

Psalms: Book Four: All His Benefits

Christ's Atoning Work

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Please turn in your Bibles to I Corinthians 4. I am going to pull a little principle out of one verse out of context. I do not necessarily want to use the context at all but I want to just pull out this little thing, from what Paul says here, to get us going on a thought process. Paul writes:

I Corinthians 4:7 And what do you have that you did not receive?

Have you ever gone through the process (some might even call it a spiritual exercise) of putting this question to the test of really asking yourself 'What do you have that you did not receive?' and start thinking of specific things that you have and trying to trace back ownership, not just of that specific thing but of its constituent parts?

If you have a car, you paid money for that car, maybe the bank still owns half or three-quarters of that car, but when you go back and start breaking things down, you would not have a car if God did not make the various elements that go into that car. And you can end up with just about everything—and I think I can say *everything*—being traced back to God: that if God had not done something at some point, that thing would never have been yours.

So what do you have that is not a gift, that you did not receive that others did not give you? And it is not only God that gives good things, people can give good things. They do not give them in the same proportions as God and as much as God, but people give you things and we have received them.

If you go through this exercise in a humble way, it really deflates the ego because then you begin to see that all these things that you are so proud of owning, or having, or building, or accomplishing, or what have you, suddenly are not yours to boast about. I mean, you have current possession of those things but you have got to realize that other people—other entities—can claim some credit for you having those things. We may think that our material success, if we have reached the point of material success, is the work of our hands. But, as the poem says, no man is an island.

President Obama likes to bring this up quite a bit. "You didn't build that business. You had the government to put the roads down. You had this program that would help you in

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this area. These people did this. You're standing on the shoulders of giants." There is a certain amount of truth in that, not the political truth that he is trying to push.

But it is very true that even though we can be a success in this life, we cannot claim that it is all our own—that we did it all by ourselves. We cannot really even claim like Frank Sinatra, that we did it our way, because we had to conform to certain rules and regulations to get those things done to give us success.

So we cannot say that our success is even our own, not fully, and, of course, we can take it back to the fact that God is the One that has provided all the physical and spiritual resources that we needed to have that success, to build that success.

We may think that our vast knowledge (if we have vast knowledge) is ours alone, that we are an autodidact. We taught ourselves everything we know. We never went to school, that would have tainted us. We decided we would hit the books all on our own and we would learn all these great things. But who wrote the books? Do we not give our parents any credit for giving us knowledge? Do we not give our teachers credit for giving us a certain amount of knowledge? Do we not give our employers credit for teaching us things that we need on the job?

And, of course, any kind of true spiritual knowledge comes from God. He is the One that has given it, and so we have to acknowledge that our knowledge is not our own, we did not get it all by ourselves, it has been received.

Now we may think that our good looks (if we have good looks) are our own. But that is totally false too. Did you give yourself good looks, or did the genes of mom and dad come together in a very nice way to give you a very balanced face, and suddenly everybody thinks you are good looking? And, of course, it is easy to trace those genes back to God because He made Adam and He made Eve and He made it possible at some point down to you, that those genes would come together and form your pretty face or your handsome face.

So not even our bodies, not even our attributes that we tend to take such pride in—our sports prowess or the way our minds work or whatever—we cannot say that we made them, that they are our own. We received them in one way or another, either by genetics or some other way; and ultimately they came from God.

We may say "Well, my sparkling personality is my own. I've built that over many years of life." But we found out in various studies and just plain old common sense that our sparkling personalities were formed before we were even aware of what was going on.

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It was when we were still infants that those factors that were going on in our lives then, plus a little bit of genetics and other things—other environmental factors—were forming that personality to become you.

You may have done a few things to tinker here and there, once you became aware that things went better if you acted this way to the girls and not that way, or what have you, and so you had an influence on your own personality. But we cannot say that our personalities are our own, that we made them. We actually, in large part, have received our personalities.

Of course, God has something to do with that. He called us at a certain point and began to make changes on that personality and that character, but we certainly cannot say that we really made ourselves the way we are today.

Finally, if we know anything about true redemption, true salvation, we know that we had nothing to do with our calling and our forgiveness and justification before God. The most that we did was to believe and then repent. Even there, if we are honest and look to what the Bible says, God gave us the abilities to do those things. He is the One that turned on the light and allowed us to believe, and He is the One that gave us the push to repent. We kind of just complied. And any kind of character that we built in the time since then has been a product of what God has given and our application. So we cannot say that any of that is ours alone.

What do we have that we did not receive?

You can follow this pattern, this mental exercise, with anything that we think is ours and just trace it out. We will see that by the time we get to the end of it, if we are honest, that it all goes back to God—God's gifts. It is either through creation that this gift has come, or through some sort of blessing that He has bestowed, or some sort of gift that He has given, or even some sort of intervention that He has made in our lives to bring something about so that we can have whatever it is that we think that we have.

So what do we have that we did not receive?

Well, the question is rhetorical in I Corinthians 4 but it is obvious that the answer is 'Nothing.' And so if the answer is nothing—if we have nothing that we did not receive—then we have to understand then that we have great obligation, especially to God. We have nothing to boast of because we cannot say "That's mine" because it was given to us. So, instead, what we have—if we are honest with ourselves, if we chase this out in the right way, if we think this through—we have good reason to be humble

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and we have a good reason to be grateful.

This principle is an important one for us to contemplate on the Day of Atonement. We may not have ever thought of it that way, but it is. The Day of Atonement is a day when we purposely afflict our souls and we come to realize, if we are paying attention, just how weak we are, how inconsequential we are, and how we needy we are.

If we start getting really hungry after just 18 hours or so and our minds starts frizzing out and we begin to just long for a bagel, or a good steak, or a cup of coffee, or whatever it is (a glass of milk, a glass of juice), we really figure out that we do not have much to boast about if this is all that we are.

So we come to understand, if we are thinking about this in terms of God, just how needy we are without the providence of God, both in the small things like food and water and sleep and that sort of thing, and in the great things of salvation—all of these things provided by God. Everything, physical and spiritual, comes from God.

As I have told you in my last sermon on the Feast of Trumpets, we are going to go through Book Four during these fall feasts. There are a couple of psalms in Book Four that apply very greatly to this theme of our neediness and God's providence, and that is what we are going to look at today. In these two psalms, we will see both our needy condition and God's awesome and total grace in providing for us.

Let us get an overview of the Day of Atonement by turning to Leviticus 16. We are going to read the last few verses of the chapter. This captures most of the ideas that are found in the Day of Atonement, not all of them—not the ones that have to do with Satan. We could go earlier in the chapter and talk about the Azazel goat and all that, but these particular verses do not cover that. The other ones are there.

Leviticus 16:29-34 “This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who sojourns among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. It is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever. And the priest, who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father's place, shall make atonement, and put on the linen clothes, the holy garments; then he shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the

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congregation. This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year.”

Some very important principles come out in these last five or six verses. The first and most notable aspect of this day, if you are looking at it from the outside, is, of course, the fact that we afflict our souls. That is the first thing he mentions there in verse 29 is that we shall afflict our souls on this day of the seventh month. We fast—that is what ‘afflict your souls’ means.

Let us go to Isaiah 58. I want to go to here just to show you that afflicting the soul and fasting are parallel ideas. They are the same thing. We just want verse 3, and you will notice how this verse is put together in parallel form. It is two parallel questions and they both say exactly the same thing. They both ask the same question. This is the Israelites talking to God as God is quoting them.

Isaiah 58:3 ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’

So understanding Hebrew poetry and their heavy use of parallelism, we can see that fasting and afflicting the soul is in parallel, whereas God not seeing and taking no notice is also in parallel. This verse and the two couplets are saying exactly the same thing. Fasting and afflicting your soul are peas in a pod. They are the same thing.

Now that we understand that, let us go to Deuteronomy 9. Moses is recounting going back up on the Mount after the golden calf incident. Verse 18 is enough. He also says a similar thing in verse 9.

Deuteronomy 9:18 And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.

Here Moses tells us that his fasting, which occurred for forty days and forty nights, included no food and no water. No food and no drink. It was a complete fast. Nothing went into this mouth to give him any sort of sustenance. So he was completely abstinent from food and drink during this whole period.

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Thankfully, for us, it is only 24 hours and not forty days. That would lay us low, especially those of us who are used to three squares a day and all that goes with it, here in the bread basket of the world. We can be happy that God was merciful and gave us only one day and not forty, and that is really something to be thankful for.

What it does is, even in 24 hours, as short a time as that is, it makes an impression on us. Like I said, we start getting hungry, we start feeling weak. We start getting a little bit mixed up in the brain. We do not make decisions quite as well. For me, well, I am standing up here in front of you, I cannot think of words like I should. They just do not come to mind quite as fast. The synapses are just half a tick behind what they should be. So we begin to see that.

We get a little headache, start to feel a little nauseated. It is just uncomfortable. All we want to do is maybe sleep, be in a dark room somewhere, moan and groan on the floor. I do not know how you face fasting, but we can feel these effects in just a few hours. And it is incredible that that is the way it works. We are so frail. We need to be stuffing our faces every few hours or our abilities just start being limited, and then in a short amount of time they are gone. All we can do is sit around and wait for the time to be over.

But what it does is, realizing the physical weakness that comes over us without food or water for just this short amount of time, we begin to understand, if we are in the right frame of mind, that we have been thinking a little bit too much of ourselves. We have been making a little bit too much of our abilities. We realize that our flesh is so weak. And what do we really have to boast of?

And so, the result of coming to realize that we are not hot stuff, makes us feel humble. We start to feel small. What this does then, if we are thinking about God in relation to ourselves, is it makes Him look so much more powerful, so much more enduring, so much more gracious and merciful, that He gives us these things that keep us going every day.

We get to understand a bit of perspective. We see how small we are and how great He is. And what this does is it teaches us the right attitude that we need to have before God, and in that attitude we put ourselves in subjection to Him. We should. Because if He is so great and we are so weak and He has done all this other stuff for us, we have an obligation to obey Him. So that is one of the things that we learn from fasting, and specifically on the Day of Atonement.

Calling the Day of Atonement the Day of Covering (Yom Kippur), He shows us—He tells

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us, He indicates to us—what it is that He wants us to concentrate on. And that is, how He has covered for us; how He has atoned for us; how He has, of His own freewill, done for us things that we could not do on our own, by our own power, that we are utterly incapable of doing and, in many cases, we would never even think of doing. But God had to step into history, step into our world as it were, and make these changes and do these things for us, and provide these things for us because we are totally incapable of doing them for ourselves.

Along with fasting, as we go back to Leviticus 16, the next thing He brings up immediately is “do no work at all.” So not only are we to afflict our souls in fasting, we are not to lift a finger in doing any kind of work on this day—and I feel this is an important and an often overlooked point. It is the *Sabbath of Sabbaths*, as it is said in Leviticus 23. It is the superlative Sabbath. If we keep the Sabbath regularly, on the seventh day of the week every week, and we do not do any work, we are supposed to think of the Day of Atonement as just the utmost of Sabbaths. We are supposed to keep this particular holy day, this particular Sabbath, even more closely—better than the other weekly Sabbaths. Because He has a point in this. We are to do no work at all.

Why are we to do no work at all? Because it is very important to understand that there is no work we can do to accomplish the things that He is trying to get our minds to think about on this day! It forces us, on the one hand, to give total attention to God. When we do no work, that means we need something to do, and we should, then, turn our minds toward Him, on this day in particular. If we keep our minds on God on the regular weekly Sabbath, we should it in spades on the Day of Atonement. This is the day that we concentrate on Him and what He does.

We could have gone through Isaiah 58 and seen what it is that God wants us to do on a day when we fast, but we will not go into that. He also, then, goes into what it is we do on the Sabbath, at the end of chapter 58, and He says we are not to do any of our own pleasures on this day. We are not supposed to speak our own words. We are not supposed to do our own activities. All of our activities on the Sabbath day are directed at what God wants—God’s words, God’s activities. And, like I said, that goes in spades for the Day of Atonement because this day is concentrated totally on Him.

So, on the one hand, it forces us to give total attention to the things of God on this day; on the other, it points out that in the process of atonement, in the work of atonement, we do nothing; it is done for us—that God’s atoning work is an act of utter grace. To me that is the bigger point. The bigger reason why we do no work is to remind us that God does this for us, and that we owe Him a great obligation—a debt of gratitude—for what He does for us in atoning for us. We could die thinking that we could somehow atone for

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our sins. But that really means nothing. It certainly does not help anyone else. It may *pay* for what we have done, but it does not *make up for* what we have done. The deed is done and all of the bad things that came from it continue.

But by Christ's sacrifice and the atoning work that He does, He has the power to make everything right, to make everything work, to make lemonade out of lemons as it were. And His sacrifice, as we would see in Hebrews if we were going to go through it, is totally effective. He made His sacrifice once for all—and not just for all people, but for all time. He does not have to continue making this sacrifice. He does not have to continue atoning for us every time we sin or every time anybody else sins. It is done.

By that great sacrifice, all sin has the potential of being forgiven, if we would come under the blood; and many of us have, and we should be very thankful for that on this Day of Atonement.

At the Passover, we take the sacrifice of Jesus Christ personally. But when we come to the Day of Atonement, the idea is similar but it is now universal—it extends out from us to all people. We have got to remember what we are talking about here. Its fulfillment is when Jesus Christ comes down in His second coming, and He extends this out not just to the few but to everyone; and He shows then, by the putting away of Satan, that He is willing to get rid of the prime mover of sin in order to bring atonement to all men. Like I said, that is something that is not particularly in this passage, but it is earlier in the chapter.

Here we are, back in Leviticus 16. I want to concentrate now on verse 30. Now that I have mentioned what Christ has done, I want to see this here in this verse.

Leviticus 16:30 “For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.”

Leviticus 16:32-34 “And the priest, who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father's place, shall make atonement, and put on the linen clothes, the holy garments; then he shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the congregation. This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year.”

What I wanted to show you, by going through that passage again, is that the atonement

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is not confined just to our sins. The general principle here is that by the time everything is said and done, Christ the High Priest will have made atonement for everything—all of it. All the effects of sin, all the things that separate, all the things that cause destruction will eventually be covered. Christ's work will continue on until everything is holy. That is what He is getting at.

By the time we get to Revelation 21 and 22, the New Jerusalem comes down and everything is dedicated to the Lord. You get to the end of Zechariah 14, even the pots will be holiness to the Lord. That is what we are talking about here in the general principle—when God and Christ decided that they would atone for the sins of this world and for all the bad things that happened in this world, they decided not to do just a little bit; they went all the way and decided that they will atone for everything.

Here we have it, just in the context of Israel. But it was not the Israelites' sins, it was also the tabernacle of meeting. He made atonement for the altar. He made atonement for the priests. He covers everything. He leaves nothing uncovered as it were, that when God does a thing He does it completely.

And so His goal, in atoning, was not just that one time when He gave Himself for our sins; His goal was for everything—not just for all the people, but for all the misdeeds and all the bad things that have ever happened. He wants to turn things totally around until everything is holy to the Lord. Big project, takes a long time, but you understand that this is God. He has the time and He has the power, and He will do it because He said it.

Let us get back to the high priest. This high priest is a symbol of Jesus Christ. And because we know of Jesus Christ and the work that He has done, we understand the fullness of His work of atoning for us. Just think of the things that He did. A lot of it revolves around His sacrifice for sin. But just think of it this way: His sacrifice pays for our sins; His death and His resurrection and ascension open the way to the Father for us so that we can have a relationship with Him; His blood continues to cover us when we sin.

You and I know that we have sinned since we first accepted the blood of Jesus Christ, that His blood still covers us, and we can come before the throne of grace and ask forgiveness. His blood, then, is applied to us, as it has always been, and so we are forgiven. We continue to be forgiven. It does not have to be shed again. God just remembers that we have accepted the sacrifice, and He once again accepts us back into His good graces as it were.

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But Romans 5 tells us that we are saved by His life—that He continues to live and He continues to work with us. He continues to do all those things that a mediator does, as a high priest does, to bring us into the Kingdom of God. And so it is by His work—His *continuing* work with us—that we are going to be in His Kingdom and we will ultimately be saved.

Think about this: All revelation—all the knowledge, all the understanding, all the wisdom that we have learned—comes from Jesus Christ; all the gifts of God's Spirit that we have and we are able to use in service to one another, are gifts from Him; and those gifts and all the other blessings that He gives us, plus the knowledge and all the experiences that He puts us through, makes our growth possible; and He makes all of our fruits that we bear possible. Remember John chapter 15—we need to stay attached to the vine so that we can bear fruit. He is the vine and we can only bear fruit by staying attached to the vine.

He is also the just Judge that judges us and our enemies, properly and rightly, and makes sure that things will be fair and equitable, and that those who are evil get their due and those who have done good will be rewarded. He is also the King who is going to establish equitable government on this earth, but has already established that government in His church and He rules us now better than any king, president, or prime minister could ever do on this earth. He does it all. As the New Testament says, He is our all in all. He is everything to us.

So even if it is the legal acts of covering sin and reconciling us to God, He did it. Or if it is as ongoing work of His to bring us into unity, to be at One with Him and the Father, He is the One doing it. It is an amazing thing that we owe it all to Jesus Christ, our High Priest, who is making atonement for us, for our sins, and for everything ultimately.

Let us go back to I John 2 to just get New Testament take on some of these things. We will ultimately get to Book Four. But this is the Day of Atonement, so we need to go over some of these things.

I John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation [the atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Hebrews 9:11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

The high priest, back in time of Moses when they did the atonement ritual, consecrated these physical things—physical altar, physical tabernacle, physical priests. But Christ has come in a better way because He is not consecrating these physical things anymore; He is consecrating their physical counterparts.

Hebrews 9:12-15 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 10:12-18 By this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified, and the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” Now where there is remission [or forgiveness] of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

It has done its job, and He has done His job, and this is what He wants to do for every man, woman, and child who has ever lived on the face of this earth: He wants to make this sacrifice work for them to bring all humanity into at-one-ment—into unity—with the Father and with Himself. And that is what He is at work to do. That one sacrifice that He gave is sufficient for all of that because He is the Creator, and He died for us and for all of His creation so that they could be at one with God.

What do we do in all of this? It is so very little. The most we do is submit, follow, and praise Him for His many gifts and blessing. That is pretty humbling. There is not really anything we cannot do except be grateful and let that gratefulness, that thankfulness become an obligation—make it feel inside that we have to do something to thank Him. So we follow. We obey. We do what He says because He knows best.

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We are going to now look at those psalms. We are going back to Psalm 102 and 103.

As you remember, I said that Book Four of the Psalms has to do with these fall holy days. And there are not any of these psalms that are specifically said to be 'This is a Psalm of Atonement/...of Trumpets/...of the Feast of Tabernacles/...of the Last Day of the Feast.' None of them say that. But if you look at the themes, you will see that they come out quite often in the words that are used and in the ideas that are brought out.

We are going to read Psalm 102. I think what I will do, first of all, is just read the first two verses so you get a sense of the psalmist's intention here.

Psalm 102:1-2 Hear My prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; incline Your ear to Me; in the day that I call, answer me speedily.

So what we have here, as the superscription indicates ("A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the Lord"), is a prayer of a person who is in a condition a lot like we are right now. But his condition is far worse: He is in dire straits of one sort or another, and he is calling out to God for help.

We have ritually afflicted ourselves today—in this one day—and it does not touch us quite as hard as this man was feeling. But its affect—the affect of our doing this on this one day—should bring us into an attitude that is roughly similar to what is portrayed here with this man's crying out to God. Our affliction, even though it is a light affliction right now (only one day; it is not that bad), is supposed to help us realize, as it says in verse 3, that our "days are consumed like smoke." It is very quick. You burn something like grass, and the smoke goes up, and it is gone—it dissipates. It does not take very long. We also have "My heart is stricken and withered like grass" in verse 4—a very similar idea there.

In other words, just like the Day of Atonement is supposed to do, we are to be reminded by reading this psalm how finite and weak we are in the flesh; that we do not matter much; that our abilities are not that great when we really think about it; that we are rather cheap and low; and without God's help, we are destitute and soon consumed by time. It all goes so fast and we are so weak to hold it off.

Let us go back to Psalm 90. We will be looking more at this during the Feast of Tabernacles. But I want you to see that this is a major theme of this particular section of

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psalms. It comes up time and again in these few chapters in Book Four. Notice here, starting in verse 3 (he is talking to God):

Psalm 90:3-4 You turn man to destruction, and say, “Return, O children of men.” For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.

So what the psalmist is doing here is he is making a comparison between God and himself—or God and humanity—and people come out on the short end of the stick.

Psalm 90:5 You carry them away like a flood. . .

There is also this idea of God being super-duper strong, which He obviously is, and us being very weak.

Psalm 90:5-7 You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up; in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers. For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified.

Now it starts to come into the idea that there are sins hanging over us and God is angry at our sin, and it terrifies us that He will use His strength against us and we have nothing to counter it with.

Psalm 90:8-11 You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. [Nothing gets by God. He knows it all. He has seen it all.] For all our days are passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.

Psalm 90:14-15 [There is a plea here.] Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, and the years in which we have seen evil.

There is this plea here, that even though we are weak and sinful and we have got all these problems and we can be blown away by the breath of His anger, to please help us do something with these lives—something that is good. Help us to make something of them. And all the help that we can get would come from Him.

Back to Psalm 102. I just want to show you that this is an ongoing theme in these psalms. Psalm 102 is organized in three parts, roughly in thirds: Verses 1-11 are a description of the affliction of the psalmist—why he is so low, what is going on in his life; verses 12-22 explain God's sovereign work; and then verses 23-28 is God's eternity and changelessness. What we see here, in the flow of this psalm, is that the final two-thirds of the psalm are the answers to the first third. The final two sections give the solution to his affliction and what is going on in his life.

We also need to know, as we go through this psalm, that the psalmist stands for every one of us. He is every man—every man under affliction. Every man is under affliction. Even the most successful, wealthiest, you-name-it person, who thinks of himself so highly and has got it all good, is actually under affliction. He does not know it. He is not aware of his sins. He does not know what is coming around the corner in his own life or in the history of the world, and so it fits him.

The solution that is shown in the second third and the last third of this psalm is the solution for everyone. Now, if we want to narrow it down, the psalmist stands for everyone who has a true knowledge of God: We can look at it that way too if we want to make it just a little bit more personal to ourselves.

But what happens in this psalm is that the affliction that he is going through, which we are going through in a very narrow example or a very narrow imitation right now, spurs the realization that there is nothing good—no betterment, no hope, no future—without what God can do and He has promised to do. That is where we get God's work, and God's sovereignty and His eternity in the second's last two sections.

Let us read these first 11 verses. We have read the first two.

Psalm 102:3-7 For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread [Did you do that this morning?]. Because of the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my skin [To put it in the modern vernacular, he is skin and bones, he is withered away, he is down to nothing because of this terrible trial that he is going through]. I am like a pelican in

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the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop.

So not only is he sick and wasting away and grievously afflicted, he is also alone and grieving.

Psalm 102:8-12 My enemies reproach me all day long [he is always under the gun], and those who deride me swear an oath against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of Your indignation and Your wrath [now we are starting to see that his problems are self caused in some way through sin, that he sees that God is allowing him to go through this terrible trial to cause some sort of change in him, so he is under a curse as it were]; for You have lifted me up and cast me away [this is not the normal 'lift me up' as in exaltation, this is like 'dragged him up by his hair and cast away', it is much more violent]. My days are like a shadow that lengthens, and I wither away like grass [So he is in a tough spot: He feels like he is dying, everyone is against him, he is totally alone, and he does not have the physical resources to do anything. And then comes verse 12]. But You, O Lord [now notice the difference here: He had just been talking about how weak he is and how alone he is and how he is going to die soon—that is the impression you get], shall endure forever, and the remembrance of Your name to all generations.

So, with verse 12, we see a pivot. It is the pivot verse of the psalm. We see that he has stopped thinking about himself. It is almost as if he has come to this point. He has described himself and his situation, and everything is bad, and suddenly he gets to verse 12 here and it is like he suddenly says, "Wait, here I am moaning and complaining about myself all this time, and I have no answers. I've been able to come up with nothing that works. Everything I've tried has just made things worse. I'm getting thinner, I'm getting weaker, I'm falling down. I see no hope whatsoever. But God comes to mind." It is like the man who comes to himself and suddenly realizes "Hey, I've been looking at this all wrong. I've been looking at 'Me' and all I have wanted to do is 'Make me better.' "

Then from somewhere comes the idea that he better think about God. "But God, He has eternity, He has power, He has character. He knows what to do. There's the answer. Here I've been looking inwardly all this time for the answer and it's never been there. The answer is in God." And so that is where we go into the final two sections of this

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chapter here.

Psalm 102:13-22 You [meaning God] will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and show favor to her dust. So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. For the Lord shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory. He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer. This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord. For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the Lord viewed the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those appointed to death, to declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem, when the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.

In this section, what he does here is he begins by saying God will have mercy. It is a fundamental part of His character. After he turns his mind to God and says, “Hey, God has time and He has strength and He has character,” the next thing that pops into his head is that “He is going to show mercy.” And who is He going to show mercy to? Well, he uses the word ‘Zion’. It is a code word. It does mean God’s people. It does mean, if you are looking at it in a physical sense, those in Jerusalem, those of Judah, those of Israel.

But it is a code word for us—because where was Zion? Zion is where the Lord’s house is. Zion is where He dwells in His Temple. So he is talking about having mercy on those who live close to God. They are on Mount Zion. They are the ones who are His neighbors as it were or who are actually in the Temple, serving God in the Temple. So His mercy begins with His people.

Notice that the next thing he says, that God has made a “set time” for that. He has an appointed time (where He is going to have mercy to favor her) to give Mount Zion, to give God’s people His grace. So He is going to open it up at a time that He has set and He is going to do that. Now, for this psalmist, that is a future time. He mentions that later where he says “This will be written for the generation to come” in verse 18. He knew, whoever this psalmist was, that there was going to be a time in the future when God was going to open up grace to a lot more people and He was going to have mercy.

Now there are intimations here that he is talking about Christ’s first coming, but the emphasis actually seems to be on His second coming, which we are talking about now,

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and the atoning work that is done once He comes. Now, do not get me wrong, the first coming was when He made the sacrifice for that work to be able to be done. But there is still work to be done when He comes.

Have you ever thought of it this way, that when He comes back, He makes atonement in terms of judging the peoples? He is setting up conditions for there to be unity and at-one-ment between the people of earth and God. So by judging the wicked at His coming, particularly the beast and the false prophet, and getting them out of the way makes certain things possible. By putting Satan in the bottomless pit and getting him out of the way also makes things possible. By setting up His government on earth, in making a government of peace and equity, this sets up conditions for people to be at one with God.

All of these things that He does are part of this great process that He is involved in to get the people of earth (to get humanity, in general) to follow Him and the Father and to be One with them.

So these are the things that are being talked about in this section, that He is thinking far into the future of the time not just when Christ's sacrifice is made, but even beyond, when God is able to do all these other things to bring all of humanity together under Him. All of these things that He does, he ascribes under the heading of 'Acts of mercy, and grace, or favor, to His people.'

So, if we look at verses 18-22 where it is said "This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord," he is probably here referring to the generation of Jesus Christ and the apostles; that this is when things got going, in this 'generation to come.' It could also mean our generation because there have been a lot of people called and converted in this generation.

But it is probably more that other generation that I talked about. Because look what he says next: "For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the Lord viewed the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those appointed to death, to declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem." Now let us go to Luke 4 and see what Jesus said about His ministry. He is quoting the prophet Isaiah here.

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable

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year of the Lord.”

Luke 4:21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

So these are the things in verses 20 and 21, back in Psalm 102, that are being talked about here, that Christ came in His ministry to bring redemption, salvation, and freedom from sin and its consequences. And that is what He did: God looked down, said the set time—the appointed time—is right, and He sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Then, once we get to verse 22, we find that he jumps far forward in time and he says “when the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.” That is Millennium because that did not happen when He came in His first time. The work that He did in order to bring about atonement was done in that first coming (the main work). But this other work—bringing all the kingdoms of the world and all the peoples together to serve Him—is a second coming job. And so all of this atoning work is considered in this one particular passage.

In verses 23 and 24, the psalmist returns to his affliction. He thinks that he is weak and dying before his time, and this reminds him of God’s eternity.

Psalm 102:25-27 Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, all of them will grow old like a garment; like a cloak you will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end. The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You.

When he thought again about his affliction, it made him think about God again. But this time he was not thinking necessarily about this mercy and the appointed time; it made him think about the fact that God is eternal and everything about God is eternal, and nothing changes about God: His character is constant.

He begins to put this together, that if God is eternal and His character never changes and He is our powerful Creator (he brings in that too that God laid the foundations of the earth and that sort of thing), he said this is in itself a solution to the problem. Because God is good. And if God is good and His character never changes, and He has all this

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power as Creator, is death any impediment to Him? Not at all.

And, so, by the time you get to the end of verse 26, he says “like a cloak you will change them, and they will be changed.” It is saying that all of this physical body we have is like a garment, and in time God will say “That garment needs to be changed” and He will change it. This is a reference to the resurrection from the dead.

Verses 27 and 28: “You are the same, and Your years will have no end. The children of Your servants will continue [they will keep on living] and their descendants will be established before You.” What he is saying here is that (one of the solutions) even if God allows us to die before our time in weakness and in all this trouble and affliction, at one point in the future (whenever that is) He says: “Your garment will need to be changed. Rise up and continue. Because you are one of My servants.” And we know that that will happen in the first resurrection for those who have been called now.

He is saying here that even though these great afflictions weigh down upon us, even if we die, the solution is still tenable. God can raise us from the grave. So death is no problem for God. He can overcome death. Even if we are very afflicted to the point of death, we do not need to worry; God is on His throne, He will raise us up.

Let us go II Corinthians 4 and just look at the positive way Paul looks at this. He says:

II Corinthians 4:7-14 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side [sounds like the psalmist], yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body [he is talking about the resurrection]. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

This is the same idea that is found at the end of Psalm 102, that even though we are going through great trials, we do not need to fear. God has us in the palm of His hands and He will raise us up at the appointed time.

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Psalm 103 is a psalm that extols God for all of His benefits. And the sense of elation, of joy, of hope that came through at the end of Psalm 102 goes right into Psalm 103.

Psalm 103:1-2 Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.

Then he goes and starts listing all the benefits that he has figured out are from God. This is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving as David counts his blessings, you could say, and realizes everything good that he has comes from God—like we did at the beginning of the sermon.

He went through an exercise like this and said, “All that’s happened to me has been a blessing from God. He’s worked everything out.” The overall theme here is that God provides and, in fact, not only does He provide, but He is all sufficient for us. We do not really need anything else. God will supply all that is good that we need. And as David says very pointedly there, in verse 2, these are benefits that we should never forget. Do not ever let them get far from your mind.

The word ‘benefits’ is worth considering just for a moment. It is ‘gemul’ in Hebrew and its primary meaning is ‘recompense’; it is ‘pay for something.’ It has to do with giving what is deserved, or giving what is due. It can be a reward, or it can be someone’s just desserts—depending on how it is used in the particular context.

But here, in this chapter, every one of the benefits that we see David extolling here—all the recompense—is good. Every one of them is a reflection of the supreme goodness of God that whether we deserve them or not (whether we should actually get more bad things, it does not matter), God continues to give us good things. We do not deserve it, but God gives us wonderful blessings time after time.

It is a mix of physical and spiritual benefits, but top of the list is in verse 3, that He forgives all our iniquities. It is that atoning work that He did on the cross that gets first billing—God forgives our sins. It is from this atoning work that we are supposed to get the sense that all of the rest of these things flow. All these other spiritual benefits come as a result of it because by that atoning sacrifice, the relationship between us and God has been restored and now these benefits that He gives us are both possible and necessary to bring us to perfection and unity with God. So He had to get that one first—the forgiveness of our sins—so that we can have that relationship and start all these other processes.

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Most of this psalm revolves around God's mercy and grace and the fact that He puts it away completely. He wants us to understand that once He forgives us, once He gives us mercy, all those sins are gone—like he says later “as far as east from the west,” He puts it out of His mind. “It's done. It's over. Let's move forward,” He is saying.

Psalm 103:2-7 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

What he is saying here is that the law is a gift, a benefit from God, things that He taught through Moses; and all the experiences that He dragged Israel through were also gifts of God to you.

Psalm 103:8-19 The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins [as we probably deserved], nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust [He knows that we are fleshly people and that we can only take so much]. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children [meaning forever], to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them. The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all [and he finishes with “Bless the Lord, O my soul!”].

All of these benefits are ours because God loves us and He has mercy toward us, and He wants to favor us with His grace and with His goodness.

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But the psalm contains a reminder that He expects something of us. In verses 11, 13, and 17, He extends His mercy to “those who fear Him,” those who honor and respect Him and are afraid to disappoint Him and who always come to Him for help in time of need—who come and ask for His mercy—because they do not want to be apart from Him.

In verse 18: His mercy covers those who “keep His covenant”—those who are faithful to the agreement to give their lives to God as a living sacrifice and to love God and to love our neighbor. Those are the people to whom God’s benefits will flow.

Also in verse 18: He will be merciful to those who keep His commandments—those who practice His way of life by following His instruction.

In the way this psalm is written, David shows that these requirements are nothing (easy to do as it were) compared to all the blessings and the gifts and the grace and the mercy that God bestows upon us. What little we do in these ways of fearing Him and keeping the commandments, that is little price to pay for what He gives. We should gladly throw ourselves into doing these things in gratitude for what He does for us. David ends telling all creation to praise God for all the wonderful things He does, for all His manifold blessings. We cannot praise God enough for the things that He is.

Commentator Adam Clarke said about this psalm: “The more we praise God, the more occasion we shall see to praise him, and the more spiritually minded we shall become. Praise proceeds from gratitude; gratitude from a sense of obligation; and both praise and gratitude will be in proportion to the weight of that obligation; and the weight will be in proportion to the sense we have of God’s great goodness and our own unworthiness.”

We have much—a great, great deal—to give thanks for, and especially for the work of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. I would like to close just by reading a few verses from Jude.

Jude 20-21 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Jude 24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.