

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL

Psalm 103

Introduction:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." These are the words David uses to issue a heartfelt cry to adoration and worship of God for all of his many blessings.

How often we can use the reminder to offer up praise, worship and thanksgiving to God. Each year we make a big event out of Thanksgiving Day, when we focus on thanking God for his many blessings in our lives. But that attitude should not be confined to one day a year.

If you spend some time going through the Psalms, you will find that mixed in with a great deal of lamentation over current situations, the psalmists also call us regularly to praise and thanksgiving. There is a significant amount of focus in the psalms on praise to God for his blessings to us.

This morning – one of those praise psalms. We are going to be looking at Psalm 103. It was written by David and is a hymn of praise, celebrating the abundant goodness and love of the Lord for his people. It is the first of four psalms reflecting on God's dealings with his people from creation to exile. Psalm 103 introduces this sequence of praise psalms by recalling that Israel's survival in the time of Moses was due to God's steadfast love.

We can divide this psalm into three main sections.

1. A personal call to worship, focusing on God's faithfulness and his blessings to us – vv. 1-5
2. A broader view of God's dealings with his people, focusing on his steadfast love and the contrast between our finite nature and his eternal power and sovereignty – vv. 6-19
3. A final call for all of creation to worship God and bless him for his works – vv. 20-22

So let's begin our whirlwind tour through this psalm.

I. A Call to Praise Him for His Benefits

The psalm begins with a personal call to worship - Each member of the worshiping congregation urges himself to bless the Lord, i.e., to speak well of him for his abundant generosity. Let every fiber of my being reflect praise to God.

Bless – to praise, salute... the word also has the meaning, to kneel, which suggests, in this context, the idea of prostrating oneself before God in worship and adoration for all that he is and all that he has done for me.

In verse 2 he goes on to a reminder that in our praise we are to remember the many benefits we receive from God.

Illust. – Many companies try to attract employees by offering good benefits—medical and dental care, life insurance, pension plans. These benefits, of course are only for those who become a part of the company. Do we ever think about the benefits God offers those who become a part of his family through faith in Jesus Christ?

In vv. 3-5 the psalmist gives us a checklist of five specific blessings for which we should regularly praise God.

1. He forgives all your iniquities (sins)

Have you ever given much thought to the wonder of forgiveness.

A mother whose soldier son had been sentenced to death sought a pardon from Napoleon. The emperor declared that the youth was clearly guilty and that justice demanded his execution. The mother responded, "I know he is guilty, but I am not asking for justice. I am pleading for mercy."

"But he does not deserve mercy," the emperor replied.

"Sir," cried the mother, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for."

"Well then," answered Napoleon, "I will have mercy."

It is natural that forgiveness should top the list of blessings. Even in OT days, David knew the joy of sins forgiven. A few weeks ago we looked at Psalm 32 – the Joy of Forgiveness. In the OT people would bring the offerings commanded by the Law, as an expression of their faith in God's provision for salvation. The sacrifices have been replaced now by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. John tells us that "the blood of Je-

sus, his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7) Because of his blood God can offer us the blessing of complete forgiveness.

(Mention the truth that this forgiveness is only effective for those who are willing to receive it by faith.) For many people their pride gets in the way of accepting God's forgiveness. They want to earn acceptance, but that is impossible.

2. He heals all your diseases

There are a couple of important things to consider regarding this blessing of healing.

First, healing often refers to curing someone from a physical sickness, but it can also be used as a metaphor for restoring the moral and spiritual life. In Jer. 3:22 God says to his people, "Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness." Since it is used in parallel with forgiveness, it is quite possible that the metaphorical use may be intended here. Thus iniquity is like diseases, which weaken and corrupt; it is God's mercy that takes them away. These sentiments certainly reflect David's own experience of God's forgiveness.

Second, if we do consider this to speak of literal physical healing, it may seem hard to see the truth in this statement. But while it may not be true that God always heals every sickness that comes into our lives, it certainly is true that it is always God who heals us. It is his power at work. When you get over a cold, or recover from the flu, or your finger heals after you cut it with a knife, realize that your healing was not your own doing. It is God who heals all your diseases.

Either way, physical or spiritual, it is God who is at work in us to bring healing to body and soul.

3. He redeems your life from the pit

Here we have another powerful and important blessing – redemption. To redeem means to buy back something that was lost, sold or stolen. E.g. something pawned. Our very life was sold out to Satan because of sin. We were headed for destruction. The pit – the word literally means destruction (KJV).

If it were not for God's redeeming work—paying the price to buy us back from the enemy who possessed our souls—where would we be? What would we do with sin's load of guilt? When we stand before the cross, the burden rolls away, to trouble us no more. God's forgiveness, his healing power, and his redemption free us from our burden of sin and guilt.

4. He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy

This blessing is a double one – NIV says love and compassion. The word is often translated as lovingkindness, steadfast love, or unfailing love. It speaks of God's commitment and loyalty to his covenant obligations. It is a love which will not allow him to go back on what he has promised. Tied in with that is compassion or mercy. Again the word refers to the idea of love, but a love that is rooted in compassion. The KJV uses the term tender mercies.

God demonstrates "tender mercies" toward us, like the attention a loving mother gives her child when he is sick.

5. He satisfies you with good – NIV "satisfies your desires with good things"

One commentary said, "God doesn't deal in 'snacks.' He wants to completely satisfy His children's desires. If we would accept all that God wants to give us, our cup of blessing would overflow."

It is God's desire to satisfy his people with blessing and all that is truly good, that we would be encouraged and strengthened and renewed with strength like the eagle – cf. Is. 40:31.

II. God's Steadfast Love for His People

In vs. 6 David shifts from looking at personal blessings to a broader survey of God's dealing with his people. He reviews some of the gracious acts of God to the nation throughout their history. We are not going to go into much detail on these verses. I just want to kind of outline them with a few thoughts, because the way he showed his lovingkindness to His people in the past is certainly a picture of his steadfast love to us as well. In many ways these verses are an expansion of the blessings and benefits we just looked at in the first 5 verses.

vv. 6-7 – righteousness and justice revealed in his ways with his people. Righteousness and justice are the blessings of protection from those who might exploit or harm. The Lord extends these blessings to all who are oppressed, but especially to his own people.

vv. 8-12 – merciful and gracious – forgiving and removing sin. Go through verses, highlighting the wonder of God's mercy.

v. 8 – slow to anger, longsuffering

v. 9 – willing to forgive, let go of his anger, when we confess our sin

v. 10-12 – his mercy and steadfast love – higher than the heavens are above the earth. He removes our sin – as far as east is from west.

vv. 13-14 – he is compassionate – he understands our frailty – we are but dust, weak and incapable of keeping his commands. That is why he did what he did for us.

vv. 15-18 – this is really the climax of this psalm. Amid the shortness of human life (vv. 15–16), God's steadfast love for his faithful is everlasting (v. 17a), bestowing on them the privilege of nurturing those who will be his people in coming generations.

vv. 15-16 – think about Isa. 40:7 – the grass withers, the flower fades... in contrast to that look at vv. 17-18... read them.

"Those who fear him" are the same as "those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments." They are the faithful, who believe the promises and obey the commands. The covenant of circumcision, which Abraham's descendants were to "keep," included the promise that the Lord would be God to both the offspring and their parents. This psalm goes beyond that, however: the faithful can expect that God sets his saving love on their children's children. This is the crowning privilege that God gives to his faithful: though their lives are short and appear almost insignificant, they may still contribute to the future well-being of the people of God by their godly and prayerful parenting and grandparenting.

(from the *ESV Study Bible* notes)

v. 19 – we see the permanence of God's throne and kingdom. His throne ... his kingdom refers to God's universal rule over all creation. The marvel of being God's people is that the one whose kingdom rules over everything offers us the privilege of gratefully embracing his rule in our lives.

What a climax that is to this psalm of praise and worship! It is overwhelming to think of the blessings that God has showered on us as his children. No wonder the psalmist calls us to worship and express our praise to God, when we consider the benefits we have from him.

Well, the psalmist closes his psalm of praise with another call...

III. A Closing Call to Worship

Read vv. 20-22 – in these closing verses the psalmist calls on all of creation to raise their voice in worship of the one who has done so much for us.

v. 20 – the angels, who do his work at his command.

v. 21 – all his hosts – the mighty ones, every created being that names the name of God is called upon to bless him...

v. 22 – even his works, the creation itself is urged to sing forth the praises of God.

The overflow of goodness and steadfast love that God's works reveal compels his people to call on the angels and all of nature (cf. 19:1) to join in their celebration.

Then the psalmist ends where he started. The psalm closes with the singer returning to urge his own soul to bless the Lord. I am sure he ends up with a deeper appreciation of how much praise and admiration he owes.

Conclusion

So how about it? Where are you in all of this? As the psalmist has urged his own soul, so he urges us.

We should worship and praise God with all that is within us. We should cultivate the habit of adoring Him for what He is as well as for what He has done in us and for us. And I believe that as we do, we will find that expressing gratitude to God deepens our own spiritual lives, strengthens our testimony, and increases our joy.