

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

EXPOSITORY SERMON

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"COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS" – BE THANKFUL

Scripture Reading - Psalm 103: 1-12

Introduction

Once again we have passed through the period of transition from summer to winter. In many parts of the country where there are a variety of tree species the magnificent glory of their brilliant colors has faded as the trees have lost the last of their leaves. The farmer's crops have been harvested and stored in the grain elevators. Our cars have been winterized and our houses have been prepared for the winter months which lie ahead. Even much of the natural world appears to have retreated into its winter cocoon. But this is the season of the year when we take time to reflect on the blessings of God poured so generously upon us by His loving hand. It is also the season when we get together as families. Our heavily laden tables with the turkey and all of its trimmings will eloquently testify to the fact that our diets have been flung to the four winds, and that our dieting misery will be transformed into the relish and enjoyment of a sane meal for a change. And that by itself should be a reason to be thankful. But all of these things are symbols of the goodness of God and should give birth to a grateful heart. This thanksgiving season teaches us that we "should count our blessings and name them one by one." Let me add that this spirit of thanksgiving should not simply be seasonal but a permanent attitude. Paul admonishes us "in everything give thanks." Matthew Henry the great Bible Commentator revealed this attitude when he told of how he was

assaulted by thieves and robbed of his purse. He wrote these words in his diary "Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my purses, they did not take my life, third because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, and not someone else." "When the Sunday school teacher asked her class what they were thankful for, one little guy replied, my glasses. He then explained, "they keep the boys from fighting me and the girls from kissing me." You can always find something for which to be thankful.

It occurs to me that as I have studied the scriptures, that one of the outstanding features of those who know God is praise and thanksgiving. The book of the Psalms is a graphic example the expressions of gratitude towards. Again and again the Psalmist burst out in thanksgiving and praise to the God they serve. This spirit of praise is like a smoldering flame until it can contain itself no longer, and it breaks out into a flame of praise and thanksgiving. It is not that the Psalmist does not experience periods of discouragement, pain and mystery. He does!! But regardless of difficulty and even despair He ends up expressing his gratitude towards God.

We read together selective passages from Psalm 103. This a vibrant Psalm pulsating with praise and throbs with the spirit of thanksgiving. Dr C. Morgan wrote that this Psalm is "perhaps the most perfect song of pure praise to be found in the Bible." The Psalmist David writes this Psalm to encompass the whole of life. It has 22 verses which is the equivalent of the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The covenant title, LORD, occurs 11 times and the Psalm ends as it begins "Praise the Lord my soul."(Scroggie). This great Psalm of thanksgiving and praise begins with "personal blessings(v.1-5) it proceeds in recognition of national blessings(v. 6-18) and ends with universal blessings for he includes all the angels, and hosts and works in vast dominion of God(19-22)(Scroggie) There is a lot in this Psalm, but I want to give you an overview of what the Psalmist's message is to us in this thanksgiving season.

Firstly will you note

1. THE ROOT FROM WHICH THE SPIRIT OF GENUINE PRAISE PROCEEDS. Psalm 103 :1-2.

Or the source from which genuine praise comes. There are two areas in which genuine attitude of thanksgiving is to be nurtured and cultivated. There is first of all the

a. The Inward Dimension. Psalm 103:1. The Psalmist is very clear on this truth. "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His Holy Name..." Genuine thanksgiving comes from the heart. It is evident from the scriptures that God is concerned with who we are in our inmost self. "As a man thinks in his heart so is he." The Bible says "Man looks on the outward appearance, but God Looks on the heart." The Psalmist David wrote in Psalm 51:6. "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts." Jesus had something scathing to say about inward insincerity. To the Scribes and Pharisees He said "You make clean the outside of the platter, but inwardly you are full of dead bones." Moreover, what is so significant here is that Praise which does not come from a genuine heart does not resonate with God. David recognizes this fundamental truth and it is as though he is talking to himself. "Praise the Lord O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His Holy Name." The poet wrote "HE WHO THANKS BUT WITH THE LIPS, THANKS BUT IN PART; THE FULL AND TRUE THANKSGIVING COMES FROM THE HEART." And what is so significant here is that genuine thanksgiving is made with the total man. "Praise the Lord O My soul; ALL my inmost being, praise His Holy Name." He gathers together all that he is to praise his God. The inward dimension is indispensable in the offering of thanksgiving and praise to God. Then there is,

b. The Upward Focus in thanksgiving spirit. Psalm 103:1. David emphasizes this truth in verse 1. "Praise the LORD, O my soul." The focus of praise is on God and God alone. In this great psalm of praise the designation Lord is made no less the eleven times an indication that the prime focus of the thanksgiving spirit is directed towards God. "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits....." To praise Him is to recognize that He is indeed the Sovereign Lord, and that He is the source of all of life's benefits. This is what David was saying in the opening verses of this psalm. Praise the Lord. Praise His Holy Name. From heaven comes all. The root from which the spirit of genuine thanksgiving and true praise is from the inmost being of man. The source of genuine praise is found in the inward dimension and upward focus of the total man on God.. The Psalmist moves on,

**2. THE REASONS ON WHICH THE SPIRIT OF GENUINE PRAISE ARE GROUNDED
Psalm 103:3-12.**

What were the reasons David gave for praise and thanksgiving. Note what he said in verse 2. "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Verses 3-12 is an outline of the benefits for which David is grateful. One has correctly pointed out that these benefits relate to the past, the present and the future. They are priceless benefits which touch some of the basic spiritual needs in men and women. They are rich and incalculable. We know them so well that we tend to take them for granted. They are evangelical truths which are sounded forth from the evangelical pulpit. What is disturbing is that even in parts of the contemporary evangelical church there are signs that some of these truths are becoming less and less distinctive and definitive. There are some with a contemporary mindset who do not want to offend the listener in order that they might attract great crowds. It seems to me that to attract great crowds and rob them of the truth is exceedingly deceitful, and undermines the gospel and is no doubt a slap in the face to all that God has done to provide salvation for us. It is treading under the precious price that Jesus paid on the Cross to redeem us. The Psalmist David does not want us to camouflage these great benefits and blessings. He urges us to praise God for them. What are these benefits. In New Testament language they are first of all,

a. Justification. Psalm 103:3. "Praise the Lord.....who forgives you all of your sins."

This is really where we start in this business of genuine praise. It comes from the heart, that is true, but a forgiven heart. The reality of inward forgiveness bursts forth into the reality of genuine praise. I said that this is where we begin. Without forgiveness nothing else can follow.

Furthermore note that this forgiveness is complete and all inclusive signified by that little word with great implications "ALL". He "forgives all your sins." The prophet Isaiah rejoiced in this kind of forgiveness (38:17). "You have put ALL my sins behind your back." There is no such thing as a limited forgiveness with God. There is no evidence of a selective pardon with the Lord. When God forgives, He forgives all my sins. The seriousness or the depth of our sin makes no difference to His forgiveness. That word "All" applies to every sin that we have committed. Now if that is not a benefit, I don't know what is. Praise the Lord O my soul, and forget not all His benefits - who forgives all your sins." The second benefit

here is summed up in the word,

b. Restoration. Psalm 103:3. What David is saying here is "Praise the Lord...who heals all your diseases." It is Dr. Stephen Olford who points out that "while the thought of

sickness is not entirely absent from this statement, the main idea is that of moral defilement." And so while there is the idea of physical disease he includes moral and spiritual sickness. The thrust of the message is that God so heals that it brings with it both physical, moral and spiritual healing. He restores to us wholeness.

In N.T. language this truth is brought to light in 1 John 1:9. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Confession and repentance results in forgiveness and cleansing. Cleansing from inward defilement means moral and spiritual wholeness. No wonder the Psalmist encourages us to "praise the Lord and forget not all His benefits." Forget not the benefit of restoration. Furthermore forget not the benefit of,

c. Redemption. Psalm 103 :4. "Praise the Lordwho redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion...." Note first of all,

i. What He Redeems Him From. Psalm 103:4. "He redeems him from the pit.." It is the place of desolation, darkness and bondage.." It is a clear description of the slavery of sin. It is the place from which there is no escape. David uses the word pit in other places. In Psalm 40, he said, "I waited patiently for the Lord, He turned to me and heard my cry, He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mire and mud and set my feet on a rock." The Psalmist paints a picture of the soul that lies in the pit of sin's captivity. There really is no way, except there be help from the outside. David knew it to be true for he went to say, "the Lord turned toward me - He heard my cry - He lifted me up He set my feet on a rock - He gave me a firm place on which to stand - He put a new song in my mouth." He rescued David from the pit of sin. He redeemed from the clutches of depravity. In this Psalm David does stop not at this point. He goes on to tell us,

ii. What He Redeems Him for. Psalm 103:4-5. The words of David are interesting.

The Lord he says "crowns you with love and compassion." Did you notice where sin put him in life. The slimy pit! The mud and the mire! and did you notice where the Lord puts a man! On a rock with a new song and crowns him with love and compassion.

Sin always debilitates a man - devastates a man and ultimately destroys a man. God gives dignity and self respect to a life. He crowns him with love and compassion. This is a vivid metaphor from the common custom of wearing wreaths and garlands on festive occasions.

(Oxford). John tells us that Jesus having redeemed us has elevated us to be a "kingdom and priests to serve God." Rev. 1:6. He has lifted us up out of a pit and crowned us with love and compassion. That is why David writes "Praise the Lord my soul for the benefit of redemption. Be thankful to for the benefit of,

c. Satisfaction. Psalm 103:5. David makes no bones about it. The Lord "satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. This is not the satisfaction which simply fulfills selfish needs and desires. It is satisfaction with a redemptive purpose or design to it. This satisfaction rejuvenates, refreshes and restores strength. The reference here is to the fresh and vigorous appearance of the eagle when it receives its new plumage. Isaiah reminds us that ".....those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like angels." Isaiah 40:30. Such are the blessings of the Lord to us. Is it any wonder that David writes "Bless the Lord O my soul... and forget not all His benefits." Psalm 103:1-2. These are the reasons on which the spirit of praise are grounded. Finally notice,

3. THE REVELATION ON WHICH THE SPIRIT OF PRAISE IS FOUNDED. Isaiah 103:7-22.

What is this revelation? David tells us that in verse 7 that **God "made known His ways to Moses and His deeds to the people of Israel"** and from verses 8 through to 22 there is a recital of who God is. The psalmist describes His attributes and the way He deals with His people. All of this points to the greatness of God. A truth which should be the center of our focus in all of worship and life. In the first verse, David talks about the Holy Name of God. This spotlights the

a. Holiness of God. Psalm 103:1. He urges us to praise His Holy Name. You cannot talk about God without first recognizing His holiness. When we focus on Him, we must be aware of the white dazzling light of His holiness. For His perfect holiness determines how we worship Him and how we live before Him. You cannot have a correct conception or perception of who God is unless you are conscious of His holiness. He is fundamentally and supremely a Holy God. He reveals His holiness because He is holy in essence. He reveals His holiness because He is Holy. Tozer correctly tells us that 'Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is.' He is Holy. And a low view of God which is accepted by so much of Christendom is the reason that sin is taken so lightly and that it flourishes, even in the church. And Tozer was so right when he maintained that "we have learned to live with unholiness and have come to look upon it as the natural expected thing." We have lost the awesome sense of His holiness in the modern mindset of contemporary casualness and as a result so often approach Him in a casual and irreverent way. The tragedy is that many prefer it that way because it does not demand anything of us. Much of the flim flam and fluff and stuff of so much of modern day evangelicalism would disintegrate if it was placed under the scrutiny of the penetrating beam of God's holiness. David starts his psalm by spotlighting the holiness of God. If we want to honor God and bless His Name and express our gratitude to Him we must do it with the consciousness of His Holiness. "Praise the Lord, O my soul ...Praise His Holy Name." Another attribute for which we can praise God,

b. The Righteousness of God. Psalm 103:6. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed." The God who is righteous is concerned with the establishment of righteousness among His people. His design is for justice and right wrongs. He will do it on His time table. The writer to the Hebrews said of Jesus, God's Son, "righteousness is the scepter of your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated injustice. He will ultimately establish righteousness and justice on the earth. But we must move on with the flow of this psalm, and highlight

c. The Thoughtfulness of God. Psalm 103:8-22. The heartbeat of His thoughtfulness is His all-embracing love. Note the words of verse 11, "for as high as the heavens are above so great is His love for those who fear Him...." and again in in verse 8 "the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love...." Because God is a Holy God and works righteousness and justice for His people , His love is compatible with who He is. His love is a holy love. And in this Psalm we told what the characteristics of this love is. Firstly note

i. The Purity of God's Love. Psalm 103:1,6,8,11 and it is a love which does not condone that which is contrary to His love. Because God's love is a holy love, it does not wink at sin nor does it minimize its seriousness. But this love does seek to bring forgiveness to the repentant soul. This love seeks to remove our sins from us. The Lord abounds in love, but it is a pure love But also note,

ii. The Patience of God's Love. Psalm 103:8 "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love." Paul talks about agape love as being patient. But for the patience of God, man would have been permanently removed from this planet. The fact that we still live in the day of Grace is a testimony to the patience of God. "He is slow to anger. What about

iii The Pardon or Forgiveness of God's love. Psalm 103:8-12. Tied in with this is the mercy of God's love. David tells us that God "does not treat us according to our iniquities" If He did we would be lost forever. If there was no mercy in the heart and mind of God there would be no salvation. His mercy and love are as high as the heavens, so David is able to say "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (v.11) The Holy justice of God is tempered by His holy mercy and love. It was His holy love which found away to redeem sinful men and women when Jesus Christ became the Lamb of God who died and rose again to take away the sin of the world. Love planned the salvation of a damned mankind. That plan is revealed in a Cross. It is through redeeming Blood that God will treat us as if we had never been separated from Him. Is this not a benefit for which we can thank God this season of Thanksgiving ?

Conclusion

Paul urged us "in all circumstances give thanks. There was a fine family living in Zululand

that my wife and I came to appreciate. Mr. and Mrs. Khanye joined the Church of the Nazarene in 1980. He was elected treasurer of the church. They were loyal, faithful, and radiant Christians. They walked 3-4 miles to church one way on a Sunday Morning. Their lives were filled with tragedy. All of their sons 3 or 4 excepting one were murdered over a period of time. I recall standing by the casket of last son that was murdered. I remember the deep sorrow and anguish of those moments. One Sunday morning after I had preached Mrs Khanye made her way to the altar. She sobbed and sobbed as she prayed asking the Lord to help forgive those who had robbed her of her sons. We prayed together and she got up from the altar that day, her face was radiant and full of joy. I knew that she had won the victory. One day some time later my wife and I received a message inviting us to share a praise meal with her family. We walked into her neatly kept house. Table was laden with all kinds of appetizing foods, some western, and some African. We gathered in her living room before the meal to pray, sing and praise the Lord and read the Word of God together and testify. There was a short devotional by the pastor, and Mrs Khanye got up to testify. In her testimony she told us of the life they had lived they got saved. They had spent their money on alcohol, cigarettes and and sinful pleasures. But Jesus had redeemed her. He had changed her life. They now had money to spare, and they had this thanksgiving feast in order to thank God for for all His many blessings, His saving grace and sustaining power. I watched her shining face and felt her vibrant spirit and praise and joy. What about the painful tragedies of her life? There was no bitterness or hatred for those who had killed her sons. There was simply a sincere expression of gratitude to God for all His benefits. I was talking to the Rev. Mike Porthen some years ago and we discussed the wonderful custom of Indian families having a thanksgiving service and feast when they receive special blessing from he Lord. Maybe they bought a new house or there was a new baby in the household, or one of their children graduated from school, or someone had been healed. They had one of these celebrations after they got saved. And every year they have an anniversary feasts They will testify to the goodness of God. For they recognized that every good and perfect

.gift comes from God. They will invite their unsaved friends and relatives and many times their testimonies result in people getting saved. They find salvation in the atmosphere of praise and thanksgiving. They take time to celebrate their blessings. You maybe surprised how many blessings you have when you begin to count them. "Count your many blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." and be thankful

