November 26, 2017

**What Comes After Thanksgiving?**

Luke 8:1-3

**Intro:** What comes after Thanksgiving?

The obvious answer is Christmas! But I’m not concerned with what holiday comes next.

**Big Idea: What are the results of a lifestyle of Thanksgiving?**

Maybe we should coin a new word - Thanksliving!

Thanksgiving is a great holiday! Two days off for most people - a 4 day weekend for some people. It is uniquely American. People in other countries don’t celebrate the Puritans coming to Plymouth Rock and celebrating the first actual American Thanksgiving in 1621.

Now, by an Act of Congress, we have a national holiday of Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of each November.

When in the Philippines …

If it weren’t for the fact that everyone enjoys the food and football so much, there might be those who would try to get rid of this holiday - some want to get rid of any remembrance or recognition of Christian faith in our culture -

But I’m more worried about those of us who do follow the Lord, yet we don’t live fully thankful lives.

We worry and gripe and complain more than we are thankful. We love this holiday, and we remind ourselves that we should be thankful all year long - but life gets in the way - frustrations get in the way - and we often forget to be thankful for every little thing the Lord does and has done for us!

There is a woman in the Bible that has been much talked about in recent years. In fact, people have talked about her so much they have speculated about her and tried to establish certain speculations as facts about her - but actually the Bible tells us very little about her.

Mary Magdalene -

Luke 8:1-3 - Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

The Bible doesn’t tell us nearly as much about Mary Magdalene as people have speculated, but it tells us enough to know that she lived a life of Thanksliving - her life shows us the results of living a life of Thanksgiving -

This is what comes after Thanksgiving:

**> Thanksgiving leads to faithfulness.**

Out of Mary’s thanksgiving for Jesus setting her free, she followed Jesus faithfully and supported Him financially!

Luke 8 is the first time we meet Mary, but from other passages we know that she followed Jesus faithfully for the rest of His ministry, and was actually more faithful than the 12 followers we cal disciples and apostles -

John 19:25 - Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene.

She was there - at the cross - openly identifying with Jesus when the others had run away.

Matthew 27:57-61 - As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

She never left Him! Arrest - crucifixion - burial - no matter the danger to herself from the soldiers - potential arrest for her being identified with Jesus - potential execution for herself - these are all the reasons the other disciples ran away - not Mary.

She remained FAITHFUL!

We can only imagine the torment that had been in her life. Possessed by 7 demons.

Some speculate that Mary was a prostitute - Some speculate that other women in the Bible who are not identified by name might have been this Mary - we really don’t know - but we know she lived a tortured, tormented, painful and destructive life until Jesus came along. He cast out her demons - He set her free - and her thankfulness led her to faithfulness!

Matthew 12:43-45 - “When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. Then it says, ‘I will return to the person I came from.’ So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and in order. Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation.”

If she had not become a faithful follower of Jesus, multitudes of demons would have possessed her. She had so many reasons to be thankful, faithful and generous.

Think of your life. What has Jesus set you free from? If you are a follower of Jesus - what was your life like before?

If you have been a follower of Jesus since childhood - have you ever considered what your life might have been like without Him? I have - I don’t like the thoughts ...

Don’t we have multitudes of reasons to be thankful for the freedom He has given us? Don’t we have multitudes of reasons to be faithful?

**If we remain mindful of where we would be without Jesus, then we will always want to be with Him!**

You will want to be a person of prayer - you will want to be with other believers in worship and in relationships - you will want to be in His presence and so worship and thanksgiving will become a lifestyle!

Luke 8 talked about Mary giving - what was her motivation for giving?

Her motivation was her thankfulness. Mary did not give in order to get! She did not give thinking about what she would get in return for her giving. She gave with no strings attached - simply because she was thankful for what Jesus had done for her!

What a great example for us! She had already received more than she would ever be able to repay - so why expect more? Shouldn’t that be our attitude?

“I tried that tithing thing and it didn’t work out!” - Oh - so Jesus being mutilated on a cross was not enough for you?

If our motivation for giving is greed, selfishness, or what we can get in return - it is not really giving - and it is not thankfulness.

Also - Mary did not give because Jesus needed her money!

Do you think God needs your money? That’s not the reason He asks us to give!

He owns the cattle … all the silver … all the gold … fed the multitude with 5 loaves and 2 fish … got His tax money out of a fishes mouth …

He asks us to give because it is good for us!

Acts 20:35 - … should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Jesus received Mary’s gifts not because He needed to receive - but because she needed to give! Giving is better for us than it is for God!

He knows that we need to express thankfulness. He knows that by giving we receive blessings that money can’t buy!

When I am set free, I am set free to give! It is not an obligation, it is a privilege.

When I learned that all I have belongs to the Lord, it did not put me under legalistic obligation - it sets me free to turn more back over to Him! In that, there are blessings and benefits that cannot be explained or measured! And I have the confidence that He will always provide for me what I need!

Mary’s thanksgiving led to faithfulness - she followed Him - wanted to be in His presence - and she gave to His work as much as she could!

**> Thanksgiving leads to loyalty.**

The thankfulness Mary had for what Jesus had done for her gave her a loyalty that defied danger and death!

Matthew 27:62-28:1 - The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, “Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: ‘After three days I will rise from the dead.’ So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we’ll be worse off than we were at first.”

Pilate replied, “Take guards and secure it the best you can.” So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

She was not afraid of a Roman guard!

For Mary, no distance was too far, no danger was too great - she was a loyal follower of Jesus to the very end - no matter what it may cost!

This reminds me of the loyalty of Ruth …

Ruth 1:16-17 - But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!”

Ruth was thankful to Naomi - this is the kind of loyalty that true Thanksgiving leads to!

Christ was so loyal to us, the human race, the highest aspect of His creation, that He gave His life for us. That should create such thankfulness in me that I would make the commitment of Ruth to never leave Him! I should be bold enough to stand up and defend Him before any accusers!

Mary witnessed Jesus execution … His burial … she didn’t fully understand what it was all about and what it would lead to … her heart must have been broken … nothing more she could do … but later she would realize that He was doing even more than when He cast those demons out of her. In His act on the cross He was paying for all of her sins! He was giving her ultimate eternal freedom!

Those we call Apostles didn’t have the privilege of witnessing all of this - but Mary’s thankfulness led to this kind of loyalty.

Think again - what has He done for you? How has He set you free? Shouldn’t our Thanksgiving lead to such a loyalty that will inspire us to never leave Him - never even consider ceasing to follow Him - always want to stay close to Him no matter what it may mean for us?

**> Thanksgiving leads to reward.**

Mark 16:9 - After Jesus rose from the dead early on Sunday morning, the first person who saw him was Mary Magdalene, the woman from whom he had cast out seven demons.

John gives us more detail -

John 20:11-18 - Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her.

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?”

She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

“Mary!” Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).

“Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

What a reward! She saw Him die … now she is the first to see Him alive! She is also the first to be able to tell others! She is the first witness! She is the first evangelist!

It was her thanksgiving that led to her faithfulness and loyalty that led her to the tomb that day! And that led to this great reward!

When we live a life of thanksgiving, it leads to the reward of His presence:

Psalm 100:4 - Enter his gates with thanksgiving;

go into his courts with praise.

Psalm 16:11 - You will show me the way of life,

granting me the joy of your presence

and the pleasures of living with you forever.

Psalm 22:3 - Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

If we live a life of thanksgiving, we will be rewarded with His presence. We will know that His Holy Spirit is with us. We will know that He never leaves us and never forsakes us!

We will hear the quiet, gentle voice of the Holy Spirit. We will hear Him speak to us through His Word! We will know His presence as we gather together to worship Him - as we come together in our groups to encourage one another - He will be with us!

**Concl:** Thanksgiving is a great holiday … But be reminded again - the day is not over - thanksgiving is not over - thanksgiving must continue.

If it does - we will be faithful - we will be loyal - we will see the rewards that He wants to give us.