

8:00 P.M.

"THANKFUL FOR EVERYTHING"

1987

I THESSALONIANS 5:18

IT IS A WELL KNOWN FACT THAT THE PILGRIM FATHERS OBSERVED A KIND OF THANKSGIVING DAY AFTER THEIR FIRST WINTER IN AMERICA. APPROXIMATELY 150 YEARS LATER, PRES. GEORGE WASHINGTON ISSUED A THANKSGIVING DAY PROCLAMATION TO CELEBRATE AS HAD THE PILGRIMS. HOWEVER, THOMAS JEFFERSON, 3RD PRESIDENT OF THE U.S., DISCONTINUED THE PRACTICE. THANKSGIVING WAS OBSERVED ON AN INDIVIDUAL STATE BASIS ON DIFFERENT DATES FOR MANY YEARS. HOWEVER, IN THE EARLY 1800'S A MRS. SARA HALE, AUTHOR OF THE POEM "MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB" BEGAN CAMPAIGNING FOR THE RESTORATION OF A THANKSGIVING NATIONAL HOLIDAY. SHE WROTE LETTERS TO NATIONAL LEADERS REPEATEDLY BUT WAS NOT GIVEN MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT. FINALLY, IN 1863, ABRAHAM LINCOLN LISTENED TO HER PLEA THAT THE NORTH AND SOUTH LAY ASIDE THEIR DIFFERENCES AND OBSERVE A SPECIAL THANKSGIVING DAY. LINCOLN PROCLAIMED THE FOURTH THURSDAY OF NOVEMBER TO BE THE OFFICIAL, NATIONAL THANKSGIVING DAY AND IT WAS RATIFIED BY THE U.S. CONGRESS IN 1941. WE MAY NOT BE ALL WE SHOULD BE AS A NATION, BUT PROBABLY NO OTHER NATION OBSERVES THIS KIND OF NATIONAL DAY FOR THANKSGIVING, ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE A DAY OF FEASTING MORE THAN THANKSGIVING. I HAVE BEEN READING SOME INTERESTING STORIES ABOUT THANKSGIVING. FOR EXAMPLE, DR. ALEXANDER WHYTE OF EDINBURGH WAS FAMOUS FOR HIS SUNDAY PULPIT PRAYERS. IT SEEMED THAT HE ALWAYS FOUND SOMETHING FOR WHICH HE COULD THANK THE LORD EVEN IN DIFFICULT TIMES. ONE STORMY MORNING AS HE STOOD TO OPEN THE SERVICE WITH PRAYER, DR. WHYTE SAID: "WE THANK THEE, O GOD, THAT EVERY DAY IS NOT LIKE TODAY." MATTHEW HENRY, THE FAMOUS BIBLE SCHOLAR, WAS ROBBED OF HIS FUNDS BY THIEVES. WHEN ASKED TO COMMENT ON HIS DESPERATE SITUATION, HE SPOKE OF HIS THANKFULNESS TO GOD FOR THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE. ONE, HE WAS THANKFUL THAT HE HAD NEVER BEEN ROBBED BEFORE. TWO, HE WAS THANKFUL THAT THEY TOOK HIS MONEY AND NOT HIS LIFE. (3) HE WAS THANKFUL THAT EVEN THOUGH THEY TOOK ALL HE HAD, IT WASN'T MUCH. (4) HE WAS THANKFUL THAT IT WAS HE WHO HAD BEEN ROBBED AND NOT WHO HAD DONE THE ROBBING! MATHESON COULD WELL HAVE WRITTEN PAUL'S TEXT ABOUT

THANKSGIVING. PAUL WAS A REMARKABLE MAN IN THAT HE KNEW THAT IT IS NOT HAPPY PEOPLE WHO ARE THANKFUL BUT THANKFUL PEOPLE ARE HAPPY. PAUL KNEW HOW TO THANK GOD IN EVERY SITUATION, AND HIS JOYFUL ATTITUDE IN LIFE WAS NOT DEPENDENT EITHER ON WHAT HE HAD OR WHERE HE WAS. HE COULD BE THANKFUL IN JAIL OR ON A STORMY SEA, OR IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY. PAUL'S GREAT PASSION IN LIFE WAS TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL AND HE FOUND HIS GREATEST JOY IN SENDING THAT MESSAGE TO PEOPLE EVERYWHERE. IN A GENERATION WHERE WE ARE PRONE TO THANK GOD FOR TANGIBLE THINGS IT IS GOOD TO TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT THE BIBLE AND NOTICE WHAT PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR. (COMMENT REGARDING HOMER COOMBS OBSERVATION REGARDING A 230Z.)

I. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR THE FAITH AND THEIR FAITH

ROMANS 1:8, I COR. 1:4

Eph. 1:15-16

ROMANS IS A GREAT BOOK ON THE SUBJECT OF FAITH. (ROM. 1:17, 5:1, 10:17) 3:22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31) IT IS EASY TO FORGET THAT FAITH IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN FACILITIES. PAUL REJOICED WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE WERE FIRMLY ROOTED IN THE FAITH AND WERE FIRMLY COMMITTED TO SPREADING THEIR FAITH. THE CHURCH AT ROME WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH "HOME MISSIONS" BUT WITH WORLDWIDE WITNESS! EVEN WHEN SOME PREACHERS AT PHILIPPI DID NOT PREACH IN A MANNER WITH WHICH PAUL WAS COMFORTABLE, HE COULD STILL REJOICE THAT THE FAITH WAS PROCLAIMED. (PHIL. 1:15-)

II. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR FELLOWSHIP - PHIL. 1:4-5,

EPHESIANS 1:15-16

FELLOWSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP GO TOGETHER. SOMEONE HAS WELL SAID, "I WENT OUT TO FIND A FRIEND, BUT COULD NOT FIND ONE THERE. I WENT OUT TO BE A FRIEND, AND FRIENDS WERE EVERYWHERE!"

III. HE WAS THANKFUL FOR FAMILY - EPH. 5:20FF

SOMETIME AGO, WORKERS AT THE WHITE HOUSE WERE STARTLED TO RECEIVE A HAND WRITTEN MEMO FROM PRES. CARTER IN WHICH HE ENCOURAGED THEM TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH THEIR FAMILIES. IN THE MEMO HE REFLECTED ON THE FACT THAT HIS WORKERS WERE MORE VALUABLE TO HIM AND TO THEIR COUNTRY IF THE HOME LIFE WAS STABLE. SOMEONE HAS CHARACTERIZED OURS AS

A "HOMELESS" SOCIETY. BORN IN A HOSPITAL, EDUCATED ON COLLEGE CAMPUS, COURTED IN AN AUTOMOBILE, MARRIED IN A CHURCH, EATING OUT OF A FAST FOOD RESTAURANT, SPENDING MORNINGS ON THE GOLF COURSE, AFTERNOONS IN THE CLUBS, EVENINGS IN THEATRES, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF HOME LIFE. WHEN WE REACH THE EVENING TIME OF LIFE AND REFLECT ON THE GOOD THINGS THAT HAVE COME OUR WAY, FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND FAITH WILL BE PRIMARY IN THE BLESSED THOUGHTS AT THE END OF LIFE.

NOVEMBER 22, 1981

Revised A.M.

"A THESSALONIAN THANKSGIVING""Thanksgiving in Thessalonian" 1987

MANY YEARS AGO, DURING A TIME OF ECONOMIC DEPRESSION, A GROUP OF MINISTERS MET JUST BEFORE THANKSGIVING TO TALK ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TIMES AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO SPEAK TO THEIR CONGREGATIONS ON THE SUNDAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING. WHAT COULD THEY SAY TO ENCOURAGE THEIR PEOPLE DURING HARD TIMES? AS THEY TALKED, ONE PASTOR SUGGESTED FOR STARTERS THAT HE WAS GOING TO WRITE A LETTER TO A FORMER SCHOOLTEACHER AS AN INDICATION OF HIS APPRECIATION FOR HER DEDICATION TO TEACHING AND ALSO FOR HER CONTRIBUTION TO HIS EDUCATION. A FEW WEEKS LATER, THE MINISTER RECEIVED A LETTER FROM HIS FORMER TEACHER WITH THE FOLLOWING GREETING: "MY DEAR WILLY" - WHICH WAS ENCOURAGING TO HIM BECAUSE OF ITS INFORMALITY, AND HE HAD NOT BEEN CALLED WILLY FOR MANY, MANY YEARS! THE LETTER SAID, IN ESSENCE, THAT THIS 30 YEAR OLD RETIRED TEACHER WHO WAS LIVING ALONE AND WHO WAS ALSO LONELY IN THE AUTUMN OF HER LIFE. SHE HAD TAUGHT SCHOOL FOR OVER 50 YEARS AND CONFESSED THAT THIS WAS THE FIRST LETTER SHE HAD EVER RECEIVED EXPRESSING APPRECIATION FOR WHAT SHE WAS AND HAD BEEN AS AN EDUCATOR. SHE SAID THAT THE LETTER HAD NOT ONLY MADE HER DAY, BUT IT HAD RENEWED HER FAITH IN HUMANKIND, AND JUST TO KNOW THAT ONE PERSON APPRECIATED HER MEANT EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD. THE CLERGYMAN SAID, "WHEN I RECEIVED THAT LETTER, I DETERMINED BY THE GRACE OF GOD TO WRITE OTHER LETTERS AND SAY TO PEOPLE WHO ARE IMPORTANT TO ME - THANK YOU!" 1900 YEARS BEFORE THIS EPISODE, ANOTHER MINISTER WROTE A LETTER, THIS TIME NOT TO A PERSON BUT TO A CHURCH, AND IN IT, ALONG WITH SEVERAL OTHER SUBJECTS, HE SAID, "THANK YOU" TO THE CHURCH. 300 YEARS BEFORE CHRIST WAS BORN, ALEXANDER THE GREAT DIED, LEAVING HIS VAST EMPIRE UNDER THE CONTROL OF 4 GENERALS. ONE GENERAL, NAMED CASSANDER, MARRIED THE SISTER OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT. HER NAME WAS THESSALONICA. CASSANDER RENAMED A CITY IN WHAT IS NOW KNOWN AS MODERN TURKEY, THEN KNOWN AS THERMA, AFTER HIS WIFE. ONE DAY, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRST CENTURY A.D., A JEW CAME TO THAT CITY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. HE STAYED IN THE CITY FOR LESS THAN A MONTH, BUT DURING THAT TIME ESTABLISHED A LOCAL CHURCH. THE CHURCH FLOURISHED EVEN UNDER PERSECUTION. DURING HIS SHORT STAY, THE APOSTLE PAUL TAUGHT SOME RATHER HEAVY SUBJECTS TO THE CHURCH. HE ESTABLISHED THESE NEW BELIEVERS IN CHRISTIAN

DOCTRINE, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WAS THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. NOW, A FEW YEARS LATER, PAUL WRITES TO THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA AND MAJORS ON THE THEME OF THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST; THERE ARE AT LEAST 20 REFERENCES TO THE SUBJECT IN THESE TWO EPISTLES. HOWEVER, THERE IS ANOTHER SUBJECT WHICH RUNS THROUGHOUT THE EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS, DEALING WITH THE IDEA OF THANKSGIVING. THE TERM APPEARS NO LESS THAN 5 TIMES IN THE TWO LETTERS, AND TODAY WE ARE GOING TO EXAMINE THIS WORD IN THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES. A THESSALONIAN THANKSGIVING ON THIS SUNDAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING.

I. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR BELIEVERS WHO HAD A BURDEN FOR THE LORD'S WORK - 1:2-3

THERE ARE TWO WORDS IN THE TEXT WITH THE SAME GENERAL IDEA BUT WITH DIFFERENT DEGREES OF INTENSITY. THE WORD WORK IS THE GREEK WORD ERGON FROM WHICH WE GET THE ENGLISH WORD ENERGY. THE WORD LABOR IS THE WORD KOPOU WHICH MEANS TO BE WEARY WITH TOIL TO THE POINT OF EXHAUSTION. WHEN PAUL REMEMBERED WITH THANKSGIVING THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS, HE REMEMBERED THEM AS PEOPLE WHO EXPENDED ENERGY AND WEARISOME TOIL IN THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST. YOU CANNOT IMAGINE HOW REFRESHING THIS MUST HAVE BEEN TO PAUL, UNLESS YOU HAVE TRIED TO ENLIST OR RECRUIT PEOPLE TO WORK FOR JESUS CHRIST. SOMEONE SAID: "THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF WORKERS IN THE AVERAGE CHURCH. (1) THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO WORK. (2) THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO LET THEM DO IT." D.L. MOODY'S BASIC MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLE WAS STATED SIMPLY WHEN HE SAID, "WHY SHOULD ONE PERSON DO THE WORK OF TEN WHEN TEN CAN DO THE JOB?" THE THESSALONIANS WERE ENERGETIC, HARD-WORKING PEOPLE WHO DID NOT BELIEVE PAUL WAS CALLED TO DO ALL THE WORK, AND THEY WERE CALLED TO BE SPECTATORS. RELATE INCIDENT OF BUS WORKER WHOSE APPROACH TO FAMILIES WAS THAT "I'M DOING THE HARDEST WORK IN THE WORLD." THE THESSALONIANS HAD DISCOVERED THE BIBLICAL DISTINCTION THAT GENUINE FAITH IS MORE THAN "MOUTH" RELIGION. IT INVOLVES AND MOVES HANDS, FEET, AND MIND. QUESTION: WHAT IS THE LORD'S WORK? HOW MAY I DO IT? (1) NEIGHBORHOOD - IS EVERYBODY SAVED IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? DO ALL OF THE CHILDREN GO TO SUNDAY SCHOOL? IS YOUR CAR FULL WHEN YOU COME TO CHURCH EACH SUNDAY? WHAT HAVE YOU PERSONALLY DONE CONCERNING THE GREAT COMMISSION OTHER THAN ATTENDING CHURCH AND GIVING A FEW DOLLARS TO MISSIONS? DOES EMPTY SPACE IN A LOCAL CHURCH BOTHER YOU? FOR EVERY BELIEVER, THERE IS SOMETHING YOU AND I MAY DO FOR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. IT MAY NOT BE SPECTACULAR, OBVIOUS TO OBSERVERS, BUT FOR

THOSE WHO HAVE A BURDEN FOR THE LORD'S WORK THERE IS MUCH TO BE DONE, BECAUSE WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF LOST PEOPLE WHO NEED TO BE WON AND NURTURED IN CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DOCTRINE. THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH WAS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THIS KIND OF PROGRAM.

II. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR BELIEVERS WHO RECOGNIZED THE UNIQUENESS OF THE WORD OF GOD - 2:13

*K-Mant
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right*

THE CONTRAST IN THIS VERSE IS BETWEEN "THE WORD OF MEN" AND "THE WORD OF GOD". OUR NEWS STANDS AND BOOK STORES ARE FILLED WITH THE LATEST IN HUMAN OPINION. I DO NOT MEAN TO SUGGEST THAT THE LATEST OPINIONS OF THE BEST QUALIFIED MEN ON A GIVEN SUBJECT ARE OF NO VALUE. THE POINT IN THE TEXT IS THAT ONLY THE WORD OF GOD CAN "OPERATE" IN THE LIFE OF A PERSON TO THE EXTENT OF DEALING WITH HIS SINS AND DEVELOPING FAITH. (HEBREWS 4:12, 1 PETER 1:23, JAMES 1:18, PSALM 119) I AM CURRENTLY REREADING A FASCINATING BOOK LITERALLY FILLED WITH COMMON SENSE PRACTICES IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS. IT HAS BEEN CALLED BY SOME THE BUSINESS MAN'S BIBLE, BUT AT ITS VERY BEST, IT IS STILL "THE WORD OF MEN". NO PERSON WILL EVER BE SAVED, BORN AGAIN, HAVE HIS SINS FORGIVEN BY READING THIS BOOK OR ANY OTHER BOOK LIKE IT. THE BIBLE AND THE MINISTRY OF THE BIBLE HAS POWER TO CHANGE THE LIVES OF MEN! (ROMANS 10:17) YOU WILL REMEMBER WHEN HENRY STANLEY STARTED ACROSS AFRICA IN SEARCH OF LIVINGSTONE; HE STARTED HIS EXPEDITION WITH SOME 73 BOOKS. HOWEVER, AS THE JOURNEY CONTINUED INTO DAYS AND WEEKS, HE WAS OBLIGATED TO THROW AWAY BOOKS ONE BY ONE, UNTIL ALL WERE GONE EXCEPT THE BIBLE. IT IS SAID THAT HE READ IT THROUGH THREE TIMES ON THAT REMARKABLE TRIP. IT IS THE ONE BOOK THAT LIVES THROUGH THE AGES, HAVING STOOD THE TEST OF TIME. *Times ago* A FEW YEARS AGO, A COLLEGE PROFESSOR ASKED HIS LIBRARIAN TO GO INTO THE LIBRARY AND PICK OUT ALL THE BOOKS ON A PARTICULAR SUBJECT THAT WERE NOT NEEDED. THE LIBRARIAN RESPONDED THAT EVERY BOOK OVER TEN YEARS OLD COULD BE REMOVED AND REPLACED OR UPDATED WITH CURRENT LITERATURE.) THE THESSALONIANS RECOGNIZED THE UNIQUE QUALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD TO GENERATE FAITH AND CREATE SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIVES OF THE BELIEVERS.

III. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR ALL OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE, EVEN THE DIFFICULTIES - 1 THESS. 5:18

MANY OF US BELIEVE THERE ARE SOME THINGS FOR WHICH WE CAN AND SHOULD BE THANKFUL. MANY BELIEVE THAT MOST THINGS ARE AREAS FOR WHICH WE MAY BE THANKFUL.

*Can't
still
live!*

THIS VERSE SAYS EVERYTHING. YOU AND I MAY BE THANKFUL FOR EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OR HAPPENING WHICH COMES INTO OUR LIVES. WE MAY NOT UNDERSTAND WHY AND, TO BE SURE, THERE MAY BE A CERTAIN MYSTERY ABOUT LIFE SHATTERING EXPERIENCES, BUT IN THE REALM OF THAT EXPERIENCE, EVEN THOUGH WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND AND HAVE AN ANSWER, WE MAY THANK GOD! I DON'T THINK THE VERSE MEANS THAT IF ONE BREAKS HIS LEG HE SHOULD IMMEDIATELY EXCLAIM: "OH, BOY, PRAISE GOD, I BROKE MY LEG!" IT DOES MEAN THAT IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF LIFE, EVEN IN PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL AFFLICTION, WE MAY LEARN FROM THESE EXPERIENCES AND THANK GOD FOR THEM - IN ADVANCE. IF I UNDERSTAND THIS VERSE CORRECTLY, THERE IS NO CIRCUMSTANCE IN LIFE, NO MATTER HOW PAINFUL IT MAY BE, FOR WHICH WE CANNOT THANK GOD. WE THANK HIM BY FAITH. BY THE WAY, GEORGE H. MORRISON REMINDS US THAT: "IT IS NOT THE HAPPY PEOPLE WHO ARE THANKFUL, BUT RATHER THE THANKFUL WHO ARE HAPPY. HAPPINESS IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON HOW MUCH WE HAVE, OR ELSE THOSE WHO HAVE THE MOST SHOULD BE THE HAPPIEST." THIS IS THE THANKFUL SIDE OF ROMANS 8:28! IT TELLS US THE ATTITUDE WE SHOULD ADOPT CONCERNING EVENTS DESCRIBED BY ROMANS 5:3 - "BUT WE GLORY IN TRIBULATIONS." THE LITTLE PREPOSITION IN IS THE SAME IN THE GREEK IN ROMANS AS IT IS HERE IN 1 THESSALONIANS 5:18. IT IS THE PREPOSITION EN. THE TEXT DOES NOT SAY WE REJOICE IN SPITE OF, BUT WE REJOICE IN THE SPEAR OF OR IN THE MIDST OF THEM.

IV. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR THE GREAT STRIDES IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH MADE BY THE BELIEVERS IN THESSALONICA - II THES. 1:3

WHEN PAUL THOUGHT OF THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH, HE REMEMBERED A FAITH THAT WAS GROWING AND LOVE THAT WAS INCREASING. THE TERM "GROWETH EXCEEDINGLY", THOUGH APPLIED TO PEOPLE IN THE TEXT, REMINDS ME OF A PLANT IN OUR HOME. (RELATE THE GROWTH PRINCIPLE AND PATTERN OF THE SPLIT LEAF PHILODENDRON IN OUR LIVING ROOM. IT IS GROWN FROM ONE CORNER TO ONE QUARTER TO ONE-HALF OF THE LIVING ROOM AND NOW THREATENS TO ENGULF THE ENTIRE ROOM!) THIS VERSE, IS ESPECIALLY ENCOURAGING WHEN ONE REMEMBERS PAUL'S ADMONITION TO THE HEBREWS CONCERNING THEIR DULLNESS OF HEARING; THEIR PREOCCUPATION WITH THE ABC'S OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE WHEN THEY SHOULD HAVE LONG BEFORE MOVED ON TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY. THE CORINTHIANS WERE BRETHREN IN CHRIST, BUT THEY WERE STILL BABES! (1 CORINTHIANS 3:1) THE THESSALONIANS WERE MUCH LIKE AN ACQUAINTANCE OF MINE WHOSE FIRST YEAR OF HIS CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE READ THE NEW TESTAMENT

THROUGH EVERY WEEK FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR, NOT COUNTING HIS READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND EVERY OTHER BOOK HE COULD LAY HIS HANDS ON! HE LITERALLY SOUGHT TO DEVOUR THE WORD OF GOD AND HIS CHRISTIAN DEVELOPMENT KEPT PACE WITH HIS INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT OF BIBLE TRUTH. BELIEVERS WHO TAKE CHRISTIAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT SERIOUSLY ARE ALWAYS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHER PEOPLE WHO SHARE THEIR BURDEN AND VISION.

V. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR SALVATION IN CHRIST - II THESS. 2:13

THE WORD CHOSEN BOTHERS SOME PEOPLE. TERMS SUCH AS ELECTION, PREDESTINATION, FOREKNOWLEDGE, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE BIBLE TERMS, SCARE SOME BELIEVERS, AND, WHEN THEY HEAR SUCH TERMS, THEY HAVE A TENDENCY TO BLAME GOD. THESE TERMS CONJURE UP IN THE MINDS OF SOME A GOD WHO ARBITRARILY SELECTS SOME PEOPLE TO GO TO HEAVEN AND DOOMS OTHERS TO GO TO HELL. WE SHOULD EXAMINE THE SCRIPTURE IN ITS ENTIRETY TO DETERMINE THIS SIMPLE BIBLE FACT THAT GOD LOVED US FIRST, AND IF HE HADN'T CHOSEN ME IT'S A CINCH I WOULD NEVER HAVE CHOSEN HIM! HOWEVER, IT IS NOT GOD'S FAULT THAT ANY SINNER MISSES HEAVEN. EVERY PROVISION HAS BEEN MADE FOR THE SINNER. STRONG HAS WELL POINTED OUT THAT BECAUSE A GOVERNOR PARDONED ONE CONVICT FROM THE PENITENTIARY HE MUST NOT, THEREFORE, PARDON ALL. WHEN HE PARDONS ONE, NO INJURY IS DONE TO THOSE WHO ARE LEFT. HOWEVER, WITH GOD, THE PARDON IS OFFERED TO ALL. NOTHING PREVENTS ANY FROM BEING PARDONED EXCEPT THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT IT. SOMEONE HAS WELL SAID: "NO MAN CAN BE SAVED WITHOUT GOD, BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT THERE IS NO MAN WHOM GOD IS NOT WILLING TO SAVE." IF MEN GO TO HELL, IT WILL BE IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING GOD HAS TRIED TO DO TO STOP THEM, NOT BECAUSE OF SOME ETERNAL DECREE WHICH MADE THEM PAWNS IN THE HANDS OF A MECHANICAL AND DESPOTIC GOD. LET US SUPPOSE THAT A GIANT JUMBO AIRLINER CRASHES SOMEWHERE NEAR A LARGE METROPOLITAN AREA. IN THE CRASH, SCORES ARE KILLED AND SCORES ARE WOUNDED. AS THE EMERGENCY CREWS AND VEHICLES TRANSPORT THE WOUNDED TO AREA HOSPITALS NO ONE IS AT THE DOOR OF THE HOSPITAL ASKING IF A PERSON COULD PAY OR IF HE IS A CERTAIN COLOR OR NATIONALITY. THE SOLE BASIS FOR HIS ADMISSION IN AN EMERGENCY OR CRISIS IS THAT HE IS HURT AND NEEDS HELP! EVERY MAN IS A SPIRITUAL CASUALTY. HE IS HURT AND NEEDS HELP. EVERYWHERE IN THE WORD OF GOD HE IS TOLD TO LOOK TO CHRIST TO BE SAVED. BY THE WAY, THAT REMINDS ME OF A MAN WHO SAID HE WAS SAVED, NOT BY HIS GOOD WORKS BUT BY HIS GOOD LOOKS. A

PASTOR ASKED AN OLD FARMER ONCE ABOUT HIS CHEERFUL COUNTEenance AND OBVIOUS ZEST AND LOVE FOR LIFE. THE MAN SAID: "I'M SAVED AND I WAS SAVED BY MY GOOD LOOKS." THIS SURPRISED THE PASTOR, AND HE INQUIRED CONCERNING THIS INTERESTING AND UNIQUE PHRASE. THE FARMER TOLD THE STORY HOW HE WENT TO A GOSPEL MEETING AND HEARD THE PASTOR RECITE ISAIAH 45:2: "LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, FOR I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE ELSE." HE SAID THE PASTOR SPOKE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WHO DIED ON THE CROSS, AND ADMONISHED EVERYONE NOT SAVED TO LOOK TO CHRIST AND BE SAVED. THE EVANGELIST ALSO QUOTED HEBREWS 12:2, WHICH SAYS: "LOOKING UNTO JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH..." ALSO IN THE SERMON THE PREACHER SPOKE ABOUT: "LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE AND THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST". (TITUS 2:13) THE OLD FARMER SAID, "THROUGHOUT THE MESSAGE THE PREACHER KEPT SAYING LOOK TO JESUS, LOOK TO JESUS, AND BE SAVED" - MUCH IN THE VAIN OF SPURGEON'S CONVERSION. THE FARMER SAID HE WAS SAVED BY HIS "GOOD LOOKS" - LOOKING UNTO JESUS IN SAVING FAITH BROUGHT PEACE TO HIS SOUL AS IT DOES TO ALL WHO WILL TRUST HIM. THIS GREAT ALL-ENCOMPASSING BIBLE THEME WAS THE CONCLUDING THOUGHT IN THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLE ON THE SUBJECT OF THANKSGIVING. PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR THE WONDERFUL SALVATION WE HAVE IN CHRIST. QUESTION: CAN YOU SAY THIS THANKSGIVING, I'M THANKFUL TO BE SAVED? I KNOW FOR SURE, BEYOND ALL DOUBT, THAT CHRIST IS MY LORD AND SAVIOUR.