

## THANKSGIVING

-Ryan Parsons-

I have visited and stayed in third world villages, and as a result, I have been brought to my knees by the circumstances in which other people live. Having not grown up wealthy, I always thought I came from a lower-middle-class home. As I entered people's homes and graciously received food and gifts lavished on me, I became aware of how rich I am.

One of the things that has always impressed me by those who live in such meager conditions is their joy, thanksgiving, and generosity. In my younger mind, I always worried they would resent me for where I come from, the clothes I wear, and the fact that I have the means to get on an airplane and fly to comfort and security. However, they treated me as an equal, as a brother. More than that, they, in thanksgiving, treated me as if I needed everything they provided me. And, in reality, I did. I needed those things, not for life and sustenance, but to teach me the way of the Lord better.

I could weep as I listened to their prayers. Over and over again they said "thank you" to the God of heaven. As I watched kids with only a flat tennis ball and an old bicycle rim play cricket in the alleys, they exuded so much joy that I simply had to join in the fun. Not only that, they were happy to have me in their home. As they served me small cakes made out of minnows and cornmeal, they joyfully watched as I ate from their meager rations. Sitting on a bench of scrap wood in a home with no running water and no indoor plumbing, I was embraced with complete love. I asked over and over in my mind, "What is happening here?"

I realized I had been blinded by my abundance. My comfort had numbed my thanks. My community's affluence had minimized my generosity, and my security had muzzled my joy. How could people who have so little (comparatively) be so thankful, joyful, and generous? I believe it is only because of the Spirit of Christ.

As I enter another year of "Thanksgiving," I am reminded and humbled by those journeys where I met physically poor, but spiritually rich Christ-followers who taught me what true thanksgiving is. It is found not in the abundance of wealth or possessions, but in the truth of our eternal security in Jesus Christ. Nothing can take that away from us. Though we be stripped of wealth, security, health, and even life, we have nothing to fear and everything to anticipate. If that doesn't put some joy in your heart and thanksgiving in your bones, I don't know what will.

Colossians 2:6-7

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Happy Thanksgiving!