

# The Royal Poinciana Chapel

Sermon By

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## "29,222 REASONS TO BE THANKFUL!"

Text: "So teach us to number our days  
that we may get a heart of wisdom." -- Psalm 90:12

"29,222 Reasons To Be Thankful!" . . . Well, I hope you brought your lunch. You are brave indeed to have come at all and stayed around until now, waiting to be informed on each and every one of the 29,222 reasons to be thankful. I promise to talk fast . . . so, hold on. Most sermons have three parts, some four or five, but this is ridiculous!

It reminds me of the story of that famous graduation commencement speech at Yale University some years ago. The speaker was an alumnus of that fine Ivy League school, and so enamored of this status, that he chose to outline his address to the graduates with an acrostic of his alma mater: Y-A-L-E. He began. "The 'Y' is for Youth, which you have to invest in the future. The days of yore are gone. . . ." On he went for 17 minutes.

For the next 16 minutes, he harangued the class with "A." "A" was for Authority, which the whole world needs to have. 20 more minutes were spent on the "L" . . . "L" is for Love, without which the world will languish and lose. Oh, dearie me! Now, 53 minutes into his speech, he came to the "E," and explained that "E" stands for Energy, which you will need to expend to make your dreams come true . . . and on, and on.

At about that time one of the graduates turned to another and whispered: "What do you think of all this?" He replied: "I don't know, but thank God we are not graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology!"

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"29,222 Reasons To Be Thankful!" . . . I will offer a small prize to the first person who deciphers the origin of the number. It comes from the following calculation: The Bible says that the days of our years are three score and ten; that's 70 years. By reason of strength, it says, they can be four score . . ." or more.

A score of years is 20; four score would be 80 years. Multiply 80 by 365 days per year; add 20 extra days for leap years; and the number of days you will have lived, if you reach age 80, is 29,220. Add two for good measure, and viola!: "29,222 Reasons To Be Thankful!" This Thanksgiving Sunday, it is a reminder that each new day is a reason to be grateful. We do nothing to deserve it; we can do nothing to demand it. It comes as a gift.

You might want to amuse yourself a little by numbering your days. It is easy. If you are 40 years old, you have lived 14,600 days. (By the time you are 40, half of your days are gone.) If you are 50 years old, you have lived 18,250 days. If you are 60 years old, you have lived 21,900; you have 7,322 left. If you are 70, you have lived 25,550 days; 75, 27,395 days. If you are 90 years old, you have lived 32,850 days.

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Oh, how the days slip by. On the average, we spend 1,500 days more or less in high school, the

same in college, and if in graduate school, 4,500 days in all, preparing to do something great. By the time we reach 21, we have already used up 7,665 days. Much of the time and many of the days go by automatically.

A recent report by Priority Management Corporation entered the following average estimates: The average person spends 400 days worth of minutes looking for lost items (cleaner's slips, glasses, teeth, checkbooks, etc.); the older I get I think that number doubles every year. 240 days opening junk mail; 750 trying to return phone calls; 1,400 days washing dishes, mopping the kitchen and bathroom, vacuuming, etc.; 2,190 days eating and drinking (I think I spend more than that, too); 8,000 days sleeping; 150 days waiting at traffic lights; and in Palm Beach County, 7,000-10,000 days playing golf. We could go on and on. The days of our lives . . . swiftly fly. Job said they go faster than a weaver's shuttle.

"When as a child I laughed and wept --  
Time crept!  
When as a youth I dreamed and talked --  
Time walked!  
When I became a full-grown man --  
Time ran!  
Then as with the years I older grew --  
Time flew!  
Soon I shall find as I travel on --  
Time gone!"

Oliver Wendell Holmes

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Now, please adapt this all to the Thanksgiving Festival we are celebrating this time of year.

(1) First, thank God for the days He has given us . . . all of them. Not only the good ones, all of them. My mother used to say that some years are better than others. So are some days. By the way . . . the bad days begin just like all the others. But, the Bible says: "In all things, give thanks." "Praise and thanksgiving in the Bible are the equivalent of life," says theologian Gerhard von

Rad. They are the most positive evidence of being alive." Gratitude is good for the soul. The gift of appreciation is near enough the greatest gift of all.

The great Scots preacher, George Matheson, who was blind, wrote: "Lord, I have often thanked You for the roses, but I have never thanked you for the thorns . . . yet, I climbed to You more through the thorns of my handicap, than in the sweet aroma of the roses." First, thank God for all the days. The alternative was not to have had them at all!

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(2) Secondly, this Thanksgiving season, thank God for the days, years, and centuries of our nation. "The land of the free and the home of the brave." This great day of national Thanksgiving commemorates the Pilgrims' gratitude to God for His Providential guidance and keeping.

The Mayflower first put in on the opposite side of the Cape, at what is now Provincetown. Then, dissatisfied with the lack of shelter on the ocean, they moved around the Cape to Plymouth. Although the historical details are shrouded in the misty past, a legend at least was born there in 1620 when they landed at Plymouth Rock.

We were in Plymouth, Massachusetts a couple of summers ago. We looked for the Rock. I expected to see something like the Rock of Gibraltar. What we found was a pint-sized piece of granite, locked away in a protected vault down in the sand, open to the ocean side, with 16 little stone columns supporting the roof above it. The remaining rock was the size of a small sofa.

Approximately 137,500 days have passed since the Pilgrims landed. We do not know how big the famous Rock was at that time, but come today, it measures six feet.

By the way, the Rock was ignored for a long time . . . the Pilgrims were too busy surviving. But in 1771, some business men built a wharf over it, mindful of the tourists. Then, in December of

1774, a group of patriots decided to relocate it to the Meeting House Square. It took 40 oxen to pull it (it was surely much larger than a sofa), but the Rock broke into two pieces. So, they continued their journey with the top half, and placed it in the Town Square next to an elm tree. No one knows for sure what happened to the other half.

In 1834, some citizens thought the Rock would be safer indoors, so they built Pilgrim Hall Museum. Again, they tried to carry it in on a cart, but it fell and broke again.

Parts of the original Rock are everywhere. A 100 pound piece is located in Immingham, England, the place from which the original Pilgrims fled. A 50-pound chunk is in the Plymouth Congregational Church. Some good-sized fragments are as faraway as in Los Gatos, California, and the Nevada State Museum at Carson City. The Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. has its own piece, too. Smaller pieces have been crafted into earrings and cuff links. Most of the diminution of the original Rock came about by the carelessness of those who moved it, and because visitors chipped away pieces of it for personal souvenirs.

As writer John F. Rhodes says (Are you listening?): "Plymouth Rock has not been ravaged by natural catastrophe, or some freedom-hating despot. It has been trashed by those who care about it the most. Those who desired to get a piece of the Rock for themselves have almost destroyed it." . . . I wonder, as we thank God for our Nation this year, whether that is a symbol of what we have allowed to happen all along the way: not many intending great harm to the nation, just neglecting this and that and getting a little piece for themselves. We have chipped away at a lot of things.

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Do you remember that famous Norman Rockwell poster of Thanksgiving Day a generation or two ago? The family is gathered, confident that their Nation and their lives are under divine guidance and protection. Their moral stance and standards are

sure. They look relaxed, secure and grateful.

Confidence is harder to find these days. We have chipped away at our moral grandeur, too. Public officials and corporation executives can sneak around the edges of their public charges. We turn our backs on the children of the nation. We discriminate without even knowing it. People feather their own nests.

Plymouth Rock, the symbol of our moral and spiritual power, once ranging from sea to shining sea, is now the size of a sofa in your den. I do not want to depress anyone here. . . . I want to warn us all that we need to find the fragments symbolically, and piece them back together again. Let us be thankful, and pray for the future of our Nation. We are a long way from where we should be. In 1,133 days we will enter a new century.

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Psalm 90, the Scripture I read, is one of the most beautiful of all the Psalms, it recalls the brevity of human life on earth, but it enhances the beauty of the days and years and decades we live. Life is like a tale that is told, like a story. (Are you listening?) Your life and mine are written by an author. We play out our parts; we make our decisions, but we are part of a story. Some stories are long, and some are short and end too soon. Some have mysteries. I often say out loud in reading a story, "Why did the author ever put that part in his story? I would not have done it."

So many things in my life and the lives of those around me, I would change . . . but you see, I am not the author of human life and what God writes is the story we will read.

As it says in Lamentations: "I call this to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end. His mercies are new every morning. . . . Great is Thy faithfulness, O God. The Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in Him." To the faithfulness of God, we must respond with 29,222

expressions of gratitude. The Psalmist said, "I have been young, and now am old, but I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor His children begging for bread."

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My old friend, Dr. Scharfe, the man I worked for when I began my ministry at Shadyside Church in Pittsburgh, loved to tell the story of the little boy who was away at summer camp. He wrote home to his parents:

"Dear Mom & Dad: We went on a great field trip yesterday. It was a mountain climbing trip. We climbed a great big mountain. It was fun and we did good. Except, when we got back, they said we climbed the wrong mountain and tomorrow we have to go back and climb the other one. This sure is a funny camp."

You only go around once. Sometimes we climb the right mountain and sometimes we don't. Thank God that we always get another chance, 29,222 of them, if we're lucky. There will always be a new day tomorrow. For now and evermore. Amen.

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