

Give Thanks First

TEXT: Psalm 103:1-22

KEY VERSE: Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. — 1 Chronicles 16:8

Among the definitions of the word *thanksgiving* are: “the act of giving thanks,” “a prayer expressing gratitude,” and “a public acknowledgment or celebration of divine goodness.” Although the word *thanksgiving* does not appear in Psalm 103, this Psalm is an excellent expression of heartfelt gratitude and praise to God. The more one praises and thanks God for His goodness, the more reasons he finds for doing so. To deny God genuine thanksgiving is to fail to recognize God’s wonderful bounty to each individual.

RESPONSES

1. The Psalmist praised God with his soul and all that was within him. Jesus told the woman at the well, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” Ask the students what they feel the word *soul* means, bringing out that “the soul is the living spiritual principle embodied in human beings.” It is acceptable with God and vital to man’s eternal welfare that this spiritual principle be centered in worship of the Father, whether that worship takes the form of blessing, praising, or thanksgiving.

2. The six benefits are: the forgiveness of all iniquities, healing of all diseases, redeeming life from destruction, crowning life with loving kindness and tender mercies, satisfying the mouth with good things, and renewing of youth. Allow the students time to express themselves regarding these benefits. The consensus will probably be that these benefits are vital to earthly well-being. A class discussion on this question could bring out which of these benefits are most essential, which benefits are the most enjoyable, and which benefits will probably be talked about the most at Thanksgiving time.

3. The reference is that our youth is renewed like the eagle’s. Thanksgiving should be given to God for every blessing that He bestows. Ask the students if they know how an eagle’s youth is renewed. Bring out that every year, through a molting process, the bird loses most of its old plumage. The lost feathers are then replaced with new, causing him to look like a young bird. Help the students draw a parallel between the renewal of the eagle and the benefits of those who serve God. On the whole, the Christian has better health than those who serve the devil. Christians do suffer afflictions, it is true, but God promises to deliver from affliction, and He does.

4. The Lord delivers righteousness and judgment for the oppressed who trust Him. There are many illustrations of this truth in the Bible. Have the students talk about David’s deliverance from the oppression of King Saul. The release of Peter from prison by the angel on the night before King Herod would have taken his life, is another example. Let the students add other deliverances to the list. This provision is a great blessing to those who trust God. How thankful we should be!

5. The Lord is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, not always chiding, and not keeping anger against us forever. Ask the students how many enjoy being scolded for their faults. Once the Lord has forgiven their

1. In looking at the first verse of our text, with what part of his being did the Psalmist bless [praise] the Lord? Why? See John 4:23.

2. Name six benefits the Psalmist listed as coming from the Lord. How do you feel about these benefits?

3. What is likened to the eagle in verse 5? Why give thanks for this?

4. How do the oppressed fare when they trust the Lord?

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ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION NOTES

5. List five other items, mentioned in verses 8 and 9 of our text, for which we should be thankful.

6. What are the wages of sin (Romans 6:23)? How does the Psalmist treat this truth (verse 10)?

7. How far does God remove the sins of those who repent? Why should this cause thanksgiving?

8. Why does God have pity upon His children? See verses 13 and 14.

9. In what way is the duration of life brought to our attention?

10. In what way is the mercy of the Lord emphasized? Why should this be an inspiration for thanksgiving?

YOUR WRAP-UP

faults and sins, He does not scold or chide. He forgets those things in which they have transgressed, which certainly is a great theme for Thanksgiving.

6. The wages of sin is death. The Psalmist brings out that instead of exacting the full penalty for sins, the Lord has compassion upon the sinner, atoning for the sins as they are repented of and forsaken. Ask the students what the full penalty of sins would have been for the thief on the cross, had he not turned to Jesus, asking for mercy? The thief died, but his soul went to Heaven. Had he not turned to Jesus, believing on Him, he would have been judged for his sins and lost throughout eternity.

7. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." How far is the east from the west? The east and the west never meet at one point. They are forever the same distance from each other. Just so are our sins removed to an eternal distance by God's mercy. This truth brings thanksgiving to the penitent's life in that he does not live any longer in that condition of sin which has brought so much grief, remorse, and suffering to his soul.

8. The Lord has pity [tender compassion] upon His children because He cares for them. He remembers that they are made from the dust. The picture is brought out of a father pitying his children. Many beautiful examples can be found to show this pity. King David, in his love for his son Absalom, who was killed, showed this pity. God demonstrates His concern in a far greater measure than any earthly father is able to do.

9. The Psalmist likens the length of human life to the grass and the flower of the field. Discuss with the students that life is much shorter for some than for others. No one has any promise of tomorrow. Impress upon your class the necessity of getting ready to meet God today.

10. "The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting." This should bring forth a flood of thanksgiving from those who love God, just knowing that His mercy will never fail us. Over and over this Psalm emphasizes the mercy of the Lord to those who fear Him. Ask your students what part we have in showing mercy in order to please God. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8) Bring the lesson to a conclusion by emphasizing that mercy is both good and necessary. God gives His mercy abundantly to those who serve Him, and He enables them to have this important attribute in their own lives.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

What is a psalm?

How are people affected by a thankful attitude?

Is it easier to thank God when you succeed or when you fail? Why?

Why should you give thanks unto God?

Does God care if you thank Him or not? Why?

How can you show God that you are thankful for the blessings He has given you?

In the ANSWER story, what was the Thanksgiving centerpiece supposed to remind the family of? What other holidays serve as a reminder to us to be thankful?

THINGS TO DO

Divide the class into two teams. Using the letters of the word THANKSGIVING as the first letter of each word, see which team can be the first to complete a list of things for which they are thankful.

After making a list of things to be thankful for, let two of your students role-play the parts of a thankful person and a person who always complains. The thankful student could go down the list of things to be thankful for, and the complainer could respond in character. (Or the complainer could be first.) Have your class decide which person they would rather be around. Ask the following questions when you have completed the activity: Why do some people find it so hard to be thankful? How does a thankful attitude affect other people?

Pass out slips of paper which will later be collected and made into a paper chain. Have each student write his name and something for which he is thankful. Put all the strips in a large paper sack and shake them up. Take them from the sack one at a time and start putting

them together to make the chain. Connect both ends of the chain so it makes a circle. Next, read the names on the chain. As each student hears his name read he should listen carefully for the next name because he is supposed to pray for that person. Tell the students to remember to thank God for the person praying for them.

List some things for which it might be hard to be thankful. Try to think of something positive for each one.

Answers for ANSWER

Give Thanks to God

Read the verse on the balloon, then find all the words in the wordfind. What are some of the benefits with which the Lord has loaded you today? List or draw a picture of them on the sign below. It always feels good to thank Jesus for His blessings. Have you thanked Him today?

