

*“Thanksgiving: Lifestyle of Christians” Lev 7:11-14 / 1 Thess 5:16-22 / John 6:10-11 (11/17/24)*

After Sunwoo and I decided to get married, Sunwoo’s parents invited me to stay a night at their home. I was nervous, but Sunwoo’s family made me feel very comfortable so that I could have a great time with Sunwoo’s family. We had a great lunch at a restaurant and came back home. At dinner time, I was surprised because Sunwoo’s family had just had some fruit and then went to their rooms to rest. I thought there would be more food for dinner, but nothing was after the fruit. I was hungry during the whole night. Later, Sunwoo told me that her family eats simple fruit for dinner if they have a heavy lunch.

Sunwoo’s family’s lifestyle was different from my family’s lifestyle. Because of this different family style, Sunwoo also suffered from my family’s lifestyle. My family likes to eat. My family eats something from opening eyes from sleeping until closing eyes to sleep. Sometimes, if we feel hungry while sleeping, we wake up, eat, and go to sleep. Eating well is one of the virtues of my country’s culture, so Sunwoo told me she felt so difficult and uncomfortable because of my family’s eating habits. She was so full, but she had to eat and eat again at my parents’ home.

Of course, now we understand each other well, so Sunwoo’s parents

prepare dinner for me, and my parents do not push Sunwoo to eat when we visit each family.

Every family has their own lifestyle. Every person has a different lifestyle. Not only families and individuals but also each country has different cultures and lifestyles. Each religion has a different culture and lifestyle. I had a Muslim classmate when I lived in China. He could not eat pork, so teachers ordered a lamb dish for him when we went on the school trip. Muslims have to pray five times a day toward Mecca, so I saw many prayer rooms for Muslims in the airport and university. Jewish people only eat Kosher food. The rabbi chaplain who worked with me in the hospital did not eat the Korean snacks that I gave him because the snack did not mention any information about Kosher. He needed to keep the Sabbath, so he worked off early on Friday to go back home before sunset. Each religion has its own lifestyle. They have their own way of worshipping their gods and practicing their spiritual practices. Then, what is Christians' lifestyle? What is Christianity's special culture and lifestyle?

Today's Scripture, Leviticus, is the main book of the Law that God gave to Hebrews. We normally say that Leviticus has a lot of rules and laws that Hebrews should keep before God. We can also say Leviticus is the lifestyle that

God gave to Hebrews in ancient times. Hebrews had lived in Egypt for more than 400 years before they received the Book of the Law. They lost the name of God, and they lost their identity as chosen people. They probably kept their culture. However, their lifestyle might be very similar to that of Egyptians. They ate food from Egypt, and they were part of the culture of Egypt. Hebrews did not have their own lifestyle as people of God. After the Exodus from Egypt, God gave their lifestyle through the Law. The Law had many rules about Hebrews' lifestyle, such as how they should worship God, how they should eat, and how they should behave together.

At this time, there was another strong culture in the Ancient Middle East. It was the Canaanites. Canaanites were not as strong as Egypt, but they also had a strong culture and religion. They worshiped Baal, and they had their own lifestyle to worship their gods. So, while Hebrews forgot about God and lost their own lifestyle, they were affected by two strong cultures and lifestyles, which were Egyptian and the Canaanites.

If we compare the way of worshiping God that is written in Leviticus with the way of other gods of Egypt and Canaan, it looks very similar. People gave animal sacrifice offerings to their gods. And our God also taught Hebrews to bring

some sacrifice offerings. However, our God never requested very unethical practices, while Egyptians and Canaanites offered human sacrifices, unethical relationships with priests, and self-harming. Our God taught Hebrews to bring offerings, that they could prepare, and sometimes, our God let Hebrews eat and share the offerings together. The new lifestyle that God gave Hebrews was very ethical, and the Law protected the people of Israel.

In addition to these special features of the Law, we can find an interesting lifestyle that God gave to Hebrews through Leviticus. It is Thanksgiving. In Leviticus 7:12, the Bible mentions “an expression of thankfulness” and “thank offering.” Those ideas appeared when the Law explained “the regulations for the fellowship offering.” We should understand what the fellowship offering is to know why the thank offering in Leviticus is so special. God gave Hebrews regulations for many kinds of offerings. Each offering had a purpose, such as asking for forgiveness. In many offerings, the fellowship offering has the purpose of a relationship with God. For asking for a peaceful relationship with God, Hebrews gave God sacrifices as a fellowship offering. In other words, Hebrews expressed thankfulness and gave thanks to God for asking for God’s blessing and peace with God. Therefore, Thanksgiving was the very special lifestyle of

Hebrews in ancient times.

Last Sunday, I mentioned the context of the Thessalonian church. Thessalonian church people believed Jesus would come again very soon. But the second coming of Jesus did not happen for 20-30 years. People were disappointed and despaired. And while the other churches in the time of Paul had both Jewish and Gentile Christians, most of the Christians in the Thessalonian church were Gentiles. They probably were not familiar with believing in Jesus and living as Christians. Most of the people in the Thessalonian church were familiar with the lifestyle of the Roman Empire. So, Paul wrote about how Christians should live in the last part of 1 Thessalonians.

The Roman Empire was a country full of abundance and peace. As peace lasted longer, people pursued pleasure. The life of the Romans was promiscuous. They also pursued the pleasure of eating excessively. When people were full, they threw up the food they had eaten and ate new food to taste more. Roman lifestyle was different from the lifestyle pursued by Christianity.

In the Letter to Thessalonians, Paul wrote how Christians should wait for the second coming of Christ and how they should behave. Paul said, “Rejoice

always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil." Those quotes in the letter were the lifestyle of Christians Paul taught people in the Thessalonian church. He placed Thanksgiving on the same level as "Rejoice always, pray continually, do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies, hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil." When we think about the lifestyle of Christians, we can imagine "Worship God every Sunday, pray every day, Read the Bible, love neighbors, love God." However, Thanksgiving is also a very important lifestyle for Christians, as much as "Worship God every Sunday, pray every day, read the Bible, love neighbors, love God."

Now, in the present day, we also live in abundance. I believe many people lost their hearts of thankfulness. Because of the development of social media, people can compare their lifestyles to each other. We are Christians who pursue thankfulness in our lives. Thanksgiving is our lifestyle. Thanksgiving is our unique lifestyle. Through this week, I hope we can find the heart of Thanksgiving. And I hope God may reveal our hearts and minds so that we can see Thanksgiving in our lives. Amen.