God!

One of the traditions my mother-in-law, another of those cloud of witnesses in my life, used to make us practice around the table at Thanksgiving, was what or for whom are you thankful. Thinking back, our kids often gave silly responses, but for the adults, it generally was more about simple things rather than possessions. In fact, most often it was about the people in our lives who had somehow touched us.

In a few weeks when you gather around the table for a Thanksgiving meal, remember the saints who have gone before us, and the saints that surround us now. For each of them we can truly give thanks as forgiven sinners and saints!

In His peace,

Greg



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