BE THANKFUL FOR THE LORD'S EVERLASTING MERCY!

Here we are, the Sunday before "Thanksgiving." Does the Bible have anything to say about ***giving thanks?*** Another one of those, "Duh, Pastor" kind of questions, right? ***Giving thanks*** is a thread that is woven throughout the entire Bible—and it is ***God's will*** for our lives! We see that in I Thessalonians 5:18 "In everything give thanks: for this is the **will of God** in Christ Jesus concerning you."

This morning we are going to look at a "Thanksgiving" Psalm that doesn't have the word "thanks"—or "thanksgiving" in it! And it doesn't have the words "praise" or "rejoice," either! So why am I calling it a ***thanksgiving*** Psalm. Let's turn to Psalm 103 and find out!

Notice how David ***starts*** the Psalm in vs 1: "Bless the LORD, O my soul…" Now look at the ***end*** of the last verse—verse 22—where we see David ending the psalm in the same way he began it: "…bless the LORD, O my soul." ***What does*** "bless" mean? We think ***of God*** "blessing" ***us***—giving things ***to us***—not the other way around! ***How can we*** bestow upon God something He doesn't already have? **Barnes** explains it like this: "The word 'bless,' as applied to God, means **to praise**, implying always a **strong affection for Him** as well as a **sense of gratitude**." (Biblehub.org; Psalm 103:1; emphasis mine)

So this Psalm reminds us that we are to ***praise and thank God*** with our "soul"—meaning our entire being. My guess is that some of your Bibles have ***a title*** for Psalm 103 like: "A Psalm of Unmixed Praise" or "A Magnificent Hymn of Praise."

But David doesn't just ***tell us to render praise*** to God in this Psalm—he gives us a whole bunch of ***reasons as to why!*** In verses 2-7, David praises God for ***what He has done*** (read).
--But David is also grateful because of ***who God is!*** Notice what it says in verse 8 (read). As you already know from your outline, this morning we will be focusing on God ***being merciful***—and ***plenteous*** in mercy.

Notice again what it says in verse 8. God is merciful—and plenteous in mercy.
First, let's consider…***1. What is mercy?***
--One definition I have heard throughout the years is ***simply this***: mercy is God's withholding of deserved judgment. We see that aspect of mercy in verses 10-11.
--Vs 10: "He hath not **dealt with us** after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

How do we know that "dealing with us after our sins" is ***less than*** what we deserve—and not ***more?*** Because of verse 11, right? "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so **great is His mercy** toward them that fear Him." Mercy is the ***withholding*** of judgment—not ***the intensifying*** of it!

But there is ***another aspect*** of mercy—also seen in this psalm—that expands on this definition. It is ***not just God withholding judgment***—which is an amazing thing in and of itself—it is God ***providing forgiveness instead!*** We see that in vs 12: "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? It is ***an immeasurable distance***, right?

You can go ***north*** to the north pole and—if ***you find*** the actual location of "true north"—every direction from that point is ***south!*** And if you travel to the ***south*** pole, every direction from that point is ***north.***

But you can ***go east***—forever—and never come to a point where you are going ***west! Why?*** Because there is no ***east*** pole or ***west*** pole! **Spurgeon wrote**: "If this be the distance of its [our transgressions] removal, there is no shade of fear of it ever being brought back again; even Satan himself could not achieve such a task. Our sins are gone, Jesus has borne them away" (Treasury of David; Vol II, pg 257).

And all God's people said? Amen! A more ***complete definition of mercy***, then, would be this: "Mercy means God does not give sinners the judgment they deserve and instead provides forgiveness, deliverance, restoration, and hope." (https://www.scottlapierre.org/examples-of-gods-mercy-in-the-bible/)

Next, let's consider… ***2. Why we need mercy?***
--The ***short answer*** is because we ***are sinful***—and God ***will judge sin some day!***
Not exactly a newsflash, is it? And yet many people ***deny the existence*** of God—and many that say they ***do believe*** in God have ***an unbiblical*** view of Him!
--As I was thinking about mankind's need for mercy, I had this thought: ***On judgment day***, there will be ***only two groups*** of people—those who are thankful that they ***obtained mercy***—and those who ***wished they had*** obtained mercy!
--Not everyone would agree with that statement, though. R.C. Sproul, for example, suggests that those in hell who are "gnashing their teeth" do so ***not in anguish***, but in ***hatred and intense anger*** at God because of their punishment!
--That may be true, but I still tend to think they would ***eventually want mercy***—but they will ***never, ever get mercy!*** It's ***too late*** for them—but it's not too late ***for you!*** Back to the question, ***why*** do we need mercy?

A. Because we are sinful!

How sinful are we? I could literally spend the rest of the day showing you from the Bible how ***sinful we are***—and I probably ***took an hour or more*** trying to decide which passage to have you turn to because there are so many! The one I finally settled on is in Titus 3, way in the back of your Bibles.

Please turn there and notice what it says in verse 3: "For **we** ourselves also were…" Let's stop right there for a moment. ***Who*** is the "**we**" Paul is referring to? You don't need to turn there, but in chapter 1, verse 4, we see that Paul is writing ***to Titus***—a Gentile that Paul had led to Christ who was now a trusted companion and fellow pastor.

--***Why*** point that out? Because Paul is reminding ***Titus***—and by extension, us—what ***all people are like*** before they become a child of God! We can't go into depth looking at each of the 7 (or 8) characteristics that Paul gives here, but I do want us to consider ***three***.
1) Foolish. Before you were born-again and became a child of God, you ***were foolish***—past tense. And if you ***are not*** yet a child of God, you ***are still***—right now, ***present tense***—foolish!
--***Adam and Eve*** were foolish when they doubted what God said—and believed instead what Satan said!
--***Pharoah*** demonstrated his foolishness by continuing to ignore God's warnings through Moses and choosing to "shake his fist" in God's face instead.
--And people now are foolish because they ***deny the existence*** of God! Psalm 14:1—and Psalm 53:1—both say, "The fool hath said in his heart, **There is no God**…"
--I've mentioned in the past that I get a free, non-subscription, daily email from ***the NY Times.*** Friday's edition was quite interesting. It had for a subject: "**The most important days**" and featured a list of what a panel of 13 "historians and scholars" deemed were the ***10 most consequential days*** in history over the last 175 years. The email only listed 3 of the 10, but 2 of the 3 they listed were ***quite revealing*** as to where we are at as a society.
--Here's the ***first*** one: November 24th, 1859. ***What happened*** on that day? Charles Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" was published. The subtitle given in the article was "The Day God was Dethroned."
--Pretty foolish, isn't it, to think that puny man can write a book—and dethrone God—and yet the majority of people in our country don't believe ***in God***—or don't think He is the ultimate ***authority and Judge!***

The next description I want us to think about is… **2) Disobedient.**
--We are—by nature—***rebels***. We have a sin nature that ***fights against*** authority—and ***despises*** being told what we can and cannot do. Here are just a few examples.
--The ***nation of Israel*** heard with their own ears God's pronouncement of the ***Ten Commandments*** from Mount Sinai. One of those commandments was: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," but 40 days later—while Moses is still on Mount Sinai communing with God—the people gather together and say to Aaron, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us…"

Aaron makes a calf, and the people worship it…and offer sacrifices to it…and proclaim, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt."

--***Achan*** was disobedient after the capture of Jericho. All the gold and silver that was in the city was dedicated to God, but ***Achan disobeyed*** and kept some for himself.
--God told ***Jonah*** to go to Nineveh, but Jonah disobeyed and went the opposite direction instead.
--***What about us?*** Most of us know—in our heads—what Jesus ***called the first and great*** commandment: "Thou shalt **love the Lord** thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mt 22:37).
--But we as God's children aren't very obedient to that command—even with the ***Holy Spirit indwelling*** us!

We ***don't spend alone time*** with God because we are too busy; we don't ***read His Word*** because we already know enough, we don't go to church because we have more important things to do, and very rarely ***do we ask ourselves***, "Is this decision—or plan—pleasing to God?" I could go on, but I believe you get the point.

Lastly—skipping "deceived"—we have…**3) Serving divers (various) lusts and pleasures**.
--The word "serving" carries the idea of "enslaved by."
--***David*** obviously wanted to satisfy ***his passion and pleasure*** when he stole Uriah's wife—then had Uriah placed in the front of a battle so he would be killed!
--What about ***the prodigal*** son? ***Who***—and what—did ***he serve?*** Not many days after he asked for—and received—his portion of the "goods"—presumably part of his inheritance—he "took his journey into a far country, and there **wasted his substance** with riotous living" (Lk 15:13). Pretty safe to say that "riotous living"—and serving lusts and pleasures—involve many of ***the same activities!***
--***What about us? Unsaved man*** has a lot more ***in common with the prodigal*** son than they realize. They take the gifts that God gives them—their abilities and goods and talents—and live their lives pleasing ***only themselves.***
--And just like Romans 1:25 says, they "worship and serve the creature"—themselves—more than the Creator!
--Here again is ***another of the NY Times top 10*** consequential dates from the email I referred to earlier.

The date? May 9, 1960. ***What happened*** on that day? It was the day the Food and Drug Administration approved a birth control pill! **Claudia Goldin**, the "economic historian" from this panel, wrote: "It replaced Russian roulette with certainty and allowed young people to divorce physical intimacy from marriage."

Let that sink in: at least 2 of the top 10 "consequential days" in history—according to a panel of "experts"—involve ***dethroning God*** and the ***destruction of life***—and marriage!

Much, much more can be said and even with the thoughts I just shared, I still don't feel that I did an adequate job of demonstrating to you the ***sinfulness of the lost.*** If we saw ourselves the way God sees us, our response would be similar to that of Job and Isaiah.
--Job 42:5-6 "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I **abhor myself**, and repent in dust and ashes."
--Isaiah 6:5 "Then said I, **Woe** is me! **for I am undone**; because I am **a man of unclean lips**, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: **for mine eyes have seen the King**, the Lord of hosts."

One last thing before we move on. If you struggle with thoughts of "sin is not that bad" and "God shouldn't be so harsh," I would encourage you to study the extra passages I have for you on your outline. (Exodus 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21; Prov 6:16-19; Mt 22:37-40; Rom 1:20-32; Rom 3:9-23; and II Timothy 3:1-5).

There's a second reason we need mercy and it is this: B. Because God will judge sin some day
--In Genesis 18:25, Abraham refers to God as "**the Judge** of all the earth."
--Ps 50:6 "And the heavens shall declare His righteousness: for **God is judge Himself**. Selah."
--Ps 96:13 "…for He cometh to judge the earth: He **shall judge the world** with righteousness, and the people with His truth." **Hebrews 9:27** "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"
--James 5:9b "…behold, the **judge** standeth before the door."
--Rev 20:12 "And I saw the dead, small and great, **stand before God**; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead **were judged** out of those things which were written in the books, **according to their works**."

--Rev 20:13 also refers to being "judged every man according to their works."
--Rev 20:15 "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Do you believe that Pastor? Yes, I do—and you better, too because Jesus taught it!

--Luke 12:4-5 "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. **5** But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed **hath power to cast into hell**; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."

Why do we need mercy? Because we are sinful—and God will judge sin some day!

Next, let's consider… ***3. How is mercy possible?***
--I want to read again the definition of mercy that I gave you earlier: "Mercy means God does not give sinners the judgment they deserve and instead ***provides forgiveness***, deliverance, restoration, and hope."
--So how can God extend mercy—and provide forgiveness—when we are ***exceedingly sinful***—and God is ***absolutely just***…and infinitely holy…and ***has to judge sin*** in order to maintain His justice and holiness?

--He can't ***just ignore it***—that would violate both His ***justice and holiness!***

--The ***only way*** God can extend forgiveness is to ***punish Someone*** else in our place! But that Someone had to be without sin—and no one "fits the bill" other than ***God Himself***, in the person of His Son!
--And that's exactly what happened, isn't it?
--Look at Titus 2:13, hopefully on the same page. Notice what it says.

--Remember, "hope" is not a ***verb***—I ***hope*** we have heat today—it is a noun meaning "expectation."

--Looking for the glorious appearing of Who? "…the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Was Paul saying God the Father ***and*** God the Son were going to appear together? No! He was saying ***Jesus is coming***—and ***Jesus is God!***
--Now Titus 2:14. Here we see it was ***the Son*** who gave Himself for us—He died in our place—to redeem us—to purchase our freedom from the punishment we deserve for our sin—by paying our penalty for us!
--In II Corinthians 5:19**,** Paul puts it like this: "To wit, that **God was in Christ**, **reconciling** the world unto Himself, ***not imputing their trespasses*** unto them…" Our sins ***are not imputed***—they are not reckoned as being on our account—because God counted them as being ***on Christ***—and He paid the penalty by His death!

Why did God do that? Because He loves us! Titus 3:4 "But after that the **kindness and love of God** our Saviour toward man appeared,"
--Eph 2:4-5 "But God, who is **rich in mercy**, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins—[even when we were condemned because of our sin and had the penalty of hell hanging over our heads], hath quickened us [made us alive] together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"

4. How is mercy obtained?
--By grace, meaning ***a gift given to us*** from God—and by God.
--Eph 2:5, the verse we just looked at, ends with the words "**by grace** ye are saved;"
--Eph 2:8 "For **by grace** are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is **the gift of God**:"
--Titus 2:11 "For the **grace of God that bringeth salvation** hath appeared to all men"
--Titus 3:7 "That being justified **by His grace**…"

It is grace—meaning a gift—and not of works. If it was ***a work*** that we did, it would be ***earned***. And if it was earned, it would ***not be grace!***
--Eph 2:9 "Not of works, lest any man should boast."
--Look at Titus 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us…"

So how do we obtain mercy? By ***seeing the need for mercy*** because of our sin and because God is the judge. And ***believing He holds out to us the gift*** of forgiveness because He paid the penalty on our behalf. And then ***receiving, by faith,*** this wonderful gift that God has provided—and longs to give us.

--Our attitude of "God, be merciful to me a sinner" is met with "Him that cometh to me, I will in no way cast out." **Romans 10:13** "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved."

Lastly, let's consider… ***5. How long will God's mercy last?***
--We already touched on this some when we thought about how far the east is from the west.
--I won't have you turn back there, but Psalm 103:17 says, "But the mercy of the Lord is **from everlasting to everlasting**…"

What a wonderful phrase! "From everlasting" (meaning without beginning) "to everlasting" (meaning without end). No matter how far back in time you go, God's mercy was ***already there*** and no matter how far in the future you go, God's mercy ***will still be there.***

There's another similar phrase that occurs ***41 times*** in our KJ Bibles. ***The phrase?*** "His mercy endureth for ever." Psalm 136 has 26 verses, and every verse ends with the phrase "for His mercy endureth for ever." God wants us to ***know*** that truth…and ***think*** about that truth…and ***enjoy*** that truth."

What would happen if God's mercy ***did not endure*** for ever? What would happen if God's mercy ***ran out*** at some point? Here's what would happen. We would be enjoying the ***beauty***…and ***joy***…and ***majesty***… and ***splendor*** of heaven—with God Himself—only to be ***cast into hell*** because God's mercy ended—and ***forgiveness ended with it!*** What a dreadful, terrifying thought!

But it will never be because God's mercy is ***from*** everlasting—***to*** everlasting—and ***endureth for ever!*** One more verse—and this may very well be a case where I ***saved the best for last!***

Hebrews 8:12 "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness"—[that's forgiveness]—"and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Doesn't that ***awe***…and ***humble*** you…and ***thrill*** you all at the same time?

We ***remember how people have sinned against*** us for a long time, don't we?
But God ***won't***—not because He is ***forgetful***—and not because He simply ***chooses not to recall them***. He ***remembers them no more*** because they ***are paid for***—and gone! There is ***no more record*** of them! The slate is ***clean;*** they have been removed as far as ***the east is from the west.***

My sin—oh the bliss, of this glorious thought—my sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my soul!

How can you not be thankful for God's mercy—if you have indeed received it?

So what would God have us do based on what we just heard?

1. First—as mentioned earlier—there are only two groups of people in the auditorium—or listening on-line. What are the two groups? Those who have obtained mercy—those who ***are forgiven*** and will not be judged for their sins—and those ***who have not obtained*** mercy!

Which group are you in? If you are trying to get to heaven by what ***you do***—even if you were baptized…and belong to a church…and pray and read your Bible—you have not obtained mercy because you are trying to get to God in ***your way*** instead of God's way.

Jonah 2:8 says, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." Let that sink in! If you believe empty lies—like "God will let me in because I'm a good person"—you forsake your own mercy!

2. If you have been forgiven—if you are a child of God—are you thankful that God is merciful? Are you thankful that your sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west and that He remembers them no more? How thankful we ought to be that His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting and will never end!