

A Gratitude Attitude

Psalm 103:1-5

An elderly man lay in a hospital with his wife of 55 years sitting at his bedside. “Is that you, Ethel, at my side again?” he whispered.

“Yes, dear,” she answered.

He said, “You’ve always been there with me, haven’t you?” Remember years ago when we lost everything in the fire? You were there. And when I lost all our savings in the stock market? You were there? And when I was struck by lightning? You were there too.”

Ethel said, “There, there. You don’t need to thank me. I’m your wife.”

“Thank you?” the man gasped, “I was going to tell you I think you’re bad luck.”

No one likes an ingrate. No one wants to be called an ingrate. David, the man after God’s heart, now extends that concern to His fellowship with God. Psalm 103 is one of the sweetest psalms in the collection. One of the reasons the psalms are considered to be inspired is that they can assist all of God’s people in giving utterance to things we feel too inarticulate to adequately express to God ourselves. Here, David praises God and gives utterance to his own deep feelings of gratitude to God. This morning, let us each try to appropriate this psalm as though it was our own as we reflect on God’s praiseworthiness as well as the benefits He has contributed to our own lives.

God warrants our consistent praise and gratitude. I should note at this point that praise and gratitude are not perfectly synonymous. Praise acknowledges God’s worth for Who He is – His goodness, His holiness, His power - and for the things He has done whether or not certain things were done specifically for me or for us. Thanksgiving is a loving response to all the benefits I or we have received from God’s hand. Still, it is difficult to attend to one without spilling over into the other. No doubt, I will use one word when I should have used the other this morning. Praise awakens thanksgiving. Thanksgiving awakens praise. Our text expresses both; the praise to which God is entitled because of “his holy name” and the gratitude due Him “for all his benefits.”

I. Praising God for His Person (1, 2)

¹Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

²Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits -

A. He Is Your Covenant God

I’m suspect that I mention this every time it appears, but it is relevant every time it appears: whenever we run across the word “LORD” spelled in all upper case letters, it represents *YAHWEH*, the covenant Name of God by which He revealed Himself to His chosen nation, Israel. *YAHWEH* is God’s name, not some generic reference to some god somewhere out there. *YAHWEH* revealed Himself to Moses, delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery and spoke from Sinai as He gave His Law to His people. *YAHWEH* is the God of covenant. A covenant is a pact between two parties. *YAHWEH* promised to protect and to bless the Israelites if they honored His Law.

The belief that someone or something greater than us is “out there” is universal. Only the most self-absorbed fool denies that any god exists. The heathen sacrificed to their imagined deities in hope that these mean-spirited beings would not destroy them just for the fun of it. Native Americans spoke of a Great Spirit. Sci-fi buffs deny god while, at the same time, chasing extra-terrestrials, because they still suspect that something more must be out there. Ancient Israel and today’s Christian worship *YAHWEH*, the God Who makes Himself known.

The Jews stood in fellowship with *YAHWEH* according to a covenant based in law. Christians stand in a relationship with that same *YAHWEH* by virtue of the atoning blood of Jesus that heals us of the wounds of our former lawlessness. *YAHWEH* is a personal God, not meaning one’s own private God, but, rather, a Person Who has spoken, making the attributes of His personhood known. It was right for ancient Israelites to willfully bring to mind all the benefits received from the hand of *YAHWEH*. It is still right for Christians to purposefully “forget not all his benefits,” the greatest of which is the benefit of atonement, the forgiveness and removal of our sins.

B. He Is Your Holy God

David sang, “praise his holy name.” God’s Name represents all that He has manifested about Himself to man. The wise man praises God for His holiness, because in the final analysis, holiness is unique to *YAHWEH*. His holiness and our sinfulness create a breach between man and God. Therefore, holiness is what we need more than anything. God is holy. Any relationship with Him requires that we be fit for His presence. For now, we stand clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, Who died for our sins, in our place. One day, we will be transformed into genuinely holy people. In the meantime, we are to be engaged in that progression toward true holiness.

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy, without holiness no one will see the Lord.” - Hebrews 12:14

To become holy means to become like God. Perfect holiness is something only God can produce in us, but even our practice of holiness is not some mystic spirituality or a demeanor of other-worldliness. Holiness is thinking as God thinks, willing as God wills and loving as God loves. To forget to praise God for His holiness is to trivialize our own greatest need – to be forgiven of all the ways that we have fallen short of God. And, to trivialize our sin is to lapse back into it.

Fear is the natural response of a sinner to the holiness of God. But, when somehow that sinner has received assurance that this terrifying and holy God loves him and has made a way of forgiveness for him, then his only reasonable response is praise and gratitude.

C. He Is Your Praiseworthy God

“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.” You venture into the presence of a holy God and then what? It is a serious thing. I’m not going to open a can of worms about whether worship should be a somber thing or a celebratory thing. Both approaches are appropriate on different occasions. But have no doubt; worship is always a momentous thing.

Note how much David demands of himself in praising *YAHWEH*: “O my soul; all my inmost being.” Is all of you here today? In just how many other places is your heart right now?

“Observe that he calls *all* that is within him to remember *all* the Lord’s benefits. God’s all cannot be praised with less than our all.” - Charles Spurgeon

"... and forget not all his benefits." Are you here this morning to purposefully bring to mind all the benefits that are yours because this holy, powerful Creator is also your Savior, your Protector and your Provider? Forgetfulness is the opposite of praise. We blame many of the deficiencies in our lives on our forgetfulness, but much of remembering has to do with the importance we attach to things. If God's benefits are important, remembering to praise Him is important.

II. Thanking God for His Provision (3-5)

³who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
⁴who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
⁵who satisfies your desires with good things
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Bible translators are concerned with issues of literary beauty and redundancy, but a literal translation of these verses speaks of the LORD *Who* forgives, *Who* heals, *Who* redeems, *Who* crowns and *Who* satisfies. The Hebrews were in a covenant relationship with God, and the benefits the psalmist recounts all flow from the terms of that covenant between *YAHWEH* and His people. If they would keep up their end of the covenant and obey Him, He would bestow all these things.

A. Forgiveness and Healing verse 3

"who forgives all your sins ..." - When God forgives, no residual grudge remains. That's a flaw of human forgiveness. Later in the psalm, David expresses the totality of divine forgiveness:

⁹He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
¹⁰he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
¹²as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us. - Psalm 103:9-12

It's difficult to even grasp such thorough forgiveness. It almost seems too good to be true. Roman Catholicism imposes penance on its members for sins they have committed. Many non-Catholics agree that without an earnest attempt at making restitution, repentance is dubious and, therefore, forgiveness is not likely. A desire to make restitution does express authentic remorse, but what's a person to do when no amount of penance or restitution can repair what is broken? David killed a man and stole his wife. How does even a king fix that? God's amazing grace extends even to what in this world is irreparable. Jesus died in the place of sinners. We do not always stand as we should on the promise of the fullness of this forgiveness secured in Christ.

"... and heals all your diseases ..." - God's covenant with Israel included physical healing, and it is still God who heals our bodies when He purposes to do so. Still, physical healing is not the slam-dunk guarantee to us that it was under God's covenant with the Israelites. But, this word for healing was also used as a typical metaphor in the Old Testament for the restoration of those who were spiritually afflicted, and that is probably what speaks more directly to us today.

About a century ago, a novelist researching a book about life in a certain New England town visited the local cemetery as part of his investigations. He noted with interest that nearly every tombstone from that era bore a final epitaph. Unfailingly, these were words of praise for the departed with references such as “kind,” “generous,” “upstanding,” “loving” and “faithful” appearing again and again. This prompted him to ask, “I wonder where they buried the sinners?”

We cannot miss being sinners because we have sinful hearts. To be “forgiven” of some specific sin that we committed does not mean that our hearts are not still ravaged with the sickness of sin. Sinful actions spring from diseased hearts. We are still unforgiving. We are still easily enraged. We are still lustful. We are still distrustful. These are matters of our fallen and diseased hearts that evidence our need for more than just occasional forgiveness, but for healing.

B. Redemption and Exaltation verse 4

“... who redeems your life from the pit ...” What David calls the pit, we might better understand as “death’s door.” David had been there on several occasions, and God had proven Himself a great Rescuer. When David fled for his life from Saul in his younger years, God delivered him. When his son, Absalom, attempted to usurp the throne of Israel, God delivered him. David was a man of war who had returned safely home from countless campaigns. It is doubtful that David had any understanding of redemption as we understand it, but we know what it means to have been pulled from the pit of near disaster by the redemptive work of Jesus:

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. – Ephesians 2:1-5

“... and crowns you with love and compassion ...” Our sins deprived us of the honor due us as God’s children. Fortunately, He does not forgive halfway. Though we deserve humiliation, God treats us as kings. When the Prodigal Son returned home, the best he could hope for was that he might be allowed on the grounds as a servant. He never dreamed that his father would adorn him in a robe of honor, present him with a ring that marked him as an heir of the estate and put him in shoes that set him apart from the children of the slaves. He was made a son in full standing once again. That’s what God has done for us in Christ. He has forgiven us *AND* He has restored us. This restoration is to our Father’s own likeness. He crowns us with love and compassion – as He is loving and compassionate.

C. Soul-Satisfaction verse 5a

Obviously, what is required to satisfy a person depends on the complexity of his demands. Jack has died. His lawyer is standing before the family, reading out Jack’s Last Will and Testament. “To my dear wife Esther, I leave the house and one million dollars. To my son Barry, I leave my Lexus and \$500,000. To my daughter Suzy, I leave the yacht and \$250,000. And to my brother-in-law Jeff, who always insisted that health is better than wealth, I leave my sun lamp.”

“... who satisfies your desires with good things ...” - This is a summary statement of all that has gone before, not a promise that God becomes one’s personal Santa Claus. All the desires an ancient Israelite could possibly have were addressed in the covenant - forgiveness, peace, blessing in regard to his worldly needs. If his desires were greater than what the covenant promised, he was regarded by God as greedy and covetous. In the same way, all we really need and the only valid desires that God has placed in our hearts are satisfied in Jesus. The point is that God provides soul-satisfaction, and that calls forth the praise of all my soul and of all my inmost being.

D. Renewal verse 5b

... so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Sin strips life of its vibrancy. A life ravaged by sin is weighed down by burdens, the most insidious of which is the guilt that issues in secrecy. Guilt itself is good if it leads to a turn-around, but toxic when it leads to secrecy. The liar always has to remember to whom he told what story. The thief lives in fear of being caught. The compulsive battles the denial that keeps him from healing. The sexual offender lurks in the darkness of shame. A life of sin can make even a young man feel very old. He yearns to come into the light, but his fear won't let him.

God alone provides that for which the human spirit yearns. He "satisfies our desires with good things." As explorers of old searched for the elusive "fountain of youth", sinners long for whatever might lift the weight of the chains they have forged with their lies and secrets. A sinner longs for a new lease on life. He wants to live courageously. He wishes to be clean. When Jesus came, a new start became possible. He spoke of new birth. He spoke of new wine. He told us:

"... I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full." - John 10:10b

And so, in Jesus, our "youth is renewed like the eagle's." The image of an eagle suggests vigor, strength, freedom, but what has an eagle to do with the restoration of youth? In her book, *Strange Scriptures that Perplex the Western Mind*, Barbara Bowen writes:

"The eagle lives to a very great age. As he grows old his beak becomes so long that he can no longer eat; then he flies away by himself to the top of a cliff and pecks and pecks on a rock until his bill falls off, after which a new bill grows in its place. While without the use of his bill, the bird also loses his feathers because of fasting. After his new bill grows and he again takes food, new feathers start growing, so that he looks and appears like a young eagle, going forth in a new covering with youthful beauty and strength."

Our "youth is renewed like the eagle's." In the previous psalm, a troubled and weary man likens himself to "a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins" (Psalm 102:6). He cries out to God because he is in pursuit of healing. Which bird do you feel most like this morning? In our psalm today, any anguished crying out to God from a crisis has passed. David now remembers *YAHWEH*, Who has come to Him in many crises as well as "all his benefits." So must we.

Memory is a tricky thing. Because it is fallen, it is prone to dwell upon all the refuse of the past while the most priceless treasures of life are neglected. We must learn to spur our memories on to their highest duty which, in fact, we would discover to also be their highest joy – to bring to mind all of our covenant God's gracious dealings with us. In such reflections, there is divine strength for today and tomorrow. If you have never tasted the newness of life that only Jesus brings, receive it today. If you have been touched by the healing hand of Christ, never hesitate to sing about it, to praise *YAHWEH* with all your soul and with all your inmost being.