**Forget not all his benefits** 7/4/24 dkm

Read: Deuteronomy 8, Psalm 103

Text: Psalm 103:1-5

Psalms: 96:7-13, 16:7-11, 103:1-7, 72old

The so called ‘baby-boomer’ generation in our society had, and continues to have it very good. Our parents experienced war, with all its hardships and deprivations. They wanted a better life for their children so worked hard to give them everything they wanted. This hard work often came at the expense of rest and worship on the Lord’s Day. Loving the good life, and listening to learned people criticising the Bible, it is no surprise that many baby-boomers turned away from the Lord. It is not uncommon to see the faith and faithfulness of one generation disappear in the second or third generation because of prosperity and a failure to teach the Bible to the next generation.

The Lord God was aware of this danger when the second generation of the children of Israel entered the Promised Land. Their fathers experienced the hardships of slavery in Egypt and then the wilderness years, years of living in tents and eating manna every day. Moses warned the people of the dangers of prosperity when they entered the land of Canaan, the land of milk and honey. The danger of prosperity is that of forgetting the Lord (Deut 8:14, 19). The Lord had given them the Passover meal as an annual reminder of how he delivered them from slavery in Egypt. They also had the Sabbath rest that was established at creation, and reaffirmed in the fourth commandment, as a day to remember the Lord and his delivering them from slavery in Egypt (Deut 5:15). Many of the songs the Lord gave his people also reminded them of their history. Many of the songs we sing from the Bible remind us of this history because it is our history as the new Israel of God.

We belong to a new covenant of course, a covenant established by the death of Jesus Christ our Lord (Luke 22:20). Yet we still have these songs telling us of the mighty power of God displayed in bringing his people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. And we still meet together to worship the Lord on the NT Sabbath. But we have a new sacrament called the Lord’s Supper as the fulfilment of the Passover. We call this a ‘means of grace’ because in partaking of the sacrament we remember the Lord Jesus and receive grace to worship him and live for him every day.

Just as Moses commanded the people not to forget the Lord when life became easy in the Promised Land, so David commanded himself and the people, in Psalm 103: ‘Forget not all his benefits’. And Jesus also commanded his disciples at the first Lord’s Supper: ‘This do in remembrance of me’ (Luke 22:19). The Lord your God is a jealous God. He does not like being forgotten, and will not have his people worshipping other gods; which is what happens when we forget the Lord. In his jealous and righteous anger, the Lord will punish those who forget him. If you forget the Lord and turn away from him, do not be surprised if you feel his heavy hand of discipline upon you. Moses outlined a whole series of curses that would come upon Israel if they turned away from the Lord (Deut 28).

Psalm 103 is a psalm of pure and high praise. There is no mention of enemies surrounding or attacking David, and no cry for deliverance. There is mention of sin or iniquity, but the context is of the Lord forgiving sin. In his mercy the Lord forgives and removes our sin, ‘As far as the east of from the west’ (103:12). Forgiveness of sin is at the heart of the gospel. This is a gospel psalm even though Jesus is not named. Blessing ‘his holy name’ however, is similar to, ‘at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow’ (103:1, Phil 2:10).

David begins by telling himself or his own soul to bless or praise the Lord. He wants to do this with all his heart and all his being. He is not like many who praise God with their lips while their heart is far from him. David delighted in the Lord every minute he was in the house of God. He was not counting the minutes to when he could leave!

What does it mean to ‘bless the Lord’? We know how the Lord blesses us with many good things, things David remembers in this psalm. But how do we bless the Lord who needs nothing from us: He owns ‘the cattle on a thousand hills’ (Ps 50:10). We bless the Lord by giving him thanks and praise (Heb 13:15). A child does not bring gifts to his father; what he does is thank and praise his father who gives him good gifts.

In remembering the Lord, and blessing his holy name, David lists five ‘benefits’ he has received from the Lord: forgiveness of sin, healing of diseases, redemption of life, crowning with love and mercy, and, mouth satisfied with good things. ‘Covenant life’ writes Harman, ‘should be an experience of God who ‘forgives’, ‘heals’, ‘redeems’, ‘crowns’ and ‘satisfies’. We will now look at each of these, asking is we have received such benefits, and if we have been as thankful as David.

**1. Forgives**

This is the first of the benefits listed by David because it is the most important. Without forgiveness we cannot even be a covenant relationship with the Lord. David sinned by committing adultery and murder. Both sins attracted the death penalty under Mosaic Law, but when David repented the Lord forgave him. David knew the commandments and knew he had broken them. He also knew God had revealed himself to Moses as ‘merciful and gracious… forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin’ (Exod 34:6, 7). He quotes these words in verse 8 of this psalm. Neither Moses nor David explained the basis upon which the Lord could forgive sin, although they knew animal sacrifices did not really atone for sin. If Abraham saw the day of Jesus, so did Moses and David (John 8:56).

Sin cuts us off from God who is the source of light and life (Isa 59:2). Our sin must be forgiven if we are to be reconciled to God and live. The blood of the sinless Son of God, and Son of Man, is the only blood that can cleanse any person of sin, and make them righteous before God- any person, past, present, or future (Heb 9:22,12). David told himself not to forget that he was born in sin and that he committed sin, and the only reason he was alive was because the Lord forgave his sin.

We must remember this fundamental truth each and every day, remember that forgiveness is the foundation of our fellowship with God, and with one another. We only know love because Jesus loved us (1John 3:16), and it the same with forgiveness. More and more we are seeing what life is like without forgiveness. As believers, let us appreciate the depths of our sin, and the height of God’s love in sending his only begotten Son to the cross, where he suffered the wrath of God upon our sin.

**2. Heals**

The second ‘benefit’ David remembered as he praised God was that he ‘heals all your diseases’ (103:3). For most of us this would be the first thing we are thankful for, and that only for a short time. Do not be like nine of the ten lepers Jesus healed! Jesus healed lots of people during his earthly ministry. Healing was a sign that he was Messiah, and that the kingdom of God had come. As Messiah he could heal the sick, and forgive sin (Mark 2:10-12). The sicknesses he healed were real even if sin was involved. We dare not say these sicknesses were purely spiritual or ‘in the mind’. Jesus healed the man born blind that God might be glorified (John 9:3). The line ‘heals all your diseases’ in verse 3 is parallel to ‘forgives all your sin’, but that does necessarily mean the word ‘disease’ is a metaphor for ‘sin’.

When the Lord brought his people out of Egypt, he promised that if they obeyed him he would heal their diseases (Exod 15:26). Under the old covenant it was clear that the Lord had power to send diseases, as he did upon the Egyptians, and power to heal diseases. It is the same in the new covenant. The Lord is powerful to heal your diseases, and he does. Do you give him thanks for doing so? ‘Forget no all his benefits’ includes physical healing, but forgiveness of your sin is more important. Cripples can enter heaven but not unforgiven sinners!

But how can we say that the Lord ‘heals **all** your diseases’? I find this difficult to understand. David, who wrote these words, knew the Lord’s forgiveness, but he also knew that the child of his adultery died, despite his fervent prayer. The apostle Paul healed people in the name of Jesus, but when he prayed for his ‘thorn in the flesh’ to be removed, it wasn’t. The Lord answered his prayer saying, ‘my grace is sufficient’. In our relationship with God, ‘sin destroys it, while suffering may deepen it (Heb 5:8, 12:11)’ writes Kidner.

**3. Redeems**

Healing of diseases is one thing, a thing we are most thankful for, but we all die in the end. We all end up in the grave. David however, saw beyond the grave to the resurrection (Ps 16:10). He was thankful to the Lord for redeeming his life from the pit or from destruction (103:4). He was thankful for eternal life which he had in Jesus Christ.

God’s redemption of his people from slavery in Egypt was a sign of full redemption from sin and death in the new covenant. Forgiveness of sins is the means by which we enter into new life in a covenant relationship with God. Again, in Psalm 16:11 David writes, ‘You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures evermore’.

**4. Crowned**

Crowns are given to princes, and those who are victorious. David was crowned in both senses, and so are we. Jesus is the ‘Prince of peace’ and he shares this crown with us. Jesus is victorious over death and the grave, and he shares this victory with us who believe. The apostle Paul gives thanks to God, ‘Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1Cor 15:57). He looked forward to the ‘crown of righteousness’ that Lord would give him on the last day (2Tim 4:8).

In this psalm David is thankful for the crown of steadfast or covenant love and tender mercies (103:4). Love is the mark of a child of God (John 13:35). David walked with confidence and with compassion as a child of God. No one and no thing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). Are you proudly wearing the crown of love and mercy given by the Lord?

**5. Satisfies**

David is calling upon his soul to bless the Lord, and not forget all his benefits. ‘God blesses his people by conferring good on them; we bless God by praising the good in him’ writes one commentator. We come to the fifth and final thing for which David blesses the Lord- although the list is not meant to be exhaustive. Yet there seems to be an order of priority in it, as mentioned. The Lord ‘satisfying our mouth with good things’ often takes a higher priority in our reckoning than it should (103:5). In the wilderness the people whom God saved out of slavery complained about the food, and even wanted to go back to Egypt. Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. How many others have put food and feasts and parties before worshipping the Lord? How many of us forget that ‘every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights’ (James 1:7).

In the wilderness God sent food from heaven. He provides our food less directly, but everything we eat, and indeed everything we have, is ultimately from God’s hand, and a blessing from him. Moses reminded the Israelites that the Lord gives the power to get wealth (Deut 8:18). Yet we still hear people proudly saying, ‘I got rich from working hard, and I will do what I like with all my money’. Remember the rich fool of the parable in Luke 12. We pray for the Lord to give us our daily bread, and should thank him when he does. God is good and does good (Ps 119:68). In contrast to idols, and human beings, God never sends us bad things. If we feel God is not being good it is just that, a feeling. Let us not complain or be ungrateful. Remember, God satisfies our needs, not our greed’s.

David looks to the eagle, a majestic and powerful bird that soars above the earth (103:5). Like Isaiah (Isa 40:31), he pictures himself and all who ‘bless the Lord’ as being renewed by the Lord to soar above the troubles and tribulations of this world. In God’s strength we press on towards the goal, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14). As the body grows weak and frail, let our hearts grow even stronger as we wait upon the Lord, wait with the assurance of the resurrection, and of a mansion for ever in our Father’s house.