

## Introduction

In just a few short days we will celebrate Thanksgiving. For many, it's a day to gather with family, pig out on turkey, pumpkin pie, and football. For us as Christians, though, Thanksgiving can have a deeper, richer meaning— an annual celebration of what really should be a daily part of our lives.

But have you noticed how Thanksgiving has all but been overlooked in our crowded, consumer driven culture. Have you noticed in the stores how Thanksgiving has been lost between Halloween and Christmas? Those two holidays are huge money makers for retail, and soon as they clear the shelves of skeletons, grim reapers, and zombies, it time to get out the snowmen, rein deer, and Santa Claus. If you've noticed this, it isn't just your imagination. Marty McGhie, the COO of Ferrari Color, a graphic design company that produces signage for retail stores says, "It appears that retailers are moving right from Halloween to the holiday season. Prior to Halloween we produced graphics touting spooky themes and pumpkin laced products. As soon as those displays went out we began producing trees, ornaments and snowflakes. We have only produced a few materials related to the big feast."

Of course, if you're Wal-Mart or Amazon you depend on you desiring what you don't have, not being thankful for what already have. But what about us— do we have room in our own lives and our own hearts to pause, count our blessings and give thanks. It can be so hard to escape the sell, sell, sell, buy, buy, buy world.

So, this morning I want to turn your hearts toward thanksgiving. Not just in the Capital T family feast sense, but in the true sense of giving thanks from our hearts. The Hebrew word for thanks is closely related to their word for *praise*. Thanksgiving and praising God are inextricably linked. Like Frank Sinatra sang about love and marriage and a horse and carriage, you can't have one without the other.

To focus our hearts and minds in the right direction we are going to look at Psalm 103, specifically the first 5 verses.

Psalm 103 is a song of Praise. And even though the word "thanks" isn't used, it's all about giving thanks to God for who He is, and what he has done. It has been called David's "Hallelujah Chorus." Notice who he's singing to. Who is he addressing here in this psalm? His own soul. He's not addressing God here. He's not addressing the nation of Israel. He's reminding himself of his own need to praise the Lord. *"Bless the Lord, O My Soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name."*

It's a reminder that we all need, because we all forget, don't we? I know do. We get busy. We get distracted. We get worried. We get fearful. We get confident. We get cocky. All of these things pull our hearts and minds away from remembering all of the blessings of God.

It was in 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln, responding to a letter, issued the first proclamation of a national Thanksgiving Day. The country was torn apart by a civil war. Brother fought against brother. The lives and freedom of nearly 4 million slaves hung in the balance. And yet in the midst of this conflict President Lincoln called on the nation to give thanks. He also called on a day of national prayer and fasting.

His words in 1863 still ring true today:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.<sup>i</sup>

The answer, whether in Lincoln's day, or David's day, or our own day is to give thanks and praise God.

### **1. Count your Blessings (vv. 1-2)**

Psalm 103 is a song of nothing but praise to God. There is no supplication, no request, no petition or plea in this song. It is pure unadulterated praise to God. David was awestruck with God's blessings. He realized how good God had been and how undeserving he was of all these blessings. Springing up from the depths of his heart and gushing out onto his parchment came this song of praise, that's what the Psalms were, they are songs. This was the hymnbook of Israel.

The first reason David gives to praise— to give thanks is all the benefits, the blessings that God has given. David reminds himself in verse 2, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*" He's telling himself, and he's telling us— Count your blessing. Take the time to remember everything God as done for you. Don't get so wrapped up in yourself that you forget to see all the benefits that God has given. There is an old hymn whose words say,

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
Count your blessings, see what God has done!  
Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
Count your many blessings, see what God has done.

In many ways, all of Psalm 103 is David doing just that— he's counting his blessings. We don't know the circumstances in David's life when he wrote this Psalm, but my guess is that it was one of these times he needed a reminder. Sometimes we get so focused on what we don't have that we forget all the blessings we do have. Sometimes in life we are so unaware of all the blessings we have in Christ. We don't know how valuable what we have is.

37 year old Waylon Pendergast of Tampa Florida was on his way home after a late night drinking binge when he found what seemed like an empty house perfect for robbing. He forced his way into the home

through an upstairs window. He filled a suitcase with cash and valuables and then set the living room on fire to cover his tracks. He escaped out the backdoor and made his way home chuckling all the way.

It was only when he turned the corner into his own street and discovered three fire engines outside his house, he realized that in his drunken stupor he had robbed and burned his own house. A suddenly sober Waylon Pendergast was quoted saying, "I had no idea I had so many valuable possessions."<sup>ii</sup>

What about you? Do you realize how much you truly have? Do you know how many blessings God has given you? Do you understand that you have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms according to the riches of his grace that he has lavished upon you?

## **2. Consider Forgiveness (v. 3)**

Secondly, David calls us to consider the forgiveness God has given. In verse 3 David lists maybe the greatest benefit of all. Let me read it in context with verse 2:

Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,  
3 who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,

He forgives our sin. He heals our diseased soul. This alone is reason enough to give thanks. Outside of New York City is a small cemetery, and in that cemetery is an entirely unremarkable grave. The headstone is not ornate. There is flowery epitaph. There isn't even a name or dates on the marker. Only one word is engraved on the stone.

Forgiven. Think about this. When you die, there is only one thing about you that will matter, only one thing that will make a difference for you going forward. None of your accomplishments, your status, your wealth, none of that will go with you. The only thing that matters is that you are forgiven.

The name Satan means accuser. In Job we see him going before God to accuse Job. We have every reason to believe that he goes before God even now to accuse us. He says, "Look at what he said. Look at what she did. These people of yours are sinners. How can they say they really love you and continue to act like they do?" He does not have to lie about us when he comes before the Lord, for God would not permit it. No, there are enough faults in all of our lives that he simply has to point out the obvious.

The Bible calls him the adversary, the enemy. But we also have an Advocate. We have one who goes to the Father on our behalf. We have Jesus Christ the righteous. When Satan accuses you, your Advocate, Jesus, raises His nail-pierced hand and says, "Just a minute. I see no stain of sin on him. I see no sin in her. She is pure and faultless. They are mine. I have bought them with a price and their sins, though they were like scarlet, have been washed white as snow. They belong to me."

He doesn't just erase the penalty of your sin. He heals your heart. The second half of verse 3 is often quoted as referring to physical healing. It's taken as a promise that God heals our physical illness. God absolutely has the power to heal, and I believe God still can and does heal. I read a story in the news just

this week about a Lodi California man with a malignant tumor, and they were about to do surgery to remove the tumor, but a final scan showed that the tumor had completely disappeared. The doctors were baffled. He had turned to prayer and to his church community for support and prayer.

Our own Claude Wells was to have an angiogram on Monday to remove a blockage, but on Monday the cardiologist couldn't find the blockage. I don't know this for sure, but couldn't that have been God's healing hand at work?

Most of us know this and believe this. But we also know that not everyone gets healed. We also know that our physical healing isn't forever, at least in these bodies. Even the sick person who is made whole will still get sick and die of something someday. Not all of our physical diseases get healed in this body and this life.

We had a dear friend in Illinois named Cathy. She was diagnosed with a deadly form of incurable cancer and given only months to live. The elders of the church and I went to Cathy. We anointed her with oil and prayed for healing. Her next doctor's visit showed her body was completely clear of cancer. It was gone. She enjoyed several more years of marriage, of her children and grandchildren, of her ladies Bible study. But then she got a completely different kind of cancer. Again, we anointed her with oil and we prayed, but this time the disease progressed and she died a few months later.

David's not talking about physical healing here. First of all, remember who he's talking to here. He's talking to his own soul. This is about the healing of his soul. The other thing is that Psalms is a book of poetry. The Hebrews used a style of poetry called parallelism. In this kind of poetry the second line parallels the first line, but just restates it in another way. So the first line in this stanza is "who forgives all your iniquity." The second line restates the same thing in another way, "who heals all your diseases."

He's talking about the disease of sin that sickens our soul. That he heals completely and forever. It doesn't come back again. It doesn't pop up somewhere else. It's not temporary. It's forgiven forever. He changes your heart. It doesn't matter what you did. It doesn't matter what you said. It doesn't matter what you thought, when you make Jesus your Lord and Savior, he removes it completely. No guilt. No shame. No record. Nothing the accuser can point to say, "Hey, she doesn't belong here. Hey, he's not worthy." You are made whole. You are forgiven.

### **3. Crowned with Purpose (vv. 4-5)**

As David continues to count his benefits, he reminds himself how God gave his life new meaning. We don't have to wait until heaven to enjoy the benefits of forgiveness. God's redemption rescues our lives here and now. We have been crowned with purpose.

who redeems your life from the pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

When he talks about redeeming your life from the pit, think of a garbage pit. It's a hole in the ground where you throw away what is used up, worn out, and broken. But God takes your life out of that pit of washed up dreams, broken promises, and worn out intentions, and he doesn't see a piece of trash. He sees a future treasure.

This verse could be translated this way, "He keeps your life from going to waste." When you give your life to Jesus, he pulls you out of the garbage pit of life, and turns you into treasure. The Apostle Paul compares us to common jars of clay who are then filled with the priceless treasure of Jesus.

Have you ever taken a load of stuff to the dump and there's someone there who's pulling stuff out of the trash. "Hey, this still works. I could use this. This is still worth something." Or maybe your one of those people who takes a load to the dump and brings back just as much as you left. As they say, "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

Nelson Molina was a New York City sanitation worker for 35 years. In 2016 he retired and opened a *Treasures from Trash Museum* filled with treasures that he pulled from the trash over the previous three and a half decades. One article says it, "is like Antiques Roadshow -- on steroids. There are tables crammed with glass vases, gold jewelry, silver candelabra, decorative clocks, electric guitars and violins that all still work."<sup>iii</sup> He has original Star Wars toys in perfect condition, baseballs signed by every Yankees superstar, and celebrity autographs. It truly is treasure from the trash.

David is saying that God has turned us into his treasures. How many people waste years of their lives on things that, in the long run, really don't count? They spend their days in pursuit of things that won't last, and wake up one day, empty and hollow and wonder what the point of any of this is. In fact, they feel betrayed because the things they worked so hard to obtain failed to bring them the satisfaction and joy they were promised.

God gives you that meaning and purpose. He keeps our lives from going to waste. In an unsympathetic world starved for love, God crowns you with love and mercy. Life is now lived with eternal purpose. In Christ, your life counts. It is never lived in vain. You have eternal significance. This is one of the things David is praising the Lord for.

His treasure becomes all the more apparent the longer we walk with him. David reminds us in verse 5 that the Lord:

*who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

We live in a world that prizes youth. We worship youthfulness. We try to look younger and act younger. When we get older and our eyesight begins to dim, our hearing begins to fade, our hair disappears from the tops of our heads and pops out in all sorts of unsightly places. We try to hide it, disguise it, or delay it somehow, but you get to the point where you feel like you're just slowly wasting away. Might as well throw me out with the trash because I'm used up and worn out.

But David says that God satisfies you with good. This isn't just a sweet, savory taste that quickly fades, but a lasting satisfaction that fills you. David says he renews your youth like the eagles. The eagle is the strongest, most fearless, and majestic of all birds. At about five years of age, eagles start going through a molting process where it loses its old feathers only to be replaced by new feathers. During the molting process the eagle looks sickly and weak, but when the process is complete the bird has renewed strength and vigor.

This verse isn't saying that we won't grow old and infirm. Ultimately, I think it points to our resurrection in heaven. But there is a renewal that we experience even now. Remember, David is addressing his own soul. Even as our physical bodies age and can no longer do all they used to, the soul continues to be renewed and receive God's goodness.

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16, *"Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."*

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/fast.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon2d/waylon\\_predergast.htm](http://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon2d/waylon_predergast.htm)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://money.cnn.com/2017/07/06/news/economy/new-york-city-trash-museum-nelson-molina/index.html>