

Being Truly Thankful : What's in it for me?

Psalm 103

Last week was Veterans Day and we rightfully acknowledged the many contributions of our military veterans. The authors of alliteration adroitly accentuated to the assemblage an accurate accolade of our venerable veterans in the bodacious bulletin. Glad I got through that sentence! Now, for the deeper question, how many of us (please **don't** raise your hand) did anything more substantial than provide verbal gratitude or perhaps shake hands with a veteran? How many of us expressed our gratitude in some sort of tangible form that actually costs us something like time or money? Hmmm, I believe I hear the sound of consciences activating guilt genes; I can say this because it is mine. As your pastor, I am supposed to lead by example, put my money where my mouth is, and **live** as well as **teach** God's laws, practices, and standards. I must confess that I did little more than lip service to honor our military veterans.

Last Sunday afternoon my personal guilt about the superficial way I had observed Veterans Day began to nag me. I pondered why people are so willing to make superficial expressions of gratitude, but much more reluctant to truly praise or provide other tangible demonstrations of our emotions. As I continued to chew on this, I noted that Thursday next is Thanksgiving Day so I added that fact to my

equation and continued to process. Growing up with cows, I realize it takes time and the right mixture of ingredients to develop a good cud so I continued to chew.

Monday morning at o dark hundred I sat down with my coffee and Bible to do my customary devotional. I am currently reading through the Psalms. Now it just so happened that my reading for Monday began with Psalm 100. Psalm 100 is a psalm of thanksgiving and emphasizes God's goodness to His people, the responsibility of all nations to acknowledge Him, and the importance of God's people exalting and worshiping Him. So, my daily reading started with a psalm of Thanksgiving...hmmm...the cud is getting better...Now I am reminded of the importance of effusively praising God and expressing heartfelt gratitude to Him for His goodness and loving kindness. So, I chewed some more and determined that, while it was abundantly clear that we ought to be truly thankful to God, I had yet to determine **why** we weren't always that way. Apparently, my cud was still lacking something...I am not my mother's brightest son, but I did realize that the book in my hands held the answer to my question so I continued to read. My persistence paid off quickly.

I got to Psalm 103 and noted that the column heading in my Bible said, ***Benefits of Serving the Lord***. My cud was now done...I had just experienced a B.F.O. (Blinding Flash of the Obvious), or, more correctly articulated, the Holy Spirit opened my eyes. The reason we are not very interested in expressing gratitude to

veterans in any sort of sacrificial manner has nothing to do with our valuation of their service, but rather our innate desire (a.k.a., the flesh) to be self-centered. In plain English, “**What’s in it for me?**” Ahh, once again, the truth attacks us and makes us uncomfortable. You see, the truth is that most all of us really do appreciate our veterans and don’t begrudge acknowledging their service, but it’s difficult for us to really invest emotional or material effort into that acknowledgment unless we understand the benefit we would derive from our effort.

This same innate desire for self-pleasure that limits our ability to express true gratitude to other people also impacts our ability to worshipfully express our gratitude to God. The “*what’s in it for me*” desire is one of Satan’s favorite tools to play on our pride. Satan wants to keep us from being truly grateful and acknowledging that **all** our blessings come from God. But, God is good and in His loving kindness, He gave us Psalm 103 to remind us of why it is right and good to acknowledge and worship Him. In this Psalm of David, we see the benefits we reap from serving The Lord. David grouped these benefits by showing the benefits to the individual believer (vv.1-6), to the nation (vv.7-19), and finally to the universe (vv.20-22). Let’s take just a few minutes to examine the benefits in each of these groupings.

Individual and Personal Benefits: (vv.1-5).

103 Bless the Lord, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.

² Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits;

³ Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases;

⁴ Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;

⁵ Who satisfies your ^{l^a}years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

To “**Bless the Lord**” means to delight His heart by expressing love and gratitude for all He is and all He does. Just as human parents are pleased when our children simply thank us and love us without asking for anything, God also is happy when we do so. True praise comes from a grateful heart that sincerely wants to glorify and please the Lord. “All that is within me” means that all our inner being is focused on the Lord – heart, soul, mind, and strength. The 12th chapter of the gospel of Mark records Jesus’ answer when asked what the greatest commandment was, “*The foremost is, ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; ³⁰ AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’*” It also means that we are prepared to **OBEY** His will **after** our praise has ended. The word *all* is found at least nine times in the psalm for the psalm is a call for a **total commitment** to God.

David listed six special blessings from the hand of the Lord in verses 3-5: pardon, healing, redemption, love, satisfaction, and renewal. Every believer who truly serves God will personally benefit from these six blessings.

God alone can grant pardon or forgiveness of sin and iniquity. Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 assure us that those who have trusted Christ have experienced God's forgiveness.

God is the great physician and can heal every disease, but He is not obligated to do so. The believer's body will not be completely delivered from weakness and disease until it is a redeemed and glorified at the return of Christ Jesus. This verse also has another meaning since Scripture sometimes refers to sickness as a picture of sin and healing as a picture of salvation. Again, God is the great physician!

The word *redeem* would remind the Jewish people of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. The statement describes God rescuing someone about to fall into a pit, and "the pit" is a symbol of sheol, the world of the dead.

We are promised God's loving kindness and compassion (tender mercies) and that we will be satisfied by God's good things so that our youth will be renewed. There is no satisfaction in this world – man strives in vain to fill that hole in his heart with material things and temporal pleasures, but we have satisfaction in Christ who

is the bread of life (John 6:33-40), and the Good Shepherd who leads us into green pastures (Ps 23:2).

In verse 6, David turns to outlining the blessings to the nation of Israel for faithfully serving the Lord.

⁶ The Lord performs ^[b]righteous deeds and judgments for all who are oppressed.

⁷ He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.

⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

⁹ He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.

¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who ^[c]fear Him.

¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who ^[d]fear Him.

¹⁴ For He Himself knows ^[e]our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

¹⁶ When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer.

¹⁷ But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who ^[f]fear Him, And His ^[g]righteousness to children's children,

¹⁸ To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them.

The nation of Israel was certainly blessed of the Lord and therefore obligated to express their praise and thanksgiving to Him. God was their righteous deliverer who guided them with His Word, His Glory and His Prophets. Verses 8-12 show us a summary of what Moses learned about God while on Sinai. Being a Holy God, He did get angry at sin, and the Israelites were prone to rebel against Him, but in His compassion, He forgave them. This was possible because one day His Son would die for those sins on a cross.

In verses 13-16 David addresses God's compassion for the nation by acknowledging how fleeting and vulnerable they are ending with verse 16's lament, "*When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer.*"

Verses 17-18 bring to light an important disclaimer that we all like to overlook. God's promises of blessings, lovingkindnesses, compassion and tender mercies are in store for those who obey Him and keep His covenant. These were His

conditions for the nation of Israel and they are His conditions for us today. If we are to truly enjoy God's blessings, we must be under His authority.

The final group of blessings outlined by David in verses 19-22 reminds us that God created the universe and all that is in it. ¹⁹ *The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, And His ^[h]sovereignty rules over ^[i]all.*

²⁰ *Bless the Lord, you His angels,*

Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!

²¹ *Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will.*

²² *Bless the Lord, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion;*

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

The stars, the planets and the galaxies are all works of His hand. David exhorts the Angels and the heavenly hosts to praise God. Nobody in Hell blesses the Lord, but every creature in Heaven does nothing but bless the Lord. We who are in this world can enjoy "heaven on earth" as we join them in expressing thanksgiving and blessing to our Great God.

I want to make one final point that I hope will help us remember the importance of being truly thankful and praising God. Don't get hung up on the numbers here, they are not critical, but there are 31,102 verses in the KJV of the Bible. That would make verses 15,551 and 15,552 the two middle verses. Those two verses

are the beginning of today's Scripture passage, Psalm 103:1&2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.* ² *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits;*

What better central message for the Bible than, "Bless The Lord, O My Soul." If you want to be in the **center** of God's will enjoying **ALL** His blessings, turn to the center of God's Word and claim the benefits He has waiting for you.

Praising (Blessing) the Lord with everything we have provides immeasurable benefits to us. Not only is it right, and just to do so, but it also provides us with both temporal and eternal blessings. Showing genuine gratitude to God brings us joy in our lives knowing that we are pleasing our creator and King. So, the next time you feel downtrodden and blue, or the next time you feel smug and self-satisfied, give effusive praise and bless our creator and Lord with a glad heart – I believe it will change your perspective to what it ought to be; a grateful child of The King. Let us close by Counting our many blessings!