

Count Your Blessings.

Text: Psa 103:1-5

1) Why bless the Lord?

Suggested Hymns:

2) How should we bless the Lord

563, 567, 452, 566, 437

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 103:1-5, *Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!* ² *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:* ³ *Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases,* ⁴ *Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,* ⁵ *Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There is an old story which points out and emphasises the importance of observing an annual Harvest Thanksgiving Festival.

The story goes somewhat like this. God sent out two of His holy angels, each equipped with a large sack. The one was to gather into his sack the prayers of people by means of which they bring their petitions for help to the throne of the Almighty God.

The second was to gather all those prayers of the people on this earth by which they send words of praise and thanksgiving to God from whom all blessings flow.

The first of these two angels soon had his sack filled to the very top, and he quickly returned to the Lord. The second angel, however, found that his task progressed much more slowly and required much more time than the first angel had needed. It was only after a very long time that his sack was sufficiently filled to justify his returning to God.

The point is very clear, people in need readily remember that God has granted them the privilege of prayer. However, people helped out of their need by a merciful God are also inclined to forget the God who has helped them.

Mindful of the lesson of this story, let us on this Harvest Thanksgiving Day devoutly meditate on the words of our text, Bless the Lord, O My Soul! May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Why Bless The Lord?

The first five verses of Psalm 103 give us abundant reasons for blessing, or praising, the Lord, and therefore for observing, in a truly grateful manner, a Day of Harvest Thanksgiving and also thanksgiving in general.

After exhorting us in a general way to *forget not all His benefits* this Psalm becomes specific and lists a number of the benefits, or blessings, which we either constantly or at least frequently receive from God's gracious hand.

The first blessing listed is *the LORD forgives all your iniquities*. Someone might think that the mention of forgiveness does not properly fit into a Harvest Thanksgiving sermon, since on this day it is not the spiritual blessings from God which are to be given consideration, but rather His temporal blessings to us.

There is an element of truth in such a thought, but still the mention of the forgiveness of sins is very much in order here. Aside from the view of many that no Christian sermon ought to be silent altogether on God's forgiveness for man, there is also this important consideration.

Although I receive from God many benefits of a material or physical nature, and these in bountiful measure, I could not be truly happy, my life could not be really rich, and I could not actually be a blessed person, if I did not possess that other blessing, the forgiveness of sins.

This is a great truth: The certainty of God's forgiveness toward us does two things for us. Firstly, it makes our burdens bearable, and secondly, it makes our blessings enjoyable.

God's forgiveness removes from us the curse of an evil conscience and gives us the joy of "a good conscience towards God." And thus on Harvest Thanksgiving day it seems good to hear, not merely that God forgives, but that *"He forgives all your iniquities."*

Let us add the statement of verse 12 in this Psalm, *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us*. The atonement for our sins which Jesus Christ as our Saviour and our Substitute made for us by His

substitutionary suffering and death on the cross is so full and so complete that for His sake God grants us the full forgiveness for all of our sins, so that *“not a spot remains.”*

Let us think of this fundamental blessing on this Harvest Thanksgiving day. It will help us readily to do the bidding of our text, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul!”*

The second blessing listed is *the LORD heals all your diseases*. The twelve-month period since our last Harvest Thanksgiving has been a normal time as far as sickness and health are concerned. There have been irritating colds, annoying headaches, short periods of time of feeling indisposed.

For many there have been illnesses of a longer duration, rendering them painfully idle for weeks; they experienced the heat of fever, the discomfort of being plagued by a serious ailment, and the uncertainty as to the outcome of their sickness.

Hospitals have been filled with patients, at times to the point that some people could not be admitted straight-away. Surgical operations had to be performed in large numbers. All this has been the general experience of the people in our community; and the people of our own congregation have not been an exception to the general rule.

Many of us in the course of this last year have passed through the trial of illness. Yet you are here today, not ill, but well, enjoying regained health. The Lord has done this!

Of course, we recognise the skill of the surgeons, the knowledge of the doctors, the professional care of the nurses, the help of friends and members of the family but let us keep in mind that all the efforts of people will always be in vain if they lack the Lord's blessing.

Only when the Almighty God lays His blessing upon the labours of people will they be truly blest and effective. Psalm 127:1 tells us, *Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain*. Can we not add, Except the Lord heal the patient, he will remain unhealed?

It is God indeed who has healed all your diseases, *So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's*. How mightily that exhorts us, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul!”*

On the other hand, if you have been so fortunate as to be able to say, I never was sick at any time this last year, never even had a cold, did not have to miss as much as one day or even a single hour from work, then, forget not the LORD'S even greater benefits toward you, and respond all the more promptly to the call of our Harvest Thanksgiving theme, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul!”*

The third blessing listed is *the LORD redeems your life from destruction*. This is a timely reminder! We are living in a time of progress, and we enjoy and rejoice over the fruits of such progress laid into our laps, for example, our modern means of rapid transportation.

However, we also realise that many new dangers are connected with it. We like the aeroplane, but we deplore the numerous deaths caused by plane crashes. We proudly speak of our luxurious trains, but we are shocked by derailments and collisions, sometimes killing many people in an instant. We are happy that trucks can move heavy loads so rapidly and that our cars will take us so quickly from one place to another; yet with horror we read again and again that annually 1,500 people lose their lives in car accidents in Australia.

Our present-day world is full of dangers, and our country especially is a country full of dangers. Perils to life lurk everywhere; death seems to be everywhere, seemingly waiting for us at every corner. That is the kind of country in which you and I are living. But the remarkable thing is that you and I are continuing to live.

Although thousands have fallen, and although perils have without doubt at times come very near to us, yet you and I have been able to come to our house of God on this Harvest Thanksgiving day, because our lives have been preserved from destruction. Better still, it is God who has preserved our lives from destruction. Into the many perilous and dangerous situations of which we were part, God has sent His holy angel to have charge over us, to bear us up in his hands, lest a car, a truck, a train, or a plane dash us to destruction.

Think of the many fatal accidents of which you have read this year and of the many people who in them have lost their lives, and then gratefully list this as one

of the Lord's benefits [**He**] *redeems your life from destruction*. Include this in the reasons for which your soul should bless the Lord.

The fourth blessing listed is *the LORD crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies*. Surely we should not overlook this sentence of our text! If each one of us will review his own affairs and his own experiences during the past year, he will without doubt find much in which the Lord has been good, so very good to him.

In your family circle think of the numerous little joys, little, seemingly unimportant, yet so valuable in making life richer. If you are in business there probably was some success, maybe a good turnover of your stock, or a satisfying profit. If you have a wage earner you may have had a promotion to a higher position, or an increase in salary.

Perhaps there was in a general way the realisation of some ambition long strived for, the fulfilment of some fondly cherished dream, a hope come true, an achievement in some special venture, a substantial accomplishment in an important undertaking.

If you still school-age, you enjoyed an increase in valuable knowledge, possibly received pretty good marks, permitting you to pass into the next grade. You may have even reached the level of a diploma or an academic degree, and the like.

If you are in retirement the Lord has also been good to you. There are many benefits that you have received also.

Count your blessings one by one, and you will find that, all counted and added together, they go into the hundreds, and thus amount to this, that "*He crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.*" For this "*Bless the Lord, O my soul!*"

The fifth blessing listed is, *the LORD satisfies your mouth with good things*. This sentence applies especially forcefully to us Australians, both individually and nationally. By the goodness and the grace of God we are living in "*a land flowing with milk and honey.*"

God has given us such a large and fruitful country, having much fertile ground, plus a great variety of climates, so that year after year we can bring in an

astoundingly large harvest and that we can enjoy a vast variety of tasty and nourishing foods.

Our nation has never had one year when our crops were not adequate to feed and to fill the mouths of the millions of Australian citizens. We have always had *“bread enough and to spare,”* so that we could not only feed ourselves, but likewise many people in less fortunate countries, and that we could help fellow human beings in distant disaster areas of the world.

Our difficulty has not been a lack of God’s goodness, or too small a measure of such goodness resulting in small and insufficient harvests.

Our difficulties rather have come from our own folly, selfishness, and greed. If all this has resulted in an unstable economy, let us not blame God, but rather ourselves, our greed, our selfishness, our lack of wisdom. As far as God is concerned, He has been very good to us.

Annually in our country *the LORD makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*¹ The words of the text are so true for us, *the LORD satisfies your mouth with good things.* For this, *“bless the Lord, O my soul!”*

2. How Should We Bless The Lord?

The answer to this question should vividly be with us, not only on this Harvest Thanksgiving day, but on every day of the year. This Psalm tells us, *All that is within me, bless His holy name!* In one of our hymns of praise we say, *“Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices.”*²

Therefore, firstly, let us thank *the LORD* our God with our hearts. Our heart must make the beginning in that it *“forgets not all His benefits.”* True thanking is always based on true thinking.

Let us never say, as it is written in Deuteronomy 8:17, *‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’* We should remain keenly aware of the truth that *“all that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee”* as the hymnist declares.³

At every meal we should say to God, and that from the heart, *You give them their food in due season.*¹⁶ *You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.*⁴

As we daily receive what the Australian likes to call our “three square meals,” we should say within ourselves, *How good is God to us!* We must vividly realise that like Simon Peter we can toil all the night (or all the day) and yet take nothing — namely, without God’s blessing.

Not only of spiritual gifts but also of temporal blessings it is true that *“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.”*⁵ Let us never regard ourselves as “self-made men” nor attribute the wealth that we enjoy in this good country to our wisdom or our diligence or our merit or our worthiness.

We must always thankfully acknowledge that *“by the grace of God I am what I am,”*⁶ and to that declaration we should add another, *By the grace of God I have what I have.* Let us remember that all that we receive to enjoy are *“His benefits,”* that is, blessings coming to us from the gracious hand of a loving heavenly Father.

Such an attitude of the heart is the beginning of all right thanking. However without it there is not and cannot be any God-pleasing thanking on this day or on any other day.

Secondly, thank God with your voice. We are in God’s house today for the purpose of expressing to *the LORD* and before others our thanks by the use of our voice.

On this day especially it is for us to obey the injunction given in Psalm 100:4, *‘Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.* Occasionally there are people in a Church Service who are adults, hence able to read, but who remains silent while the congregation sings the hymns or chants the liturgy. This ought not to be!

If all that is within us is to bless His holy name, then, surely that voice given to us by God should be used to render praise to God. If that gratitude dwells within us, of which we spoke a few minutes ago, how can we remain silent when we are in the company of fellow Christians, of people like-minded with us, who are blessing **the LORD** with their voices by singing our inspiring hymns of praise and thanksgiving?

We read in Scripture that, *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*⁷ Therefore the heart will sing praise to God from whom all blessings flow. To sing thanks to the Lord should be one of the most enjoyable features of a Service of worship at any time, and particularly on this Harvest Thanksgiving Day.

The hymnist writes,⁸

*O bless the Lord, my soul:
Let all within me join,
And aid my tongue to bless His name
Whose favours are divine.*

We quite properly thank God here and now, but that thanking should be continued tomorrow and the day after, and day after day until the next Harvest Thanksgiving day, when we shall start all over again.

In this continuous blessing, praising, and thanking our heart should continue to play its part, likewise our voice, and these should be aided by our hands and feet, our body and our soul, the strength of our body, the faculties of our mind, our skills and abilities, our gifts and talents, our knowledge and wisdom, in fact, all that is within us.

We should bless the heavenly Giver by a life lived in true sanctification, not only negatively by avoiding that which is evil, but also positively by doing that which is good, by eagerly and diligently taking a big part in the work to be done so that the Lord's kingdom might be built even more.

This will really serve to bless our divine Giver, as we see from the command of our Saviour in Matthew 5:16, ¹⁶ *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! ² *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 5:45

² Hymn 437

³ Hymn 372

⁴ Psa 145:15-16

⁵ James 1:17

⁶ 1 Cor. 15:10

⁷ Matthew 12:34

⁸ Hymn 452