

Count Your Blessings

By Dr. Manford George Gutzke

"Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name." This is the first verse of that wonderful 103rd Psalm, the Psalm of praise and thanksgiving, and this has been a very fine expression of thanks for believing people throughout the ages. Notice how the words go along:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

One statement after another, piled up to indicate the goodness of God. The creatures that need the food and the food is there. Man who needs help and guidance and comfort and God is there. In all of creation, the design is good. And then when you consider that sustaining power, how God keeps things, and people, in all of this we can see the goodness of God. We could say with the scriptural word that says, "God is good; his goodness endureth forever." But this is also true in grace, when we have failed. We can look in nature and we look in providence, and we can think of how wonderful it is that God provides everything for us, but in grace when we have failed and we have sinned, He is glorious. As we saw in this very Psalm, we were to "forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things." Truly God is good!

We read, "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed." Note Psalm 103, verses 8 to 11.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him."

Sometimes we think that people suffer a lot. And so far as this world is concerned, it is true that the sentence of death is passed out upon the whole world. And yet in the face of death and disaster, it's still true that "the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy." Now there are times when God will deal with us for some foolishness that we have committed; there are times when God will show us that our way is actually hurtful and harmful and leading us into disaster. But "He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever." This is one of the most wonderful things to find out about God.

In verse 10 you read, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins." And how grateful we can be about that! We may on occasion think that God is doing certain things and allowing certain things to happen because of the wrong we have done, but oh, how many, many times we have done wrong and He did not shake us up. For we read, "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him." It's a good thing for us right now to remember that the Lord is merciful.

In verses 12, 13 and 14 we see how practical His mercy is.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

In God's mercy He is practical. We don't do all the evil we could do because God doesn't let us have a chance. And then again the guilt is taken away. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." He doesn't only pity us because He is merciful; He doesn't only pity us because He is kind, He pities us because we're so pitiable. We are actually so weak, so blind and so foolish. But "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

"As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." That's the way it is with men.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."

This is a marvelous passage. You and I should read it from time to time, that we might realize how great God is, how Almighty He is.

Finally, we see how we're told to praise Him.

"Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul."

God is good, His goodness is all round about. It's a worthy thing that we should praise Him, our hearts would be blessed, we would find our spirits lifted. It causes us to put our whole trust in Him.

Name Your Blessings

Do you realize that the way any person can qualify for blessing from God tomorrow is to appreciate the blessing that we received from God yesterday? "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." This is the way the 34th Psalm begins. "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." Again the Psalmist says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." Many times I have the feeling that there are those of us who without realizing it actually disqualify ourselves to get more blessing. We are not wise when we fail to thank God for the blessing that we have received. Perhaps one reason why we are not more conscious of our blessings is because we haven't thought through what a blessing is. Generally speaking, if we have things turn out well we just accept that without thanks. That's just what we're expecting. It has to be better than good before we'll want to call it a blessing. Unconsciously, I think, we flatter ourselves with the idea that we deserve the good. We have a good job; we never think of being thankful for it. We feel we're earning our wages. We get good pay but we never think of being thankful for it. We think that we are able to do it and we prepared ourselves for it, and it's just coming to us, altogether missing the fact that having a place to work, and getting wages at all is a blessing. It's a very unwise thing to just accept the good as if it was a normal procedure. We need to include evil as the normal procedure, so that whenever anything is good it is already a blessing. We need to be thankful for many of the ordinary things in life.

For instance as a person, whoever you are, you've got a family heritage. Was it your father or your grandfather or your grandmother or perhaps your mother that was an outstanding person and because you belonged to them you really had a standing in the community. You didn't earn that, nor did you earn your physique and your health, your personal strength as you are, your good eyesight and your good hearing. Then again take your culture, your living in this country. You are by chance an American, and you have all the benefits that surround you, living in this day and time. You and I don't make these things. We just have them. In your situation, I wonder how many people ever stop to think how much they have given to them in the community in which they are. When I wake up in the morning and I want to get up, one of the first things I do is turn on the light. Have you ever been some place where there were no electric lights and you had to fumble around for matches and try to light a candle? Then you go over and turn on the water to get hot water so that you can wash and shave. Think of this! All you have to do is turn on the water and you can have a hot bath. Did you make that? Consider your home; appliances; your car; your neighbors; or your health. All of these things surrounding you on every side are just rich with blessing, blessing, blessing, all of which are given to you.

And then as you come on thinking further about that, you could think of yourself as a sinner, because every single one of us in the sight of God is a sinner. Now as a sinner, what do you have? Forgiveness! My, what more could you want? Forgiveness! You have cleansing, and you have deliverance from sin. It's all promised to you, it's all given to you and you don't do a hand's turn for it except receive it. Christ Jesus died and suffered for you, and you just receive it from Him, and all these blessings that you have. Now think of yourself as a Christian. If you are a Christian, think of the blessing that you have. Right now you're a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, and you can count yourself an heir of God. And think of yourself as being acceptable in the sight of God. You didn't do a thing for it. You haven't earned it. You couldn't pay for

it. You're not good enough for it, and yet you can walk into the presence of God. Sometimes I almost am frightened to think that some people imagine that they can walk into the presence of God because God just doesn't mind. All the evil that you've done, the carelessness that you have exercised, the foolishness that you've been involved in - all of this is known to God. And yet He is willing to receive you!

Remember, you'll never be left alone. When you come to God to worship Him, or go about your work, you won't be alone. When you go to bed at night, or when you get up in the morning, you won't be alone. And when you live all through the days of your life, and the time comes to die, you won't be alone. And when the time comes to come into the presence of God you won't be alone. The Lord Jesus will be with you. Blessing, blessing, blessing. "Count your many blessings, name them one by one. It will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

Sweet Savor of Prayer

Can you understand why the prayers of the believers are spoken of as a "sweet incense" before God? In the Old Testament, worship included the offering up of incense. There are various ways in which God would indicate His pleasure or His displeasure, and one of His pleasures is in referring to that which is sweet smelling to Him. And also at times there is that which is bitter to the taste. We read about that which is harsh or grievous or bitter, and that which is sweet or pleasing or a sweet savor which is a pleasing taste, or a sweet odor which is of course a pleasing smell. The Bible would give us the understanding that there are many things that men do that are just a stench to God. When we read the story in the book of Genesis about Noah, the first act in the new world after the flood was for Noah to build an altar, and on that altar Noah made an offering and the Bible says that "The Lord smelled a sweet savor."

God sees when we pray. For instance, in the New Testament when Saul the Pharisee was converted we read that God said through the Spirit to Ananias, "Behold he prayeth." The response from the heart to God is something that one can do. When we come before God with thankfulness and with prayer, that is a sweet smelling savor to God. You will remember that worship in the Tabernacle began with the altar on the outside where confession was made. Then there was the laver where the worshiper was washed and cleansing was shown. Then inside the Tabernacle there were the candlesticks which would give light and would suggest understanding. Then there was the shewbread which would suggest nourishment and gaining of strength. Then there was the altar of incense, where praise and thanksgiving were offered up to God. And this is the last thing that the worshiper would do before he would step into the very presence of God. The last thing he would do before he would go through the veil was to offer up praise and thanksgiving unto God. "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise." We always praise God for what He is, and we give thanks to God for what He does. Anybody can come to God. That's true! But no one can come to God any way. There is a way to come to God.

First, confession of sin, with personal repentance; then a cleansing, where you yield your sin and get rid of it; then understanding, where the light of the Gospel shines into the heart; then strength, where you are nourished with the Word, that you become stronger in faith. Then you come and offer your praise and your thanksgiving to God. You might ask yourself then, why is praise and thanksgiving so sweet to God? Praise and thanksgiving are sweet to God because of the faith that is involved. When you come to praise God you believe in Him, and you believe in what He has done. When you give thanks, you give thanks for what you have received. This is the case of the person coming before God knowing that "God is, and that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." When I come to God that way, my coming honors the Lord Jesus Christ who opened the way for me to come. If I come to God at all, I'm coming in Jesus Christ. When I come to God according to the pattern that was shown in this Tabernacle, this is exactly the way in which I come. Every step is in Christ. At His altar, it is the blood of Christ that was shed for my sins. At the laver where I'm washed, I'm washed by the water of the Word. When I come inside the Tabernacle and the light shines upon me, "His Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light on my pathway." And on the other side when I partake of His Word, it's the shewbread, it's the bread that keeps me alive. So that everything about coming to God is involved in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need also to learn how to pray. "We know not how to pray as we ought." The Holy Spirit helps us. When you're thinking about praying and you want to be acceptable to God, just remember that your prayer, your coming to God and talking to Him, will be sweet incense to Him, sweet perfume to Him, provided that you begin with the confession of your own sin with personal recognition of the reality and the greatness of God and He will then be able to deal with you. The Lord knows what we have need of before we ask, and

so you come into the presence of God humbly asking Him for help, pointing to what you need. This is sweet in the eyes of the Lord, for a man to humbly come before God and ask for help.

In Thanksgiving Be Humble

Can you see how a thankful person would be a humble person? I feel that I'd like to give you a parable. When Jesus of Nazareth was in the city of Jerusalem, something like this happened: In the Gospel according to Luke 17:11 we read:

"And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: and they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

It is worthy of note that the Lord Jesus noticed the one man that came back to give thanks and asked about the nine men that did not come back. Being thankful describes a frame of mind. It's an attitude of heart. It's a mood in which one keeps one's self with a settled purpose. A thankful man knows already that all things are of God, and because he knows all things are of God, when anything does happen, he gives God the glory.

Faith enables us to do this in all things. You will remember how it was with Job, "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." In another place, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

What sort of thinking is it that enables us to credit God with everything? It's the kind of thinking that's based on the idea that God is Almighty, and that He doeth all things well. Human tendency is to place blame on somebody when anything goes wrong, or give praise to somebody when anything goes right. We need to remember that back of all is God. If you take all things as from God, then you'll be able to thank God for everything that happens. If we give God the glory, then we're not likely to take it to ourselves. We're not likely to become vain. If we give God the glory, we'll have confidence enough to know where to go the next time the danger comes. We'll go to God. But you see if we don't give God the glory, then we're inclined to take the praise to ourselves, and we'll say, "I got this great victory. I managed this thing." No man was responsible for your victory, and no man's responsible for your defeat. Look up to God and think about God. Furthermore when you're glorifying God, it's a humbling thing. Because you see, if you give God the glory then you don't have it. If you'll praise God for what happened, you can't take any credit for it. This is a healthy point of view. It is strengthening to the heart to understand that God does these things and God is helping in these things.

Then again at all times, in everything, for all men, especially when we pray, "in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Paul writes, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." We can say this surely, that thanksgiving is the best prerequisite there is for answers to prayer. If you want in any way to really qualify to get blessed tomorrow, I'll tell you what to do. Dig up something that today came from God, and thank God for blessing received today that you might actually be blessed tomorrow.

Bring Your Best to God

Do you understand why Mary anointed Jesus' feet with precious perfume? It has often been said that perhaps the most famous woman in the world was Mary of Bethany. And the reason for this is because the Lord Jesus had said about her, that wherever the Gospel is preached, what this woman had done should be told as a memorial to her.

Mary appreciated what the Lord Jesus was going to do for her and because she appreciated it she

brought this sweet perfume. In the Gospel of Mark, 14:3-9, you'll come to a statement that suggests why she did it. "She hath done what she could; she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying."

In those days they didn't have any way of embalming the body, and one of the things they did was to wrap the body in spices and to perfume it, which was a way of overcoming some of the natural odors that would come from a dead body. And it became a matter of great tribute to bring perfume to put on the body of the person that had just died. So the Lord Jesus said, "She hath come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." Meaning that Mary understood that He was going to die for her. I know that for any one of us we will be impressed when she would bring this box of ointment and use it for anointing His feet. But let us look a little bit more closely to help us understand this entirely. Look at the woman's act itself, because this is what the Lord Jesus said should be told everywhere all over the world. Mary brought the very best that she had and gave it to the Lord Jesus personally as a gift. She wanted Him to have it. Here is a picture of the way in which we can serve the Lord any time, anywhere, regardless of the situation. If you once come to this place where you are coming to do anything for the Lord, ask yourself, "Is it the best I can do? And am I doing it for Him personally?" Then it is like the woman's act.

Notice also, the woman's rating. She was rated one way by the disciples around her, and she was rated another way by the Lord. The disciples criticized her because she was spending too much money on Him. It's too much, it's too expensive, it's unwise. Keep in mind, as far as the woman is concerned, she wasn't doing it for them anyway. The Lord said, "Let her alone. She hath wrought a good work on me. She hath anointed my body aforehand for the burying." But the big thing is she came to do something for Him, He knew what she had in mind, and He said, "Let her alone."

How did Mary know that this action on her part was going to please the Lord Jesus so much? How did she know that this was the one thing He would say should be repeated wherever the Gospel is preached? The truth of the matter is, she didn't know. She did this thing because she loved Him. She knew He was going to die for her. And when she thought about Him dying for her, she came to anoint His body beforehand for the burying. How is it that Mary knew so much? I want to remind you that this is the Mary who sat at His feet and heard His words. Some of you will remember that in another part of the Scripture you'll read of the incident that occurred in the home there when Jesus came to this particular house and Martha came to Him and asked Him to instruct the other sister, Mary, to help Martha with her housework. And Martha implied that she needed help and that Mary needed to help her. You'll remember that the Lord Jesus answered Martha and said, "Oh, Martha, Martha, thou art worried, nervous, upset about so many things. Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." The implication is that there are two different kinds of people in a church, some like Mary who worship and read the Bible and study and pray; and some like Martha who go out and wash the dishes and sweep the floors and set the tables and do all these other practical things.

Did you notice that when the disciples criticized Mary for bringing the ointment. Mary didn't say a word. And I'd like to tell you privately, she didn't have to; but that's hard to remember. But notice too that when Martha criticized her and came and told the Lord Jesus that Mary wasn't doing her part, Mary didn't say a word. Oh how this can happen! Right among church people, you'll have somebody who really means very well who will actually criticize a faithful person who is doing work for the Lord, and the idea is that she's doing so much it can't be real; and so she's criticized and actually falsely accused. This happened with Mary. So with reference to you, whoever you are, you may be doing something just now as unto the Lord. You may want to do something in thankfulness and in praise to Him. Let me tell you, think about Him, look at Him, do it for His name's sake, and don't pay any attention to what other people say about you. Remember you're doing it for Him, and let Him be the satisfaction of your own soul, for His name's sake.