

Thanksgiving  
Psalm 103:1-5 (NKJV)  
November 24, 2016

The following proclamation was made by Governor Bradford in 1623, three years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth:

To all ye Pilgrims,

Inasmuch as the great father has given us this year and abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as he has protected us from the raids of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday November ye 29<sup>th</sup> of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three, and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Plymouth rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.

With that in mind, our text tonight is Psalm 103:1-5: *Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Tonight, we have good reason to give thanks. We should be thankful that we live in the greatest, most blessed country that has ever existed. We should be thankful that we have received more material blessings than any generation before us. We should be thankful we are part of a church where people love the Lord and each other. We should be thankful that God has blessed us with family and friends.

As we consider all that we are thankful for, we should remember the words of James, the brother of Jesus: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning* (Jas 1:17 NKJV).

Every good thing we have ever had, have, or ever will have comes directly from God Almighty. We all know that, right? I'm sure we all can freely admit that all of our material and physical blessings come from God. We can look at where we were 10 or 20 or 30 years ago and say, "Thank you, Lord, for all that I have."

However, this evening I would like to turn our attention and our thanksgiving to some of our most fundamental blessings. These are the gifts from God that never fade away, never rust, never rot. These are blessings that last for all eternity.

Let's begin with the blessing in verse three of our text: *Who forgives all your iniquities.*

Iniquity isn't a word that pops up in our everyday conversation. Iniquity means faults, mischiefs, or sins. We have all committed faults and mischiefs against God. Not one of us is innocent of all sin.

Paul told the Romans: *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23 NKJV)*. Later in his letter, Paul would spell out the consequences of that verse: *The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23a NKJV)*. The penalty for our faults, mischiefs, sins, and iniquity is death; not just physical death, but the "second death" as well. Revelation chapter 20: *Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Re 20:14-15 NKJV)*.

Our iniquities, our sins, are a terrible thing and there is no human way to escape our sins or the punishment they bring. However, God has forgiven our sins. We have been pardoned. We are guilty of sin, there's no doubt about that. But because of Jesus Christ, God has pardoned us.

What does it mean to be pardoned? A criminal who has been pardoned is not assumed innocent of his crimes, he is just free from the penalty of his crimes. The pardon that comes with God's forgiveness frees us from the rightful wages of our sin, death and eternity in hell. If we are looking for something to be thankful for, we can be thankful for God's forgiveness.

Verse four brings another blessing: *Who redeems your life from destruction.*

Sin brings destruction. All of us are familiar with the pain of sin. At some point, everyone suffers from the pain that come from sinful choices. As we have seen, it not only brings pain and suffering in this life, it also brings the second death – eternity in hell.

Something that is often overlooked in a discussion of sin is who is most offended by our sins? Sin, all sin not just some sin, all sin is an affront to God. Every sin is pure rebellion against our Creator, and all rebellion against God will bring certain destruction for the rebel.

In his mercy, God has redeemed us from the destruction we deserve as sinful beings. God knows us. He knows us as the rebellious children that we truly are. God knows we were born sinful and he knows we not capable of helping ourselves. We are slaves to sin and that sin condemns us.

It has been said: Satan knows your name but calls you by your sin – God knows your sin but calls you by your name. When we were on the slavery auction block because of our sin, Jesus died to purchase us. With his innocent blood, Jesus bought us out of the clutches of Satan and away the condemnation we deserve.

Saint Peter writes: *You know that in the past you were living in a worthless way, a way passed down from the people who lived before you. But you were saved from that useless life. You were bought, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ, who was like a pure and perfect lamb (1 Pe 1:18-19 NCV)*. Another thing to be thankful for is the blessing of God's redemption.

Another blessing from verse four is: *Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.*

The first two reasons for giving thanks, forgiveness and redemption, show us God's reaction because of our negative actions. Now let's look at God's positive actions toward us.

God is so wonderful to us that one word just doesn't work. God is loving toward us. God is kind to us. Scripture often uses the compound word – lovingkindness. This one word is a complete description of God's attitude toward us. You might say we have God's favor. God is also tender toward us. The two words commonly used are grace and mercy.

Grace is getting what we don't deserve. As sinners, who by our very nature are in rebellion against God, we don't deserve forgiveness or redemption. We have earned every bit of the destruction our rebellion requires.

But God is full of grace. Because of Jesus, God extends his grace to us. Even though we deserve the total condemnation of the second death, because of our faith in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we are spared. We are pardoned.

That's grace. Paul writes: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God* (Eph 2:8 NKJV). The best of us have never earned or deserved anything good from God; but, by his grace, his unearned, his never-ending favor, we are saved.

While grace is a matter of getting what we don't deserve, mercy is not getting what we do deserve. How dare we rebel against our Creator? How dare we shake an angry fist in the face of the only true and living God? We deserve everything bad those actions merit.

This is where mercy steps in. Paul tells us: *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in [sins], made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)* (Eph 2:4-5 NKJV). In other words, God has had mercy on us and saved us through Jesus Christ. Our reasons for thankfulness just keep piling up. This time we are thankful for God's grace and mercy – his lovingkindness.

Verse five gives us our final blessing: *Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

As Christians, we have been, and are being, renewed. In 2 Corinthians we read: *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day* (2 Co 4:16 NIV).

Our bodies are slowly deteriorating. None of us are as youthful as we used to be. But while that goes on physically, God is, day by day, renewing us spiritually. God is at work bringing us closer and closer to him every day of our lives. God is building an ever-deepening relationship with all those who have faith in him and in his son.

One day this outward shell will pass away; but the new person, the reborn person, will live forever with God. That makes five very good reasons to turn to God with a heart full of thanksgiving.