

## **Psalm 103:1-2**

### **Thanksgiving**

I thought it would never happen to me. My mother often would call me Bert, Bruce and finally get to my real name, Mark. Now when some of you come to church I'll say, "Hi Sandy," oh, sorry its Jane. Or some of our Associate members will reappear. And I will say, quickly as they enter, "The Hansens are back." But for the moment I don't remember that it is Dave and Maureen Hansen. It comes to me sometime later. You know what I am talking about. Forgetfulness. It happens with trying to remember the names of people. It happens with things we misplace. A purse, wallet, glasses, cellphone or car keys. How many times has it happened to you that these precious possessions sometimes turn up missing? And then what happens. You go on an emotional tirade trying to locate them. You get all upset that you don't know where they are, and your blood pressure goes up as you try to locate them. Or how about the parking lot at Walmart? You walk out of the store and you just can't remember where you parked that car of yours. I don't know what's wrong with me. I just can't remember things the way I used to. Forgetfulness is a curse that seems to grow worse each year that a person ages.

Our Thanksgiving text today encourages us in every situation to praise the Lord. But it also offers us the timely reminder that we forget not all his benefits. Let's take a little time today to reflect on that tendency all of us have to forget and how we can all learn to be more thankful. Consider today: "Forget Not All His Benefits!"

"What tie should I wear today?" In a panic I look through the 30+ different ties trying to find one to wear. Fortunately, my wife comes to the rescue and locates one for me. Now it is true that I am not good at picking out proper matching outfits, but still when it gets down to it, I really don't appreciate those ties. They are just an object that I hurriedly put on in the morning. Sometimes I wish there was just one choice. This is what you wear Mark. How easy and simple that would be. But you know, I wonder if there isn't a principle at work here.

The more we have, the easier it is to forget our blessings. The more we have the easier it is to forget to thank God.

Think back to the first Thanksgiving, the Plymouth Colony Thanksgiving. How different from the circumstances today. The Pilgrims had barely survived a dangerous ocean crossing. They had erected basic huts to live in. They had planted their own crops, cultivated them and harvested them. They couldn't have imagined that someday people wouldn't even have to prepare their own Thanksgiving meals; they could eat at a restaurant or get the whole meal (turkey with all the trimmings) from Fresh Market or Publix. But those Pilgrims were so thankful for the food and shelter they did have. Who was more mindful of their blessings and more ready to thank God? Them or us? Yes, the more we have, the easier it is to take it all for granted. To forget God. There is a tendency too, when we are worldly successful, to think that we made ourselves into who we are today. In Deuteronomy 8:17-18 it reminds us how we may act. We may say, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth."

Then there is the other side of the picture too. We have hardly anything. The basics of life. A roof over our heads, food to eat, and a couple of outfits to wear. But instead of realizing what we have, we forget even that. We look over the fence at the Jones. They have a shiny new car, outfits from Marshall Fields, and a yearly paycheck, that will take us a couple of years to match.

And so instead of remembering what we do have, we forget it, and focus in on what we do not have.

Things haven't changed much over the years have they. The children of Israel had the same problems.

When they were wandering in the wilderness from Egypt to Palestine, they didn't have much, but they forgot what they did have. Eating manna and quail everyday at mealtime, having just one outfit and a pair of shoes that didn't wear out. That didn't cut it. Back in Egypt, they had a variety of meals prepared, and plenty of different beverages to drink. The focus was on what they did not have. The Egyptian Jones had it better than they did. Thus, they forgot all God's benefits. In addition, when they finally got into the land of milk and honey, had everything they needed, they took the blessings of God for granted. God had to remind them: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you".

Maybe, what we are really forgetting today, is that God doesn't owe us a thing. Shoes, clothing, shelter, nothing. God put us here on this earth in the first place, totally out of his undeserved love and mercy. He didn't need us. And yet, he gave our first parents everything they needed. Plenty to eat. Wholesome work to do. Yes, everything they could possibly want. But they messed things up. They sinned. And they passed that disposition down to us. Now, we continue to do things that hurt our God. With Jacob, we have to say, "I am not worthy of least of all your mercies."

But God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. God gave Jesus the treatment our sins deserve and took payment for our iniquities out on him. Now the Bible tells us, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from his sight." God has sent our sins packing so far away from us that they cannot possibly come back to haunt us or condemn us. With the Psalmist David, we praise the Lord, who forgives all our sins, and heals all our diseases, who redeems our life from the pit and crowns us with love and compassion." Where are my sins? They are gone. God forgives them. Jesus died for all my sins on the cross. My friends, let us not forget His benefits, the benefits of forgiveness.

Consider too, the physical benefits God provides us in our daily lives that we often take for granted. Even though I groan when the alarm rings each morning, thank you Lord that I can hear. There are many who are deaf. Even though I keep my eyes closed tightly against the morning light as long as possible, thank you Lord that I can see. There are many who are blind. Even though I sometimes maintain a martyred silence when I should speak, and I spout forth when I should remain silent, thank you Lord for the gift of speech. There are many who are dumb. Even though our breakfast table never looks like pictures in the ladies magazines and the menu is at times unbalanced, thank you Lord for the gift of food. I think of those people in Russia who stand hours in line for a simple loaf of bread. Even though it seems a doctor's office is on my monthly agenda, thank you God for doctors and medicine, without them, I could be a lot sicker and even more miserable with health problems. Even though my spouse complains that I do not listen to his words and he pays less attention to my ideas and my wise instructions, thank you Lord that we have each other. There are many who have no one. Even though I do not always approve the way our country is run, thank you Lord that I live in the greatest nation on earth. Even though I grumble and gripe and bemoan my fate from day to day and wish my modest circumstances were not so modest, thank you Lord for the gift of life.

In the moments that remain, I want to give you five ways to display thankfulness in your daily lives.

The first way is to give thanks for imperfect gifts. Have you ever received an imperfect gift? In this world, that is the only kind you will ever get. If you are married and here with spouse this morning, you are sitting next to an imperfect gift. You can take a look at that gift right now if you want to. You are sitting next to an imperfect gift, but so is that person sitting next to you. Don't get cocky about it. This world has been flawed by sin. If I wait to praise my kids until they clean their room perfectly, I never will praise them at all. If I wait for perfect gifts, I will never be grateful at all. I must learn to be grateful for imperfect gifts, because those are the only ones that I am going to get in this world.

The second way to display gratitude is to look at someone who is in a wheelchair 24-7, is on kidney dialysis, or has ALS or some other severe illness, and then to look at yourself, and say, "Thank you God for the body I do have. I am able to walk, and do things, and I am not in such difficult straits as that person. Helen Keller, the deaf and blind author who lived a hundred years ago once said, "I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his early adult life. It would make him more appreciative of sight and the joys of sound." Appreciate and thank God for the body you do have.

The third way to display gratitude is just to start expressing it. Sincere words of gratitude have enormous power. I have about 10 cards in my file cabinet, of cards some of you have sent me over the past 5 years. When I am particularly having a rough time, I read some of them again. Do you know how powerful your words of thank you are to the people of your world? Maybe you need to speak those words to somebody in your life, and maybe it's to a friend.. I open myself to gratitude when I express it openly and often even if I don't feel it yet.

The fourth way to express thankfulness is to devote yourself to worshipping God. The Psalmist says, Let us enter into his gate, into the presence of God with thanksgiving in our hearts. Our God has done so much for us. When we messed up, and turned our backs on Him, he sent his son to make things right. To pay the penalty for the leprosy of our sins, to give us the purity we need to stand before God. He now tells us that He is with us every step of the way, and one day will take us to heaven. Worship provides us the opportunity to show God's worth in our lives. We are reminded in worship of how we have so much to be thankful for.

The fifth way to display thankfulness is simply called the discipline of noticing. So many things are gifts that we often don't see, because ingratitude is a moral blindness. This is a blindness to the goodness of being alive, the beauty of creation, the love of friends and the joy of work. Lord, open my eyes.

Forget not all his benefits. All the material benefits. All the spiritual benefits. Don't forget them. That's the purpose of Thanksgiving Day---not the big meal, not the football game, not the family gathering---it's a day to help with our forgetfulness problem. It's a day to remember the Lord For the Good We have!

Praise the Lord, Oh, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Amen.....