

- 1 *A Psalm of David. 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: (Psalm 103)*

This magnificent song begins with a soliloquy, an excellent meditation aid which prods us into facing facts by stating them out loud so that they may no longer be ignored due to opposing clamors in a mind and heart lazy to give spiritual realities a worthy hearing. Jeremiah tells us the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. If we passively follow the “feelings” and thoughts that tramp into our minds without challenging them with objective truth, we shall follow delusions, despise what we should love, and love what we should hate. Doubts, fears, discouragement, despair, and hopelessness will seize on our emotions when they have no factual reason to gain a foothold. John tells us to “assure our hearts” (I John 3:19). At times we must literally take ourselves by the ears and tell ourselves how to think, feel and act. We might be amazed at how responsive our drifting bark will be when the rudder is put under command of a firm hand on the mind.

The soul is commanded to “bless the Lord.” Blessing, as benefits, flow downward from God to us, but blessing, as praises and adorations, flow from creature upward to Creator. As surely as our Benefactor blesses, we beneficiaries should respond with grateful admiration, not just from the lips, but from our whole soul and innermost being. We are to see that it is *The Lord Himself* Whom we bless, not merely His gifts, the means and power by which He blesses. We are to not merely admire His word, His salvation, His church, His works, but Him. But we should take care in our blessing of Him that we do not overlook and forget any of all His many and marvelous benefits. To help facilitate our memory and underscore the great significance of these benefits, the psalmist reminds us of five of them which fall into logical order. So that the blessing may not cloud our vision of the Blessor, each one of these benefits is prefaced by “*Who*.”

“*Who forgives all your iniquities.*” They **are** iniquities. They are not merely weaknesses, character flaws, the cause of which we are personally innocent, being visited upon us because of genetic imperfections, “child abuse” suffered in a “dysfunctional family.” They are not merely the fruit of being deprived of our “fair share” of wealth and opportunity, of a bad environment that gave us distorted values and a destructive lifestyle. They are not merely unintended “mistakes” we made while honestly trying to do what we thought to be right. They are outright willful sins. They are deliberate acts of rebellion against lawful restraint upon our wicked natures. They are nothing less than high-handed treason against God and every agency He has set to teach, order and govern us. They are unspeakably horrendous in the sight of God, so much so that He spared not His Own beloved son in order to wash us clean of them and put them out of His sight. And they are **ours**. We may not play the ancient blame game taught us by our First Parents. Just as God gave the woman to the man and the beasts to their stewardship, so all creation and cause must come back to God. We may either blame ourselves or blame God. They are not God’s iniquities: they are ours. We are **guilty** of them, stained with a blight impossible to remove. God **forgives** them, abolishes them, puts them out of sight forever! Forgiveness is God’s alone. None may truly forgive except God, for all offence is primarily against Him. My act of theft or hate or murder is not against the victim of my crime, but against Him Who made the act a crime. It is God Who said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” If every person on earth forgives me except God, my conscience will still not be clear, for I cannot forgive myself until God forgives. He forgives! Forgives them all! Past, present and future! Can there be a greater blessing than a clear conscience? Can there be a blessing at all? Would-be blessings are naught but curses while we are yet under the condemnation of God and our own conscience. How can we forget it, and fail to bless our God for it?

“*Who heals all your diseases.*” How are we to receive this? There are diseases of the body. God sometimes heals these by His divine power, apart from any known medical therapy. Indeed, these are nearly always beyond any other remedy. But He does not always do so. There are physical healings that are accomplished by means of herbs, foods, medicine and skills of physicians. All these must be accounted to God also, because it is He Who created and gave us all these things. But that will not satisfy our text, which says He heals **all** our diseases. I dare say there is not a person alive who is in perfect health, and has no infirmity or bodily abnormality. This absolute healing, then, must have reference to diseases of the soul, rather than the body. Certainly that is what is in view in I Peter 2:24. Jesus was wounded for our *transgressions*. The healing merited in His sufferings, therefore, is the remedy for our sins and **sinfulness**. Those iniquities that He forgives flow out of the diseases of our soul. He does not merely forgive the sin and leave us to hopelessly flounder forever in sinfulness. He changes us. We all have our peculiar “psyche,” undesirable personality traits which destroy moral beauty and capacity, make us ugly, offensive, unsociable, shameful and mean. As surely as He forgives our iniquities, He goes about conforming us to His image. The medicine is sometimes bitter, the therapy painful, and the time may be long, but He will surely heal us of them *all!* And then He will give us a mortal body that is completely and permanently healed as well.

“*Who redeems your life from destruction.*” Some of us have experienced what we call “narrow escapes.” A tree almost fell upon us. We missed a plane that subsequently crashed, killing everyone. We awoke with the house afire, and barely got out. We almost stepped on a rattlesnake. But these are merely those few occasions of which we were **aware** of a danger that threatened only our mortal lives. The psalmist speaks of a more certain destruction, of not only the temporal body, but an eternal ruin of the soul. We came into this world bent on ruin. Our every desire, intention and way, had us locked solidly into a course of terrible calamity. Who can tell what we might have been, except for the grace of God? Have we ever really considered where we might now be, unless *God* had intervened, stopped our mad plunge into moral debauchery and hell, forgiving our sins and healing our soul sickness? We have not yet faced reality until we soberly considered what wretches we certainly would have become, but for the intervention of a gracious and sovereign God. Every time we remember that, we will bless God.

“*Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.*” Consider the richness of the grace of this God! It is not enough for Him to rescue us from a path of ruin, to deliver us from being the chief scumballs of the earth, a curse to the creation, and the most

miserable of sinners in hell. No, He has to make us, who are natural born beggars, to be princes and kings! He takes away the ashes and rags, clads us in royal robes and crowns our heads. But we are bound to be humble princes, for we well know that our station is unmerited, that we are heirs endowed only out of God's marvelous lovingkindness and tender mercies.

"Who satisfies your mouth with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." This passage poses something of a hermeneutical puzzle. If we take it on literal face value it makes no sense. When we eat our fill, we do not feel vigorous, young and full of life. On the contrary, we feel dull, lethargic and sleepy. The Hebrew *adi*, translated here "mouth," is properly translated "ornament" eleven other times in the AV. In only one other place (Psalm 32:9), is it translated "mouth," and that is improper, for the bridle holds not the mouth in check, but the **horse**, his **will**, his **desires**. It seems the idea of the world's usage in reference to ornaments is that those adornments are essentially **desirables**. This idea makes the word sensible in our text. God satisfies our **desires**. When He intervened in our lives and stopped our headlong rush to destruction, all our desires were frustrated. Everything we lived for was lost. Our right arm was cut off and our right eye plucked out. Dear as they were, they were **evil** things to us. They would do us no good, and God was good enough to deprive us of them. But He did not leave us desolate and with no joy or fulfillment. No, not at all. That is what the foolish and ignorant world thinks. Having taken away from His little children all their destructive toys, He **immediately begins to satisfy those hungerings and thirstings with good things**. It is a proverb of the world that "everything I like is either immoral, illegal or fattening." But for the Christian, everything he likes is holy, right and wholesome! The more we feast upon them, the younger and more vigorous we feel. Christians never grow old in their inner lives. The body wastes away, but the Springs of eternal life in them are forever renewed, perpetually fresh with the vigour of youth. Shall we not bless such a God Who continually loads us with such benefits? *Bless the Lord, O my soul!*

-C.M.