

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church – Center, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Thanksgiving - November 25th and 26th, 2020

Psalm 103:1-5 - EHV

- ¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul. All that is within me, bless his holy name.**
- ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—**
- ³ who pardons all your guilt, who heals all your diseases,**
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with mercy and compassion,**
- ⁵ who satisfies your life with goodness, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.**

Dear children of God’s many blessings. Amen

Time for some self-analysis – No cheating allowed. Would you consider yourself a glass half-full type person or a glass half-empty person? Do you know what I mean? When you look at life do you most often see all the bad things that are going on (glass half-empty), or when you look at life do you most often see the many good things going on even in the midst of lots of troubles (glass half-full)? People will say that the last year was year where most people saw the glass half empty or for that matter completely empty. Because of the pandemic, the election and all the turmoil, many people as they look back at this past year are having trouble finding much reason to be filled with thanks and joy. Is that how you feel? Is the glass really half-empty or as some might think the glass is completely empty!

As we pause to gather for another day of Thanksgiving, what do you and I see as children of God? I pray that as we look back at this last year we see the glass half-full or even more so we can look back at this last year and see that God has blessed us in ways that we can’t even imagine or deserve, just as he has done every year and every day of our lives on this earth.. That is what David the writer of this Psalm is reminding us about today and really every day. He reminds us, **“Bless the LORD . . . and do not forget all his benefits”**

Those words are so true, aren’t they? They jump right off the page and are aimed right at our sinful and many times ungrateful hearts. 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 distractions and living in a world of sin all around us, it’s not too hard to forget how the Lord blesses us. Sometimes the benefits the Lord provides are clouded out by earthly problems -- like an earthly pandemic. For these reasons, this Thanksgiving we join King David in singing:

Sermon Theme: Bless The LORD, And Do Not Forget All His Benefits!

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

OK. I want each of you to get out your imaginary or I guess you could get out a literal piece of paper you have close by and I want you to think about the top 5 blessings God gave you this past year. As I was trying to write down my own top 5, I realized that it is hard. It was hard for two reasons. 1) It was hard because I had forgotten many of the blessings that God has given to me – because he has given me so many

blessings. 2) It was hard because it is almost impossible to narrow it down to a top 5 when the list needs to be much longer than a top 5. So what are some of the blessings on your top five list? Maybe this year the list was a little different than previous years. The pandemic has shifted our focus a little, hasn't it? Maybe some of you wrote down Health or Family or maybe Job security made the list, but what still should have come out on top? God and his forgiving love and mercy freely given to us.

If you were having a little trouble trying to come up with a top 5 for your list, Psalm 103 is a good reminder of things that can and should be on our list. 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 blessings. Without it all other **“benefits”** mean nothing and are unimportant. **“Bless the LORD...who pardons all your guilt.”**

This is the best blessing of all, 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. 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 our selfish thoughts. He hears our hurtful words. He sees our 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 our Lord **“forgives all your guilt”** 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 us, to endure God's holy anger in our place, and then suffer the death we deserve for every one of our sins.

Then to make sure that our forgiveness was complete, he abandoned his tomb. Through his Word and the waters of Holy Baptism he, then, made us his own. Even more remarkably, he still forgives our 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.”**

The best part about this blessing of God's pardoning and forgiving us from all our sins is that no pandemic or earthly trouble can ever take this blessing away from us. In fact, God's forgiving love seems to shine a little brighter against the backdrop of all the earthly troubles we are facing at this present time. God hasn't forgotten about us. No, his forgiving love will go with us every day until we reach our home in heaven. This is a promise that our sinful hearts can never forget so that we have eternal peace and joy and thanks. Thank You LORD for this eternal blessing

2. Benefits for our bodies.

Forgiveness is the most important blessing of all. It is the centerpiece of all God's blessings. Our 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. **"Bless 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. Pandemics strike and devastates our country and yes our world -- 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, **"Bless 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 **"not forget 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 mercy and compassion"**? How does he satisfy **"your life with goodness"**? Well, just look around you. We have plenty of clothes to wear and houses to live in. We have an abundance of food to choose from and means of transportation. Even if things are a little out whack, many of us have jobs and other earthly blessings. God continues to send us air to breathe, a warm sun

that does come out, rain and snow that water the earth, and relative peace in our land. We have friends and family, neighbors and acquaintances.

We 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 in person or through our online opportunities – What a blessing!. We 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. We have pastors and lay leaders to serve us with the Word and Sacraments. We have fellow believers to support and encourage you. We 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, we have been and continue to be crowned **“with mercy and compassion”** by a Lord **“who satisfies your life with goodness.”**

So as we go back and try to answer the question about being either a glass half-empty or glass half-full type of person ,we soon realize that we need to ask God for forgiveness for the many times we have missed God’s blessings that are all around us. The glass is not ever half-full. It is always filled to overflowing. Forgive us for the times we have forgotten you and your eternal love and mercy.

So have you completed your Top 5 list of God’s blessings from this past year? Did your list change a little over the last 15 minutes? Have you remembered everything? Today as David helped us take a brief glimpse again at God’s grace, we once again are reminded 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. Go home today and maybe a good thing for all of us would be to join together as families or friends or as a congregation and make a top 100 list of God’s many blessings. To our God be glory and praise forever and ever. Amen