

**Search engine tags:** Thanksgiving, pilgrims, tradition, journey, homecoming, everlasting joy, celebration, hope, testimony, grace.

**Pull quote:** Our life is like a journey; it is a story from birth to death, and from captivity to freedom.

**Message summary:** Israel's deliverance from Babylonian captivity prompted an 'everlasting joy' upon them. Their thanksgiving is a model for us today as we share testimonies of God's grace.

**Small Group Discussion Questions:**

- Share the high or low of your week.
- What is your Thanksgiving going to be like. We want details!
- Have you ever had a time when you just had to smile, rejoice, and be glad? What prompted such joy?
- How has gratitude changed you?

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Thursday is Thanksgiving. Recently, Connie and I were watching a fascinating British show and we learned something about the first pilgrims. They did not leave from England, but left from Leiden, Holland. They did not want to be a part of the state Church of England for theological reasons; they were separatists. Originally they moved to Holland. But the Dutch culture and language were difficult for them, so they chose to travel to the New World. In other words, America was their second choice.

There were **other Thanksgivings** that preceded the pilgrims' thanksgiving of 1621 in Plimoth.

- But the Plymouth thanksgiving is the one history favors.
- The pilgrims celebrated their survival and gratitude with a common meal and gunfire. Hearing the gunfire, native Americans were afraid of war and came to investigate. They were warmly welcomed and returned with food to contribute. They celebrated for 3 days.
- In addition to turkey, venison, eel, shellfish, fish, and cornmeal was on the menu.



What happens in a typical American Thanksgiving *today*? Here are the usual traditions:

- You travel home.
- There is food; there is lots of food.
- There are stories as we catch up with our family and friends.
- We celebrate what God has done for us this year.
- Usually, we dress in warm fall clothes.
- And we play with the children.

Similarly, today, we will have communion.

- You have traveled to church.
- We will share testimonies.
- We are wearing our flannels.
- We have worshiped God with our singing.
- And in second service we are celebrating new spiritual life and physical life with water baptisms and a baby dedication.

Today **could be compared** to a family Thanksgiving.

## A Family Thanksgiving

*Is 51:6 & Ps 126*

I will keep my **remarks short** so that we have time to hear what God has done in your lives.



Today, the Lord has led me to share about **a great homecoming** in the Bible.

- It is the homecoming of **the remnant of Israel** *after* their Babylonian captivity.
- **Israel sinned** greatly went into Assyrian captivity. A couple of hundred years later, **Judah** and the last of the Israelites were either killed or taken to Babylon as slave of war.

In **between these two events**, moved on by **the Holy Spirit**, the *Isaiah* prophesied ...

### 1. Everlasting Joy, Is 51:9-11.

'Awake, awake, arm of the Lord, clothe yourself with strength! Awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old ...

<sup>10</sup>Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over (Is 51:9-10 NIV)?'

- In many ways **our life is like a journey; it is a story from birth to death, and from captivity to freedom.**
- Here, **Isaiah recalls** the most **miraculous deliverance** in Israel's history, the passing through the Red Sea. 'Awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old.' These verses are a **cry for God's attention**. '**Where are you God?!**'
- This is **why sharing our testimonies** is an important part of our worship. **We look back in our personal histories and say, 'God delivered me,' or 'God healed me.'** God's intervention in the past gives us a **foundational trust** for his intervention today.

'Those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Is 51:11 NIV).'

- In the 1980's this verse was one of the **early chorus' sung with the OHP**: 'Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away (Is 51:11 KJV).'
- The **Exodus** was in Israel's history. **This is a future event**. Isaiah envisions a day when **Israel will be delivered a second time** from its slavery. *Just as they were miraculously delivered from Egypt, they would miraculously be delivered from this captivity.*
- *Remember the parade of conquered soldiers we described a few weeks ago? **Isaiah** was alive and **witnessed Assyria marching** Israel in such a humiliating parade of defeat. **But he now sees 'everlasting joy'** as a victory wreath on their heads. **The parade home will be a joyful celebration. All sorrow will suddenly change.***
- Perhaps on **your life journey**, you are at a point where **circumstances** seem to have locked you in; you are not on what you thought was God's journey for you. The good news is that **God sets us free from such captivity**. He frees us from addictions, from the slavery of our sinful heart. **Our life is like a journey; it is a story from birth to death, and from captivity to freedom.**
- A **later prophet, Jeremiah**, prophesied that 70 years from when he spoke Israel would be set free from the Babylonians. **That prophecy** gave Daniel hope and he prayed daily for deliverance. **To the exact year**, the Persian king Cyrus began to allow the Jews to return to Israel.

The story continues with a Psalm that recalls what walking those 300 miles on foot was like:

## 2. The Lord has done Great Things, Ps 126.

<sup>1</sup>When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. <sup>2</sup>Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." <sup>3</sup>The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy (Ps 126:1-3 NIV).'

- Can you **imagine the joy** of being able to return home! **No more slavery**, foreign language or customs – **freedom! It was like a mirage.**
- This Psalm is **a song of thanksgiving**. Note: it is said among the nations 'The Lord has done great things for them' and for us and we are filled with joy.