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Forerunner Church  
Thanksgiving and Hospitality  
November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Happy Thanksgiving week to you, it is good to see all your faces which will be much larger by next Sunday because of the food. You get it?

Well, if you would like the teaching notes for today, you can download those on our website or you can access that with your smart phone at ForerunnerChurch.com. Click on the live link and follow along with that today. We're gonna talk about Thanksgiving and hospitality today and just some interesting things in regards to that. I've been really looking forward to this, getting to be with you all.

I love Thanksgiving. I am sad that all of the stores and merchandising skip over it. We go right from Halloween to Christmas and we miss Thanksgiving because it is truly a powerful story. I am going to share some of that story this morning and it's just powerful, obviously, to walk in a heart of thanksgiving and gratitude before the Lord.

Let's look at Philippians Chapter 4, you can turn there in your Bibles. Philippians chapter 4, starting in verse 4. I will read this and then pray.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Father, we come before Your word. We subject ourselves to You this morning. We ask that You would make us susceptible to the Holy Spirit this morning in an increased way. We ask You Lord that You would release a spirit of wisdom and revelation upon the Word of God and upon this people, this spiritual family, in an increased way. We ask You Lord that You would help us, that You would take us into the things of You that You would provoke us and stir us in regard to Your Word. I ask Lord that You would help me to speak well of You, to honor You with every word, to bring glory to Your name in Jesus name we pray. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

Well, I want to begin by a charge and my charge, I think from this message has been that we would be a people that would be so alive in thanksgiving, so alive with an overflowing heart in God that even in the most dark hours, the most pressing times, that we would be a people of joy and gladness and rejoicing and that we would find a place for the stranger in our home and in our own hearts. That's my charge to us. And the verse that comes to mind, it is Psalm 23, verse 5, you can write that down if you like and look at it later but Psalm 23, verse 5 talks about Jesus as the shepherd, the Great Shepherd that leads us. And there's this interesting phrase in that Psalm and he says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil and my cup runs over." And my prayer and just what I have been carrying in my heart regarding this message and this people is that we would be a people that prepare a table for others in the midst of great pressure, in the midst of trial, in the midst of struggle, in the midst of

pain, because the Lord does the same thing for us. And that from that overflow of thanksgiving and praise, that we would reach out and truly love others with a Christ like love. Amen?

So, this week we're obviously celebrating the story of Thanksgiving. And the story of Thanksgiving gives us great insight, not just into having a thankful and grateful heart, that is part of it, but the story of Thanksgiving actually, it draws attention to spirit of hospitality. And I want to share just briefly just a summary of the Thanksgiving story with you because many of us know the Thanksgiving story as the pilgrims celebrating with the Native Americans and they all come together and everybody eats a bunch of gourds together. That's what the stories depict.

What is interesting to me about the story of Thanksgiving is the way in which the Native Americans, actually displayed the heart of Christ through hospitality, many of them without even knowing it, towards the European settlers. And the story revolves mostly around a man named Squanto. You've probably heard that name before. So, history tells us that Squanto throughout his life was imprisoned or enslaved about nine different times. Okay? And the reason that I am sharing this part of the story is because I think the story of Squanto's life actually gives us a backdrop to understand the spirit of thanksgiving and hospitality in a deeper way.

So Squanto is imprisoned by this captain and what they would do is they would come to the new world and they would kind of bate people in, the Native Americans, they would knock them unconscious, they would put them on a ship and sale them into slavery back in the old world, back in Europe. And that's what happens to Squanto. And so, he is taken from his family, he's taken from his tribe and he's enslaved, he spends about 10 years actually away from where his tribe was and where his family was. So, he is taken to Spain, that's the first place that he goes after they capture him. When he is in Spain, interestingly, there was this group of Spanish monks who made it their ministry to get money and actually buy slaves and they would buy these slaves and they would rehabilitate them in the sense of the malnutrition, just what they went through in their bodies, their physical health. They would rehabilitate them, and they would preach the gospel to them and they would let them be free. They would let them go.

And so, interestingly, the very first words that Squanto hears after he is purchased by these Spanish monks is "Esta Libre" which means "You are free." That's what they say to him and they preach the gospel to Squanto and then he spends about ten years in Europe and in England where he learns the English language and he actually becomes a translator for many different people.

Now, you could imagine his desire to go back and be with his family and be with his people and the devastation and trauma that he is personally experienced with what he has gone through. And the tricky thing was is that catching a ship to the new world was like getting a rocket ship to the moon at the time. There were so few ships and voyages where you had an opportunity to actually go to the new world, what we called the new world at the time, and so Squanto is looking for this way to get back to his family and it happens in about 1618. After nearly ten years of being in prison, being freed, learning the English language, serving these various people as a translator and that type of things, he gets the opportunity to sail back to America.

So, he gets on this ship, he serves as a translator, he sails back to America, the new world and he goes back to the Plymouth area which is where his tribe was. When he gets back, after ten years, as you can imagine this, he discovers painfully, sadly, that his whole tribe and his whole family has died of disease. The small pox disease has ravaged his whole tribe and he goes back and he is completely alone from his family and his tribe. And so now he is there, and the story goes that sadly he just kind of goes into the woods to live by himself in this state of dejectedness and pain and everything that he has been through. I mean imagine being in his situation and all the things that you've gone through, nine times being freed, delivered, da da da da, you go back, your whole family is gone, your whole tribe is gone, you are completely alone and so he lives in the woods and he begins to associate with a nearby tribe and he gets to help this nearby tribe, which is not his native tribe, but he gets to help this tribe interact with the various settlers and fur traders, you know all these different Europeans that are now coming on the East Coast and everything. And he begins to kind of just live his life in this way.

Now, interestingly, in 1620, this is where the story picks up that we know, 1620, the pilgrims that are on the Mayflower, there are about a hundred of them. They come across the ocean, it takes about three months to sail across the Atlantic Ocean and they land at Plymouth which is exactly where Squanto's family and his tribe began. And the devastation that the pilgrims go through is almost as bad. And within a year of weathering the first winter in the North East 50% of them die because of disease. And many of them get sick and, largely, those that get sick and die are actually the women that came across on the Mayflower. And so by the time the spring rolls around and about the beginning of 1621, or so, by the time the spring rolls around there are about twenty men left, there are about twenty-five children and only four women. Now these pilgrims that came, you know, are mostly Puritans and they are escaping the religious persecution that's happening in England. They want to worship God freely in their own way without being controlled by the government and the king of England and that type of thing. And so that is why they made their way to the New World. And within that first year, half of them have now died.

So you have the suffering of the native peoples and you have the suffering of the pilgrims and you have this mishmash, really unique dynamics of suffering, persecution, mistrust, racism, all these colliding narratives that are happening all at the same time, all in a set up, I think, a set up geographic location. And so, when the pilgrims come out of this time of the first winter, that's there they're going, "There almost no way that we're going to survive another winter. We're going to perish."

And then, providentially, I mean from their point of view, from the woods literally walks out this man named Squanto who begins to speak to them in perfect English. I mean, just imagine yourself in this story. This story you cannot make this up. Everything that he's been through, everything that they've been through, his tribe has been devastated. He's alive, he speaks English and he comes to the settlers that are there and he says, "Can I join what you're doing. I actually want to help you."

And so in this story we see the hospitality of this one man who is so incredibly in pain, so incredibly traumatized, cut off from his people, for whatever reason, reach out to these settlers and say, "I am here to help you" out of the overflow of his heart.

Now different people, different writers, have stated that he was a believer, that he came to the faith through the witness of these monks back in Spain years ago. Or whatever but that is disputed from different people. But the point is that he comes and helps the settlers. And he teaches them the agriculture. He teaches them out to live off the land. He teaches them the new world crops which they were unfamiliar with. And we know that story.

And so the Thanksgiving celebration actually comes when Squanto and this tribe that he had recently become affiliated with under King Massasoit, the two of them and all of the tribe of King Massasoit come together to have this feast of Thanksgiving with these settlers in one of the most turbulent deadly times to be alive in the earth and in that region because there is so much conflict, there is warfare. The tribes are warring amongst each other, they are warring against the settlers. And settlers are warring against each other. I mean this is really a time of great conflict and danger. And yet in the midst of that there is this redemptive story line of the Lord using Squanto and using the settlers and using King Massasoit and his tribe to come together and give thanks to God for His provision in their lives. I mean it is just a remarkable story.

And so the reason that I tell that is because I want that story, the hospitality, the generosity, and the power of love to be the back drop as we look at the scripture in terms of Thanksgiving and hospitality and what these things mean, a nature of giving thanks.

Thanksgiving, the actual act of thanksgiving is not a feeling. Many people believe that thanksgiving, to give thanks, means that I have to feel thankful, but the feeling of thanksgiving is actually called 'gratitude.' But thanksgiving is an act. And it is important that we make that distinction because many are driven by their feelings on the inside that lead to their actions and they go, "Well, I am not, I don't really have anything to be thankful about because I don't feel gratitude in my heart therefore I don't need to necessarily give thanks." But thanksgiving is more related to an act of worship before the Lord.

How many times have you come into a worship service, having gone to the prayer room down the road and you've shown up and there is worship music going and you don't feel like worshipping? You feel heavy, the circumstances of your life, the pressure of your life are weighing down on you, maybe it's health related, maybe it's financially related, maybe it's relationally related but all of those pressures are weighing down on you in such a way that you are sitting before the Lord and you're going, "I don't even feel like I can worship right now." That's where we need thanksgiving.

Because what thanksgiving does, is thanksgiving breaks out of the pressures and the circumstances of our lives and begins to declare who God is and what He's like in this act of worship and often our feelings will follow in the action, follow the activity of what we set our fact to do. And we know and many of you have probably experienced this as well, when you come into the worship service, you don't feel like worshipping but when you begin to lift up your voice, when you begin to set your eyes on the Lord, when you begin to, for a moment, look away from the pressures that are surrounding you and coming against you and you feel under assault, when you begin to lift your eyes up to the Lord what happens is that your heart becomes refreshed in God. There is this sense of joy. There's a sense of gratitude and delight in God

because we know, the believer knows that your portion and your identity is not connected to your immediate circumstances.

We have a greater hope. We have a hope that's stored up in heaven, where Christ is. And Christ is gonna raise us from the dead and we're gonna eternally live in His glory and His presence and that gives the believer, the Christian, the advantage no matter what you're going through in your life you can have a song of thanksgiving and praise welling up on the inside of you.

Acts chapter 16 shows us that Paul and Silas are in prison and in verse 25 it says that they are found in the prison praying and singing to God and all of the prisoners that are there are listening to them. Why? Because the born again believer, the Christian has the advantage through the Gospel of Christ to not live bound by your current circumstance. To not allow the pressures, the traumas, the persecutions of life determine the song that comes forth from our heart. We have a greater hope in God and it's one of the things that makes us stand apart is that when trouble comes, when adversity comes, that there would be a people so filled with light and love that it would be a powerful witness to anyone that would interact with us. And that is exactly what happens with Paul and Silas. There are in the midst of a prison. And in a prison, it's a place of torment and torture and sadness, and yet, here are these men, because of the Gospel of Christ, because their name is written in heaven, they know that prison is not their portion and the sufferings and the weight of this life and the trauma that we go through is only temporary compared to the glory and the joy that we will have in Christ forever and ever and ever.

The world, the world, as trouble increases for those that are in the world, their rejoicing and their gladness decreases. The person that is of the world, and in the world, completely bound by their circumstances, if their finances are good, if their opportunities are golden, if their relationships are running smoothly, then that person says, "I have a good life and I am happy, I'm happy, I'm joyful." Or whatever it is, they are bound to their circumstances. But one of the things that the cross of Christ does and one of the things that the Gospel does through us is that it frees us from the bondage of the temporary. It frees us from the stigma of what we're in so that even in persecution or prison or whatever it is, we can sing songs to God and rejoice in the Lord. And this is what Paul calls us to. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Verse 4, Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always at all times regardless of what is happening in your life or how hard it is or how good it is." He says, "Rejoice in the Lord." This is who we are, this is who we are made to be.

The Christian is always able to give thanks, to offer worship, even in the most challenging and sorrowful conditions. He goes on in verse 6, now look at this phrase in verse 6, he says, "Be anxious for nothing but with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to the Lord." Thanksgiving, the act of worship, and thanksgiving and thanking God. What are we thanking Him for? We are thanking Him for everything that comes to mind. We are thanking Him for our breath. We're thanking Him for our provision, for food, for electricity. Sometimes when I am at my house and I am washing my hands under warm water, I just go, "Lord, thank You that the water is warm." If you've ever taken a cold shower before and you didn't want to. We were in Bolivia one time and I was there with my dad and this other leader and we're staying at this resort out in the jungle and it was very hot and lots of bugs and just very not what I am used to. You know, it's so hot you think a cold shower would be nice so you go in there and turn the thing

and I'm taking a freezing cold shower and the water is pumped in from this river that's right outside, it's like category 5 rapids, it's crazy cold river from the mountains and I'm sitting there about day three one of the guys we were with, his name is Greg, he comes out of the bathroom and there's this billows of steam just wafting our behind him and I'm looking at it and I'm thinking, "How did you possibly get steam in there? What's going on?" So, I'm like, "Hey, did you figure out hot water in there?" And he's like, "Absolutely." And I was like, "I've been taking cold showers the last three days. I've just been dying." Weak dorky me. And they got a big kick out of that, I didn't, but they got a big kick out of the fact that I was taking freezing cold showers.

What do we thank the Lord for? We thank the Lord for everything. Everything and when you do it, what you will notice is that it begins to war against the spirit of anxiety in our life because here's what happens. Thanksgiving takes our eyes and it lifts them upward. Anxiety takes our eyes and it casts them downward. Anxiety is the fruit of fear that comes from our situation where we begin to imagine this will never change. This situation will never change. This financial setback will never change. This health ailment will never change and what happens is when we look down and we get caught up in our circumstances we become prone to fear and that fear leads to anxiety.

And here's what interesting about that: Studies are showing more and more doctors, secular doctors, even in America are showing that anxiety is on the rise in America. Which is interesting because we have historically some of the greatest healthcare and medical advances, some of the greatest living conditions, we are some of the most wealthy people in all of human history. You average American is one of the most wealthy people in all of human history and yet, for some reason, fear and anxiety and depression is rising, rising, rising in our midst. And here's the thing, the Scripture tells us, Luke chapter 21, verse 26 tells us that fear is going to rise before the coming of the Lord to unprecedented levels. So, what we are witnessing is actually a trend of the day of the lord that's going to increase in our midst. But here's why I'm encouraged, because the Scripture tells us that the body of Christ is going to be made pure and spotless. She is going to come into her glory and righteousness and holiness and beauty as the earth rises in their expression of wickedness and darkness and evil. So, if anxiety is rising, it means that God is going to cause thanksgiving and praise to arise. And beloved, the end of the age church, we as a people, are going to be some of the most happy, joyful people in the Lord. And it's not because of our circumstances, it's because the power of God and the beauty of God and that our hope rests fully in Him. Amen.

Thanksgiving declares the future. And it opens up the doorway into the power of God in the presence of God and if you say, "In my own life, I haven't felt the presence of God in a long time," I want to urge you to begin to make a list of everything that you can possibly be thankful for, even if you don't feel thankful for it. Even if there are people in your life that you know God has put there, but you are not always thankful for them, but begin to make war against the spirit of anxiety and against fear by declaring it and the truth of God's word.

Look at this, Psalm 100, verse 2 to 4, it says, "Serve the Lord with gladness and come before His presence with singing." I love this. Because He doesn't say, "Wait until everything is good. Wait till the check clears. Wait till the next pay period. Wait till the restoration of your family.

Wait till the restoration of your marriage. Wait till the restoration of your health." He does not say that. He says, "Come before Him." Well, when do we come before Him? We come before Him at all times. And in every season, whether its good bad or ugly, whether we feel joy or sorrow, we always come before Him. He's our Father. We come before Him with gladness. We're glad because of Him. And we come into His presence with singing before we open our mouth and we begin to sing the truth of God's word.

Verse 3, "Know the Lord, that He is God." See this is the spirit of thanksgiving. It fixes our perspective and our love and our value. It lifts it up out of the problems of the day. The psalmist says, "Where does my help come from? I lift up my eyes to the mountains and the hills, that's where my help comes from. My portion is in You and my joy is in You. It's not in temporary circumstances."

Let's continue. "He has made us and we ourselves." We have not made ourselves. The story isn't about us. It doesn't begin and end with us. It's centralized around Him. Look at verse 4, Psalm 100, verse 4, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name." See the gate is the entry way into the place, into the court of the Lord. Why do we want to go into the court of the Lord? We want to go into the court of the Lord for a couple of reasons. Number one, we want to see the beauty of the Lord. But you can't see the beauty of the Lord in the court until you go through the gates of thanksgiving. We want to go into the court of the Lord because we want to petition God. Hear my prayer and supplication before you give attendance to my need. I need a breakthrough. I need my heart to change. I need this relationship in my life to change. And so, we go into the court to make our appeal before heaven but the doorway is thanksgiving.

And the psalmist puts that there first. He goes, "Go into the Lord first with thanksgiving." And when thanksgiving begins to erupt out of you, even if you don't feel it, your heart begins to turn upwards towards God. You begin to see Him, feel His delight and His pleasure in a greater way. This is how we are to live, thanksgiving and hospitality.

Turn over to 1st Peter 4. 1st Peter 4, I'm seeing this correlation again between thanksgiving and hospitality because, even in the thanksgiving story, it is a story of thanksgiving, but it is also a story about hospitality. And we are going to touch on that.

So, 1st Peter 4, in verse 7, look that this, I love this. We can't get away from the end times. You can try but you just can't. Look at verse 7, Peter says, "The end of all things is at hand." The end of all things is near. Then he says, "Therefore," and he is about to give us three key insights into the reality of 'the end of all things is at hand.' The first one is this: To be serious and watchful in your prayer, to be sober in your prayer life, to have a real prayer life in God. Number two is to have fervent love for one another because love covers a multitude of sin. I actually preached on that earlier this year, you can archive that message if you like. And then look at number 3, this is the one we are going to touch one, verse 9. I love this. "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." Peter is sitting down with the spiritual family and he's going, "Hey, the end of all things is near and I am going to give you one, two, three, how the people of God are to act and practically respond to the day of judgment and the day of the Lord that is coming." He says, "For one, be fervent in your prayer." I go, "Okay, we can do that. That makes sense."

"Number two, I want you to fervently love one another."

We go, "Okay, well that's hard but we'll try."

And then number three, "I want you to be hospitable without grumbling."

What? How did that make it into the manual? Hospitable? What are you talking about? I thought preparing for the day of the Lord, the day of the Lord is at hand is like, aren't we supposed to memorize the whole book of Joel and like fast the rest of our lives and he goes, "I want you to be hospitable. I actually want you to open up your heart towards others."

The story of thanksgiving it shows us this unusual operation of hospitality because it gets the attention off of the present need and the pressures even that they are facing in Plymouth, celebrating this first thanksgiving they are not having this kind of sorrowful gathering together. They are coming together with joy and food and celebration and they're coming together to give thanks to God for what He has done, not begrudging God for what He hasn't done. But to thank Him for what He has done before them.

Well what is hospitality? Peter calls us to be hospitable to one another. The word literally means to have love for strangers, to have love for strangers. My idea of hospitality was you just get the house right, you got to have the right house, you got to get a fixer-upper in your house, you got to have shiplap on the wall, you got to have a turkey in the oven, you got to have a Paula Dean cookbook up in the closet. You got to get it all right. You got to have the autumn candle ready to be able to have people over. The house has got to be cleaned, the kids got to be groomed, I mean you got to have it all right and the people show up and they go, "Wow, you're so hospitable." And that was my idea of hospitality.

But when we look at the actual meaning in the Greek of the word 'hospitality' it comes from two different words. One is Philos which means brotherly love, the affectionate love. Number two is zenos, where we get the term xenophobia, fear of strangers. Hospitality actually means to love the stranger, to love the person that you don't know, to love the person that can't repay you, to love the person that can't invite you back over because they don't have the means to do that, they don't have the home, they don't have the finances. To love the stranger is to have the spirit of hospitality upon our lives and means to extend ourselves to those that cannot pay us back and expect nothing in return of them. That's the true spirit of hospitality.

Now I like all the nice things, to get the house together. I mean if I'm gonna go to someone's house or they're gonna come to mine, I would rather have good food rather than bad food. I would rather have it smell good in the house rather than be stinky. I would rather have the kids be clean rather than be dirty, you know? And so, but the problem is is that all things in our midst hospitality becomes only this horizontal expression. It becomes only this, we're afraid of being hospitable to someone because we don't know how. We're not trained in it. We weren't raised in good southern family home where we learned how to be hospitable and so we become incapacitated. We stop. We never do it.

And then you come to IHOP and you hear about the end of the age and persecution and trouble that coming to the Church and to the Jewish people and we go, "Yeah, we're gonna stand with Israel. We're gonna be hospitable to them. We're gonna invite them in and share." But we're not even doing it with each other. And we're not even doing with those in the neighborhood. We're not even doing it with the people that are right in front of us and the Lord is emphasizing this to me and He's going, "The end of all things is coming. There is a real day of the Lord."

I don't know if we'll see it in our lifetime or not, but the fact remains, that there is a real day of the Lord that is coming and we know that we are to be a people prepared for Him, prepared in love, prepared in service, prepared in devotion and the Lord wants us to prepare in hospitality, to love the stranger, to love the broken, the hurting, the one that cannot pay us back to do this and engage in it.

Look at this, paragraph B if you are following along in the notes. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. One of the challenges of loving the stranger is that it's hard to love those who don't love us back. It's hard in every sphere in our lives to love. What if I sever you but you spit in my face? What if I invite you to stay in my home but you stay too long? What if I give you something but you're not really grateful and you just want more the next time I see you? Oh no, what happens is if we play the guessing game of how people are going to respond we go, "Eh I don't think I can trust this person. I don't think I could really give them something. I don't think I can love them." Because we are afraid of how they are going to love us back or not love us back.

Many that love others, they love them because they are loved by them. It's easy to love our friends, those who look like us, sound like us, share in our similar experiences, share in similar walks of life with us, but that is not hospitality. Hospitality is to love the stranger, to love the one that does not look like you, that doesn't sound like you, that doesn't eat the same food that you eat. That doesn't come from the same neighborhood that you come from. Hello?

The Lord has us all. He has the church in America and testing place, even today because of the increasing social hostility because of increasing racial hostility and it's all a set up for where this thing is going in the end. Will the church stand with the Jewish people in the greatest time of persecution? Will we stand with them?

And we all want to say "yes." And I want to say, "Yes." But when I look at this passage and I begin to examine hospitality, I begin to realize that I am not hospitable. I'm not truly hospitable in the biblical sense of the word. I am afraid of opening myself up. I am afraid of opening up my family because what can happen to them. I'm afraid of opening up my home or I am afraid. And there is anxiety in my own heart that I didn't even know was there. And it's directing my life and I'm living in this lens of bias and this lens of what I think is spiritual wisdom but it's just a nice word for living in fear. And the Lord wants to break us out of this. I believe. He surly wants to break me out of it.

Matthew 5, verse 46, look at this, Jesus says, "If you love those who love you what reward do you have?" If you love those that can love you back, if you love those that are just like you, what reward do you have? He said, "What if I" He's not saying this but I am interjecting it,

"What if Jesus only loved the people who were just like Him?" We'd all be dead. There's none of us that are like Him. I mean he is the ultimate picture of hospitality. He didn't just invite us to heaven. He came to the earth to come and find us, befriend us, die for us, resurrect for us, so that we could live with Him forever, to none of His own gain. He did it out of the overflow of His heart. He loved the stranger. He loved you when you were the stranger to Him. He went out of His way. He sought you out. He hunted you down. He came after you and grabbed you and wouldn't let you go. He wants you.

Jesus says, "Do not even the tax collectors do the same thing?" Even the world, even the most ungodly person out there loves those who love them back. That's easy to do. He goes, "But there is no distinction in my people if you do that, if you relate to each other the same way." There's no distinction from you and the world because you love those who love you and the world loves those who love them. So how are people supposed to know that you're a believer in Christ, that you have a new identity and you have a heavenly Father and you're following what your Father did, you're doing what He did to you., you're doing to others. How will they know? And then He says this, look at verse 48, Matthew 5:48, He says, "Therefore, you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect." Perfection comes through our identity in God being made perfect as sons and daughters of Him. And then taking that same adoption, that same love, that same love of strangers and allowing it to come out of us to those that are around us because I want you to be like My Father. I don't want you to be like you. I don't want you to be like the world. I don't want you to be anything except like My Father. Go and love the stranger. Reach out to them. Learn their name, give, bless them, be generous toward them in a way that they can never repay you and never expect to be repaid. Know that your reward is in heaven with God. He goes, "This is one of the baseline critical things for a people that care about the day of the Lord."

Who knew? Well, Peter knew. A bunch of you who have read this before knew.

He says this, paragraph E, if you are looking at the notes, "Hospitality is mean to be a Christian distinctive and a Christian value because it's a reflection of the Father. For someone to love someone else that loves them back, that is just a human response. But for someone to love a stranger, let's take it up a notch, for someone to love an enemy. That's a divine love. That's a distinction. That puts your life on a razor's edge where people come in contact you and they get cut, they have to wrestle with 'where does love from?' What kind of person is this? What kind of citizen are they? Who are their idols? What is it that they are about? What are they following? It puts them on a razor edge when a believer begins to love the stranger and a believer begins to love an enemy. To bless those who curse, to pray for those who persecute them. You know how many people in the stories that you read of those who have suffered for the gospel and martyrs and the like, those that have blessed their enemies and spoken blessing over them? How many people have come to the faith?

There's a story of the first, supposed, Christian martyr in Britton and this man, he shelters this fleeing priest and they comfort him and he disguises himself, half myth, half real, whatever, he disguises himself as the guy that he's being hospitable to, he's hiding this stranger in his home who was a believer. And this man witnesses to him and when the authorities come to arrest the fleeing priest guy he dresses up like the priest and they take him instead. And they go to unveil

who he is and take him before the authorities and they are like so mad that it's not the priest guy, it's this other guy, and they are like, "Well, you to renounce the God of this guy and you got to worship these idols." And he goes, "No, I'm not gonna do that." And he dies. He gets killed and the executioner, the first executioner wouldn't even kill him because he said, "If this man would suffer for someone else, his faith has to be pure, it has to be real." And the executioner end up dying and giving his life for the gospel too. So now two people have died they haven't even killed the guy they were originally after. Because this love, it's a divine love, it's a supernatural love, it's a witness that baffles the human mind and the human way. And that, as Christians, the way were supposed to live. We are supposed to cut against the grain of what is comfortable and convenient. We're supposed to go in the other way to be salt and light in the earth.

Amen?

When the Christian hosts another, let's go back up to paragraph F, we're supposed to do it without grumbling. I want to mention that.

Why do we grumble when we're hospitable to strangers? That's because it comes at a great cost, because not everybody is a nice house guest, because not everybody is a nice roommate and people are rude and inconsiderate and they're making weird food at 2 in the morning and you're whole house smells like it. And you're going, "What in the world is going on. This isn't going the way that I expected it to go. I expected written rules. They're not following the rules." Right?

And so, Paul warns us, he goes, "When you're hospitable, do it without complaining. Do it with a generous heart. Do it out of an overflow of love. Love covers a multitude of sins. Be fervent, 1st Peter 4, verse 7 and 8, "Be fervent in your love." Let your love stretch out beyond what is comfortable and convenient for you. When a Christian hosts another they're to do it with cheerfulness and generosity seeing their guests as Christ Himself. Many surprising things will happen when the heart is opened up to a stranger.

And interesting verse, Hebrews 13, verse 2, you'll like this cause we are weird charismatic's, "Do not forget to entertain strangers for by doing so some have unwittingly entertained angels." If this people, if we begin to do this, to exercise this muscle in preparation for days that are coming, in preparation to house refugees and immigrants and people fleeing for the gospel sake and people that are being persecuted because of who they are, and what they believe. If we begin to work this message, you know what's gonna happen? There's gonna be people in our midst that host angels unknowingly. It happened to Abraham. It happened to a couple of disciples, they are walking down the road and there is a fellow traveler with them and they are walking with Him and they don't know it's Jesus. And they sit down to have a meal together and He breaks the bread and He disappears from their midst. There is a richness in God and a power that will flow in the Holy Spirit when the people of God begin to love the stranger.

Verse 10, I'll invite the worship team to come up. Verse 10, as a part of showing hospitality and love it's not just the outward things, again the bunk cakes, although if I come to your house please make me a bunt cake. It's not just the outward things, but the very core expression of operating in a spirit of hospitality is this: as each one has received a gift, and He means a

spiritual gift that is given to us, not just one but many, the spiritual gifts that have been given to us by the Holy Spirit, He says, "Allow those gifts to come out of you. Minister those gifts to one another." He says, "So the propensity, the turning of the heart in hospitality is to love the stranger and the most practical way you can love them is to allow your gift, whatever your gift is, to flow to that person, allow them to experience the gift of God in you. If it's a word of wisdom, then give them a word of wisdom. If it's a word of knowledge, then give them a word of knowledge. If you have a gift of healing, then pray for their sickness. Let the gift of God flow through you. Because the spirit of hospitality isn't just about a church and a building and it's not just on a leadership team somewhere to create a feel of hospitality although we like that. It comes when the whole body offers their distinct gift because I don't have the gift that you have. And the gift that you have, the person next to you may not have that gift so how can they experience the fullness of the kingdom and the power of the kingdom life unless the whole body begins to operate and bring their gift to others, to express it to them, to show them, to encourage them and strengthen them and call them into the things of God in their life. Some are afraid to host others because they don't believe they have the resources to do so.

But we want to break down that idea a little bit. We want to destroy that idea. It's not just about having the outward resources, it's about the heart.

I love what Sara and Clay Edwards were sharing a couple of months ago about hospitality and they said this, "It's not about just hosting people in your home, it's about hosting people in your heart." Will you let them in to your heart? Will you make yourself vulnerable to them? Will you express the gift of God? Will you do it without expecting a payment or a return and please just a quick pastoral note, please use wisdom. Don't throw wisdom out the window. You know, if you're a single person and you know someone comes in from wherever and they are like, "Hey I'm gonna stay at your house no matter what." That's a different story. You know. Anyways. Don't be unwise. Get counsel from others if you're working through specific issues relating to hosting people, get some insight there.

In summary I would say this, "That the story of thanksgiving shows us a powerful picture of hospitality." Because you have all these people with conflicting backgrounds, warring ideals, religious, I mean just racial. I mean you have all of these convicting things and they come together to give thanks to God and share a meal with one another. It's powerful. And they loved Squanto and Squanto loved the pilgrims. He loved them. He allowed himself to be extended. He made himself vulnerable to them to actually open up his heart and actually help them in their time of need and desperation and not shut them out. It's a powerful testimony.

Let's stand.