

THANKSGIVING ILLUSTRATION

[Psalm 103]

For a brief moment, I'd like you to think on some words that were uttered in the first century A.D. They are not the words of a theologian. Nor are they the utterances of a scholar. They were not even spoken from the mouth of a Christian.

In fact, they were spoken by someone who never wrote a book. Ironically, the man who delivered these words was born a slave. His name was Epictetus, a Greek slave turned Stoic philosopher. Somehow he stumbled upon an idea that is biblical, and very relevant to 21st century America. If you have an ear to hear, listen attentively to these words:

"HE IS A WISE MAN WHO DOES NOT GRIEVE FOR THE THINGS WHICH HE HAS NOT, BUT REJOICES FOR THOSE WHICH HE HAS."

Wouldn't you agree that wisdom OF THAT NATURE is worth embracing? It reminds me of the opening lines of Psalm 103:

- Psalm 103:1-2 (NASB95) Bless the Lord, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits ...

Psalm 103 is really a hymn of thanksgiving.

There are many ways to show gratefulness, but something I read years ago really defined what our attitude of thanksgiving should be toward God. The Masai tribe in West Africa have an intriguing way of saying thank you. Translators tell us that when they express thanks they bow, put their forehead on the ground, and say, *"My head is in the dirt."*

In a similar way another African tribe expresses intense gratitude by sitting for a long time in front of the hut of the person

who did the favor and literally say, "*I sit on the ground before you.*" These tribes may understand well the biblical concept of thanksgiving and I think I understand better why it is so difficult for us, because at its core thanksgiving is an act of *humility*. It is a recognition of grace. It's a realization that we have been highly favored and singled out as the object of someone's attention and blessing when we have done *nothing* to deserve it.

Friends, let me be as blunt about this as I can be. As those on the receiving end of the amazing grace of Christ, we need to stop burying our heads in the sand and start "*putting our heads in the dirt*" before God today. Listen to the psalmist David's heart :

- Psalm 103:1-2 (NASB95) Bless the Lord, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits ...

Have you forgotten? Have I? All of us are guilty of forgetting His benefits. We take them so much for granted. Why is that? Are we totally out of touch? There's a reason why we don't constantly rehearse and recall His benefits. It's more than simple absent-mindedness. It's *pride*. It's this thing called *entitlement*. There is a glaring absence of true humility in us. Want to see a classic biblical example of this?

- 2 Chron. 32:24-25 (cf. 2 Kgs.20:1-11) (GNB) About this time King Hezekiah fell ill and almost died. He prayed, and the Lord gave him a sign that he would recover. But Hezekiah was too proud to show gratitude for what the Lord had done for him, and Judah and Jerusalem suffered for it.

Hezekiah's illness was cured, his life saved, yet he "*gave no*

*return for the benefit he received..." Why? Not because he forgot, not because it slipped his mind, but because his heart was *proud*.*

What will *you* bless the Lord for today? What are some of the benefits *you* have received that you simply *cannot* forget? If I were to ask you to list at least 10 things you are eternally grateful for today how long would it take you? Do it now. Need a jump start? Look at vv. 3-5 of Psalm 103:

- Ps. 103:3-5 [ESV] who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

- v.3 He forgives us.

- v.3 He heals us.

- v.4 He's given us life (Ps. 16:9-11).

- v.4 He's shown us compassion.

- v.5 He satisfies and fulfills us. He gives us spiritual vitality (Isa. 40:29-31).

My dear friends, we need to come to God today, and *every day*, crucifying our pride and clothing ourselves with a humble heart of thanksgiving for *all* His benefits. We need to say to our Savior, "*Jesus, I sit on the ground before You for all you have done for me! My head is in the dirt!*"