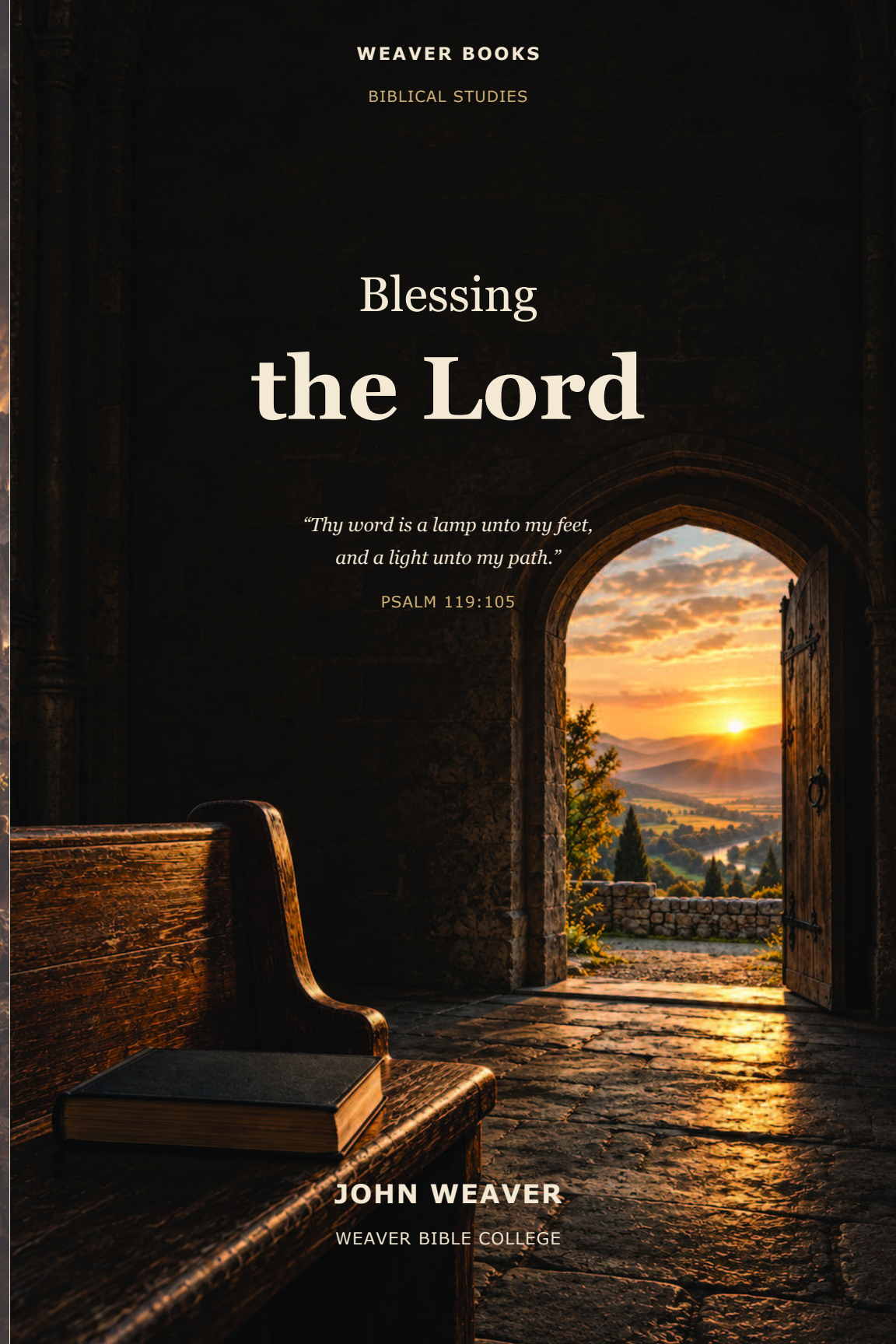
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Blessing the Lord

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

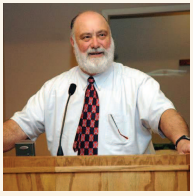
Bless the LORD, O my soul.

PSALM 103:1, EXCERPT

Praise calls upon the whole person to remember the goodness of God. John Weaver considers forgiveness, deliverance, lovingkindness, and the duty of continual thanksgiving. These messages draw the reader from a passing expression of gratitude toward a life of remembrance and dependence upon the Redeemer who preserves and restores His people.

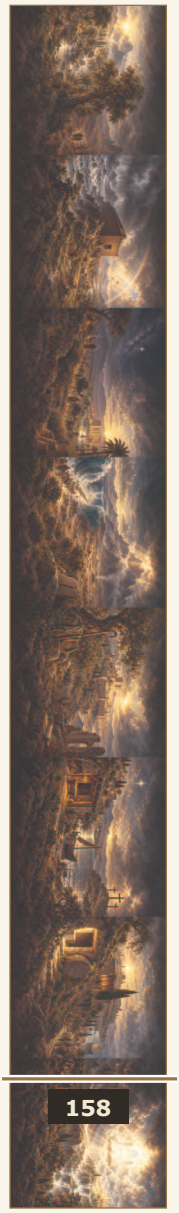
"God not only owns us by virtue of creation, but also by virtue of redemption."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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CHAPTER 1

Blessing the Lord

Part One of Four

Introduction: The Question of Blessing the Lord

Psalm 103, beginning with verse one: “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 forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles.”

Let me call your attention to verses one and two: “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.”

A few months ago, a Christian brother asked me a question: “How do I bless the Lord?” When you stop and think about that question, it should be a very important one. We know that the Lord blesses us, but how do we bless Him?

I gave a very quick answer to his question, and my answer, of course, was correct. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized I could have answered in depth, to a greater degree. Even if you answered the question the way it should be answered, you would basically have to go through the entirety of the Bible. I would imagine that "How do we bless the Lord?" is a question most of us probably never get around to asking.

Probably because we are too busy and too interested in seeking His blessing upon us, our family, and our friends. I suspect that attitude—being more interested in His blessing us than in our blessing Him—would have shades of idolatry in it. When we are more interested in ourselves, we are putting ourselves first, ahead of and before God, which is indeed a violation of the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Theological Foundation: God's Essential vs. External Glory

Our Lord taught His disciples to pray: "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'" After we praise and bless Him, we begin to ask petitions for ourselves.

Before answering the question, "How do we bless God?" we need to consider a theological precept: the difference between God's essential glory and His external glory. God's essential glory is sometimes called His inherent glory; His external glory is called His manifested glory.

Since we are in the book of Psalms, hold Psalm 103, but look back quickly into Psalm 16. There David says in verse 2—which, of course, David was a type of Christ, and this verse is representative of Christ—"O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, 'My Lord,'" and then he says, "'my goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.'"

In other words, the perfection of Jesus Christ added nothing to the person or glory of God. The work Jesus Christ did did not extend to God the Father in that sense, but, as Scripture says, His work extended to the saints who were in the earth. Thankfully, although it

did not add anything to God's honor and glory, it did something for us.

The Bible says in Psalm 108:5, "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth." Why could neither you nor I, nor even Jesus Christ, add anything to God the Father? Because God is perfectly blessed and perfectly sufficient in Himself. His will is most holy, His glory is most perfect; nothing can be added to God, and nothing can be taken away from God.

God is perfect in honor, in glory, and in praise. So when you are talking about God's inherent glory, God's intrinsic glory, and God's internal glory, you have to understand that nothing can be added to or taken from it.

What about God's external glory? The truth is that God's external glory can either be praised or blasphemed by our words, our attitudes, and our conduct. That leads us to another question: How do we distinguish between God's inherent glory and God's external glory? Essential, inherent glory is that which God is in and of Himself. God's external glory is the emanation or manifestation of His inherent or essential glory. His external glory is simply the outward manifestation of His internal glory.

Let me state it again: God's inherent glory, God's essential glory, is that which He is in and of Himself. His external glory is the manifestation outwardly of His internal glory. If I were to ask you this simple question, "How did God manifest His glory?" you can answer in three simple ways: God manifested His glory in creation, in redemption, and in providence.

God's External Glory Manifested in Creation, Redemption, and Providence

Very quickly, look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 1 and verse 20. God does have an external glory, and that external glory is indeed manifested in creation. Romans 1:20 says, "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." God does have an external glory that He has manifested in the world.

What does Psalm 19 say? "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." The very heavens declare the glory of God. God's inherent, essential glory has been manifested in some degree—not perfectly, but it has been manifested—in creation. Therefore, when you and I, listen carefully, enjoy and use, but do not abuse, God's creation, we are extolling and praising Him for His creation.

Some of you have been to Yosemite. Thankfully, the Lord has let us go a number of times. There is no way in the world that any picture or video camera can capture the beauty and magnitude of Yosemite Valley. You have to see it. When you see it, you cannot believe it; you cannot get enough of it. Why? Certainly not because of evolution, but because you understand that God created this world and everything in it.

The same is true when you view the ocean, the mountains, or the desert. Whenever you enjoy and use God's creation, you have to understand that creation is an external manifestation of God's glory. When we use it the way God commands us to, we are indeed praising and blessing Him for it.

The same truth applies to redemption. God has not only revealed Himself in creation; He has revealed Himself in redemption, in Jesus Christ. Everyone in this room can quote, or at least should be able to quote, John 14:6, where Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

Do you remember the passage in verse 14? "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Therefore, when we trust in Jesus Christ, study His Word, obey Him, and bring our lives into conformity to Jesus Christ, we are, in one sense of the word, blessing and praising God because God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

That is why the Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:16, "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." When you and I trust in Christ and live for Him, we are

indeed, in one sense of the word, blessing God and His glory. If we are concerned, as we should be, with praising God in His external glory, we have to realize that external glory is simply a manifestation of His inherent, or internal, glory.

Psalm 113 says, “Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord’s name is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?”

“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people.” So God has manifested Himself not just in creation and in redemption, but in providence as well.

The Bible says the name of the Lord is to be praised from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun. There are a multitude of Scriptures that command us to praise God and the name of the Lord. Psalm 100:4 says, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful unto Him and bless His name.” Bless His name.

Revelation 4:11 says, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.” In one sense of the word, since we are in Psalm 100, understand that we are obligated to bless God and to praise Him, for we are His creatures and the sheep of His pasture. Psalm 100:3 says, “Know ye that the Lord, He is God. It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.”

In other words, God not only owns us by virtue of creation, but also by virtue of redemption. Therefore, we should be desirous to bless and to praise His name. We are talking about God’s providence. Acts 17:28 says, “For in Him we live and move and have our being.” Very simply stated, without Him we would not exist. In Him we live and move and have our being.

God has revealed Himself in creation, in redemption, and in providence. How then do we bless Him? This is a question we will

consider, I hope, for the next three weeks. Look at Psalm 50:23. This is going to be a key verse. I love this passage. God says, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.” “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.” We bless Him. We praise Him. We honor Him by offering Him and giving Him praise.

First, we bless Him for who He is, and secondly, for everything He has done. You had better praise God and bless God that God is God. You have heard me say this before. I can assure you that if I were God, I would have killed me and a whole lot of you a lot earlier. God has far more patience than I do, I can assure you. We need to learn to bless Him simply because He is God, and then for all that He does.

Look at Psalm 103:1. David begins in verse 1, and this is our introductory verse: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name.”

The Command to Bless the Lord with the Whole Soul

John Stevenson, writing in 1856, made this observation about Psalm 103: “It is observable that no petition occurs throughout the entire compass of the 22 verses. Not a single word of supplication is in the whole Psalm addressed to the Most High. Prayer, fervent, heartfelt prayer had doubtless been previously offered on the part of the psalmist and answered by his God. Innumerable blessings had been showered down from above in acknowledgement of David's supplications, and therefore an overflowing gratitude now burst forth from their joyful recipient. He touches every cord of his harp and of his heart together and pours forth a spontaneous melody of the sweetest sound and purest praise.”

In Psalm 103, David is not asking any petitions or begging for any supplications. David is not asking for anything in Psalm 103. All David is doing is simply blessing and praising the Lord: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name.” Now, interestingly enough, when David says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” it is an imperative in Hebrew, which means it is a command. David is, in essence, commanding his soul to bless the Lord.

The word “bless,” when it applies to God, means to praise, implying a strong affection for Him as well as a sense of gratitude. When we bless God, we praise Him with strong gratitude and affection. So David says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” He commands himself to bless the Lord to the fullest capacity of his being. Every faculty, every desire, every ounce of his being is given to praising and blessing God: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me.”

John Stevenson, the pastor quoted earlier, continues on verse 1: “Let your conscience bless the Lord by unvarying fidelity. Let your judgment bless Him by decisions in accordance with His Holy Word. Let your imagination bless Him by pure and holy musings. Let your affections bless Him by loving whatever He loves. Let your desires bless Him by seeking only His glory. Let your thoughts bless Him by meditating on His excellencies. Let your memory bless Him by not forgetting any of His benefits. Let your hope praise Him by longing and looking for the glory that is to be revealed. Let your every sense bless Him by its fealty, your every word by its truth, and your every act by its integrity.” Well said, John Stevenson: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me.”

No one actually knows the occasion for David’s writing Psalm 103, but evidently it was composed after some signal manifestation of God’s mercy toward him. It could have been God’s judgment upon him for his sin, His chastisement, or His teaching him things. Whatever the occasion, that divine displeasure had been lifted. God had interposed and mercifully and graciously delivered David, and now David was doing nothing but blessing the Lord.

In verse 1 he says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me,” and verse 2 as well. In verse 20 he says, “Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word.” Verse 21 says, “Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts, ye ministers of His that do His pleasure.” Then verse 22 says, “Bless the Lord, all His works in all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.” David begins with his own soul and extends the blessing to the angels, His ministers, everyone, and all creation.

David says, “You join in with me by blessing the Lord.” Now, if you go back to verse 1, he says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all

that is within me. Bless His holy name." What does David mean when he says, "Bless His holy name"? You have to understand that the name is a revelation of the character of the person. God's name is a revelation of Himself. Every truth of God, every attribute of God is to be praised and blessed under God's name. Thus we read in Proverbs 18 and verse 10, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." What do you mean by that? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is safe."

If someone's persecuting you, don't you pray that God would intervene and stop the persecutor? If you're in need, don't you pray that God would supply your needs? If you're sick, don't you pray that God would heal you in touch? You're running to the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is safe.

David has commanded his soul to bless the Lord. So let's ask this question: If you and I are to bless the Lord, where do we begin? How do we start? David gives us a point of beginning in verse 2. He says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

The Danger of Forgetting God and His Benefits

Our biggest sin is that we forget God. And we do forget His benefits as well. The word "benefits" is the Hebrew word "gemul," which is usually translated as "rewards," or "recompenses," or "benefits." Over and over in the Scripture, we are instructed not to forget God, nor His benefits. Do you realize that Israel's greatest sin in the Old Testament was they forgot God? In Judges 8 and verse 34 we read, "And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side." And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God.

You remember what he said in Deuteronomy 8? He said, "Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God." He warned us, as he warned Israel, not to forget God. Look in your Bibles, if you would, to Psalm 106. Psalm 106. And notice, if you would please, verse 7. Notice again what Scripture says. Psalm 106, verse 7. "Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt. They remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies, but provoked Him at the sea, even at the

Red Sea." Now, look. "Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt." In other words, they didn't remember God. They didn't even remember what He did. They didn't understand what He did. They remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies. What was the result? They provoked God. They forgot God. They forgot His benefits and they ended up sinning against God. Skip down to verse 21, Psalm 106 verse 21. "They forgot God their Savior who had done great things in Egypt." Israel had been warned over and over and over not to forget God. In fact, Deuteronomy 6 and verse 12 says this.

"Then beware lest thou forget the Lord who brought thee out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage." I want you to understand something. And I think I want to take the time right here to make this point. And to make this application lest we fall into the sin that Israel fell into in the Old Testament. Here it is. Listen carefully. I'm going to show it to you from the Bible.

A forgetful people cannot be a thankful or a grateful people. That's one thing. Listen carefully. A forgetful people cannot be a thankful people or a grateful people, and a forgetful people will always fall into idolatry. Look in your Bibles to the book of Romans chapter 1. Everyone in this room is familiar with the wickedness, the corruption, the filth, the abominations that these people fell into in Romans chapter 1. But have you ever asked, how in the world did they fall into such wickedness and such corruption?

Let me show you how it began. Notice Romans 1 and verse 21. Here's how it all began. "Because that when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Because when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, that is, they forgot Him, and their forgetfulness led them to their unthankfulness, and their unthankfulness led them to their corruption and their idolatry. So a forgetful people cannot be a thankful people. And a forgetful people will always fall into idolatry.

That's what happened to Israel. Every time they forgot God, they ended up in idolatry.

The First Benefit: Forgiveness of All Iniquities

Psalm 103, verse 2, says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” Here is His spiritual provision: “Forget not all His benefits,” particularly this one point—His spiritual provision, “who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” I want you to stop and ponder that thought: “who forgiveth all thine iniquities.”

Albert Barnes, commenting on verse 3, says, “It is observable that this is the first thing in view of the psalmist, the first of the benefits which he had received from God, or the first thing in importance among His acts or His dealings which call for praise. Properly considered, this is the first thing which calls for praise, that God is a merciful God, that He has declared His willingness to pardon sin, that He has devised and revealed a way by which this can be done, and that He has actually done it in our case, is the most important matter for which we should praise Him.”

“When we understand all the things which most affect our welfare, and which enter most deeply into our happiness here and hereafter, we shall find that this is a blessing compared with which all other favors are comparative trifles.” In other words, it is most important that God has forgiven all our iniquities.

Psalm 86:5 says, “For Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee.” Think about that: God is good, ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Him. Psalm 57:10 says, “For Thy mercy is great unto the heavens and Thy truth unto the clouds.” Psalm 103:8 says, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.”

Now consider again: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” All thine iniquities—not some of them, not a few, not most, and not many, but all of them. Do you realize that forgiving a few of our iniquities, or most of our iniquities, or many of our iniquities, would never do?

If the smallest iniquity was left in us, we would still be left unforgiven, just as badly off, just as far from God, just as unfit for heaven, and just as directed to hell as if none of them had ever been

forgiven. Our text does not say, “who forgiveth thine iniquities previous to thy conversion.” It simply says, “who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” There is no notion in Scripture that God forgives us of our sins prior to conversion and, after conversion, leaves us responsible for our sins. It is true that we are responsible beings, but God forgives all our iniquities.

The source, the channel, the power, and the standard of forgiveness are all divine. God's forgiveness is full and free. When God cancels a man's sins, He cancels all of those sins. Just as Christ died for our sins, the forgiveness of God extends to the work of Jesus Christ. God's forgiveness stretches to the length of Christ's atonement, and Christ's atonement stretches to the length of every one of the believer's sins—past, present, and future.

Listen to 1 John 1:7: “The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. I have had innumerable believers ask me concerning our sins after we are saved. Everyone in this room who is saved has sinned. None of us is perfect. Sometimes we have committed sins of omission, sometimes sins of commission, and sometimes sins of ignorance, but all of us have sinned. And what does the Bible say? “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Now, to help you comprehend this simple fact—that Jesus Christ and God the Father, through the work of Christ, forgive our sins, past, present, and future—let me ask you a question. Maybe this will help you grasp the greatness and wonder of God's forgiveness. How many sins had you committed before Jesus Christ came, was crucified, and was raised from the dead? How many sins had you personally committed before Jesus Christ was crucified? What is the answer? None. You were not even born. What does that mean? It means Christ not only died for all past sins, but for all future sins as well. Now let me ask you another question. How many sins does a believer have to pay for on judgment day? The answer is zip, zero, nada, none.

He forgiveth all thine iniquities. Now it is true, and I will show you the Scripture. It is true that there is a judgment seat of Christ for believers. It is also true that we will answer for our obedience or a

lack thereof, and we will either be rewarded or not be rewarded. But this is not necessarily a judgment for our sins. If you and I were being judged for our sins, we would not even be near the judgment seat of Christ.

For instance, look in your Bibles at Romans 14 and verse 10. Notice what Paul asks: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Then look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 10. Notice again what the Apostle Paul says: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether"

There is a judgment seat, but that judgment seat has nothing to do with our sins. He forgiveth all thine iniquities, past, present, and future.

Since all of our sins are forgiven, does that mean we can run out in sin? What does the Apostle Paul say? "God forbid," perish the thought. Read Romans chapter 6: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid," he said. Don't even let that thought enter in your mind. The very fact that you've been saved and forgiven should drive you not to sin, not to do anything that would be wicked and wrong. Why? You're not your own. You're bought with a price. As the Scripture says, "Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are His."

Turn in your Bible to Romans chapter 4. I'm not going to read this Scripture right now, but I want you to be ready. This passage is quoted from Psalm 32. Before giving you the Scripture, I want to read a paragraph written by John Gill. He is commenting on Psalm 103, verses 2 and 3:

"The psalmist explains here what he means by benefits and gives a particular enumeration of them and begins with the blessing of pardon, which is a special and peculiar benefit. It is according to the riches of divine grace and the multitude of tender mercies, without which all outward blessings signify nothing. And without a sense of this, a man is not in a suitable and proper frame to bless the Lord."

If you really want to be in a proper and suitable frame to bless the Lord, you have to comprehend that God has forgiven you all your iniquities. “Without a sense of this, a man is not in a suitable frame to bless the Lord. And this being the first benefit, a soul sensible of sin, its guilt, and its concern for and seeks after, so enjoying it, is the first he is thankful for. This is rightly ascribed to God, for none can forgive sins but He. And what He forgives are not mere infirmities, peccadilloes, and the lesser sins of life, but iniquities and grosser sins, unrighteousness, impieties, and the most enormous crimes, sins of a crimson and scarlet dye, yea, all of them, though they are many, more than the hairs of a man’s head, He abundantly pardons, multiplies pardons, as sins are multiplied and leaves none unforgiven, original sin, actual sin, sins of the heart, lip and life, of omission and commission, all are forgiven for Christ’s sake.”

The special mercy is when a man applies this to himself and can say to his soul, as David did to his, “God has forgiven thine iniquities.” It may be observed with pleasure and encourage us to hope in the Lord, that He is a forgiving God and has forgiven others; yet what would this avail a man if his sins should not be forgiven? The sweetness of the blessing lies in its being brought home to a man’s own soul.

This is also a continued act. It is not said, “who has forgiven” and “will forgive,” though both are true, but “forgiveth”—continues to forgive. As there is continual virtue in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, and as His blood continues to cleanse from all sin, so there is a continual flow of pardoning grace in the heart of God. His Spirit afresh applies this grace to the consciousness of His people. This is a blessing to be thankful for. As there is constant and continual power in the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse sin, so there is constant and continual forgiveness flowing from God toward us because of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

David said, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.” Then he said, “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” All. If God forgives all of them, how many are left? None. Not one.

When we understand that all our sins are forgiven, and that none of them are imputed to us who believe on Jesus Christ, who have

turned from our sins and repented, it should lead us to say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all of His benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities.”

Look at Romans 4, beginning with verse 6, and verse 8. Paul is quoting David from Psalm 32:2: “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, ‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.’”

Do you know what the word “impute” means? It means to charge to one’s account. Do I sin? Yes. Unhappily, I am a sinner. Do you sin? Yes. Unhappily, you are a sinner. But when you sin, your sin is not charged to your account. Why? Because it is charged to the account of Jesus Christ. You remember the passage in Second Corinthians 5:21, where the Bible says, “For He, God the Father, hath made Him, that is God the Son, to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

God does not impute sin to His believers because our sin was imputed and charged to Jesus Christ. This shows you, if you are a believer, why you can bless the Lord. Psalm 103:11 says, “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.”

The Completeness of Divine Forgiveness

Verse 12 continues, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” As far as the east is from the west. Suppose I left today heading west. When I got to the west, what direction would I be going? I would still be going west. In fact, I really could not go east, because it does not matter where I am; I would still be heading west. If I am making a circle, I am always heading west. As far as the east is from the west, so hath He removed our transgressions from us.

Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 38:17. You probably need to underline some of these verses and make sure you memorize them. Isaiah writes, “Behold, for peace I had great bitterness, but Thou

hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption, for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." God has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west, and the Bible tells us that God has cast all of our sins behind His back.

You no doubt heard the story about the little boy and the atheist. The little boy was walking down the street singing a hymn, and the atheist stopped him and said, "Son, are you a Christian?" He said, "Yes, I am." The atheist asked, "Son, are you a sinner?" He answered, "Well, yes, I am." Then the atheist asked, "What are you going to do about your sins?" The boy said, "They've been taken care of. God has put them behind His back."

The atheist sneered and said, "But what if God turns around?" The little boy said, "Sir, it doesn't matter which way He turns, they're always behind His back. He'll never see them. He'll never remember them again." He has not only removed our sins as far as the east is from the west; He has placed them behind His back, never to remember them against us anymore.

Hebrews 8:12 says, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more." In Hebrews 10:17, God says it again: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." I could ask you this simple question: How many times does God have to say something to make it true?

The answer is only once. Yet God says it again. Alice can tell you that oftentimes we hear and see things, and I hear about what people have done or are doing. I could say, "I could never do that." Alice will respond, "Well, you used to." I say, "Well, I don't remember it." She says, "You used to." My response is always, "Well, if God has forgotten my sins, why should I not forget them?" He never remembers them against us anymore.

Application: Blessing God for Full Pardon

What an abounding grace has been displayed to a creature so completely vile, so destitute of all ground of hope in himself. What an amount of guilt God has pardoned! It is impossible to overstate this. Think of our original debasement, our wayward youth, our

rejection of His love, our rebellion against His authority, our forgetfulness of His goodness, our backslidings in the way, our inconsistent profession, our vain and sinful example, the wickedness of our unconverted state, and the errors and sins of our renewed state. Alas, every day and every act brought up against me as a separate testimony, He has completely, totally, and freely pardoned and forgiven.

He has blotted out the whole fearful record. So that when God sees me, He looks at me through Jesus Christ, and He sees perfection, holiness, and righteousness.

Now can you say with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities," every single one, gone through the blood of Jesus Christ?

Father, we bow to Thee this day, and we thank You, magnify You, and exalt You for Your divine forgiveness and Your tender mercies toward us. We acknowledge and confess, Lord, this is the first and greatest mercy: that You have had mercy upon us who are sinners. We confess our ungodliness, our waywardness, our wickedness, and our rebellion; yet, Lord, You have wiped it all clean, so that we are forgiven in Jesus Christ. We do bless Thee, O Lord, and may we constantly and continually bless Thee for that divine forgiveness. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Blessing the Lord

Part Two of Four

Introduction and Review

Let us open our Bibles to Psalm 103. Last week I began a brief series on this Psalm, especially the first five verses, dealing with blessing the Lord. Psalm 103, beginning with verse 1:

"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 forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles."

Last week, by way of introduction, I told you that a friend of mine had asked me several months ago, "How do we bless the Lord?" I gave him an answer, but afterward I began to mull over it and found there were many other things I could have said and probably should have said. So I began to deal with this passage, that we might understand how indeed we are to bless the Lord.

We must distinguish between God's inherent and essential glory and God's external glory. These are two separate things. In reality, there is absolutely no way that we can bless or praise God in His essential or inherent glory. In Psalm 16, Jesus Christ, the God-man, said to God the Father, "My goodness extendeth not unto thee, but to the saints and all the earth." Even the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ did not add one thing to God the Father; thankfully, it did indeed add something to us. Psalm 108:5 says, "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens, and thy glory above the earth."

When I speak of God's inherent and essential glory, I mean God's absolute perfection in and of Himself. He is the most blessed and most sufficient individual. His glory is most perfect, and He is most holy. Nothing can be added to Him, and nothing can be taken from Him.

God also has an external glory, and that glory is either praised or blasphemed by our words and actions. How, then, do we distinguish between God's essential, inherent glory and God's external glory?

God's external glory is simply manifestations of His internal glory. God has revealed Himself particularly in three ways: in creation, in redemption, and in providence. I went through the Bible and showed you how even creation is a manifestation of God's glory: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." Jesus Christ is indeed the glory of God, and in His providence God does indeed reveal Himself.

Last week I dealt primarily with the first phrase of verse 3: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." Every iniquity, every sin, everything that you and I have ever held or had held against us, has been forgiven in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been told that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sins. Thus we looked at His provision, the first part, His spiritual provision in verse 3: "who forgiveth all thine iniquities."

Now we are still on verse 3, but we are looking at the second phrase: "who healeth all thy diseases." I believe that not only do we have the spiritual provision in verse 3, but also the physical provision in verse 3.

Scholarly Interpretations of 'Who Healeth All Thy Diseases'

Let me tell you up front, and I am going to give you some illustrations, that most scholars are really divided as to the application of the latter part of verse 3. Look at verse 3 again: “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases.” Some scholars believe that the phrase “who healeth all thine diseases” is simply an extension and explanation of “who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” Others believe that the latter part of verse 3 can refer to physical healing as such. Then there are some other views, which I am going to show you, and none of these are contradictory to Scripture.

Let me give you a sampling. George Horne wrote concerning this phrase, “who healeth all thy diseases.” His position is that the second phrase is merely an extension and explanation of the first phrase, “who forgiveth all thine iniquities.”

He says, “The body experienceth the melancholic consequences of Adam's offense, and is subject to many infirmities. But the soul is subject to just as many. What is pride but lunacy? What is anger but a fever? What is avarice but a dropsy? What is lust but a leprosy? What is sloth but a dead palsy? Perhaps there are spiritual maladies similar to all corporeal ones.” This is primarily an extension dealing with spiritual maladies. Matthew Henry said, “The corruption of nature is the sickness of the soul.”

“It is in its disorder and threatens its death. This is cured in sanctification. When sin is mortified, the disease is healed. Though complicated, it is all healed. Our crimes were capital, but God saved our lives by pardoning them. Our diseases were mortal, but God saves our lives by healing them.” These two go together, for God's work is perfect and not done by halves. If God takes away the guilt of sin by pardoning mercy, He will break its power by renewing grace. Where Christ has made righteousness to any soul, He is also made sanctification.

Matthew Henry is therefore saying that the second phrase in verse 3 is an extension and explanation of “who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” John Gill says, “Who healeth all thy diseases, not bodily

ones, though the Lord is the physician of the bodies as well as the souls of men, and sometimes heals the diseases of soul and body at once, as in the case of the paralytic man in the gospel. But spiritual diseases or soul maladies are here meant, the same with iniquities in the preceding clause."

"Sin is a natural, hereditary, epidemical, nauseous, and mortal disease. And there are many of them, a complication of them, in men which God only can cure, and He heals them by His Word, by means of the gospel, preaching peace, pardon, and righteousness by Christ, by the blood, wounds, and stripes of His Son, by the application of pardoning grace and mercy, for healing diseases and forgiving iniquities, or one in the same thing." The Lord does this freely, fully, and infallibly; therefore thanks are due unto Him, and it would be very ungrateful and justly resented if they were not returned to Him.

John Trapp, the old Puritan, believes there are two implications, the first spiritual and the second physical: "corporeal and spiritual," physical and spiritual. "Jehovah-Rophe," the Lord the Physician, "cured his people on both sides and making them hold every wit."

"God gives efficacy to medicine for the body, and His grace sanctifies the soul. Spiritually, we're daily under His care and He visits us as the surgeon does his patient. Healing still, for that is the exact word, each malady as it arises. No disease of our soul baffles His skill. He goes on healing all and He will do so till the last trace or taint is gone from our nature."

The two alls of this verse are further reasons for all that is within us praising the Lord: "who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases."

There is another view, and this view also has a ground in Scripture: the diseases spoken of here, which are being healed, are diseases inflicted upon individuals because of their sin, rebellion, or disobedience to God. Hold Psalm 103, but look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 28, the passage of blessings and curses, where God promises blessings if we obey and curses if we disobey. Please remember what I've always told you: there are principles in Scripture. One principle is this, that blessings always follow obedience and curses always follow disobedience.

In Deuteronomy 28:20, we read of curses inflicted upon individuals because of disobedience: “The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.” “The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish.” All these diseases and calamities are a result of disobedience. Leviticus 26:16 gives the same principle.

You also have the blessings and the curses. Leviticus 26:16 speaks of disobedience: "I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it." The next verse says, "and I'll set my face against you and you're going to be slain."

Notice that these are diseases simply given upon individuals based upon penal infliction; that is, they deserve them because of their sin and rebellion against God. In Psalm 103:3, however you interpret the latter part of the verse, it does not do any harm to Scripture. If you want to say that it is an extension and an explanation of the first part, "who forgiveth all thine iniquities," that is fine. The Bible does talk about the nature of sin and its physical applications. If you want to say there are physical applications to that, fine. There is certainly no harm done to Scripture there.

Biblical Evidence for Physical Diseases

But when you read verses 1 through 3, consider what David says: "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 forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." Evidently, this transpired in David's life. David had sinned in some degree. Maybe he had been afflicted by God for his sin and rebellion. Now God has graciously forgiven his sin and graciously healed him, and

David is bursting forth with praise unto God. This is something that actually happened to David.

In fact, David often refers to diseases in Scripture. Every time this particular word is used in the Bible, it is used in a plural form. When he says, "who healeth all thy diseases," the same exact word appears in Deuteronomy 29:22.

“So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the Lord hath laid upon it.” The word “sicknesses” here is exactly the same word translated as “diseases” in Psalm 103. So we are talking about evidently real, genuine sicknesses—real, genuine diseases.

In Jeremiah 14:18, the same Hebrew word appears: “If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine!” Them that are sick—those that are diseased with famine. Same thing. In Jeremiah 16:4, it is stated this way: “They shall die of grievous deaths.” Literally, they shall die of diseased deaths. “They shall not be lamented.”

Whenever this word is used in Scripture, it is indeed speaking of real, genuine sicknesses and diseases, and of sicknesses and diseases that ultimately result in death. The word, being in the plural, would therefore cover all forms of sickness and all forms of diseases. Did you know that oftentimes in the Psalms, David himself spoke about being inflicted with diseases?

For instance, look in your Bibles to Psalm 6 and verse 2. In fact, let us read verse 1: "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed." Then he says, "My soul is also sore vexed." So David is saying, look, there is a problem.

Turn right over to Psalm 38 and look at verse 7. In fact, let us begin reading at verse 4: "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are

filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart."

David is evidently saying, "I've got some real problems in my life physically as well as spiritually." Then in Psalm 41 and verse 8, he says, "An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more." So evidently David was sick, and they thought that he was going to die.

Now, think about this phrase: "who healeth all thy diseases." Let me make a simple statement—a fact. Listen carefully: all healing is from God. All healing is from God. Therefore, that is sufficient grounds to praise Him and bless Him. That is exactly what David is saying: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Forget not all his benefits, who not only forgiveth all thine iniquities, but who healeth all thy diseases."

All Healing is from God

All instances of restoration to health, and all illustrations of God's graciousness and healing, whether healing comes through the hands of a skilled physician or through the wise adaptation of means, demonstrate that all healing virtue comes from God.

God may use means, or He may not use means. He may use the skill of a physician, or He may heal directly. The two theological terms are mediately and immediately. When we say that God heals mediately, we mean that God is pleased to use means through the healing of another, whether a naturopath, an herbalist, a chiropractor, a medical doctor, or a surgeon. In other words, God uses means to heal. When we say that God heals immediately, we mean that God heals directly, without any means whatsoever.

Mediate vs. Immediate Healing

Let me give you an illustration of each. In Isaiah 38, Hezekiah was sick unto death. The prophet Isaiah had told him, “Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.” Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept. God then sent Isaiah back to Hezekiah and said, “I'm going to add 15 years to your life. I've heard your prayers.” Notice, in

Isaiah 38:21, how Hezekiah was healed: “For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover.”

Isn't that interesting? Just a lump of figs. Here was a man who was dying, evidently with a great deal of infection from a boil. All he did was lay a lump of figs on the boil, and he was healed. What did God do? God used means to heal him.

God likewise can heal immediately, or directly. In Luke 8, we have an illustration of Him healing without any use of means whatsoever: the woman who had the issue of blood. Let us read it. Verse 41 says, “And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.”

Here is the woman with the issue of blood: “And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanched. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.” Of course, He told her, “Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.” She had been to all kinds of doctors, and they could do absolutely nothing. She came and touched our Lord’s garment, and instantly she was healed.

She was healed directly by God without any means whatsoever. Now, it can be said that God is pleased to use means most of the time. Can God heal with means? Yes. Can God heal without means? Yes. But it is usually God’s will to use means; that is, He works mediately.

For instance, can God supply my financial need without my working? Yes. But is that the way He normally does things? No. In Genesis 3:19, God said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, He said, “If any would not work, neither should he eat.” It is normally means that God uses. God can heal apart from means, but He most normally uses means to do so.

One of my favorite stories is about old Aunt Amanda, who believed only in divine healing and did not believe in doctors at all. She would beseech the Lord to heal her. Aunt Amanda started going deaf and began to pray to the Lord to heal her. The more she prayed and the longer she prayed, the more deaf she became. Finally, it became almost impossible for her to hear.

Finally, her friends begged her to go to the doctor. She finally broke down and went. The doctor examined her and looked in her ears. He said, "Aunt Amanda, no wonder you can't hear. Your ears are full of wax." He cleaned out her ears, and she could hear perfectly. The old woman slapped her thigh and started laughing. The doctor said, "Aunt Amanda, why are you laughing?" She said, "Because God done showed me He's not going to clean my ears for me."

The point I'm trying to make is very simple: God does give us common sense, and God is not going to do for us what we're responsible to do for ourselves. God has given healing, a gift of healing, to individuals.

Do you know what question is asked in Jeremiah 8:22? "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Is there no physician there? In Colossians 4:14, we read of Luke, the beloved physician. Luke traveled constantly with Paul. You remember what our Lord said in Matthew 9:12? "But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Then He said, "But go ye and learn what that meaneth."

Does God use individuals to help others get well? The answer is yes, very obviously. That is the normal way that He does so.

Seeking God First in Sickness

Although God is pleased to use means most of the time, that does not mean that we should immediately run to man. It does mean that we should seek Him first. Is He the great physician? The answer is yes. Look in James 5, beginning with verse 14. God asks, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Now go back to verse 13: "Is any among you afflicted?" What is the answer if you're afflicted?

Something may be wrong with you. It may not be anything great or disastrous, but something bothers you. What is the admonition? “Is any afflicted among you? let him pray.” Pray. That is the first thing. “Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”

“Is any sick among you?” That is, are you really down and out? “Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.” “And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” Verse 16 says, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

The Scripture is saying that we should seek Christ first with our physical problems. That does not mean we cannot go to men or to doctors afterward, but we are to honor Him by seeking Him first. If our sickness is related to sin, unless that sin is dealt with, the sickness will not be healed. That is exactly what James chapter 5 is talking about. Our bodies will not be healed until our sin is repented of and forgiven. It would probably do us no good to go to a doctor if we are unwilling to repent, correct, and make things right in our lives, because curses follow disobedience just as blessings follow obedience.

Four Sources of Sickness

Now, where in the world does sickness come from? Why do we get sick? I am going to give you four answers. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 13; this first answer is important. Some sickness can come from the hand of Satan. The enemy tries to afflict the people of God. Luke 13:11 says, "And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God.

That would be an immediate healing. "And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?"

Those who dabble in magic, the occult, and all those forbidden things are going to end up having problems—mental, physical, and emotional. Here is an instance where we know that Satan had bound this woman; our Lord said so. We know that Satan attacked Job. Someone has asked me about the many people who try to blame everything on the devil. I usually say that most of us are not important enough for the devil even to mess with. He only attacked about three people in the Bible that we know of: Job, our Lord, and Peter. Of course, he entered into Judas Iscariot, but those are the ones we actually know of. Satan is one of them.

Sickness can come not only from Satan but also from sin. I would probably say that this is the most basic cause of sickness. In fact, we could call it the root and ground of all sickness. Romans 5:12 says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Have you ever stopped to think that, had there been no sin, there

would be no sickness and there would be no death? We can say that the root and ground of everything is our sin and disobedience. It is our sin and disobedience that bring sickness and death.

In Exodus 15:26, God said, “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee.” What did God say? If you will obey me, “I will put none of these diseases upon you that I put upon the Egyptians.” Then he says, “for I am the Lord that healeth thee.” Isn’t that interesting?

So, secondly, most of our sickness comes from sin. Do you realize that many ailments are a direct result of sin? Drunkenness, fornication, rebellion, and a host of other sins produce a myriad of diseases. Drunks usually die from cirrhosis of the liver. I mean, fornication? The Bible says, “he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” In 2 Samuel 12:15, after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, David certainly reaped what he had sown. But who died as a result of that sin? The baby. I am simply pointing out that our sins affect our bodies. In Hosea 7:5, there is an example of the king being made sick with drunkenness: “In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine;”

"He stretched out his hand with scorners." And are drunkards sick? Of course they are. I am not just talking about being sin-sick; they get physically sick as well. Let me point something out: there are a lot of diseases that Christians should never have. Why? Because we do not commit the sins that produce those diseases.

There was a commercial that used to come on television years ago. I would get so angry every time I saw it. The only thing shown was a hand with a finger pointing, and underneath it said, "VD will strike you in 15 seconds." I said, "Bless God, it will not strike me, because I do not plan on being immoral." You see, there are some diseases Christians should never have because they are the result of sin. And by the way, when we are talking about sin causing sickness and diseases, do not stop and think only about drunkenness, fornication, and doping. No, no, no, no.

There are other spiritual sins that can equally cause disease and death. Look in your Bibles at 1 Corinthians chapter 11, particularly verse 30. The sin there is not drunkenness, adultery, or thievery. It is the misuse of the Lord's table. These Corinthians were committing spiritual sins, and he says, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

It was not that they were drunkards, whoremongers, and adulterers. They had committed spiritual sins, and because of this many were sickly and many slept. Some had died because of their sins. Years ago, Dr. S. I. McMillen wrote a book entitled None of These Diseases. In that book, he demonstrated how many of our bodily afflictions can arise from unbiblical and ungodly attitudes and dispositions.

I never will forget reading one of the stories in that book about the husband who stopped at the drugstore and asked the druggist for something for his wife's colitis. The little boy looked at his daddy and said, "Daddy, who's Mama been colliding with now?" She was a fierce fighter who had sharp words. Dr. McMillen was simply pointing out that we can have bowel problems and everything else from unbiblical and ungodly attitudes.

One of the main avenues of living a healthy life is keeping a healthy heart—not physically, though we should exercise physically for our hearts, but by keeping our hearts right with God. That is the greatest step in living well physically.

So where does sickness come from? So far we have seen Satan; secondly, sin; and thirdly, self. I use the S so you can remember these easily and because I am keeping everything alliterative. By self, I mean that each of us is made of flesh. We came from the dust of the earth and are liable to all the normal, natural, and human ailments simply because we are in the flesh.

We have discussed Satan’s attack and sin, but you do not need to be attacked by Satan or commit a great sin to catch a cold, have sinus problems, or suffer from allergies. We are weak creatures. The day we were born, we started dying, and the older we get, the weaker we become. Roy once asked me, “Pastor, why didn’t you tell me getting old had all these illnesses and problems?” It is the truth.

Consider Daniel. He is called the beloved of the Lord, a man greatly beloved, yet Daniel became sick. In Daniel 8:27, he says, "And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." Notice his words: "and I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days." Daniel was not necessarily attacked by Satan, nor had he committed sin, but Daniel was sick. In fact, it was Simon Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with a fever.

Our Lord took her by the hand and healed her in the book of Mark, chapter 1.

Just because you have a cold or allergy problem, a sinus problem, or because you are sick, that does not necessarily mean that you have a lack of faith. I have heard that all my life: "Well, you wouldn't be sick if you had enough faith." That's hogwash, folks. Even the mighty Apostle Paul had to leave Trophimus sick at Miletum. He said in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 20, "Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." I would certainly not like to be the one to accuse the Apostle Paul of having a lack of faith because he had to leave his good friend and coworker sick and could not heal him. No, just because you are sick does not necessarily mean it is a lack of faith. A lot of our sickness is simply due to the fact that we are flesh and blood.

Look in your Bibles at Psalm 103, verses 13 through 16. This points out that we are flesh and blood, and since we are flesh and blood, we are weak: "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. 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." He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are but dust.

Where does sickness come from? It can come from the attack of Satan. It can come from sin, rebellion, and disobedience. It could come simply from the fact that we are flesh and blood. We are weak, and the older we get, the weaker we become. If you do not believe that, try to do at seventy what you did at twenty.

In John chapter 9, we find the fourth place that sickness comes from. The fourth answer is that sickness comes not only from Satan, sin, and self, but, fourthly, from the sovereign God. Here is a man who was born blind. John 9:1 says, “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.” He had never seen. “And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” You know the story: Jesus miraculously and marvelously opened his eyes. Yet the disciples asked particularly, “Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Neither, he said, but it was for God’s honor and God’s glory.

There are people in this world who are born with maladies that you and I do not understand or comprehend. I saw a young child last night with Down syndrome. I have seen individuals in their forties with the mentality of a four- or five-year-old. I do not understand those things. Those children and individuals would not be what you and I would call normal. But I believe that somehow, in the grace and mercy of God, these individuals are ultimately going to bring more glory to God than a lot of us.

I have a dear friend whose daughter was born with Down syndrome. She is probably in her thirties or forties now. She loves her mother and daddy, sits down and draws like a three- or four-year-old, and loves to hear me preach. Every time she sees me, she runs and hugs my neck and tells me that I am her favorite preacher. I watched that young woman and thought: As much as I do not understand why she was born that way, and as much heartache and trouble as her parents probably go through in keeping and helping her, yet I believe I would rather have a child like that than one who is in

Rebellion against God hates God and would not serve Him. I am just telling you, folks, some of these things are going to redound to God's honor and God's glory. When we get into glory, we are going to find that some of them will be a source of absolute amazement to us. God does heal diseases and sicknesses placed upon us by attacks of Satan, our sins, by virtue of being human, and even though

sometimes He sovereignly places them upon us. When He does so, we should give Him the honor and the glory.

You know, folks, it is amazing that when you are sick sometimes, God will even give you a little respite. He will give you a day or two of feeling great and feeling good. That is when you really ought to praise Him. If I were to ask you, how many of us deserve healing? If we get any healing, any help, or any mercy, we should give Him the praise. May I remind you of Psalm 50 and verse 23, where our Lord said, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." We can praise Him not only for forgiveness of sins, but for healing all our diseases.

Applications: God's Will in Healing and Discerning the Source

Let me make just a couple of applications in closing. The first is this: a question frequently asked concerning the will of God and healing. The question is usually posed like this: "Is it God's will to heal all of the time?" The answer is no. Now listen carefully. It is God's will to heal most of the time. How do I know that? Because all of us have been sick and have gotten well. It is God's will to heal most of the time, but it is not God's will to heal every time, because if He did, no one would ever die. The wages of sin is death. No matter how many times God marvelously and miraculously heals us, there will come one time when we will not be healed physically in this life. We will die. Of course, we will ultimately be healed because we will receive a resurrected, glorified body, one that does not know sin, pain, or sickness. But no, it is not God's will to heal every time. I have prayed for people who were on their deathbeds, and they got well. I prayed for other people, and they died. It is not God's will to heal all the time, but it is His will to heal most of the time.

The second application is this: it would greatly help us to discern the source of our sickness before seeking medical help. If sickness results from our sin, it will not do us any good to go to the doctor. We will be like the Syrophoenician woman who spent all she had and was nothing the better, but the worse. If sickness has a spiritual root, no amount of medicine will correct that spiritual sin and rebellion. The only medicine that will correct it is the blood of Jesus Christ,

God's Son, which cleanses us from all sins. Believe it or not, like it or not, it is still the truth.

Many sicknesses, emotional problems, and mental problems could be cured with a good dose of repentance and faith. The starting point is to make sure our lives are right with God and that we are living in obedience to His Word.

Father, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Jesus Christ and Your truth. Help us to live for Thee. Give us, Lord, Your mercy and grace, and help us give Thee praise for what You have done and are doing in our lives. For every good day, every blessed day, and every healthy day, we praise Thee. For every sick day, Lord, we still praise Thee and seek Your help and hand in our lives. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Blessing the Lord

Part Three of Four

Introduction and Review

Psalm 103 calls the soul to bless the Lord: “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 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 satisfies thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles.” According to Psalm 103, we are bound to praise God because of all of His blessings, because of who He is, because of His position, and because of His power. The Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 13 said that we were bound to give thanks. The Greek word for bound is opheilo, which literally means that we are indebted to, obligated to, and duty bound. Consequently, as we look through the Bible, we find numerous reasons why we are duty bound to praise God.

We praise Him not only because He is our Creator, but also because He is our Father. We must distinguish between God’s

internal, essential glory and God's external glory. In one sense, there is absolutely no way that you and I could either praise or bless God's internal, essential, and inherent glory, for that is what God is in and of Himself. He is the most perfect and most holy being, and consequently He is in need of absolutely nothing.

Psalm 16 speaks of the work of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, who said, "My goodness extendeth not unto thee, but to the saints that are in the earth." Even the goodness of our Lord did not add anything to the perfection of God the Father. But God does have an external glory, and that external glory is either praised, blessed, or blasphemed by our attitudes, our actions, and our conduct.

God's external, or manifest, glory is the aspect of His eternal, inherent, and essential glory that He has in and of Himself, manifested in time and in history through redemption, creation, and providence. Everything that we see in creation, everything that we see in redemption, and everything that we see in providence is an aspect, a reflection, and a manifestation of God's inherent and essential glory. For that, we are bound to give thanks.

In verse 3, "who forgiveth all thine iniquities," there is the spiritual aspect of His provision. He forgives all of our iniquities, past, present, and future. The physical aspect is, "who healeth all thy diseases." God is indeed the great physician. All healing is basically divine, and God is free to use means or to act immediately, independently of all means. He is free to act independently of all means. Whatever means God uses, healing is still of God.

For instance, Hezekiah was sick unto death, and Isaiah told him to take a lump of figs and put it upon the boil, and he would be healed. That was an illustration of means being used. But when the woman touched the hem of our Lord's garment and was instantly healed, that was actually God's healing without means. The woman did not receive healing through any medical treatment or human method; she was healed when she touched the hem of our Lord's garment.

There are four sources from which sickness comes. It can come from Satan, because our Lord Himself, in Luke 13, spoke of the woman whom Satan had bound these eighteen years. Sickness can

come from sin. Sin is the major foundation for all sickness, because the wages of sin is death: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Had man not sinned, there would not be any sickness or death. A lot of sicknesses are intimately connected with sin.

There are some sicknesses that Christians ought never to have simply because we ought not to be involved in those sins. Venereal disease normally strikes whoremongers and adulterers. Drunkards often die of cirrhosis of the liver. These are diseases that Christians ought not to have by virtue of being obedient to the word of God. They should not have them simply by virtue of the fact that they are obedient to the Word of God.

Some sickness comes from self, using the word self simply to refer to the fact that we are flesh and blood. You do not have to be attacked by Satan or be a great sinner to catch a virus, have a cold, or have allergy problems. That is simply the fact that we are weak and frail and have been dying from the time we were born. The fourth source from which sickness could come is the sovereignty of God, as illustrated in John 9 by the man who was born blind.

The disciples asked our Lord, “Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” And our Lord said, “Neither, but for the glory of God was this man born blind.” Of course, our Lord then miraculously healed him. That dealt with verse 3. If we skip down to verse 4, we come to our second point: His protection. We are bound to thank God for His protection.

“Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (Psalm 103:4). He has so graciously protected us, oftentimes when we are completely and totally unaware of His protection. The Bible says, “He redeemeth thy life from destruction.”

The Kinsman-Redeemer Concept

Let us take a few moments to emphasize this important word, redeemed. In fact, the Hebrew word is goel, from which we get our English word goel. According to the Bible, the goel is the

kinsman-redeemer. Thus, “who redeemeth thy life”: Who is the kinsman-redeemer?

When we think of the kinsman-redeemer in the Bible, the first thing we normally think of is the avenger of blood. The avenger of blood, the kinsman-redeemer, was the next of kin to a murdered individual. His responsibility was to make sure that the murderer was executed, that he was put to death.

Hold Psalm 103, but go back in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 19. There are plenty of passages, but we will not read all of them. Deuteronomy 19 shows the role of the avenger as it is spelled out in Scripture. Look there beginning with verse 1. Here is the kinsman-redeemer acting as the avenger of blood: “When the Lord thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the Lord thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses; thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it. Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 19:1-13 (KJV)

"That every slayer may flee thither. And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbor ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past." This is what you and I would call accidental killing. "As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbor to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbor, that he die; he shall flee into one of those cities, and live: lest the avenger of blood," that is the kinsman redeemer, "pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past."

"Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee. And if the Lord thy God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers; if thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the Lord thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt

> thou add three cities more for thee, besides these three: that innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee. But if any man hate his neighbor, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities: then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die."
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> "Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee." So the avenger of blood then had the responsibility of making sure that the slayer of his family member was executed.
>
> The cities of refuge had to be close, so if someone killed accidentally, he could get to that city, lest the avenger of blood overtake him because of the length of the way. But if a man killed premeditatedly and he still fled to a city of refuge, then the judges just handed him over to the avenger of blood, the kinsman redeemer, and he executed him.

You will find this also in Numbers 35 and in Joshua chapter 20. When we talk about the kinsman-redeemer, we automatically think of the avenger of blood. But it is important to understand that avenging was only one aspect of the kinsman-redeemer. The kinsman-redeemer did other things rather than avenge.

Sometimes a man was sold into slavery. There were numerous reasons why a man might be sold into slavery, although it was usually because of irresponsibility and debt. The Bible says in Leviticus 25:47-48: "And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: after that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself."

The passage also identifies several possible redeemers: one of his brethren, his uncle, his uncle's son, any near kinsman, or, if he was able, the man himself. Thus, even when poverty or debt had brought

him into bondage, the law provided a way for him to be redeemed. The kinsman-redeemer could redeem a member of his family who, through debt or poverty, had sold himself into slavery. Thus, the kinsman-redeemer not only avenged; he also redeemed the family member. This provision shows the breadth of the kinsman-redeemer's responsibility.

The kinsman-redeemer could also redeem property. Leviticus 25:25 says, "If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold." The kinsman-redeemer could redeem a family member sold into slavery and could redeem property. Without turning there, he could also redeem the family that was left in desperate straits.

You remember the story of Ruth. Naomi, her mother-in-law, went with her husband and her two sons into the land of Moab. There her husband died, and her two sons died; Ruth came back with Naomi. They were in desperate straits. But in Ruth 2:20, Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." Speaking of Boaz, Naomi said unto Ruth, "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen." Boaz told Ruth not to go to any other field, but to stay there with his servants. You know the outcome of that story: Boaz redeemed Naomi and Ruth.

Now if you will look back in your Bibles to Psalm 103, in verse 4 he says this: "who redeemeth thy life from destruction." The word redeemeth is the word for the kinsman redeemer. We found that the kinsman redeemer was not only the avenger of blood; he could buy back an individual, buy back property, and also buy back or help the family that was in desperate straits. The word redeemed, in its broadest sense, simply means to pay a ransom price or to buy back. The redeemer then actually ransoms and often times buys back that which was his originally. Anytime you see the word redeem, there is a definite cost involved.

Greek Words for Redemption

There are only three words in the Greek New Testament that are translated redeem or ransom: lutroo, agorazo, and ex-agorazo. The

important point is that each word shows us something about redemption.

The word lutroo simply means to redeem, release, or liberate by the payment of a ransom. If Dr. Bowen held Ron hostage and said, "I want a million bucks for him," and I gave him a million dollars, I would have redeemed Ron. I would have liberated him by paying a ransom price. Thus, lutroo literally means being delivered from the evils of bondage by the payment of a price.

Secondly, agorazo literally means to buy or redeem out of the marketplace. It is an English word as well, but it comes from the Greek. Even in Greece today, the marketplace is called the agora. The agora is simply the marketplace. The word agorazo, therefore, literally means, "I buy out of the marketplace." It refers to purchasing something off the market.

Then there is ex-agorazo. It means the payment of a price to redeem one, ransom one, buy off, or buy back for the use of oneself. For instance, if you took my tractor as collateral and I paid what you were asking, I would have literally bought my tractor back for my own personal use.

I want you to see what I call the most beautiful illustration of all three of these words. It is found in the Old Testament, in the book of Hosea. Some of you will remember that, a number of years ago, I preached seventy-five consecutive messages out of the book of Hosea. The book of Hosea is a wonderful book.

In Hosea, God commanded Hosea to go love a woman who was loved of a friend. In other words, she was basically a prostitute—an ungodly, unclean woman. Hosea 1:2 says, "The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord." When Hosea married this unclean woman, it pictured the love that God had for Israel and how Israel was treating the Lord.

Hosea went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, who conceived and bore him a son. The Lord told him to call the child Jezreel, saying, "For yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom

of the house of Israel." The Lord also said, "I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." Thus Hosea and Gomer had a son, and in all probability this was Hosea's son.

But Gomer conceived again and bore a daughter. God told Hosea to call her Lo-Ruhamah, declaring, "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." When Lo-Ruhamah was weaned, Gomer conceived and bore another son. God said, "Call his name Lo-Ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." There is the possibility that these last two children did not belong to Gomer but were children born of whoredom.

It became so bad that evidently Gomer left Hosea and found herself in the low places of the city. She was captured and put on the slave market. Remember, lutroo means to redeem, to buy out of bondage; agorazo means to buy out of the marketplace; and ex-agorazo means buying back so that the person may be your own.

Hosea 3:1 says, "Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine." Hosea was told to love her again. He said, "So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley." He told her to abide for him many days, not to play the harlot or be for another man, and said, "So will I also be for thee." Hosea went and bought Gomer back off the auction block for himself again. He redeemed her, ransomed her, and bought her out of bondage and destruction.

In Psalm 103, look again at the word redeemeth: "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction." Everything in the three words lutroo, agorazo, and ex-agorazo, and everything pictured in Hosea 1 and Hosea 3, describes what Jesus Christ has done for us. He redeems us from every vestige of destruction. Look at verse 4 again: "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction." The word destruction refers to the pit and to the grave. When you think of the grave, you naturally think of death. There are all kinds of pits and all kinds of

destruction. Certainly, there is the destruction of the pit which leads to death and the grave.

Destruction as Pits and Snares

When the Bible speaks of pits and destruction, it speaks of many kinds of pits and many kinds of destruction. You may think of Joseph being thrown into a pit—a twelve- to fifteen-foot hole, straight up, with no way out. He is trapped and snared. The Bible teaches that the wicked lay traps and snares and dig pits for the righteous. Proverbs 1:12, speaking of the wicked, says, "Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit." In other words, the intent of the wicked is to swallow us up.

The Psalms show the intent of the wicked to destroy the righteous. Psalm 7:14 says, "Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood." He is speaking of a wicked man: "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made." The wicked man dug the pit and ditch for someone else, but in the providence of God, God let him fall into his own pit. Psalm 9:15 says, "The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken." Here again, the pit was made for someone else, but the wicked man's own foot was taken in the net he hid.

So what have they done? They have dug a pit. They have laid a snare. They have laid a trap. But God has delivered us and allowed the wicked to fall into the very pit and into the very trap that they laid. Psalm 35:7 says, "For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul."

We can talk about the Lord's protection, but what you and I fail to consider so many times is this: dangers oftentimes lurk on every side for each of us. There have been pits that have been dug for us that you and I are totally unaware of. God, in His sovereign providence and sovereign protection, has delivered us from those pits and delivered us from those traps, and oftentimes we are totally and completely unaware of what is happening. We do not know what God has prevented, what He has intercepted, or from what danger He has delivered us.

You have to remember that Mordecai was singled out by Haman to be hanged. Haman built the gallows for Mordecai. But who was hanged on the gallows? Haman. God allowed him to fall in his own trap, the very trap he had prepared for another.

Now let me show you another thing. The Bible says, "who redeemeth thy life from destruction." Here is an interesting thought: Do you realize that wicked, vile, and corrupt women are referred to as a pit? Think of all the pornography, all the adultery, all the whoremongering, and all the fornication that is prevalent in our day and in our society. Proverbs 22:14 says, "The mouth of strange women is a deep pit." It also says, "He that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein."

Proverbs 23:27 says, "For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit." The mouth of strange women is a deep pit, and he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.

Since every positive has a negative and every negative has a positive, if those who are abhorred of the Lord shall fall into adultery, fornication, and wickedness, what about those who are loved of the Lord? They shall be delivered out of that. In other words, it is the grace of God that regenerates us, converts us, and sanctifies us. It is the grace of God that enables us to mortify our flesh and control our thoughts, so that we may walk obediently according to the Word of God and be delivered out of that kind of life. It is amazing when you stop and think how God has preserved and protected us.

Personal Testimonies of Protection

When I was a teenager, I had two friends. I was not a Christian at the time, although I was a church member. I went to church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, and every Wednesday night, but I was still not a Christian. One night I took my two friends in my car and we went out to a juke joint. You have to be from the South to know what a juke joint is; it is a dive.

I had never been to such a place. It was called Faye's Dine and Dance. My friends wanted to go, so I went with them. I will never forget opening the door and seeing gaudy beads hanging down.

There was cigarette smoke so thick you could hardly breathe, and you had to part those beads to walk in. Inside, people were dancing and bumping into one another. The place was packed. Waitresses were carrying beer, and everybody was smoking. I stood there with my mouth open. I could not believe it; I had never been in a place like that.

I looked at my friends and said, “Look, you rode out here with me. If you want to ride back, I’m leaving. You need to get in the car right now.” They said, “Now, come on, don’t be a chicken.” I replied, “Call me whatever you want to call me. But this is not the place for me. I don’t like this. I don’t want a part of this.”

I was not even a Christian, but I turned around and walked out. Thankfully, they followed me. We got in the car and left, and I never went back.

Now let me ask you, who do you think put it in my mind to realize that was not the kind of place for me? That was simply the hand of God, in the providence of God, working that in my life. I was totally unaware until I learned what Scripture says. Here’s God's protection: “who redeemeth thy life from destruction,” all kinds of destruction.

When I joined the service at seventeen, my father had to sign for me. I was about to go to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to boot camp. I wish I knew who this man was. I do not know, but I wish I knew. I was still unconverted, although I was a church member. My dad was standing with me at the bus station, where a bus would take me to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. A man came up and, finding out I was going to Fort Jackson, asked, “Son, do you smoke?” I said, “No, sir.” He asked, “Son, do you drink?” I said, “No, sir.” He asked, “Do you chase women?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “When you come out, you’ll be doing all three.” And I looked at him and said, “No, sir.”

"Not me." I never smoked a cigarette. I never drank a beer, and the only woman I chased, I caught and kept for forty-six years so far. Who made the difference? What do you normally do in the flesh, being unsaved? You want to experience all the sins. But I made up my mind when that man said, "You're going to be doing all three." I said, "No sir, not me." "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction." It

is only the grace of God that redeems us from these sins, these destructive areas that we face on a daily basis.

Deliverance from Death and Enemies

Sometimes in the Bible, the word destruction does indeed refer to the grave and death. I am showing you how great our Lord's protection is. You remember that Hezekiah prayed, and God added fifteen years to his life. None of us should be afraid of death as Christians. That does not mean that we want to die. If I were to ask you, "Do you want to die?" nobody should raise a hand. I want to live. That is normal and natural. I want to continue preaching. I want to continue being the husband of Alice and the father of my children.

David prayed it like this: "Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit." That is, you die and go to the grave. What David is praying for is deliverance.

Psalm 30:3 says, "O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit." Think of the times that you and I have been sick and God has healed us, and the times we have been close to death in wrecks and God has preserved us. David asks, "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?"

"Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?" The Lord says, "God, I can't praise you and I can't preach your word if I'm dead." Job likewise understood this principle. In Job 33:18, the Bible says, "He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." Who preserves us? Who protects us? It is God who has kept our life from perishing by the sword. Verse 24 says, "Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit." "I have found a ransom." That is the grave.

Verse 28 says, "He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." Verse 30 says, "To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." When God sovereignly and miraculously delivered David from terrifying and destructive circumstances, David praised Him. In Psalm 40:1-2,

David said, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."

How many times has God delivered you? You may be aware of a number of times. Mrs. Bowen is aware of one when that car caught on fire. You may know of several times that God has sovereignly delivered you, but God has delivered you so many times of which you are totally, completely unaware.

There have been times when I have wanted to be somewhere, and I wanted to be there on time, but I was delayed. I might sit there and fuss and fume a little bit. Then we get about ten miles down the road and I see a horrible wreck. I realize that, had I not been delayed, that could have been us in that wreck. Then I have to repent and thank God for delaying me and protecting me from it. You are totally unaware of it, and yet God has sovereignly, marvelously protected us.

As you turn back to Psalm 103, consider this quotation from John Stevenson, commenting on verse 4: “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction.” David is blessing and praising God, and Stevenson writes:

“Many were the hair-breadth escapes and the wonderful deliverances which he experienced, dangers of various kinds presenting themselves as his years advanced. The jaw of the lion and the paw of the bear at various times threatened to terminate his existence and at others the ruthless hand of man. The same God who delivered him from the sword of Goliath rescued his life from the javelin of Saul. The almighty friend who had covered his head in the day of battle, delivered him at one moment from the lords of the Philistines, saved him in another out of the hands of the men of Keilah, and again preserved his life and throne from the unnatural rebellion of his own son.”

“Well, therefore, might the psalmist stir up his soul and all that was within him to bless the Lord with the most fervent gratitude who had by so many signal deliverances redeemed his life from destruction.”

Our lives may not be parallel with David's. I have never fought a bear, a lion, or a Goliath. Yet we have fought our Goliaths in different areas. Sometimes it is our physical health, sometimes our married lives, and sometimes our financial lives. God has still sovereignly delivered us. How often He has worked out the same deliverances for each of us, and we have failed to praise and bless Him.

Think of all the automobile wrecks from which you have escaped. I think of one instance involving a gentleman who used to be in our church, Wayne Coulter. Wayne liked to play golf. He was an older man, and I would sometimes go with him—not necessarily because I enjoyed golf, but to be there for him. He was older than I was, and I needed the exercise, so we would walk together.

I remember that we were going to the golf course in Folkston, Georgia. To reach it, we had to cross the railroad track. Wayne was driving, and when I saw him look to the left, I automatically looked to the right. An Amtrak train was barreling down on us. Somehow I said very calmly under my breath, "You better whoa or go." Thank God, he heard only "whoa." He slammed on the brakes, and Tommy slammed on the brakes; the train shot right by. After he put it in park and the train was gone, I looked at him and said, "Shall we sit here just a few minutes and thank the Lord?"

He said, "I think that would be appropriate." And that is exactly what we did. But I am simply saying, the host of times that God has sovereignly delivered us, many times we are totally unaware. I want you to look in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 10 at what the Apostle Paul said. Paul is talking about the Lord, and he says this: "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." Notice what Paul is doing. Paul is thanking God for past mercies, present mercies, and even future mercies. He has delivered us. He is delivering us. And we trust that he will continue to deliver us.

Now, let me hasten on. I want you to turn to two passages: Romans 8 and Hebrews chapter 2. We will read Romans 8 first, and then we are going to Hebrews chapter 2. Look in your Bibles, if you would please, to Romans chapter 8 and verse 32. This is a very simple verse, and yet a very wonderful verse: "He that spared not his

own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Now let that truth sink in: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Hold that truth and look in Hebrews chapter 2, verses 14 and 15: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Put these two truths together. First of all, the greatest gift that God has ever given unto us is His Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 9 and verse 15, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." So Jesus Christ is the greatest gift that God has ever given to us. And look what the Bible says again in Romans 8, verse 32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?"

If God has so richly, fully, and graciously given us His greatest gift, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall He not also give us lesser and smaller gifts? He has given us the best and the greatest. Why should we think He will be grudging toward us and refuse to give us that which is smaller and lesser?

Consider this reasoning in Hebrews 2:14: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." If our Lord has delivered us from our greatest enemy, which is death, shall He not also deliver us from lesser enemies? The Bible says in John 11:26, "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." If Jesus Christ has delivered us from our greatest enemy, will He hesitate to deliver us from our other enemies?

The answer is absolutely no. We are duty-bound not only to bless Him, but also to seek His deliverance in every area of our lives. He is our Kinsman Redeemer. He redeems our life from physical and

spiritual destruction; He redeems us individually, our property, and our family. He delivers us from our enemies.

Victory in Christ and Crowning with Blessings

Turn to Luke chapter 1 and see this marvelous passage. It is given in the context of our Lord's first coming, not His second coming. In Luke chapter 1, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, is praising God for his deliverance.

Luke chapter 1, verse 67: “And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;” who, of course, is Jesus Christ, “as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.”

Why did God send Jesus Christ the first time? Verse 71 says, “that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.”

Everybody knows, or at least should know, what will happen when our Lord returns the second time. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul said, “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.” That is the second coming. He will wipe out every enemy totally and completely. But go back to verse 71 and verse 74.

He said this was the reason that He came the first time: “that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us,” and “that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.” Do you know why we are cowering before our enemies? We have not realized that

our Kinsman-Redeemer is our Avenger of Blood. Our Kinsman-Redeemer is the One who gives us victory, and He came the first time for that.

Why are Christians going around in despair and discouragement? Because they do not realize that in Jesus Christ we are the victors, not the victims. In Jesus Christ we are the conquerors, not the conquered. What did the Apostle Paul say in Romans 8:37? “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ. God has not appointed us to defeat; God has appointed us to victory, and that victory comes through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Every personal and temporal deliverance that God gives us in time and history is indicative and manifestative of that great, full, and final deliverance that He will give us when our Lord returns.

Now go back to Psalm 103 and look at verse 4: “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” Think about this. Just like Gomer, we were brought by our Lord out of the slave market. We were sinful, wicked, rebellious, and ungodly. We were children of disobedience, even as others. And what did He do? He redeemed us. He bought us back out of the slave market.

Just like Hosea—and I cannot even envision this—after that woman had treated him so wickedly and unfaithfully and had children by different men, what did he say after he brought her back? “You're gonna be for me. I will be for you and that's it.” Our Heavenly Father has done the same thing. He brought us back. He paid the ransom price. He redeemed us. And now He says, “You're going to be for me and I'm going to be for you.” The amazing thing is this: our Lord did not just stop with redeeming us from destruction.

He also crowned us with lovingkindness and tender mercies. Here is a poor illustration, but you will understand it. Suppose you are starving and perishing, with no food, and somehow manage to crawl to Jane’s door. She sees you and says, “Let me help you to my table.” She fills you with beans and rice and meat and biscuits and gravy, and then says, “Now I have a piece of pecan pie,” adding a big scoop of ice cream.

Did you deserve to be saved? Did you even deserve to be fed? No. Yet she not only fed you; she crowned you with tender mercies and lovingkindnesses. Do you realize that this is exactly what our Father has done for us? We were rebellious, disobedient, ungodly, and sinful. After He saved us and redeemed us, He crowned us. He gave us everything that we have and continues with multiple blessings day after day.

John Gill, commenting on the latter part of verse 4, said: "Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; with all other blessings which flow from the lovingkindness and tender mercy of God, even all the blessings of the everlasting covenant, the sure mercies of David, all the spiritual blessings with which the saints are blessed in Christ, the grace given them in Him, and the mercy kept with Him forevermore; all things pertaining to life and godliness, given in regeneration, the fruits of great love and abundant mercy, with all the other supplies of grace between that and eternal glory."

"Crowning with these denotes an application and enjoyment of them, the great plenty and abundance of them, of being surrounded and loaded with them, as also the honor that goes along with them, which makes those that have them great and glorious, rich and honorable, as well as preservation and protection by them, these encompassing about as a crown upon the head and a shield upon the body."

Application and Call to Praise

John Trapp said it more succinctly: "He encircles and surrounds thee with benefits, so that whatsoever way thou turnest, thou canst not look except at a blessing." Here is one application: our preservation and protection are due solely to the grace, mercy, and goodness of God. He protects us; therefore, we should abundantly praise Him. Out of all the travels Alice and I have undertaken, and all the miles we have driven, I remember having only one flat tire on the road. We have driven hundreds of thousands of miles in the last forty years—one flat tire.

Consider the word preserves. Psalm 31:23 says, "O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully

rewardeth the proud doer." Psalm 97:10 says, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked." Psalm 145:20 says, "The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy." Proverbs 2:8 says, "He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints." Psalm 32:7 says, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." Psalm 121:7-8 says, "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." The Apostle Paul capped it all off in 2 Timothy 4:18: "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

In light of our Lord's provision, both spiritually and physically, and His protection, can you now say with David, "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 forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies"? When we recognize that our protection is of the Lord, we praise Him for it, blessing and honoring Him.

Father, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You and praise You. Lord, You have protected us so many times and in so many ways, oftentimes in ways of which we are totally unaware. Yet You have delivered us from every avenue of destruction. Make us thankful unto Thee. May we be grateful and acknowledge that we are what we are and have what we have only by Your grace and mercy. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Blessing the Lord

Part Four of Four

Review of Previous Messages

Psalm 103, verse 1, says: “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 forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.” Second Thessalonians 2:13 tells us that we are bound to thank the Lord.

The word “bound” is from the Greek word opheilo, which literally means to be indebted. It means to owe, to be duty bound. Scripture is telling us that we are duty bound to praise and bless God. There is a distinction between God's inherent, essential glory and God's external glory. We cannot add anything to God. We cannot bless or praise Him in His inherent and essential glory, because that is what God is in and of Himself. God is the most perfect God and is in need of absolutely nothing.

As Psalm 16 shows, even the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ added nothing to God, because God already is perfect. Yet the Bible says that this obedience extended to the saints that are in all the earth. God, in His essence and being, is exalted above all blessing, praise, and glory. God does have an external glory that is manifested, however, and that external glory is nothing more than the manifestation, in some degree, of His essential and inherent glory. God has revealed Himself in creation, redemption, and providence. Therefore, we can either bless or blaspheme the external glory that God has manifested.

In Psalm 103, verse 3, we saw God's spiritual provisions: “who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” We saw His physical provisions: “who healeth all thy diseases.” In verse 4, we saw His protection: “who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” God has sovereignly protected us over and over, many times without our awareness. Now we come to verse 5 and God's providence: “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.” We find not only God's provision and protection, but also God's providence.

Introduction to God's Providence

There is a wonderful truth revealed in verse 5: "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." I am thankful that God does not save us and then leave us. The truth is given in Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 23: "And He brought us out that He might bring us into the land which He sware unto our fathers." He brought us out that He might bring us in. God did not bring His people out just to drop them and forsake them. Certainly, God is the same toward us. He saved us, and now in His wonderful grace, His providence takes care of us. The proof is in Hebrews 13 and verse 5: "For He hath promised that He will never leave us or forsake us." God has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us, and the proof that He never leaves us and never forsakes us is abundantly clear in His gracious providence, where He provides for us and protects us constantly and continually.

The Bible says in Ephesians 3 and verse 20, "Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or

think." Stop and ponder that: God is able to do—and this is one word in the Greek, a super-abundant word full of superlatives—exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think. You cannot even imagine what God cannot do.

God's Providential Care

The Confession on Divine Providence

Today I want to cover briefly God's providential care for each of His own. God's providential care should be a source of blessing, comfort, and encouragement to each of us. If we understand this, it should also be a source of constant and continual praise and blessing unto God.

I want to read four short paragraphs from the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith on God's providence. We often refer to the Westminster Confession of Faith as the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, but Presbyterians were not the only ones involved in it. From 1644 to 1648, the Westminster Confession of Faith was produced. The Baptists used that confession of faith for about forty years. Then, in 1689, they said, “We might as well have our own confession of faith.” Amazingly, the old London Confession of Faith of 1689 is almost word for word identical with the Westminster Confession of Faith, except when it comes to baptism and church membership.

A hundred Baptist preachers met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1747. They basically adopted the Old London Confession of 1689 as their confession of faith, and it became known as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. Here is what the Old London, the Westminster, and the Philadelphia Confessions say concerning God's providence.

I am not reading all of it, but paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7. Paragraph 1 says: “God, the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for which they were created, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.”

God upholds and disposes all things, from the greatest to the least. Paragraph 2 says: “Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, so that there is not anything befalls any by chance without His providence. Yet by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.” God is the cause of everything. He is sovereign; He is the first cause. Everything that God ordains comes to pass immutably and infallibly.

That is why He said, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.” But that same sovereign God has also ordained, usually, that means are to be used. Nothing happens to us by chance, fate, or fortune; it is all in God’s providence.

“God in His ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure.” God normally uses means, but He does not have to. He is free to do whatever He pleases because He is God.

“The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption, and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled, and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for other just and holy ends, so that whatsoever befalls any of His elect is by His appointment for His glory and their good.”

I am not preaching on this paragraph, but I want to tell you why sometimes we are persecuted, downtrodden, or mournful because of our own sinful condition: God in His providence exposes such things. You must remember that the pride of our hearts is exceedingly deceitful. Scripture says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?” The next verse says, “I, the Lord, try the reins and the heart.” Only God knows our hearts.

We have all said, “If I know my heart.” The truth is, none of us knows his heart. There have been times in my life when I thought I was doing something for God’s honor and glory, and God pulled the curtains back and let me see that He was not even in my view. I was doing it for myself, not for Him. That is how deceitful the heart is. Oftentimes God will leave us to ourselves so that we can discover what we really and truly are.

“As the providence of God doth in general reach to all creatures, so after a special manner, it taketh care of His church and disposeth of all things to the good thereof.” Divine providence has reference to God, especially to His preservation, care, and government of all things.

It covers everything from the greatest even down to the least. God is going to make sure that everything functions to the end that He has created it. God normally uses means. He is not bound to means. But listen carefully again to paragraph number 7: “As the providence of God doth in general reach to all creatures, so after a more special manner or a particular manner or peculiar manner, it taketh care of the church and disposeth of all things to the good thereof.” Thus, while God’s providence extends to everything, He makes sure there is a special providence for His people.

God's Special Providence for His People

Consider this. There are many men here today, and most of us are married. If Mrs. Bowen had need of something, would you help her and take care of her to the best of your ability? Yes. Would you even take care of Granny Darce? That is a hard question, but you know you would, and so would I. Yet as much care as I would take of either one of them, would I not take special care of my wife? You would hope so, and I certainly would. God will take care of all His creatures and all His people, but He will give special care to His own.

Hold Psalm 103, but look quickly in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 6 and verse 10. Notice what we are commanded to do: “And as we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, but especially unto them who are the household of faith.” As we have opportunity, let us do good unto how many? All. But then he said, especially to them who are the household of faith.

In one sense, I might owe everyone general concern and general help. But if you are a believer in Christ, I owe you a special concern and a special help.

Is God the same as He commands us to be? The answer is yes. Here is the general care of God: “That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust alike.” Isn’t that amazing?

Some of us got up this morning, saw light and life, and said, “Thank you, Lord, for a new day.” Others got up, saw light and life, and went on their merry ways, never acknowledging God. But God sends His rain, His sunshine, and His breath to the just and the unjust alike.

Yet God has told us that we are to do good unto all men, especially to the household of faith. We know that He sends His rain upon the just and the unjust alike, but notice what He did in Psalm 78. “And smote all the firstborn in Egypt, the chief of their strength and the tabernacles of Ham, and made His own people to go forth like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.” God showed general care to all, but He showed special care to His own people. He smote the firstborn in Egypt, then led His own people forth like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

Did God show special care to His people in Israel, in Egypt? And the answer is yes. Did He show special care for them in the desert? And the answer is yes.

I want you to see this principle. In Luke chapter 18 and verse 7, our Lord is teaching us why men ought always to pray and not to faint. In Luke 18, verse 7, our Lord said, “And shall not God avenge His own elect who cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?” Shall not God avenge, note, His own? What is God doing? God is paying special attention to His own. I want to tie these things together.

Now turn to 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 8. Here is a command that God has given us. Notice, if you would, 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 8. The Scripture says this: “But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith.”

There is worse than an infidel. Here is a man who claims to love his wife, but he neglects her. Here is a man who claims to love his children, but he refuses to provide for them, refuses to help them, and refuses to educate them. He claims to be a Christian. What does the Scripture say? He has denied the faith. He is worse than an infidel.

Now pay close attention. Look at what he says: “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.” Did you know that Christ has His own house? The Bible says in Hebrews 3, verse 6, “But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing hope firm unto the end.” Christ is over His own house. Since the Scripture says, “If any provide not for his own, especially those of his own house,” and since Christ is Lord over His own house, whose house we are, would anyone in this room, or anyone you know, like to accuse Christ of infidelity—of not particularly taking care of His own?

And the answer is no. Very obviously, if He has commanded us in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 8 to take care of our own, especially those of our own house, do you not realize and believe that Jesus Christ is going to do exactly the same? The Bible says in Proverbs 15 and verse 29, "The Lord is far from the wicked, but He heareth the prayer of the righteous."

With that understanding in mind, go back to Psalm 103 and look again at verse 5. We are talking about God's providence. God has told us to do good unto all men, especially those of His own house, those in the household of faith. He has told us that if any provide not for his own, especially those of his own household, he is worse than an infidel; he has denied the faith. Christ has a house, and we are His house. Just as we are to provide specifically and specially for our own, Christ provides specifically for His own. He says in verse 5, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Satisfaction in God's Good Things

Do you realize that the Lord not only gives us satisfaction or salvation, help, and life; He also gives us satisfaction? "Who

satisfieth thy mouth with good things." It is indeed the blessing of God to be able to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Some time ago, when I turned sixty-two, Henry came up to me and laughingly said, "Well, you can retire now. You're 62." I laughed and said, "Yeah, right." I know the Lord can retire me. I realize I can have health problems, and I realize I could die.

But I have no plans on retiring. I cannot envision myself not preaching. There are a lot of things I would like to do, but I cannot envision that. Alice gets on to me and says, "All you want to do is study, and all you want to do is go preach." I enjoy it. I like it. I am satisfied with it. There is nothing wrong and nothing unbiblical about being satisfied with your wife, your family, your life, or your work. All of that is the blessing of God.

Remember, “who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.” Solomon was the wise man who wrote many proverbs. Ecclesiastes 2:24 says, “There is nothing better for a man that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor.”

“This also I saw that it was from the hand of God.” What is from the hand of God? That a man is able to eat and drink and to enjoy the good of his labor. If I say I enjoy studying, preaching, and working, is there anything wrong with that? No, that is the blessing of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:13 says, “And also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God.” It is the gift of God. Ecclesiastes 5:18 says, “Behold that which I have seen, it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor, that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him, for it is his portion.” Ah, isn’t that interesting?

God has given us the ability to be satisfied with His kind and gracious providence, everything that He provides for us. Isaiah 65:22 says, “They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat, for as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble, for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.”

God says, as long as My people obey Me and do what's right, they're not going to build and someone else take it away from them. They're not going to plant and someone else eat. God says, I'm going to give to them, and they're going to be protected, provided for, and taken care of. And so are their children. One of the blessings in the Old Testament, speaking basically of the millennial blessings, is this: that every man shall sit

Under his own vine and under his own fig tree. How many of you, in this day and time, have time to sit under the shade tree and sip your iced tea or your mint julep? You know what I am trying to say? And when you retire and can take it easy, ask Ron: fifteen hours a day, six days a week. The point I am trying to make is this: God has promised satisfaction to His people.

Every man is able to sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree. If God has given you a home, a farm, a ranch, or one little piece of dirt, I do not care how small it is. There is nothing wrong with enjoying it, because it is the blessing of God.

Now turn to 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 17. This is a wonderful verse: "Charge them that are rich in the world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." Is that not amazing? No matter what you have—whether you are a multi-millionaire, a billionaire, or have only twenty dollars to your name—you do not trust in what you have. You trust in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

The World Cannot Be Satisfied Apart from God

Satisfaction is found only in the Lord and His blessings. The world and the unbelieving can never be satisfied because they do not know the Lord or His blessings. Years ago, I knew a wonderful young woman married to an unsaved man. She frequently invited me to their house, hoping I would have an opportunity to witness to her husband. On one visit, I saw that he had all these expensive radios. This was his hobby.

A couple of months later, I would go back, and he would have something else—hundreds of dollars invested. Two or three months

later, I would go back again. Nothing ever satisfied the man. You know why? Satisfaction is found only in the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

Listen to what Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote: “No man is ever filled to satisfaction but a believer, and only God Himself can satisfy him. Many a whirling is satiated, that is, you're soaked through and through, many a whirling is satiated but not one is satisfied. God satisfies the very soul of man, the noblest part, His ornament in glory, and of consequence He satisfies his mouth, however hungry and craving it might be otherwise. Soul satisfaction loudly calls for soul praise, and when the mouth is filled with good, it is bound to speak good of Him who filled it.”

“Our good Lord bestows really good things, not vain toys and idle pleasures, and these He is always giving, so that from moment to moment He is satisfying our soul with good, shall we not be still praising Him? If we never cease to bless Him, till He ceases to bless us, our employment will be eternal.” If we never cease to bless Him, till He ceases to bless us, our employment will be eternal.

Augustine said that no man can find rest except he find it in the Lord. It could equally be said that no man can find satisfaction until he found satisfaction in the Lord. In Him we rejoice and have our good things in this life, and we look forward to even better things in the next life.

Spiritual Satisfaction and Fatness

Now look in your Bibles to Isaiah 55. I remember years ago reading this passage and laughing out loud because it is so contrary, especially to modern-day terminology. Isaiah 55:1 says, “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat. Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, without price.” Verse 2 asks, “Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

Here is the modern-day expression: You can pig out on the Lord. You can get fat in the goodness and grace of God. He invites you to let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Let me give you a couple of verses. Listen carefully. Psalm 36:8 says, “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house. And Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures.” They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house.

There is another passage I want to show you. Psalm 63:5 says, “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips.” Look what David says: “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.” Note the connection: “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.” What is the consequence? “My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips.”

Now consider Psalm 92:12. “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing to show that the Lord is upright. He is my rock. There’s no unrighteousness in Him.”

So I guess it’s not bad to be fat in old age. That’s just being biblical: “They shall be fat and flourishing.” That just means, Ron, we’re really being blessed of the Lord.

Isn't that a wonderful verse? Thomas Fuller said, “God can so satisfy the soul that every chink and cranny therein shall be filled with spiritual joy.” Every chink and cranny shall be filled with spiritual joy.

Frederick Whitfield, commenting on the phrase, “who satisfieth thy mouth with good things,” said, “Mark, what does the Lord satisfy with? Good things. Not rich things. Not many things, not everything, I ask but good things. All my need fully supplied and everything good. Goodness is God expressed.”

“All His blessings partake of His own nature. They are holy blessings, holy mercies. Everything that satisfies must have the nature of God in it. Nothing else will ever satisfy. The heart was

made for God and only God can meet it." What does the Lord satisfy with? Good things. Not rich things. Not everything, but good things. As Paul said in Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

God's Providence as a Witness

God does this through His wonderful providence. It is God's providence that brings everything to pass in our lives that redounds for our good and His glory. He satisfies us. We need to recognize this truth and learn to praise Him for it. Acts 14:17 gives a wonderful testimony to God's divine providence: "Nevertheless, He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Take note of this phrase: "He left not Himself without witness." Every time God sends rain in due season, it is a witness to His sovereign providence and faithfulness. Every time God allows you to have a good garden, blesses you financially, keeps you healthy and alive, or brings good things into your life and enables you to enjoy them, it is a witness to His sovereign faithfulness and providence. "He left not Himself without witness in that He did good." Everything God allows us to experience that satisfies us is the gift and blessing of God.

Renewed Youth Like the Eagle's

Look back in Psalm 103, because there is a phrase that needs explaining. Verse 5 says, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." Here is an illustration or comparison by which we may better understand the good providence of God in satisfying us with good things.

I must confess that there is a great deal of speculation concerning the latter part of this verse, but that speculation is not based upon scriptural truth. It is based upon the legends surrounding the illustration, the eagle. According to Augustine, or Saint Augustine, one supposed legend says: "When the eagle grows old, the upper curved portion of the beak becomes so enlarged that the bird is unable to open its mouth to seize its prey. It would die of hunger,

therefore, did it not dash this part of its beak against a rock until the troublesome excess has gotten rid of."

"Then it can devour its food as before, vigor is restored to its body, splendor to its plumage, it can soar aloft, a kind of resurrection has taken place. Thus it renews its youth." I do not know whether that is true. I do not know enough about eagles to verify or discount what Augustine wrote. However, I believe there is a simpler explanation: "So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

It could in all probability refer to what we would call the molting of birds. Birds do take care of themselves. When we lived in Jessup, we had a stone water trough. Alice looked out one morning and saw a bird—perhaps a duck—on the trough. It had drunk and was cleaning itself. She said, "Oh John, look, there's a bird out there pruning itself." I said, "I think the word is preening, not pruning. I haven't seen him cut off any parts of his body yet."

Birds do preen and clean themselves, but do you realize that birds molt annually? Especially these larger birds like the eagle, they get rid of their old feathers, and new feathers come in—clean ones, shiny ones. Thus the bird looks young because it has a new set of feathers. The psalmist could have used any bird, but he chose the eagle, basically the king of birds—not only because of its bulk, but also its strength, vivacity, and longevity.

Matthew Henry says, "The eagle is long-lived, and as naturalists say, when she is nearly a hundred years old, cast her feathers, as indeed she changes them in a great measure every year at molting time, and fresh ones come in, so that she becomes, or at least appears, young again."

"When God, by the graces and comforts of His Spirit, recover His people from their decays, and fills them with new life and joy, which is to them an earnest of eternal life and joy, then they may be said to return to the days of their youth." As the eagle puts on new feathers, God refreshes us, revives us, and restores our first love, so that we return to the days of our youth. Matthew Henry further says, "The long life of the eagle might have induced the psalmist to use it for the illustration."

"An eagle was nine years old in the possession of Owen Holland of Conway in Wales, and it lived 32 years in possession of the gentleman who made it a present to him. But of its previous age, for it came from Ireland, we're not informed. Keesler relates that an eagle died in Vienna after a confinement of a hundred and four years." So you take an eagle that's a hundred years old. If the bird has just molted and has new feathers, the eagle still appears young, full of strength, and you would never guess its age.

I believe the meaning should be obvious to the people of God. I believe the meaning is this: We shall be so blessed by our sovereign God that we shall receive strength in our inner life and in every area of our life. David said, "I've been young and now I'm old, yet I've not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."

Isaiah 40:31 and Renewed Strength

There is another verse, the verse that I had in mind: "Now when I'm old and gray-headed, forsake me not until I've shown this generation Thy strength." It's probably not Psalm 37; it is some other verse, but that's what David said. "Now when I'm old and gray-headed, forsake me not until I've shown this generation Thy strength."

When he said, "so that thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle's," it is just like he said in Psalm 92, "in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing." In other words, God still renews our strength. He said, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

And here it is in Isaiah 40 and verse 31: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." There it is again: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint."

John Gill, commenting on Isaiah 40, verse 31, says, "They shall mount up with wings as eagles swiftly and strongly."

It is expressive of the motion and the affections heavenwards toward God in Christ and things above, of the entrance of faith and hope within the veil, and of the exercise of these graces on Christ, who is now at the right hand of God, and the expectation of glory and

happiness in heaven hereafter, and of present support under afflictions, the Lord bearing them on eagles' wings.

"They shall run and not be weary in the way of God's commandments, which show great affection for them, haste to obey them, delight and pleasure, cheerfulness and alacrity therein, so as to be without weariness. They shall walk and not faint in the ways of God in the name of the Lord or in Christ as they have received Him, leaning on Him, trusting in Him, continuing to do so till they receive the end of their faith and the salvation of their souls."

"And so shall not sink under their burdens, nor give out until they enjoy it. Different persons, though all of them believers, may be herein intended. Particularly Christians under the gospel dispensation, tried and exercised by many enemies, some shall soar aloft and dwell on high. Others, though they cannot rise and fly so swiftly and strongly, yet they shall run without weariness. And others, though they cannot fly or run, shall walk without fainting." Isn't that amazing? It doesn't matter. It is the providence of God that sustains us, whether we soar with the eagles, run, or walk and not faint. It is still the sovereign providence of God, even in our old age, that makes sure we show this generation the strength, grace, and mercies of God.

Applications: Bless the Lord Continually

David said it very clearly: "Now when I'm old and gray-headed, forsake me not till I've showed this generation Thy strength." Now, let me make three applications.

I trust, I hope, and I pray that through these four messages, you have been encouraged to bless the Lord with all that is within you. One way you are encouraged to bless Him is by not forgetting all of His benefits. When you stop and think how He has spiritually and physically provided for you, how He has protected you, and how good, gracious, and glorious His providence is, how can you not praise Him? Remember Psalm 50:23: "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Me." Through the psalmist David, God said that if you offer Him praise, you are glorifying Him. We need to constantly praise Him for His protection, His provision, and His kind and gracious providence in our lives.

A second way that we can bless the Lord is simply to recognize that, in His sovereignty, everything that we are and everything that we have, we have and are only by the grace of God. You remember what the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10: “By the grace of God, I am what I am.” That is a fact. If it were not for God's grace, we would not be here, nor would we have whatever we have. Under the Old Testament, under the Levitical system and ceremonial laws, sacrifice was to be given to God daily. There was even a morning and an evening sacrifice. Now here is my question: If under the older covenant sacrifice, blessing, and praise were given to God on a daily basis, can we do any less in the New Testament with the grace and mercy of God in our lives?

Now look in Hebrews 13:15: “By Him therefore, that is by Jesus Christ, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. That is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.” What are we to be constantly and continually doing? Giving praise to the one true and living God through Jesus Christ, giving Him the fruit of our lips in thanksgiving. We need to thank God, bless Him, and praise Him for His kind and gracious providence in our lives.

Father, we bow to Thee, thankful for Your mercy and truth. We acknowledge, Lord, we are what we are by the grace of God, and everything we have, You have given us. Everything we are, You have made us; everything we ever will be only by Your grace and mercy. Every day we live, every bit of food we eat, and every bit of air we breathe is Your handiwork. We acknowledge all praise, all honor, and all glory belong to the one true and living God, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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