Satisfied with Good Things (v 5)

Finally, we receive the benefit of being satisfied with good things from the Lord. In some ways, this includes everything the psalmist has talked about to this point—it’s salvation and healing and love—it’s all of that. James tells the churches not to be deceived into thinking that we receive good things from any other source than him. “Every good and perfect gift,” he says, “is from above, coming down from the Father of lights…” (James 1:17). When we stop to take inventory of the countless benefits we receive from the Lord, it renews our youth like the eagles.

Of course, you can’t really read that without thinking about Isaiah 40:31, which promises that “those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” To recount the benefits we receive from the Lord is to increase our hope in the Lord. It fosters faith in him and renews our strength. And metaphorically speaking, we earth-bound creatures can fly in the heights like the most majestic of birds, the eagle.

Conclusions

So what do we take away from this? Working backward, the second thing we conclude is this: it is important for us to deliberately and specifically remember and celebrate the many benefits we receive from the Lord. Remembering and celebrating what God has done not only builds our faith and ignites our hope by keeping us focused on who God is, but it renews our youth. It can be so easy to think about our lives as a series of needs, or as a series of problems to be solved. We receive provision for one thing, but there’s always something else. If we just move from one need to another to another without ever recounting what God has done, pretty soon all we’re looking at is our needs and it stunts our faith and makes us old. So let’s be careful to remember and celebrate everything God has done.

The other conclusion we can draw from these verses is this: after remembering and celebrating the benefits we’ve received from the Lord, we should bless the Lord with every part of our being. It’s not enough for us to quietly and privately make a list of the things God has done for us. Instead, as God’s people, who have received goodness after goodness from him, we should join together in blessing him with every part of who we are. As his people, we all join together to bear witness to his faithfulness.

Before we close, if you’re here and you’ve never experienced the blessings we’ve talked about in Psalm 103, let me just say this: the God who created the heavens and the earth loves you and wants to give you good gifts. But of all of the good gifts he wants to give you, the greatest gift of all is the gift of salvation——the gift of forgiveness. Rather than punish us for our sins, he made a way for us to be forgiven. He sent his son, Jesus, who lived the life we were supposed to live and died the death we should have died so that we could be forgiven. If you’d like to know more about that gift or you’d like to receive that gift, there will be an elder here at the end of service and they would love to pray with you.

Crowned with Steadfast Love & Mercy (v 4)

Another benefit we receive from the Lord is that he crowns us with steadfast love and mercy. God lavishes his steadfast love and mercy on his children like a wreath on their heads. Not every need we have is as tangible and specific as forgiveness or healing. As humans, we need to be loved. To be ignored— to feel that no one cares about who you are—can create a crippling deficit in people’s lives. God, in his kindness and mercy not only spares us that which we deserve, but lavishes his steadfast love and mercy on his children like a wreath on their heads. Not every need we have is as tangible and specific as forgiveness or healing. As humans, we need to be loved. To be ignored—to feel that no one cares about who you are—can create a crippling deficit in people’s lives. God, in his kindness and mercy not only spares us that which we deserve, but lavishes his steadfast love and mercy on his children like a wreath on their heads.

While God does protect us and does deliver us from death, Scripture teaches that all of us will eventually die. But through Christ, not only will we be raised from the dead so that our lives will literally be redeemed, but we will be saved from the pit of the second death described in Revelation 20:12-15, which says, “12And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” We have even more to be thankful for than the author of Psalm 103; we understand that our redemption is both temporal and eternal, both physical and spiritual.
Prayer & Fasting  
February 23, 2020  
Pastor Jared Stoner  
Psalm 103

Introduction
This morning we’re going to conclude our series of messages on prayer by looking at the beginning of Psalm 103. Over the course of these messages, I hope that you have received some helpful instruction in how to pray, been encouraged to pray, and been encouraged by actually praying. Prayer is one of the greatest gifts God has given us and I hope you’re enjoying its full benefits.

Next week, we will begin our Easter sermon series. As I part of that, we’re encouraging you to read the daily Scripture readings with us, including the Scripture readings we’ll work through together on Sunday mornings. There is a list of those Scriptures divided into an Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle (or letter), and Gospel reading, which you can find on our website at wcag.org/easter or by picking up a booklet at the welcome center in the foyer. With that, let’s jump into Psalm 103.

Introduction (v 1)

1Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ‘Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 2who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 3who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 4who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

A Call To Praise (v 1)

Psalm 103 is a song, and a prayer, of praise to God. It’s length precludes us working our way through the whole thing together, but I do hope you’ll consider spending some time this week on the parts we don’t have a chance to cover. These verses bring to mind God’s people who would come to him with their thank offerings, singing as they go, filling the streets of Jerusalem with the sounds of “joy and gladness...[the sounds] of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord, saying, “Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; his love endures forever” (Jeremiah 33:11).”

The Psalmist begins then, by exhorting himself to bless the Lord, or to praise the Lord, with all that is within him. “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” he says, “and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” The Psalmist isn’t trying to distinguish between spirit and soul and mind and heart. He’s exhorting himself to bless the Lord with the entirety of his life, which he makes clear in the next phrase: bless the Lord with “all that is within me.” As we’ll see, God’s blessings touch every part of the psalmists life, not just the forgiveness of sin, but physical healing as well. As a result, it’s only appropriate to bless the Lord with the entirety of his being.

Of course, the idea that we would worship the Lord with the entirety of our being is not new to this psalm, nor does this psalm state it for the last time. Of particular importance is Mark 12:30-31, in which Jesus answers the question about the greatest commandment in Scripture: “The most important [commandment],” Jesus answered, “is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” God’s name is holy, which means God is holy. He is unlike anyone or anything else. He’s not just a better version of us, but he’s infinitely perfect in every way and deserves to be praised with everything we have.

A Call to Remember (vv 2-5)

In verse two then, the Psalmist takes it a step further and says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” Scripture has a fair amount to say about remembering and forgetting. In particular, God instructs his people to remember him, and to remember how he acted and moved on their behalf. In Deuteronomy 6:11, Moses warns the people, “Be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” Again in Deuteronomy 8:11, Moses tells the people, “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws, and his decrees that I am giving you this day.” Forgetting the benefits of the Lord depletes our joy, our faith, and our hope, and puts us in danger of disobedience to the Lord. Now the Psalmist begins to flesh out the items that should be included in our list of remembrances.

Forgotten Iniquity (v 3)

One benefit we receive from the Lord is the forgiveness of all of our iniquity. Iniquity is an older word that in this case refers to the guilt we incur because of our sinful actions. Think about what happens when you do something that you know is wrong and then, because of your conscience, you make it right. You undo it. You give back what you took. You apologize for your words or whatever the case may be. While you might have done something to undo the sinful action, you can’t so easily undo the guilt—the iniquity—that you know goes with what you did.

Not only does God forgive our sins, the acts of sin we commit, but he forgives our guilt as well. In the Old Testament, God graciously forgave the sin and iniquity of his people by allowing an animal to be sacrificed in their place. Even more so, in Christ, God not only forgives our sins, but cleanses us of our consciences. Speaking of the Old Testament sacrifices, the author of Hebrews says, “13The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God (Hebrews 9:13-14)” In a beautiful unique way, Jesus forgives us for our sins but then also washes our consciences so that we can live without condemnation.

Healed Diseases (v 3)

Another benefit we receive from the Lord is the healing of our diseases. Although when we think about healing, we typically think about Jesus, God actively healed in the Old Testament as well. In Exodus 15:26, the Lord told his people, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.” At times, God supernaturally heals his people, and at other times he sustains them in times of sickness or disease, and Scripture bears witness to both. In either case, God is our healer. How much more through Christ, whose blood was shed so that among other things, we might be healed.

 Redeemed from the Pit (v 4)

Another benefit we receive from the Lord is that he redeems our lives from the pit. The pit here refers to death, to the place of the dead. To be redeemed from the pit is to recognize that by all accounts death should have been the end of the story, but God in his mercy intervened on behalf of the psalmist. He was given a new lease on life. God not only forgives our sins, but cleanses our consciences. Speaking of the Old Testament sacrifices, the author of Hebrews says, “13The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God (Hebrews 9:13-14)” In a beautiful unique way, Jesus forgives us for our sins but then also washes our consciences so that we can live without condemnation.

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