

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Thanksgiving -- November 21st and 22nd, 2012

Psalm 103:1-5

- 1 Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.**
- 2 Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—**
- 3 who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,**
- 4 who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,**
- 5 who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

Dear children of God's many blessings. Amen

Have you remembered everything for Thanksgiving? Grocery stores are as jam-packed today as are airports with holiday travelers. People filled those stores to purchase necessary items for the annual Thanksgiving meal. Shopping lists were surely long and detailed. Stuffing, potatoes, cranberries, French onions, green beans, cream of mushroom soup, squash, rolls, Jell-o, whipped topping, pie filling and pie crusts, pickles, olives, fresh veggies. Maybe a bottle of wine or some sparkling grape juice. Did we forget anything? What about the turkey? Did we get that? With such a busy time at home, busy stores, long lines, and long lists, it's not too hard to forget an item, even one as important as the turkey. When it comes to the annual Thanksgiving feast, we don't want to forget anything.

As we pause to gather with loved ones this Thanksgiving, there's something else we don't want to forget. We don't want to forget to praise the Lord for **"all his benefits..."** You see, sometimes the benefits the Lord provides don't seem like benefits at first until you look back and see what the Lord has done. Sometimes the benefits the Lord provides seem so common they are easily forgotten until they are taken away. Even the obvious benefits the Lord provides can be taken for granted until the Lord allows you to see them in action. With such busy lives filled with distraction, it's not too hard at all to forget how the Lord blesses us. For that reason, this Thanksgiving we join King David in singing:

Sermon Theme: Praise The Lord, And Forget Not His Benefits!

- 1. Benefits for our souls.**
- 2. Benefits for our bodies.**

Much like the lengthy shopping lists we have in preparation for the Thanksgiving feast, King David has a list of sweet blessings for us to remember. What are some of these **"benefits"** that come from the hand of our gracious God? The first blessing we find is really the centerpiece of all God's other blessings. Without it all other **"benefits"** are just side dishes or bare ingredients. **"Praise the LORD...who forgives all your sins..."**

This is a very special blessing, because this is forgiveness and pardon from the very God of forgiveness. David uses a word that refers to the forgiveness that comes only from God. It's never used to refer to the pardon extended by another person. Why would such forgiveness from the God of grace be so necessary? David gives us a hint later in the Psalm, **"He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities."** (103:9-10)

When we understand who we are by nature and what we have been in the eyes of the holy God, only then will we realize how great this **“benefit”** is. In Psalm 51(:5), David sang, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** From our parents and the generations before them, each of us has inherited a sinful nature that makes us blind and hateful to God’s holy will, and ultimately dead in transgression and sin. Since conception, that sinful nature has given God every reason to accuse us and pour out on us his holy anger. He knows your selfish thoughts. He hears your hurtful words. He sees your loveless actions. As the holy God of all creation, he has the right to **“treat us as our sins deserve”** for all those times when we have completely missed the mark of his perfection. He has the right to **“repay us according to our iniquities”** for all those times when we’ve failed to measure up to his holiness. He has every right to lock each of us out of heaven forever and cast us into the eternal death of hell.

We daily earn it. We daily deserve it, but this Lord **“forgives all your sins”** through the Savior he sent 1000 years after David. That Savior came in lowliness to meet God’s holy standards for you. That Savior came to take on God’s holy accusations against you, to endure God’s holy anger in your place, and then suffer the death you deserve for every one of your sins.

Then to make sure that your forgiveness was complete, he abandoned his tomb. Through his Word and the waters of Holy Baptism he, then, made you his own. Even more remarkably, he still forgives your sins each and every day. David sings later in Psalm 103:11-13, **“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him...”**

That is the most important blessing of all, but it’s more than just the centerpiece of all God’s blessings. That forgiveness through Christ is our hope, our shield, our sure foundation, our key to eternal life. Yet David has other **“benefits”** for us to remember. **“Praise the LORD...who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit...”** Even though we are forgiven and saved by Christ, we still face the troubles and difficulties of this life. Sometimes those troubles and difficulties come because our sinful nature got its way and led us to think or say or do something that led to unfortunate consequences—conflict in a family or between friends or even between fellow believers, hurt feelings, misunderstanding, ruined relationships.

Sometimes those troubles and difficulties come because we are Christians living in a society that wants nothing to do with a crucified Savior who lived 2000 years ago and those who follow him. We are then tempted to go along with the world or face isolation, ridicule, or worse. Sometimes those troubles and difficulties come because we are sinners living in a sinful world where the effects of sin are always evident. One is struck with a major injury, another with a difficult disease. Death strikes a family unexpectedly. The financial situation of a household or a congregation takes a turn for the worse. Disaster strikes and devastates an area taking lives and ruining livelihoods. Especially if the troubles and difficulties pile up, the Christian is easily tempted to forget God’s benefits and his hand of grace in everything.

All that trouble, all that sorrow can quickly cover the eyes of the believer, but yet King David, who knew how bad such trouble and difficulty can be, still sang, **“Praise the LORD...who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit...”** When sins we have committed affect our lives and the lives of others, the only solution is God’s forgiveness. When we face hardship for following Christ crucified, the only solution is clinging to Christ and his cross. When we face the effects of sin in our daily lives, God’s grace again is the solution. We can be sure that he does provide healing, often in a physical way and most certainly in the eternal rest of heaven. We can be sure that the Lord doesn’t make any mistakes, that there are no accidents, but that the Lord uses those struggles for our good, even if we don’t see it now and will only understand it in eternity.

We can be sure that our God of grace rescues us from going to the grave in despair and fear. Yes, unless Christ returns, every one of us will have to face the terrifying reality of death, but death is no longer what it once was. St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, **“Death has been swallowed up in**

victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our God has certainly given us these great blessings, but there’s even more! **“Praise the LORD...who...crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”** So often we take for granted even the obvious blessings our gracious God gives to us. We fail to realize how great they are until we lose them. That’s why David reminds us to **“forget not all his benefits...”**

Each of us has been showered with more of God’s grace than we could ever have enough time to discuss here. How does the Lord of grace crown you **“with love and compassion”**? How does he satisfy **“your desires with good things”**? Well, just look around you. You have nice clothes to wear. No one here is starving. You have roofs over your head and means of transportation. You have gainful employment or benefits from previous employment or the employment of others. You have clean air to breathe, a warm sun that does come out, rain and snow that water the earth, and relative peace in our land. You have friends and family, neighbors and acquaintances.

You have here a place where you and your family can regularly come to hear the Word of God taught in its truth and purity, both from the pulpit and in the classroom. You can regularly come to receive Christ’s body and blood with bread and wine and bring your children to Christ through water and the Word. You have pastors and lay leaders to serve you with the Word and Sacraments. You have fellow believers to support and encourage you. You have opportunities to support the work of the Gospel and opportunities to share those many **“benefits”** of our God with others. By God’s grace, you have been and continue to be crowned **“with love and compassion”** by a Lord **“who satisfies your desires with good things”**.

So have you remembered everything? This brief glimpse of God’s grace only reminds us that it will take a lifetime here and in eternity to remember and praise the Lord for **“all his benefits”**. Let us never forget his countless blessings. To our God be glory and praise forever and ever. Amen