

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL

Psalm 103:1-22

Key verse: 103:1,2

Thanksgiving

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

Thanksgiving Day was last Thursday. There are many customs and traditions that are a part of the atmosphere of American Thanksgiving. Pilgrims and indians, turkeys, football, family gatherings all contribute something to the atmosphere. The real point of Thanksgiving, however is giving thanks. I heard a well-known psychologist talk about being thankful. She said that thankfulness is seldom a spontaneous feeling. It must be learned. Children must be taught to be thankful. Today we want to learn thanks-giving from the Psalmist, David. Today we have some specific things for which to thank God. Especially, we want to thank God for his spiritual blessings.

During this fall term we have been praying for our Pre.R.N. nurses. God has been working among us in answer to prayer. Last Friday our Pre R.N. nurses finished covering all five subjects on which they will be tested in February. We are very grateful to God for helping them work hard and learn much. We are also grateful for the sacrificial spirit and shepherd minds of Missionaries Joseph Chung, James Kim, Hannah Zun and Grace Yoon, who taught them for three months. It is easy after studying hard, to become selfish or worried and forget about the grace of God. But our Pre. R.N. missionaries have not only learned nursing subjects, they have also been learning faith in God. We praise God who has helped us thus far. And we pray that God will continue helping and training them to be useful missionaries and that he will give them grace to pass the exam in February. We have also been praying for Missionaries Peter and Inja Chang and for 60,000 students in Ohio State University. Today, Missionary Inja and Sister Susan Carroll are with us. We praise God for his gracious work there. Today we want to raise an Ebenezer stone, as Samuel did in 1 Samuel 7:12 and say, "Thus far has the Lord helped us." Praise the Lord.

Being thankful is very important. In Romans 1:21 Paul tells us that ingratitude--not being thankful to God--is at the very root of sin. In Genesis 2 and 3, God made a perfect Paradise for Adam and Eve, but they were not thankful to God. They were dissatisfied, and began to doubt God's love and goodness. So they yielded to Satan's temptation and sinned. They disobeyed God. Because of their sin, spiritual order was broken and the world came under curse. A disobedient, rebellious heart is a heart that has in it no thankfulness. God's gospel is grace. His gift of Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin is grace. Grace is a free gift, undeserved. The only response we can make to God's grace is to receive it by faith and be thankful. The life of a Christian is not built on his own will power or on good works. It is built on grace. So the Christian's heart should always be overflowing with thanksgiving. I pray that all of us may deeply realize this and be grateful to God for his grace and mercy.

Today we want to study Psalm 103. The caption above this Psalm says that it is a Psalm of David. It is a psalm filled with praise to God. In this psalm, the Psalmist remembers the spiritual blessings of God and praises God. All of us have received human and material blessings from God. We must be grateful for these. But the spiritual blessings we have received are the really wonderful blessings. Today we want to learn from the Psalmist to thank God for his spiritual blessings.

The title of this psalm is found in the first verse and the last verse. "Bless the Lord, O My Soul". The N.I.V. says "Praise the Lord, O my Soul." This psalm is a hymn of personal thanksgiving. Let's read verses 1 and 2.

1. Forget Not All His Benefits--our spiritual blessings (1-7)

In verses 1-5 the psalmist addresses his own soul. "Your" refers to "my Soul." Let's read verses 1-5. What are the spiritual blessings for which the Psalmist praises God?

(i) Forgiveness. The first spiritual blessing is forgiveness. (3a) This is God's greatest blessing. David was deeply grateful for God's forgiveness. He said that the truly happy, blessed man is the man who knows his sins are forgiven (Ps 32:1,2). Unforgiven sin in our hearts is like cancer. It gradually destroys us. No amount of human effort can wash out the stain of sin. No psychological technique can remove guilt, when the guilt is there because of sin. On the other hand, some people have broken God's laws and they know it, but they have no sense of guilt. Their sin is like untreated leprosy, which, after the initial pain, causes one to lose all feeling and eats away at the infected person's flesh without his being aware of it--until he dies. The only cure for sin is God's forgiveness. John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we are lying. But if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:8,9) It is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin. (7) God loves us and wants to forgive us. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Ro. 5:8) "Since we are justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." (Ro.5:9) Rom

Forgiveness is so important to the psalmist that he returns to this theme in verses 10,11,12. Read these verses. God's forgiveness really solves our sin problem. He completely cleanses and forgives and removes the root of sin from our lives. God does not punish us according to our sins. Sometimes in his love he gives some hard training to lead us to repentance. But if he punished us according to our sins, we would have no hope in this world and no hope in heaven. God forgives all our iniquities. He frees us from the power of sin and from the guilt of sin.

(ii) Healing. He heals all my diseases. (3b) God made us. He gives life and he takes away life. Doctors and nurses cannot heal. Only God heals. Doctors can sometimes help by removing things that hinder healing or giving medicine that helps the body fight bacteria. Dr. Joseph Chung has had more medical training than any of our doctors. He knows that God alone is the healer. When Missionary Esther Chung was sick and asked him for medicine, he said, "Repent". She repented and got well. Some people worry about their health so much they make themselves sick. When we get older it is natural for some parts of our bodies not to function so well. Paul speaks of the body as an earthly tent. He said, "We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (II Cor. 5:1) But God has given us life and health until now. He will continue to heal our diseases and sustain our lives until he calls us to heaven. Praise and thank God for healing all our diseases. We must commit our physical lives to Him.

(iii) Saves me from Hell. (4a) "Who redeems your life from the Pit." God saves us from eternal punishment in hell. This is a very great spiritual blessing. It removes from my life and heart all fear of death and, therefore, all fear of life. Heb. 2:15 tells us that Jesus delivers all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

(iv) He crowns me with steadfast love and mercy. When God's love is in our hearts our lives are filled with meaning. Human love gives temporary joy and enriches life for a while. But God's love, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is the greatest wealth of life. Human love is limited to those whom it is humanly possible to love. God's love breaks down all barriers. God's love enables us to love all the people of the world. God's love enables us to love those whom we cannot love. God's love is indeed like a crown--it makes us live like royal princes and princesses.

(v) He satisfies my desires with good things so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's. Who can really satisfy another person? What material thing can satisfy our

desires? Human and material satisfaction are only temporary. When human desire is filled by human things and material desire is filled by material things, often bigger desires are created. Someone says, "If I could just get married, then I would be satisfied and be a good missionary." But after she gets married, she spends all her time thinking and calculating about her family's future. or "If I could just get a proper job, I'd be free from worry and be able to serve God." But every job brings with it new problems and new things to be overcome. A drug addict is temporarily satisfied with drugs--but more and more drugs are required to satisfy his appetite. Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income..as goods increase, so do those who consume them..."

But God satisfies our basic desires--not with evil things that destroy us, but with good things that really satisfy. So God renews our youth like the eagles. "He satisfies my desires with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's" This verse tells us that when our desires are satisfied by God, our youth is renewed. People who have no spiritual desire, no vision or real hope are already old. When we have spiritual desire to grow in Christ's character, and desire to grow in English and in understanding of American students so that we can be better missionaries and vision to pioneer 560 campuses, we don't have time to get old. God hears our prayers and satisfies our desires and renews our youth.

In verses 6 and 7 the psalmist mentions two more spiritual blessings which God pours out on human society. First, "the Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed". Sinful men are always seeking ways to oppress weaker people. God sent Jesus to "preach good news to the poor;...to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed..." (Lk. 4:18) Second, God gave a very precious gift to this cursed world. He gave the Bible. Read verse 7. God made known his ways through the Bible to people who had lost their direction and meaning of existence, living in this wilderness world. Because we have the Bible, we can know God, We can also know who we are and where we came from and where we are going. The psalmist says, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path". What a great blessing it is to have light and direction! Furthermore, as we read the Bible and receive it as God's word to us and try to obey him, we may have a personal walk with God and spiritual life. We find strength to defeat the power of sin and temptation through the word and the Holy Spirit. "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." (119:10,11) There is no way to defeat sinful thoughts and negative thinking by our will power, but when we hide God's word in our hearts, God defeats the power of Satan in us. How richly God has blessed us by giving us his timeless, unchanging word of truth, the Bible! Praise God!

II. God's mercy (compassion) and grace (8-18)

As we think about the Spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us, we must also think about God, who blesses. We thank God and praise him not only for what he has done for us. We also thank him for himself. Read verse 8. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." The NIV says, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious." We praise and thank God for his compassion.

God is perfect and righteous. He hates sin. But he loves sinful people and instead of punishing us for our sins as we deserve, he covers us with his love and mercy. We cannot comprehend with our small human minds the wideness of God's love and mercy. Read verse 11. "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him."

And look at verses 13 and 14. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." His love and compassion reach down into the depths

of our greatest weakness and sin and sorrow. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And his love is eternal. Look at verse 17. "But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him..." Our lives are transitory and temporal. We are like grass, like a flower of the field that flourishes for a short time in the warm summer sun. The cold winds of autumn and winter blow and the flower is gone, leaving not a trace of its former beauty. Man's life is like that. Our human love is also like that. The worldly fame and wealth which many people have as a goal in life are like that. Human dreams--even if realized--are like that. But God's love is eternal--from everlasting to everlasting.

Notice that in these three verses, 11,13,17 which describe the love and compassion of the Lord, there is the phrase, "those who fear him". God's great compassion is poured out on those who fear him. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..." What does it mean to "fear the Lord?" One young lady I know fears that God is punishing her for her sin. So she is very rebellious against God. This is not what fearing God means. To fear the Lord means to repent of our proud and rebellious hearts. To fear the Lord means to see ourselves from God's point of view and realize that we are dust, that our lives were given by him, that we are like the flowers that flourish then fade. To fear the Lord means to come to him as the prodigal son came to his father and to open our hearts to his compassion and love so that he can forgive and cleanse our sins and heal our diseases and redeem us from hell and crown our lives with love and mercy. To fear the Lord means to keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. (18) That is, to study the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us through the scriptures according to God's will. We must fear the Lord and stop living by our own feelings and by our calculating human reason. For God is a loving and compassionate father who wants his people to fear him--to reverence and respect him as God.

III. God's Sovereign Rule. (19-22)

God is not only a loving and compassionate Father who is deeply involved in all our human affairs. He is the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth. We praise God with our feeble human voices. But angels in heaven praise him perfectly. Let's read verses 19-22 together. We can learn something important from the angels. They are described as mighty ones who do his word, as ministers who do his will. They are full of praise and blessing and thanksgiving. When we receive God's sovereign rule and will in our hearts and seek with all our hearts to take the good news of his redemptive grace to all the people of the world, our hearts are filled with joy and thanksgiving, too. Those who have rebellious minds and who do God's work with a calculating mind, not realizing that it is a great privilege to serve him, have in their hearts only complaining and dissatisfaction.

David was a great king, a victorious soldier, a poet and musician. He was the shepherd of Israel and he was loved by many people. But during his life there were many times when he was rejected and hated and treated like an outlaw. There were times when those closest to him betrayed him. And he, himself sinned and struggled before God with tears of repentance. But David did not allow self-pity capture him and he did not become bitter and rebellious to God. He accepted God's sovereignty. He knew that God would protect him. He knew that God would make him king of Israel and bless the people of Israel through him. So he could praise and thank God in every circumstance. We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by our problems or by hard circumstances, and lose our thankful hearts. We must learn more and more how to thank God. We must thank him for spiritual blessings--for basic grace and answered prayer. We must thank him for helping us thus far. Let us praise and thank us for calling us to be his servants, especially for calling us to be tenants of campus evangelism. Let's read again verses 1,2,22.