

Text: Proverbs 30:8b-9

Theme: LORD, Lead Me To Thanksgiving.

- I. Give me not poverty.
- II. Give me not riches.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!  
Proverbs 30:8b-9

Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.  
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

Dear thankful Christians,

Wouldn't it be fun to have one of those first pilgrims to our country visit at our home this Thanksgiving? As he came in the door, he could take off his shoes and feel what it's like to walk on carpeting. We could show him how our turkeys just sit in our modern ovens, and pretty much cook by themselves. We could show him where the switch is, so that he could turn on the light above the table, and get a better look at the good china and sterling silver. We could impress him with the way we cook food in a microwave. After dinner, we could show him how the automatic dishwasher works, and then kick back and let him enjoy watching a football game on our TV. We could show him how we not only talk to others, but text them on our cell phones; how we check the internet to see what is going on around the world, and chat with our friends on e-mail and face-book. Then we could take him for a ride around the countryside in our car. None of us would have any difficulty impressing one of those first pilgrims. We have so much more than they did. Does that mean that we are more thankful? I doubt it. Even in the midst of their poverty and hardships, I think those pilgrims were just as thankful on that first Thanksgiving as people are today.

It simply is not true that the more a person has, the more thankful he will be. There are rich people who are not very thankful at all. There are people, rich or poor, who are so busy trying to get more, that they take no time to appreciate what they have, and stop to be thankful. The rich and the poor alike celebrate Thanksgiving, and they can both be equally thankful or thankless. Thanksgiving does not depend upon how many earthly things we have. True Thanksgiving depends upon recognizing from where our blessings come. All that we have comes from the LORD, and especially the ability to be thankful comes from the LORD. That's why we pray today, "LORD, Lead Me To Thanksgiving. Give me not poverty. Give me not riches."

The first request we ask often, don't we: "Give me not poverty." No one wants to be poor, so we ask the Lord for the things that we need here on earth; food, clothing, shelter, and all that we need to provide for ourselves and our family. "Give me not poverty...or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." If we have too little, the temptation is to become dissatisfied, to try to get more, even by stealing. If we have too little, we are tempted to complain, to be angry against God for not giving us more, to blame God for our misfortune.

What is poverty? How many earthly goods do we really need? That's a difficult

question, a question that we can't really answer. Some people seem to think they need more than others. Some are happy with one square meal a day, and the clothes on their back; while others are not even satisfied with their four-bedroom home and two cars in the garage. Sometimes we think we need something, but later we find out that we can get along fine without it. The point is: we don't know what we need, but God does. That's why we leave it in the Lord's hands. "Give me not poverty. Give me what I need. Give me my daily bread."

God has given none of us poverty. I don't see anyone here who is starving. I don't see anyone here who doesn't have clothes to wear, and I'm sure you all have a sheltered place to sleep tonight and a way to get there from here. Our God loves us dearly, enough that he died for us to give us eternal salvation in the bliss and glory of heaven. He also gives us material blessings here on earth. Let each of these blessings be a reminder of God's greatest blessing, his own Son, who suffered the greatest want in his life and death in our place to give us our greatest need, forgiveness for our greed, for our complaining against him and for our ingratitude toward him. Lord, cause us to trust that you do, you have, and you always will, give us those things that we need. Help us to be content with those things that you give us. Lead us to appreciate them. Lord, lead us to thanksgiving.

The other request we probably haven't prayed for so often: "Give me not riches." That might sound like a foolish prayer, but ask the rich man in hell if it's a foolish prayer. In our sinfulness, we tend to be greedy. No matter how much we have, we always want more. The richest man in the world wants more, until the day he's lying on his deathbed, and then he suddenly realizes that earthly riches are not the important thing. It would not be difficult for me to convince you that the Lord has not given you too much. But we need to realize that earthly riches can be a dangerous thing.

When I was growing up over in rural Spring Valley, Wisconsin, the neighbor's bull died. A young three-year-old bull—why did it die? Because it got out of the pen and into the ripening cornfield where it ate and ate and ate until it ate itself to death. A bull will do that. And that's exactly what we would do if we had the chance. We would take more and more earthly riches from the Lord; we would keep taking more, until we would destroy ourselves, until we would worship the gifts instead of the giver, until our faith would be gone and we would be lost for all eternity. That is why we ask the Lord: "Give me not riches, otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?'"

Now there is nothing wrong with being rich. Abraham was very rich. So was Job. So was King David. There are sincere Christians today who are very rich. In many ways you and I would be considered rich. One of those first pilgrims would call any of us rich. How many riches are too many? Again we don't know. But God knows. So we leave it in his hands: "Don't give me more riches than I can handle. Don't give me so much that I destroy myself, and fall from you."

Our riches can easily lead us to forget the Lord, to think that the blessings of this life are more important than the eternal blessings that the Lord has won for us. The rich fool says, "I don't need the Lord. I have everything I need. I don't want the Lord. I don't want to serve him with my riches. I want to serve myself." People have often fallen into the trap of trusting in their riches, instead of trusting in the Lord who gave them their riches.

Concerning the Children of Israel, God said, "When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me." [Hos. 13:6] God had warned the Children of Israel, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." [Deut. 8:10-14] Yet in spite of that warning, we know the tragic account of how the Children of Israel did later forget the Lord.

God gives some of us more than others. That's up to him. He's our gracious God! He knows each one of us. He knows our needs, but he also knows our weaknesses. He knows just how much we can handle. He gives to each of us the amount that is best for us. May the Lord lead us to be content and satisfied with what his gracious hand has given us. May he cause us to remain faithful to him and not forsake him in our prosperity. May he teach us to pray "Give me not riches" as fervently as we pray "Give me not poverty."

There is a danger at both extremes. It is dangerous for us to be too poor. It is dangerous for us to be too rich. We can be especially thankful this Thanksgiving and every Thanksgiving because our gracious God keeps us between those two extremes. Let us be thankful for what God has, and what God has not given us. He gives us exactly what we need, exactly what we should have, exactly what is best for us. Most of all, God has given us a Savior from sin, and in him we have everything we need for all eternity. In our congregations the Lord has graciously led us before himself today, where we belong, thanking him, where we belong to him. Lord, continue to lead us to Thanksgiving.

Amen.

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.