

May 2

Psalm 103, 104, 113, 114, 117

Psalm 103

Like several other Psalms we have looked at, this one has twenty-two verses - one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet - a clue that the Israelites were expected to memorize this one so they could sing it often as a part of their worship.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits”. What are those benefits of being in a covenantal relationship with God?

#1: (And this is always #1!) He forgives all your sins. And I love the note in verse 12 that says He removes them from us as far as the east is from the west! I've often thought about how glad I am that the Psalmist didn't say 'north and south' there, because if you go far enough north, you will eventually be going south - they meet; but you can go east or west forever and never change direction because they do not meet! God has taken our sins away forever and on other places (like the 8th chapter of Hebrews) it said He remembers them no more - they are forever gone! That truly is worth celebrating!

#2: He heals all your diseases. Some scholars would take this as poetic language that simply repeats the point already made that our sins - our spiritual sickness - has been healed, but in light of the explicit teaching of the Pentateuch (remember: “None of these diseases”) and the ministry of Jesus who made physical healing a major part of His work and the specific reference in Matthew chapter 8 linking that healing ministry to the prophecy of Isaiah 53, we need to take the Psalmist's remark quite literally - God, through the finished work of Christ, not only forgives our sins but He heals our diseases.

#3: He redeems our life from the pit - He changes our eternal destiny.

#4: He crowns us with love and compassion. Friends, how often do you stop to reflect upon all the ways in which God has surrounded you with love and compassion?

#5: He satisfies our desires with good things. This brief summary in verses 3 through 5 of the personal blessings that are ours because of God's love and compassion then yields to a longer recitation of what God did for the nation of Israel.

Now here is the really important thing to notice. What God has done - for us as individuals, or for the children of Israel as a nation, flows directly from His character - out of who He is - and the two overriding characteristics of God

upon which the Psalmist wants us to meditate upon are His compassion and graciousness (that is His love).

Since the Psalmist has referenced Moses - he immediately goes to the description that God gave Moses of Himself in Exodus 34: "The Lord - compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love" and remember - in Exodus 34 - on Mount Sinai God gave that description as His very name! 'This is who I am!'

Did you also notice that in describing God's forgiveness the Psalmist once again describes our shortcomings by using three very familiar Old Testament terms, "sins", "transgressions", and "iniquities"? Now these words can certainly be seen as synonyms, but as we have seen before, when they are taken together, they provide us with a remarkably clear and complete 'picture' of what the bible means when it talks about sin.

Well, one last thing. We need God to be compassionate and gracious to us for two very important reasons - and the Psalmist sees them both very clearly. We need His compassion because as human beings we have two major issues: We are fallen (we are sinners) and, we are finite (we are dust, we are fragile and temporary like flowers). Any "theology" of man must reckon with these two facts: human beings are finite and human beings are fallen - and that is what we need to be in relationship with our Creator who is full of compassion and graciousness and who offers us His love through the work of His Son.

Psalm 113

Malachi's use of Psalm 113 is in the context of a sentence attributed by Malachi directly to God Himself. It is God, not the prophet who quotes the Psalm here. Since God Himself is the author of all scripture even though some of it passes through the heart and mind of a human author before being written down in the Word of God, it is not a problem to have God quoting a Psalm, it is both interesting and important because it underscores the divine nature of all the Bible.