

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL

Psalm 103:1-5

Introduction:

This is Thanksgiving weekend. One weekend each year we emphasize the importance of giving thanks for all that we enjoy throughout the year. Last year at this time I shared some material about the history of the thanksgiving holiday in Canada and the United States. There is a great history of formal days of thanksgiving in Canada, dating right back to the 16th century and the explorer Martin Frobisher. But the formal holiday as we know it today was established on January 31st, 1957, when Parliament proclaimed... "A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed..." It was to be observed on the 2nd Monday in October.

For many people Thanksgiving is a day that is focused on turkey and football. There is a tendency to stuff ourselves with turkey and pie until we can hardly move and then retire to the couch for the afternoon. But before that happens, I want to spend a few moments this morning focusing our attention on giving thanks. We are going to look at Psalm 103 today. (*Note: the outline of this message is not original with me – comes from the Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook 2003 edition.*)

Psalm 103 is a chapter in the Bible with no clouds, devoted exclusively to counting our blessings, to exalting our Lord; it's one prayer in the Bible that doesn't have any dismal moods, no petitions, no problems—just praise. We don't have time today to study the entire psalm, so we are just going to look at the preamble—verses 1-5 (*read verses*).

The psalmist, David, begins: "Bless the Lord." To whom is he speaking? He is speaking to himself! King David is giving himself a pep-talk. When was the last time you talked to yourself like this, saying: "Self, you've been down in the dumps, fretting, fainthearted. Shake it off. Cheer up! Count your blessings!" What blessings should we count? In these verses, David takes us on a little tour, and we are going to join his tour this morning to see where he takes us.

The Courtroom (v. 3a).

The first stop is the courthouse where we are reminded that we have been declared "Not guilty." The psalmist says, "...**[he] forgives all your iniquity.**" That is certainly something to give thanks for. Our sins, which are many, have all been laid on him. He paid for them when Jesus died on the cross. Song – It is Well with My Soul, v. 3:

"My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought, My sin—not in part, but the whole, Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul."

Look down to verses 10-12 - *read them*. Here the psalmist uses a graphic comparison, telling us God's forgiveness is as high as the heavens; that He removes our sins as far as east from west. They are gone for good, never to be seen again. His love and forgiveness are as infinite and inexhaustible as the universe.

The Hospital (v. 3b).

Next we tour the hospital, for God heals our diseases. Psalm 103 is not asserting that it's *always* God's will to heal *all* our diseases *physically* in *this* life; that runs counter to the overall teachings of Scripture and it certainly contradicts our actual experience. It's true that God *can* and often *does* give healing in answer to prayer; but that isn't always the case. Even the apostle Paul wasn't healed of his thorn in the flesh. God said instead, "My grace is sufficient for you." But what of Paul now? If we had a telescope to look into heaven, we'd see him healthy, happy, and disease free. There's no cancer in heaven, no heart disease, no diabetes. God will heal us, in this life or through the process of death, but in either case "by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). And certainly, it is God who is the healer. He may use doctors and medications to bring about the desired response in our bodies, but ultimately it is God who heals us, whether from cuts and bruises or from serious life-threatening diseases.

The Slave Market (v. 4a)

Next we go to the slave market to remind us we've been purchased and set free—redeemed. The psalmist says, "...*who redeems*

your life from the pit..." In past days, cruel masters sometimes threw slaves into deep holes where they sunk in brackish mud. The holes were sealed shut, and the slave was left hungry, terrified in the darkness amid rats and rodents. That's a picture of the eternal condition Satan desires for us. But Christ saw us when we were enslaved to that cruel master and purchased us with His blood. We're redeemed from darkness and the pit. I'm reminded of another psalm written by King David. Psalm 40 –

"I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD." (Ps 40:1-3 ESV)

What a marvellous picture of salvation. We were enslaved by Satan, slaves of sin. But God, in his mercy, redeemed us. He bought us with his blood and set us free. He took us out of darkness into the light, out of the pit and the miry bog unto solid footing.

He redeems your life from the pit...

The Palace (v. 4b)

So where do we go next? From the pit to the palace, to the throne room. David says, "...[he] crowns you with steadfast love and mercy."

In the Tower of London in England the British crown jewels are stored. The Imperial State Crown, the one Queen Elizabeth wore for her coronation in 1953, is covered with over 3000 jewels, including more than 2,800 diamonds, 273 pearls, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds, and 5 rubies. One of those diamonds is called the Cullinan II – the second-largest clear cut diamond in the world, and it weighs 317 carats. That crown is perhaps the most precious collection of stones and jewels on earth.

But just think about this. When we come to Christ, He crowns us with something infinitely greater—His love and compassion—steadfast love and mercy. And not only that, He promises an eternal crown of glory for all those who love Him. He wore a crown of thorns that we might wear a crown of glory.

The Banquet Hall (v. 5)

Finally, we visit the Banquet Hall where God satisfies us with good things. He gives us all good things. In your bulletin this morning there is a verse printed. It says, *"O Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for his mercy endures forever." (Psalm 107:1 KJV)* God is good. When it seems like everything is going wrong, do you still believe that He is good? Out of his goodness, he satisfies us with good things.

He meets our needs. What do you need today? Finances? Physical strength and healing? Do you have emotional needs? Do you need peace and strength? When we seek first the kingdom of God, God promises to look after all these other things.

I am reminded of another psalm written by David. In Psalm 23 David says, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..."* When God is our shepherd, we will not lack anything we truly need. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He fulfills our desires.

Conclusion:

In the previous psalm—Psalm 102—the psalmist was afflicted and troubled. In his pessimistic state, he sees himself as a brooding, lonely old owl—sad, silent, grim (Ps. 102:6). But one chapter later as he remembers to praise the Lord, how does he feel? Like an eagle—strong, majestic, soaring (Ps. 103:5). The next time you're needing a pep talk and there's no one around to give it to you—learn to strengthen yourself in the Lord. Tour God's blessings, and learn to say: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.