

Praise the LORD, O My Soul
Psalm 103:1-22
Key Verse: 103:2

"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits..."

This week we observe Thanksgiving Day in our nation. It is a good time for us to reflect on the past year 2008, remember God's love and mercy and praise him. Psalm 103 was written by David, Israel's singer of songs. David was filled with praises to the LORD--who was his LORD, his nation's LORD, and who is the LORD of all creation. David praises the LORD for who the LORD is and for what the LORD does. The psalm includes personal praise, communal praise and heavenly praise. As we study this psalm, may we forget not the LORD's grace and benefits to our souls and may we also praise the LORD.

I. Praise the LORD for who He is and what He does (1-5)

First, praise the LORD, O my soul. 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."

David begins and ends the psalm with the same words: "Praise the LORD, O my soul." David summons himself to praise the LORD. He speaks to himself again saying, "...all my inmost being, praise his holy name." We usually regard it as strange for someone to talk to himself. But it is necessary to remind ourselves of some things. It is good to remember to praise the LORD often, even daily, not just at Thanksgiving time. It is also good to remind ourselves to repent of our sins daily. David summoned all his inmost being--all that was within him: his heart, mind, soul and strength, to praise the LORD.

The LORD is the one true God who calls people to be his own. The LORD called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to become the fathers of a great nation, Israel. 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, O my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name!"

Second, forget not all his benefits. "Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Why does David urge himself to "forget not all [the LORD's] 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." No one can solve this sin problem on his own. There is nothing we can do to remove our sins before the only, holy LORD. The LORD must do it for us. And he has done it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Can you praise the LORD who forgives all your sins? Do you know the sins he has saved you from? Are you sure that all your sins are forgiven? If not, please memorize 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." The LORD forgives all our sins. Acts 10:43 says, "All the prophets testify about [Jesus Christ] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." 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 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. It pleased the LORD to heal King Hezekiah and add 15 years to his life (2Ki 20:5). Once the Israelites wandered for 3 days without water. When they found water, they could not drink it, because it was bitter. So they grumbled against Moses. Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood which made the bitter water sweet. The LORD said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you." (Ex 15:22-26) 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).

We Americans are generally materialistic, pleasure-seeking and self-centered. Many are complaining about the financial crisis. But our troubles are nothing compared with the poverty and sufferings throughout the world. Still we complain about things like our third car needing repairs or our pharmacy co-pay or car insurance going up. At the Purdue conference, something beautiful happened: about 500 people committed themselves to God for his world mission purpose. This is contrary to our national trend of selfishness. It is evidence of God's healing grace.

Once Jesus met ten men with leprosy. They called out, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." Jesus told them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests," and as they went, they were cleansed. It was a great miracle which revealed Jesus' mercy, power and compassion. But surprisingly, only one of them came back to thank Jesus, praising God in a loud voice. Jesus immediately noticed the missing ones, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" Jesus was not happy that they did not return and give praise to God. But Jesus was encouraged by one thankful, healed man and said to him: "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." (Lk 17:11-19)

Can you testify how the LORD has healed you? The LORD has healed some of bitterness or fatalism or wounded relationships or selfishness. I know people in our church healed from melancholy, sexual immoralities, laziness, even an Elvis wanna-be. Before studying the Bible as a NU freshman, I loved TV, sports, video games, cars and pop music and wasted all my time in these. I came to NU to get a high-paying job. But the LORD's word and Spirit has changed me. Since my freshman year 24 years ago, I've been praying for and studying the Bible with NU students. I can only explain this by the LORD's healing grace to me. Praise the LORD who heals us and is transforming us into healthy, holy children of God!

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'm sure that many of you can testify how you were redeemed from the pit. 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.

"...who satisfies your desires with good things..." 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). Many of us know the story of the first Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims suffered through a difficult winter and half of them died. But they kept their faith and hope in God and love for one another to remain strong as a community. The next summer they had an abundant harvest and celebrated with local Indian friends. This inspired the national tradition every year in America of giving thanks to the LORD.

What benefits or blessings in this year have you received from the LORD? Personally, I praise the LORD for a new home and for 20 years of marriage. At NU, we are blessed with 3 new families: Peter and Esther Kim, Joseph and Deborah Kang, and Young and Curie Lee. Our Friday meeting has grown so much that the Bible house is too small for us. All NU coworkers say, "Praise the LORD!" I'm sure you can add to these praise topics, but here are a few: UIC has nearly 70 student 1:1s. NEIU has over 80 Sunday worship attendants. Loop ministry sent a short-term missionary to Mongolia. Loyola has several new girl students and the possibility of a new house church. Oakton/Truman has a new Bible club with ten students attending. HBF leaders are growing, they had their 1st international conference at Purdue and they are bringing friends. CBF became the 1st fellowship in Chicago to reach 120 members. 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, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits..."

II. The LORD's compassion on those who fear and obey him (6-18)

In verses 6-18, David's praises to the LORD reach beyond himself to the LORD's love and compassion for all who fear the LORD.

He says in verse 6, "The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed." The LORD is righteous and just. 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. 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. In my own life time, I have seen the LORD liberating the oppressed people of the former USSR, even through our UBF missionaries. The LORD works righteousness and justice among all the oppressed in China, in North Korea, and throughout the world.

Verse 7 says, "He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel..." Moses received a tremendous privilege to speak face to face with the LORD, as a man would speak with his friend (Ex 33:11). The LORD made known his mind and will and character to Moses. The LORD made known his power and law to his people Israel. Unless the LORD revealed himself, we would not know him. Still, no one has ever seen God in his full glory. But God the One and Only Son Jesus Christ, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (Jn 1:18).

Verse 8 echoes Exodus 34:6: "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." The LORD first gave these words to Moses. The LORD's compassion and love are repeated themes in this psalm. Verse 11 says, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for 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 his son's death in battle. 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 some day, sooner or later.

The LORD is slow to anger, but we are quick to get angry. The LORD is patient with us, for love is patient. 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 from us as far as the east is from the west. Our sins have been removed far away from us. 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."

To whom is God's love directed? The psalm mentions 3 times that God's love is directed to those who fear him: Verse 11 says, "...so great is his love for those who fear him..." Verse 13 says, "...the LORD has compassion on those who fear him..." And verse 17 says, "...from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him..." Do you fear the LORD? Who are they who fear the LORD? They are those who love, trust and obey him. Verse 18 says that those who fear the LORD are "those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts." 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. This psalm tells us to remember two categories of things: the LORD's benefits, and the LORD's word to obey it.

III. Praise the LORD all his works everywhere (19-22)

In verse 19 David's praise shifts from the earthly community to heaven: "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." 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. David is not content to praise the LORD by himself; like an excited singspiration leader of the universe, he calls all of heaven and earth to praise the LORD with him: "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." All creation is privileged and obligated to praise the LORD. It sounds like David is dancing before the LORD with all his might. And in his final statement in the psalm, he doesn't exempt himself but returns to where he was inspired to begin: "Praise the LORD, O my soul."

When I look at our nation, I praise the LORD for our godly heritage. I praise the LORD for the freedoms, prosperity and opportunities given us. I praise the LORD for the missionaries the LORD has raised and sent out, like Mother Barry. When I look at our church, I praise the LORD for his saving grace to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I praise the LORD who is reaching college students and making them disciples of Jesus Christ who fear the LORD. Let us praise the LORD, and forget not all his benefits to us personally, to our nation and to all people. Praise the LORD, O my soul.