

# Count your Blessings

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[ 0 : 0 0 ] I would like to turn back this evening to Sam 103 as we look at the next of our Sunday evening Sams. This is a well-known one, I guess. It is a well-known one in our free church context. We have sung it for many years in the Metrical Version. It is a Sam of praise, a Sam of blessing. The title of this sermon is really, Count Your Blessings because in many ways that is what the Sam is asking us all to do as believers, is asking us to count our blessings. We are looking at the Sam on page 502 in the Old Testament, the book of Sams. That is what we planted. There is no clear knowledge of the circumstances in which the Sam has been written. We do not know David's personal circumstances. It is a Sam of David, but we do not know his personal circumstances. There are one or two hints in it, what it might have been. The great thing about a lot of the Sams of David is that they are quite generic at that level. They are quite open and they are quite free to be used and applied in different circumstances. We do see in the Sam very clear, holy spirit of influence and an almost uncanny knowledge of salvation that David is able to express in the Sam and the sense of thanksgiving that comes from it. Really, the Sam is about thanksgiving.

It is about returning thanks and blessing and praising God for what he has done for us. It is an important thing for us to do that we do not forget to do that. The Sam is saying, please bless the Lord of my soul and forget not all his benefits. It is a terrible thing to be forgotten, is not it? I do not know if I should say this in church, but I am going to say it anyway. The person is not here, so I do not feel quite so bad. I felt really bad this morning, really bad after church because I spoke to someone on the way out and I said, are you visiting? I said, well, I have been here for five or six weeks. I have asked him that question at least twice, but he looked so different today. It is a terrible thing to be forgotten. He must have felt terrible. He is the Sam minister of this. There is no idea who is coming into his church and he has welcomed me three or four times. You all have to pray that he will forgive me. He will come back with his family to church. It is like if you go to a place and nobody recognises you have been there lots, you feel kind of rubbish, really, forgotten. If you do something for someone and they do not bother to thank you, it is a really nice thing when people say thanks. It is lovely that we can teach our children to say thank you for gifts. I think that is very important spiritually, also as Christians, that we do not forget to give thanks, that we do not forget to bless

God and to praise him for all his benefits. Shakespeare is quoted as saying how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child. The reality is that that is true in life generally. To receive a lot of gifts, to receive a lot of goodness and love and belonging from people and to have no sense of thanksgiving is a terrible thing. This is really a call to thanks. It is a call to counter blessings. It is a call to give praise to God. That is something that is very important in the Christian. It is what sets us apart from many people because one of the great things about being a Christian is that when we do have a great sense of thanksgiving for our lives or for something good that has happened or just for being alive, we have someone to thank. We have someone we know and someone we can genuinely give thanks to. I think that is one of the great realities that sets us apart that we can give thanks and praise to God for who he is and what he has done. Praise is an important part of our lives. Whether it be praise in song or whether it be praise in obedience and praise through our lives, it is a supremely significant part of what we do. I believe for us as Christians it is both a command but it is also a lifestyle choice. I need to choose to praise him because there will be many times in our lives outwardly when things are happening. There is no tangible immediate reason why we should be praising him. But as we think on his character and what he has done for us, it enables us to praise him. We cannot look at the life of David and say he was an ivory-towered believer that he just lived and created these beautiful sonnets and these beautiful songs from some kind of place of protection and isolation from the world and its problems. David faced death many times. David was a king among his people. David knew bitterness and sadness and betrayal and adultery and murder and all kinds of things in his life. It was not that he had a sheltered life but he was one who nonetheless was able to channel his life of faith into this sense of praise. It becomes for us a lifestyle choice and so it must be for each of us tonight a lifestyle choice or a command. Can I put it that way as well?

Can I say a lifestyle choice? I just mean that it is something we need to choose to do. Because we can choose to be grumpy, we can choose to be thankless but we can choose to dedicate our lives and our minds towards thanksgiving. Why would I say that? Because the Psalm is not initially written into the presence of God and for God and to give thanks to God.

It is not written to the church primarily and it is not written to David's family, it is written to himself. So this is a soliloquy, a soliloquy Psalm as David is writing to himself and he is speaking to himself and he is telling himself what he has to do and what he is trying to remind himself that it is important to do. Oh bless the Lord, oh my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name, bless the Lord, oh my soul and forget not all his benefits.

[ 7 : 01 ]

So there is a great introduction to this Psalm where this Psalm is where David is reminding us of the significance of being Christians, believers who speak to ourselves. I agree that they say today, the first sign of madness is if you speak to yourself. I don't necessarily agree with that and certainly not spiritually. I think spiritually it is a tremendous discipline and a great characteristic that we learn to speak to our own souls. Do you know what I mean when I am saying that? Do you appreciate what I am maybe, maybe you don't do it or I am sure all of us do. We speak to ourselves and I think it is something conscious and something deliberate and something that just as you go to have a conversation with someone else it is a very deliberate act and something you decide to do. So speaking to yourself spiritually is something that we need to do. We give ourselves a prod and we speak to ourselves and we remind ourselves of our own souls existence and we speak and remind our souls, our consciousness, our beings, our ego, however you want to describe it. What makes us, the totality of our being, we speak to that as believers and remind ourselves who we are. In our self-consciousness we remind ourselves who we are as believers because it is easy for us to forget. He says deep within ourselves, you know this is not to be a shallow passing conversation that sometimes we would have on a Sunday morning. It is not a quick glance in the spiritual mirror, it is taking time to be in our own company and speaking to ourselves from the very core of our being and allowing the truths of God to infiltrate the very core of our being so that we might recognise and consider and list and remind ourselves of all his benefits. That is where we are able to find praise emanating from. So praise is to come deep from within ourselves as we spend time allowing the truths of God and the realities of God in our lives to permeate our being, to break down the forgetfulness and to give us a sense of gratitude, soul praise, deep feeling. I think that is becoming an increasingly difficult thing to do because we live in a supremely noisy world where we do not have much opportunity or freedom to speak to our souls. We are not great with silence, we are not great with our own company, we are not great with that level of introspection. I am not talking about introspection in a negative way but simply self-examination. It is easy to be distracted. There are a thousand different things on a daily basis that can distract us from spending time with our own souls. The media world in which we live and the kind of things we are able to do mean that we can fill our time always without ever speaking to our souls or taking time to do that. I think it is a great gift, a great spiritual gift to develop in our lives that we speak to ourselves and we remind ourselves of the spiritual blessings we have as believers.

We remind ourselves as we speak of our deliverance and of our God. Remember, do not forget His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, heals all your diseases, redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, satisfies you with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

There is the psalmist speaking, probably very much personally, there are testimonial words here, words of testimony, that this is one who has been forgiven, one who has been healed, one who has been redeemed, one who has been rescued. Probably in some ways it was literal, he would have been physically healed and possibly physically released from a dungeon or a pit or somewhere at some point in his life with the enemies he had. He was also recognising that he was satisfied with the goodness and we have been looking at this in different ways over the last few weeks and this morning looking at youth being renewed like the eagles.

Now I have tried in lots of different places to find out why that image is used. What is it specifically about eagles? That they are used as an illustration for the renewal of youth and I have not found anything satisfactory. So if you find anything or if you know anything, if you are an ornithological person and know something about eagles that might explain why they are being used and they are used also in Isaiah in the same way, various people speak about their leaves, their feathers being shed and they seem to renew their youth as you can see I am not great ornithologically. But they do something about that, I am not sure to be honest. But nonetheless the truth is that spiritually we can recognise a renewal and a refreshment and a revitalisation that is wholly miraculous and God given and as we remember that in our lives that we do not simply follow the way of the world and that we age and that we become cynical and we become weak. That might happen outwardly physically but inwardly there is that as we mentioned this morning, that renewal and that refreshment and that satisfaction with his steadfast love and his mercy which we will go on to say a little bit more about. So there is this reminder of the personal deliverance, that testimony of personal deliverance and again I think we live in a society, we live in a day and generation where the most powerful witness, the most powerful thing we can do in terms of sharing the gospel is sharing our own personal testimony of God's goodness and grace. That is hugely powerful today where people are not quite so willing to in a secular and maybe atheistic world view are not so willing to accept truth or infallible truth from the word of God as being authority for them. We hope they come obviously round to that position but we know that personal testimony, the reality of what Jesus has done for me and how he has transformed and changed my life is something that people are more willing to listen to and accept and be challenged by because they can relate to that. They can relate to you because you are an ordinary person, I am an ordinary person and when they see that our lives have been changed by Jesus Christ they can relate that that must be something real and David is reminding his soul of the importance of that testimony of personal deliverance and also reminding himself of the nature and the character of God, the Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed, his ways made known to Moses to the people of his

Lord is merciful and one of the, it is used often in the Old Testament and a very, it could almost be a declarative theological statement of the living God, the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. It is a great keynote statement about the character of God right in the middle of the Old Testament with hints of Calvary in there that we have the Lord God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and this character of himself, this character that is revealed is what David needs to remind his own soul of, both the personal testimony, the reality of what he has experienced of God and the character and nature, the truth of God as he is revealed in himself. So you have got the truth and personal testimony giving utter conviction to this guy, David and that is very true of our lives is when we know and understand God as he is revealed and when we have a personal and powerful testimony the two come together and give great conviction and that is a challenge for us both to be grounded in the word and also to think through our personal testimony and to consider if we were asked what we would be able to say. What is it that we say when we are asked about our faith? Do we hide behind sometimes truth that comes from God's word which is truth?

[ 16 : 58 ] Are we unable to verbalise the personal testimony that we have of God's deliverance and God's goodness in our day to day living? I think that is an important challenge for us to consider.

And then the psalmist goes on, and we just look at this for a few moments, he goes on as it were to elucidate a lot of the different characteristics of God to remind himself of these things because they are helpful to him as he goes forward in his life of faith and it is good for us to do the same and we do so very briefly. As it were not just speak to our souls but take time just to soak our souls in the truth of God's light, like having a good bath, soaking your body in a bath as opposed to having a quick shower. We live in a site where everything is quick and we want to get everything done quickly. Maybe the same with our relationship with God, he is quick-wired with him every so often now and just keep us going. But he is saying, just relax, take time in his company, take time away from other things and give him the time that he is due just to consider who dwell on his character, pamper our souls with the goodness of God's grace so that it can change and channel our praise and our lives. We see in verse 9, the reluctance of his anger he will not chide nor will he keep his anger forever. His anger we are told in the word is but for a moment and the reality of that is that he is a God who is a God primarily who is love, God is love. He deals with injustice and he deals with that on the cross and he deals with that in his judgment but in reality his anger lasts but in his justice it will be dealt with and we know that it is not capricious and it is not just random and it is not just thoughtless. His amazing mercy he does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities and a great text, a great verse to consider and to remember in our ongoing lives because it makes us really humble and appreciative of what mercy is that he does not deal with us as we deserve and does not repay us according to our sins, not what we deserve. That therefore will change always the way we think about and relate to other people and the mercy that we will show to other people. I think again

I have used this illustration at some point here before there was a deserter in Napoleon's army who was captured and was brought before Napoleon where he would have been executed as Napoleon passed judgment on him for deserting the cause and the soldier's mother came and burst into the room and fell on her knees before Napoleon and pleaded for mercy for her son and Napoleon said he does not deserve mercy for what he did and she said if he deserved it it would not be mercy. I think that is so important for us to remember that mercy is mercy because it is not deserved. We have not earned it, we are not better than other people, we have not stood before God and said look come on, accept me for who I am. Mercy is something that we do not deserve and it saves us from ourselves and helps us to look at others in a much more different and graceful light. His amazing mercy, the greatness of his love, verse 11, for his highest heavens are above there, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. And we are brought in here to a recurring theme of this

Psalm which is the fear of the Lord and it is an important one and anything that is repeated by the Spirit through these things reminds us of its importance and that fear refers to reverence and awe and worship and it relates all of this Psalm to that walk of faith and that walk of trust and dependence on the Lord God. So we have the greatness of his love, it is not mediocre, it is not half-hearted, it is a great love and it is the fundamental reality of our experience. Behind all our praise must come a recognition and an acknowledgement of the greatness of the love of God. I think sometimes it is hard for us, it is hard to recognise that, it is hard to see it and we live in a world where we are battling against things that challenge that but we are reminded always to come back to the place where that love is greatest revealed on the cross of Calvary and because of the cross of Calvary we reflect on the totality of his forgiveness. We are reminded as far as east in verse 12 is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. So in Christ you sit this evening forgiven before the judge of all mankind, great thing that our guilt is removed from us. So far as east is from the west is that a picture, an analogy just that he has put us and our sins on different horizons that they just do not interact as far away as they possibly could be. It is as if when he looks at us he cannot look at our sin, it is like when he is facing us and when we are accepted because of what Christ has done he cannot look at us in our failure and our sin and when he looks at our sin he sees Christ in the cross and we are cleansed and forgiven. The totality of his forgiveness, so we will stand on the last day, the totality of his forgiveness will absolutely be there for us, forgiven as far as east is distant from the west. His tender compassion, as a father shows compassion for his children, so the Lord shows compassion for those who fear him. Great comforting, great strength.

Every day analogy of the importance and the significance of family love, and I know in many cases in this life that family love is not there and it is a poor illustration because many fathers can, it can be seen to be a poor illustration because many fathers can be brutal and uncompassionate and uncaring but this is giving the kind of the longing, the perfect illustration of the perfect father that deep down we would all long for, the deep down we would all long to be or the perfect mother as is in Isaiah 66 verse 13 speaks about God's love being like a mother's love for their child and it is that prodigal, it is the prodigal picture again isn't it, that as people we have shown such great ingratitude to the prodigal son who takes everything from his home and spends it all on riotous living and wishes his father was dead and ends up eating pigs food and longs to go back eventually and to be a servant and then we are told that the father is longing to look out, longing for the son to return and when he sees him he is filled with compassion and he lifts up his robes and he runs out in a very undignified way and all his servants would have been sniggering and laughing at him, he was doing something so undignified and he just hugs his son and takes him to be with himself that is God's picture, Jesus picture of his compassion for his people filled with compassion that even in our back slidings and our turning away from him he longs for us to be with him just like a father like a mother and wants us to be in his company. His intimate understanding with this we are nearly done verse 14 he knows our frame he remembers where dust and we know we flourished like a flower in the field the wind is over and it has gone its place knows no more. Intimate understanding you know we don't need to be gods we don't need to be supermen he knows what we are like he says the psalmist is basically saying I know how you feel I know what it is like for you

[ 26 : 10 ] I know your weakness I know the temptations that you face I understand your tears and your loneliness and your sense of inadequacy and your lack of identity in me I know what it is like because I have been among you and I have taken on humanity and I have created you and I have seen how that image has been broken and all that goes with it because of sins and I know what is good in your life and I long for you to appreciate that and these are kind of the things that he is wanting us to speak to our soul about and to consider in our lives and throughout that he is speaking of the importance again in 17 and 18 steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting for those who fear him and then later on again for those who fear him then it is those who remember him and who do his will and so there is that great reminder to us of living worshipful awe struck lives of respect and awe for the living God as we are touched by his grace and we understand his great compassion and so he ends the Sam it begins the Sam with a twofold command to praise bless the Lord

Lord on my soul bless the Lord on my soul and so it is very personal and very independent are very very much looking into the individual Christian life the believers life but then he finishes with a fourfold call to blessing and it is much wider and it is much more all encompassing bless the Lord O you his angels you mighty ones who do his word of being is blessed the Lord all his hosts his ministers who do his own bless the Lord all his works the creation the trees are going to sing and praise him and which will clap their hands it was all creation recognizes and falls before the great and then bless the Lord my soul so we have this cacophony of praise that is commanded from all of creation and the heavenly realms and in our own souls so we join a very significant and important chorus when we speak to our souls and when we are able to praise him and I hope that you can do that I hope that you are able to spend time speaking to your own soul speaking to yourself about the blessings of God and the blessings of grace and I hope that these are blessings that you have taken for yourself and above all the great blessing of rescue and redemption in

Jesus Christ and as we speak to our souls about these things it gives us identity and it gives us perspective and it gives us hope and it gives us a future amen let's pray Father God we thank you for your word we thank you for the very human reminders that it gives us of what we need to do and we ask that you forgive us for the tendency we have to forget we thank you for the Lord's Supper that you give us because you know we're prone to forget and he said do this in remembrance of me we thank you for the Psalms which tell us not to forget and we ask your forgiveness when we are thankless children when we eat when we drink when we wake up when we live our lives when we use the gifts we've been given when we get promotion when we find a partner in life when we have children when we have so many things in life that happen to us that are amazing help us to give thanks and help us to give thanks in the battles and in the struggles and in the sadnesses and in the loss and the separation and in the loneliness we have a saviour who is rescuing and redeeming and buying us back and will give that tremendous sense of identity and longing and belonging that he alone can give that one that will go beyond the grave and that will enable us to be renewed inwardly day by day so help us to conclude our worship this evening with songs of praise with a sense of our deepest souls being able to express our heartfelt thanks to the living God for Jesus' sake. Amen.