**Praise the LORD, My Soul**

October 8, 2017

Psalm 103:1-22

Key Verse 103:2 “Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

In this thanksgiving day of 2017, we want to think about what God has done and give thanks to God. Many times, we cannot find words to express our feelings. But this psalm verbalize so beautifully our own deepest emotions of gratitude. It seems that this psalm was written by King David in his old age. He experienced all kinds of events, both sad and happy. He could have remembered all the bad things, and complained about them. But he said, “Praise the Lord, my soul.” He commanded his soul to praise God. This means that giving thanks to God is a deliberate act, coming from our soul. It is not an emotional feeling. St. Paul said the same thing. He said in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” It is very true. More often than not, we tend to remember one bad thing over ten thousand good things, and be grumpy about it. We have to know that God has given us our mouth to give praise to God, not to complain.

David repeats six times at the beginning and end of this psalm, “Praise the LORD.” The Hebrew words, which we have often heard, are “Hallelu Yah.” Many of the psalms contain these words. Who is worthy of our utmost praise? Only the LORD. Who is the LORD that we should praise him? He is our Creator who gave us life. We did not plan our lives. The LORD planned our lives. The LORD planned our children’s lives. Each day it is good for us to praise the LORD for the gift of life. Every living thing is obligated to give thanks and praise to the LORD. The last verse of the last psalm, Psalm 150:6 says it well, “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.” If you are breathing you are supposed to do it. That is why God is so offended by the ungodly because they refuse to praise Him. They are not thankful, as Romans 1:21 says, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” But all of us created by God, all of us given breath by God, all of us redeemed by God, all of us saved by Christ, “praise the Lord.” “Praise the Lord.” “Praise the Lord.” Don’t make the focus of your life you; make the focus of your life Him. Don’t trivialize the great glory of our great God. We must be God centered.

The LORD is the one true God who calls people to be his own. The LORD revealed his name to Moses at the burning bush as “I AM WHO I AM.” The LORD sent Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt to a land prepared for them to be his chosen people and treasured possession. The LORD is the holy God. Holy is his name. Surrounding his heavenly throne, angels call to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” (Isa 6:3) What happens if we do not praise the LORD? If we do not praise the LORD, we inevitably praise and adore something or someone else, which is idolatry. If we do not praise the LORD, we easily find something to complain about. We must not praise idols or complain. Let us summon ourselves to praise the awesome God, “Praise the LORD, my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name!”

Look at verse 2. “Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” Why does David urge himself to “forget not all his benefits”? Obviously, because we are prone to forget. Usually, if you give a dog a sausage, he will be your friend for his whole life, because the dog remembers. But we human beings are so forgetful of our blessings. As the saying goes, “Out of sight, out of mind,” we tend to remember only our present circumstances, like our last meal. Our sinful tendency is to remember something bitter, sorrowful or painful that leads us to complain or be depressed. These are the very things that are good to forget! But we must not forget who the LORD is and what he has done and is doing for us--his benefits. We don’t deserve his benefits--they are gifts and blessings bestowed by his grace. David mentions the benefits for which he personally praises the LORD in verses 3-5. These benefits are not merely past events but present doings of the LORD for him. The LORD forgives, the LORD heals, the LORD redeems, the LORD crowns, the LORD satisfies, the LORD renews. This is what the LORD does. Then who is the LORD? The LORD is our Forgiver, Healer, Redeemer, Crowner, Satisfier and Renewer.

Let’s think about each of the benefits David mentions. He begins with, “who forgives all your sins...” The forgiveness of sins is essential to a relationship with the LORD. Sin separates us from the LORD. Isaiah 59:2 says, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” The worst sin is when we try to be our own man or woman. Adam and Eve ignored God’s command and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was their desire to be God, saying, “I don’t need you. I don’t want God to tell me what to do. I can do it all by myself.” This hurts God. One of my colleagues has a son who does not listen to his parents. He wants to be his own man. He moved out of his parents’ house recently, and he did not tell them that he was moving out until the day he moved out. His parents are hurt. They only want to help him, but he does not want to have anything to do with them. He wants to be proud of himself that everything he has done, he did it himself. But who fed him and raised him until now? His unthankfulness is the same as our unthankfulness toward God. But God knows what we often forget: namely, we are dust. Because we forget that we are dust, this leads to pride, fear and breakdown. But God had mercy on us and sent his Son Jesus Christ to reconcile us to him. Can you praise the LORD who forgives all your sins? Praise the LORD who forgives all our sins through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ! This gives us all enough reason to daily praise the LORD from our souls.

The LORD also “heals all your diseases.” The LORD does not just forgive us and leave us as we are, in our sicknesses. He is also our Healer, our Great Physician. The LORD heals our sicknesses, in body and spirit. Jesus Christ is our Healer. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed (1Pe 2:24). Can you testify how the LORD has healed you? The LORD has healed some of bitterness or fatalism or wounded relationships or selfishness. Note that healing comes after forgiveness. The physical is closely related to the spiritual. While not all sickness is a direct result of sin, some of it is. Where the connection exists, forgiveness must precede healing. Once a paralytic came to Jesus, carried by four friends. Jesus said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus forgave his sins first, and healed his paralysis. One of the names of God in the Old Testament is Jehovah Rophi—the Lord your Healer. Every instance of true healing comes from him. Therefore, if we have been sick, and then have recovered, we can thank God for our recovery because God is the source of all healing.

David continues, “...who redeems your life from the pit...” The LORD redeems our lives from the pit. David was rescued many times from deadly situations: as a shepherd boy, as a fugitive, as a soldier. The pit can be death, destruction, despair, or failure. I am sure that many of you can testify how you were redeemed from the pit. When we get to heaven, we will realize how often we were protected by the personal intervention of our God from premature death. One time, I was driving back at night after meeting my advisor. I should have listened to my wife, and stayed for a night in a hotel. Instead, I thought I could drive home. I was very sleepy and my car crossed the center lane. Fortunately, no car was coming. God saved me. Some can testify for yourselves or of others who have been redeemed from the pit of depression, or pornography, or eating disorders, or meaninglessness. By his mercy, every Christian has been saved from the pit of condemnation and eternal separation from God, which we deserve. Praise the LORD who redeems our lives from the pit!

The LORD not only forgives, heals and redeems us; he also crowns us with love and compassion. The LORD crowns us as heirs of his kingdom. Like the prodigal son who went from the pigpen to be restored as an heir in his father’s house, we have each been called out of darkness into his wonderful light. With his love, we can love others. Look at verse 5. “...who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” It is easy to take for granted the basic blessings of food, clothes and shelter with which the LORD satisfies us. Other good things from the LORD may be a job, a promotion, a godly friend or a responsibility. Still, as much as we try, we cannot satisfy all our hungers and thirsts. We cannot find real satisfaction in worldly things. But our heavenly Father knows what we need. The LORD satisfies us with good things. Even his discipline is for our good (Heb 12:10). With these good things from the LORD, our strength, joy and youth is renewed, like the eagle's, so we can do good works which God prepared for us to do (Eph 2:10).

What benefits or blessings in this year have you received from the LORD? Forget not the LORD’s benefits for you and those around you. Everyone here, praise the LORD! Let’s say verse 2 all together: “Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” The result of these 5 benefits is that our youth is renewed like an eagle. The man who dwells with God enjoys continuous revival and goes from strength to strength like the eagle soaring from one height to another. Isaiah 40:31 says, “but 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.”

Look at verse 7. “He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.” In his dealings with his people, God revealed his mind and character, especially in the time of Exodus. First, the LORD is righteous and just. The LORD’s chosen people were oppressed greatly as slaves in Egypt. The LORD heard their cries and delivered them by his mighty hand through his servant Moses. Look at verse 6. “The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.” There are so many oppressed people--victims of unrighteousness and injustice. The LORD is mindful of the oppressed and needy, like widows and orphans who have no human protector and provider. Second, the Lord is compassionate and gracious. Look at verse 8. “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” He guides, protects and provides for every step of the way. Verse 8 echoes Exodus 34:6: “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” The LORD’s compassion and love are repeated themes in this psalm.

Look at verse 13. “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.” The LORD’s compassion is described as a father’s compassion on his children. Children make many mistakes. A good father may rebuke his erring child, but he does not crush or reject his child, because he is compassionate and loving. Even David loved his rebellious son Absalom who conspired against him, and grieved over his son’s death. The LORD is compassionate because he made us and he remembers that we are dust. We are like grass, flourishing for a short time like a flower in the field, but soon gone. Let us not forget our own mortality for we will all be gone from the earth someday, sooner or later. To whom is God’s love directed? It is directed to those who fear him. One who fears the LORD believes that the LORD is good and the LORD knows best, and he lives to please the LORD, not himself.

The LORD is slow to anger, but we are quick to get angry. The LORD is patient with us. If the LORD treated us as our sins deserved or repaid us according to our iniquities, no one would survive. But his great love has spared us. Not only has he spared us, he has removed our transgressions. Look at verse 12. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” The east and the west can never meet. This is a symbolic portrait of God’s forgiveness. When he forgives our sin, he separates it from us as far as possible and does not remember it at all. So we should not dwell in sin in the past. Do you sometimes feel sin nagging you? Then confess your sin to the LORD, turn from your sin, and claim his promise that the LORD has removed your sins far away from you. The merciful LORD has removed our condemnation from us. As Romans 8:1 declares, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Likewise, when we forgive someone, we should forget and do not remember. When we harbor grudges, it is not real forgiveness.

Look at verses 20-22. “Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion.” David is not content to praise the LORD by himself; like an excited worship leader of the universe, he calls all of heaven and earth to praise the LORD with him. The LORD is the Eternal King enthroned in heaven above all creation. The LORD rules heaven and earth. The LORD’s power and sovereignty is supreme over all. All creation is privileged and obligated to praise the LORD.

Let us praise the LORD, and forget not all his benefits to us. Praise the LORD, my soul.