Bless the LORD, O My Soul!
(Psalm 103:1-5)

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at God of Grace Christian Fellowship, Inc., Escario St., Cebu City.

Introduction

Thanksgiving is certainly a good time of the year to remember all our blessings from God. That’s exactly what David is doing in Psalm 103. He wants to remember and count his blessings. He begins by saying, “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” “Bless” (v. 1) (Heb. barak), here means, “to praise” (Piel). David is talking to himself here. He’s telling his soul. The soul in Hebrew thought represents the whole man or woman, the whole person, the whole being. David is saying that his whole being shall bless the LORD.

Psalm 103:2, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” “Forget” here is from the Hebrew word, shakach, “to cease to care” (BDB); “to be oblivious of, from want of memory or attention” (Strong) David is telling his soul, “Soul, don’t forget. Don’t be unmindful or insensitive about his benefits. Remember them.” David gets it right, because we tend to be insensitive, unmindful, and careless about the benefits we have received from the LORD.

I must note that these benefits are personal, for David is talking only about his soul, himself, in the singular form (himself) and not plural form (Israel/peoples). What are these personal benefits that we should not forget about?

For His Forgiveness

“Who forgives all your iniquity” (v. 3, ESV). I already told this story before. “A father and his teenage son had a relationship that had become strained. So the son ran away from home. His father, however, began a journey in search of his rebellious son. Finally, in Madrid, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in the newspaper. The ad read: ‘Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father.’

“The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office, 800 ‘Pacos’ showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness and love from their fathers.’

What is your greatest need today? “Well, Pastor, I need food. I need clothes. I need shelter. I need money. I need a boyfriend or a girlfriend.”

But after you have eaten, after you worn your clothes, after you have bought a house, why is it that you are still not happy? Why is it that you are not right with God? The reason is because you need the forgiveness of God. Our problem is not material or emotional. Our problem is moral. For we have sinned against God; and we are guilty.

Are you sick? Are you going to die? Did you quarrel recently with your brother, father, or sister? Do you know your purpose in life? The real reason for sickness and death, and for all the conflicts in life, and purposelessness, is sin. Sin and the guilt of sin are our greatest problem. And so our greatest need is to know forgiveness from God.

To be forgiven by God is to be released from the guilt of sin. Forgiveness means “pardon, cancellation of an obligation, a punishment, or guilt.” Somebody well said that “forgiveness does not make you right; it makes you free.”

The good news is the LORD is willing to forgive you your sin. Ray T. Pritchard writes that God is willing to forgive more than we are willing to be forgiven. He “forgives all your iniquity.” Actually in the Hebrew, “forgives” (Heb. calach), speaks of action of unbroken continuity. (Qal participle) This means that the LORD keeps on forgiving all your sin.

“You mean, Pastor, that God never stops forgiving my sins?” Yes, he never stops forgiving your sins, so long as you come to him and repent your sins. “All” here means “any” and “every” iniquity. (Strong) I’m glad God forgives not just some of my sin, but each and every sin in my heart and life. I’ve committed some big sins

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2 BAGD, s. v. αφεσις.
and some small sins. I don’t need forgiveness for just some of my sins. I need God to forgive every sin in my life.

For His Healing

“Who heals all your diseases.” "Tony Campolo tells a story about being in a church in Oregon where he was asked to pray for a man who had cancer. Campolo prayed boldly for the man’s healing. That next week he got a telephone call from the man’s wife. She said, ‘You prayed for my husband. He had cancer . . . He died.’ Campolo felt terrible.

But she continued, ‘Don’t feel bad. When he came into that church that Sunday he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time, and he hated God. He was 58 years old, and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God didn’t take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger grew towards God, the more miserable he was to everybody around him.’

But the lady told Campolo, ‘After you prayed for him, a peace had come over him and a joy had come into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of his life.’”

I think that more than physical healing is the healing of the sin-sick soul, the healing of unhappy marriages, and the healing of broken relationships. Now David is not promising us all that the LORD will heal all our diseases. David is testifying that Yahweh is healing all his diseases. Remember that David is talking to himself here, his soul. “Your” here is singular—meaning, David’s diseases. He is saying to his soul, “Soul, remember that the LORD heals all your diseases.”

Also, the verb, “heals,” can refer to a curing of physical diseases. It can also mean a curing of spiritual diseases in one’s life (Isa. 6:10; 53:5; Jer. 32:22; Hos. 14:4). In the Bible, sin is a metaphor of disease. To be infected with sin is to be infected with disease.

Note the parallelism in the Hebrew here. In Hebrew parallelism, the next line expands or explains the meaning of the first line. Therefore, the sin in the first line refers to the diseases in the second line. The diseases refers back to the sin. Since healing is placed parallel to forgiving, “diseases” is like “iniquity,” which corrupt and weaken the soul. Comparing David’s words here with his words in Ps. 51 and 2 Sam. 12, David refers to sin as a disease, and forgiveness from sin as a healing of the sin disease. In other words, God’s forgiveness of David’s sin also brings healing of the sin disease of his soul (2 Sam. 12; Ps. 51).

For His Deliverance

“Who redeems your life from the pit” (v. 4, ESV). The verb, “redeems” (Heb. ga’al), means deliverance from danger. The “pit” (Heb. shachath) refers to “corruption, destruction, ditch, grave.” (Strong) The “pit” was used to catch lions or other animals in those days. If you were an animal in those days, to fall into the pit is to face danger and death. Here, the “pit” may refer to death and corruption in Sheol. Ps. 16:10, “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” (ESV) David is saying, “LORD, you deliver me from destruction.”

How many times has the LORD saved you from destruction? Think of what did not happen to you today. Did anyone rob you? If you lost some money, you still have your life. Did someone shoot you today? Did you lose some money in business? But you have not lost the love of your wife and family and good friends. Do you have high blood pressure and diabetes? At least, you’re still alive; and if you’re careful, you will still live a long life! Your parents still love you. Are your kids disobedient and hard-headed? At least, they don’t behave like the son of a local city mayor, who always gets in trouble with the law. We always read his name in the papers, having violent encounters with the police, allegedly possessing guns and drugs.

Do you have high blood pressure? At least, it’s not cancer. If you have cancer, at least you’re still alive today! You don’t have money? Then why do you still look healthy? How come you can still three times a day? Some of us here eat five times a day. I’ve met people who’ve eaten only once a day in the past 3 months.

You don’t have new shoes? Tell that to the person who doesn’t have feet! Think of all the bad things that could have happened to you today that didn’t; because the LORD preserves you from the pit.

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For His Steadfast Love

“For crowns you with steadfast love and mercy” (v. 4, ESV). A crown is a garland, a circlet, or a headdress, just like the crowns worn by kings and queens in those days. In ancient times, they crown people with crowns made of silver and gold or garlands made of flower and leaves. But David said that the LORD crowns him with his steadfast love and mercy. Oh, what a beautiful picture of the blessing of God!

The Hebrew is even clearer here. The LORD crowns us continually, intensely, and intentionally. That’s the form of the verb, “crowns.” (Piel Participle) He is crowning us with his steadfast love and mercy passionately and purposely. He crowns us with his steadfast love intensely.

What does he mean by steadfast love and mercy? Do you know who is the most loving prophet in the Bible? I think the most loving prophet in the Bible is the prophet Hosea. One day, his wife left him for another man. Can you imagine a pastor’s wife leaving him for another man? That’s what happened to the prophet Hosea. But one day, the LORD told him to go and get his wife back. The LORD told Hosea that his wife was like Israel, who was loved by the LORD, but became unfaithful to Him. And so Hosea must go and get his wife back.

That, my friends, is steadfast love—faithfulness despite unfaithfulness. “Steadfast love” (Heb. checed) means, “goodness, kindness, faithfulness” (BDB). The KJV translates it, “lovingkindness.” He also crowns us with “mercies” (NKJV) (plural in the Heb.) I like the NKJV better—“tender mercies.” Mercies here (Heb. racham) means “compassion.” (BDB) Compassion is always tender, gentle, and loving.

Only the mercy of God is tender. But the justice of God is never tender. Justice means receiving what we do deserve. Mercy means not receiving what we do deserve. Grace means receiving what we do not deserve. And so the mercy of God is tender, because by his mercy, we do not receive what we do deserve.

Mercy presumes offense. We have offended God with our sin. We deserve to receive the penalty of our sin—death. But though we have offended God with our sin, his mercy prevents us from receiving what we deserve.

Do you think that if you were to receive what you really deserve from God, you will stand a chance before God? No. But thank God that Christ received the justice of God on the cross. Because Christ bore the full brunt of the justice of God on the cross, we can now receive the mercy of God through Christ.

On the cross, God placed all our sin to Christ. When you trust Christ, God places all the righteousness of Christ on you. That’s why God can now forgive you your sins, because somebody else, Christ, our substitute, paid the penalty of our sin on the cross. He satisfied the justice of God and made it possible for you and me to receive the mercy and grace of God.

Such is the steadfast love of the Lord!

For His Satisfaction

“For satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (v. 5, ESV). “Satisfy” here (Heb. saba’), means, “fill to satisfaction, have plenty of.” (Strong).

I read a story about a wealthy father who “took his son on a trip to the country with the firm purpose of showing his son how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm. On their return from their trip, the father asked his son, ‘How was the trip?’ ‘It was great, Dad.’ ‘Did you see how poor people live?’ the father asked. ‘Oh yeah,’ said the son.

“So, tell me, what did you learn from the trip?” asked the father. The son answered: ‘I saw that we have one dog and they had four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We buy our food, but they grow theirs.’

‘That boy was never satisfied. He compared what he had with what the poor had.’

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To be satisfied is to be filled with something that you don’t want anything else. If you are satisfied with your wife, you will no longer look for any other woman. If you are satisfied with what you eat, wear, and where you live, you will not look for any food, clothes, or house. If you are satisfied with God, you will not look for any other.

David says the LORD satisfies him. Have you come to that point that you can say, “the Lord satisfies me. I look for no other things in this world. The Lord is my satisfaction.” You see, it is great to receive things from God. But the goal of God is not to give you gifts, but to make you find your satisfaction in him. If the Lord is your satisfaction, God is glorified. If you find your satisfaction in God, you will live for God, and God is glorified.

David says that God fills us to satisfaction “with good.” The means of filling us to satisfaction is the “good” of God. He does not say the “good things” of this world, but the “good” that comes from God.

What is this good from God that satisfies our soul? It could not mean the things of this world, for after you possess all the things of this world, you still go unsatisfied and want more things, don’t you?

The context points to the goodness that comes from God—the steadfast love and mercy of God, that truly satisfies your soul. This means that only God can satisfy you deep inside. The good of God is God himself!

It is not the good things of this world that we possess, but the goodness of God himself that possesses us, that satisfies us! And when you are satisfied with God himself, then you will live a strong, vibrant, and youthful life, like the eagle.

In the OT, the eagle is a symbol of strength and virility. “They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:31, ESV). Therefore, David is saying that if you are satisfied with the good of God himself, then you will renew your youthful strength. You shall mount up your wings like eagles. You shall run and not be weary. You shall walk and not faint. If you are satisfied in God and God alone, then you will live a strong, youthful, and vibrant life like the eagle!

Can you say this with David and with me? Beginning today, I will bless the LORD of my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.