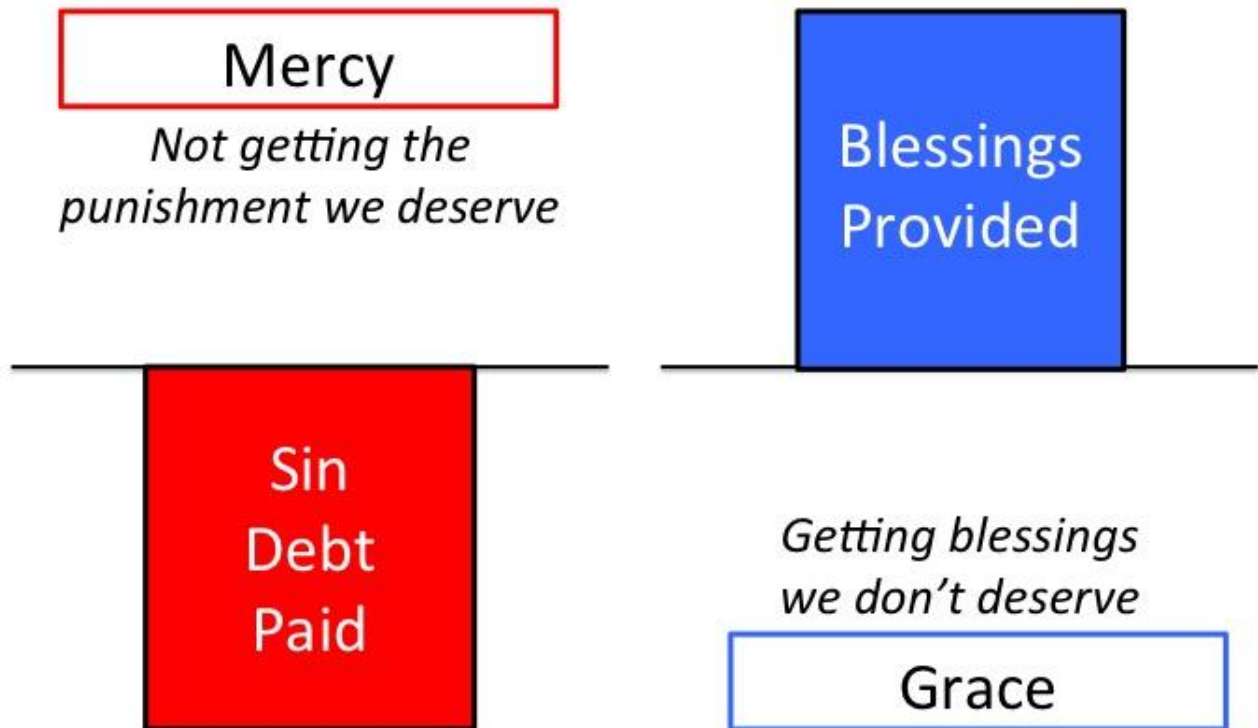


Thankful for Grace

Psalm 103

Last Sunday we walked through Psalm 51 as a reminder to be thankful for God's mercy. Today we turn to Psalm 103 to be thankful for God's grace.



- **Mercy** is not getting the punishment we deserve – like a red deficit erased.
- **Grace** is getting blessings we don't deserve – like a blue surplus given to us.

What we saw last week is that

You can't separate God's mercy from His grace for they are perfectly united in Christ.

In the same moment that God mercifully forgives your sin He graciously declares you righteous in Christ, adopts you as His child and fills you with His Spirit.

Salvation is not just about being forgiven for our sins so we don't need to suffer the punishment we deserve. Salvation is about being given infinite blessings in Christ that we begin to enjoy now and will celebrate with the Lord forever and forever.

Christians should be the most thankful people on the planet because we know both sides of this equation. **We know the uncountable cost of our sin** – the price that had to be paid in the precious blood of Jesus. We know that you and I should have paid that price and it was only God's mercy that redirected our punishment onto Jesus on the cross.

And **we also know the infinite riches of the grace of Christ** – at least we are beginning to know them. In Christ we are forgiven and free, we are justified and reconciled, we've been adopted and anointed.

Psalm 103 swings beautifully back and forth from mercy to grace, from mercy to grace. This is the enchanting rhythm of salvation – God sweeps away our sin and then lifts us up into Himself; He washes us clean and then fills us with His Spirit. Verses 12-13 give us a preview of this artistic symmetry:

Mercy to Forgive

*Not getting the
punishment we deserve*

*“As a father shows
compassion to his
children, so the Lord
shows compassion to
those who fear him.”
Psalm 103:13*

*“As far as the east is
from the west so far
does he remove our
transgressions
from us.”
Psalms 103:12*

*Getting blessings
we don't deserve*

Grace to Give

The twin strokes of mercy and grace paint a masterpiece of God's work on our behalf in this Psalm. This should fill us with **gratitude for WHAT HE HAS DONE for us**. We will focus on this artistry today but don't miss the frame of this painting. Psalm 103 is masterfully outlined with the character of God – moving us to **praise Him for WHO HE IS**.

THANK GOD for what He has done

PRAISE GOD for who He is

- “Praise the LORD, my soul... Praise *his holy name*.” (v. 1 NIV)
 - “The Lord is *merciful and gracious*...” (v. 8 ESV)
- “*His kingdom rules* over all... Praise the LORD, all his works.” (v. 19,22 NIV)

We worship and praise God because He is the only One who deserves our devotion. He IS holy, merciful, gracious, sovereign, just, patient, loving, and good – to name only seven of His infinite perfections.

So that is **the frame around this Psalm** – the holiness and sovereignty of God – focusing our attention on verse 8 and ***the central identity of the Lord*** – the merciful and compassionate God of heaven who is “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” This is the God we know and love and worship. This is the God we trust and follow and obey.

We praise God for who He IS and we thank Him for what He has DONE. “Forget not all His benefits!” Psalm 103 shows us 7 gifts from God – **3 subtractions of his mercy and 4 additions of his grace**. If you imagine what you deserve as a glaring red deficit below a neutral line, mercy removes all of that red, zeroes it out. Then if you imagine the blessings God has given us in Christ as blue credits above the line – that new account stretches “as high as the heavens are above the earth”!

May our hearts sing with gratitude as we remember and rehearse the mercy and grace of God!

First, three gifts of God’s mercy – subtractions of what we deserve.

3 Merciful Subtractions

1. Suffering for Sin

“Bless his holy name! ...Who forgives all your iniquity...as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:1,3,12

We worship the Lord as the God of all holiness, righteousness and goodness. He is utterly separate from sin and has to punish sin in order to remain perfectly just. So apart from Jesus we all deserve to be punished for our sins – to pay for them ourselves by suffering for them eternally. That would be justice.

But the suffering we deserve is the suffering Jesus endured for us on the cross. He suffered and died so we would not have to. That was the only way for Psalm 103 to come true – for the divine Son of God to take our punishment. Only then could God be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

3 Merciful Subtractions

1. Suffering for Sin

- **Removed by the Suffering Savior**

“Bless his holy name! ...Who forgives all your iniquity...as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:1,3,12

But because of Jesus Psalm 103 is wonderfully true for us. In Christ God has forgiven ALL of our iniquity. And verse 12 is a wonderful picture – as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us! If you belong to Jesus then your sins are not on you anymore, they have been removed from your account and transferred to Jesus. You will never suffer for those sins – the price has been paid, the debt forgiven!

We not only deserve to suffer for our sin, we ought to remain enslaved to our sin forever.

3 Merciful Subtractions

2. Slavery to Sin

“Who redeems your life from the pit.” Psalm 103:4

Verse four says the Lord redeems your life from the pit. God purchased you from slavery and set you free in Christ.

Apart from Jesus everyone is in bondage to sin, even if they don't know it. With some sins it is obvious – addictions to drugs, alcohol, sex or gambling. With other sins the slavery is less obvious but no less real.

- Think of how women become **enslaved to their appearance** – a certain dress size, a certain hairstyle, expectations about the name brands they will or won't wear.
- Or think of how men become enslaved to their **status in weight lifting or sports** – which is why it's so crushing when you have an injury.
- One of the most **common idols today is kids**. Children are a wonderful blessing from God but if you worship and serve them and make them something ultimate in your life – you will live in bondage to them and be crushed if anything happens to them.

It doesn't matter what the specific master is – ***anything we devote ourselves to can become a slave driver for us***, and gradually it gains more and more control over our hearts and lives. Apart from Jesus, we would never escape this but would remain bound to our idols forever, continually closing in on ourselves.

3 Merciful Subtractions

2. Slavery to Sin

- **Released by the Blood of the Redeemer**

“Who redeems your life from the pit.” Psalm 103:4

But Jesus saw us in this dark pit of selfishness, idolatry and pride and he paid the price to redeem us from it. The price was his own life. ***He got us out of the pit by entering it himself***. He allowed himself to be bound to our sin, consumed by it as you should have been consumed by it forever. But because he did, you and I are free – we are no longer controlled by sin, for we have a new master now!

Do you see what God's mercy subtracts from us? Suffering for sin – removed in Christ. Slavery to sin – released in Christ. Third – separation IN sin – replaced in Christ! Verse 9:

3 Merciful Subtractions

3. Separation in Sin

- **Replaced by the Forsaken Son**

“He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.” Psalm 103:9-10

Consider again **what we deserve**: for God to accuse us and hold on to his anger forever. We deserve for God to deal with us according to our sins and to repay us according to our iniquities. Imagine if he did that!

That will be the fate of all who do not belong to Jesus by faith. They will be **judged by their works** and dealt with according to what they have done, said and thought. It will be a grim and terrible judgment day. Listen to these troubling verses:

The Judgment we Deserve

“And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”
Revelation 20:12

“The Lord... will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.” 1 Corinthians 4:5

And here is the final result:

The Judgment we Deserve

*“He will render to each one according to his works: ...for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **there will be wrath and fury.**”* Romans 2:6,8

*“And cast the worthless servant into **the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**”* Matthew 28:30

To be judged by your works is to be utterly exposed – to have your thoughts and intentions laid bare along with your choices. The light of judgment will then give way to the darkness of punishment. And in the end, there will be a final separation of the saved from the unsaved, the righteous from the unrighteous.

We all deserve to be on the losing side of that separation – to be taken away with the goats who do not belong with the Lord rather than to be named among His sheep. We do not deserve to hear God say “well done, good and faithful servant,” but rather to hear those dreaded words, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” That is the judgment we deserve. But listen to the Gospel promise in Psalm 103!

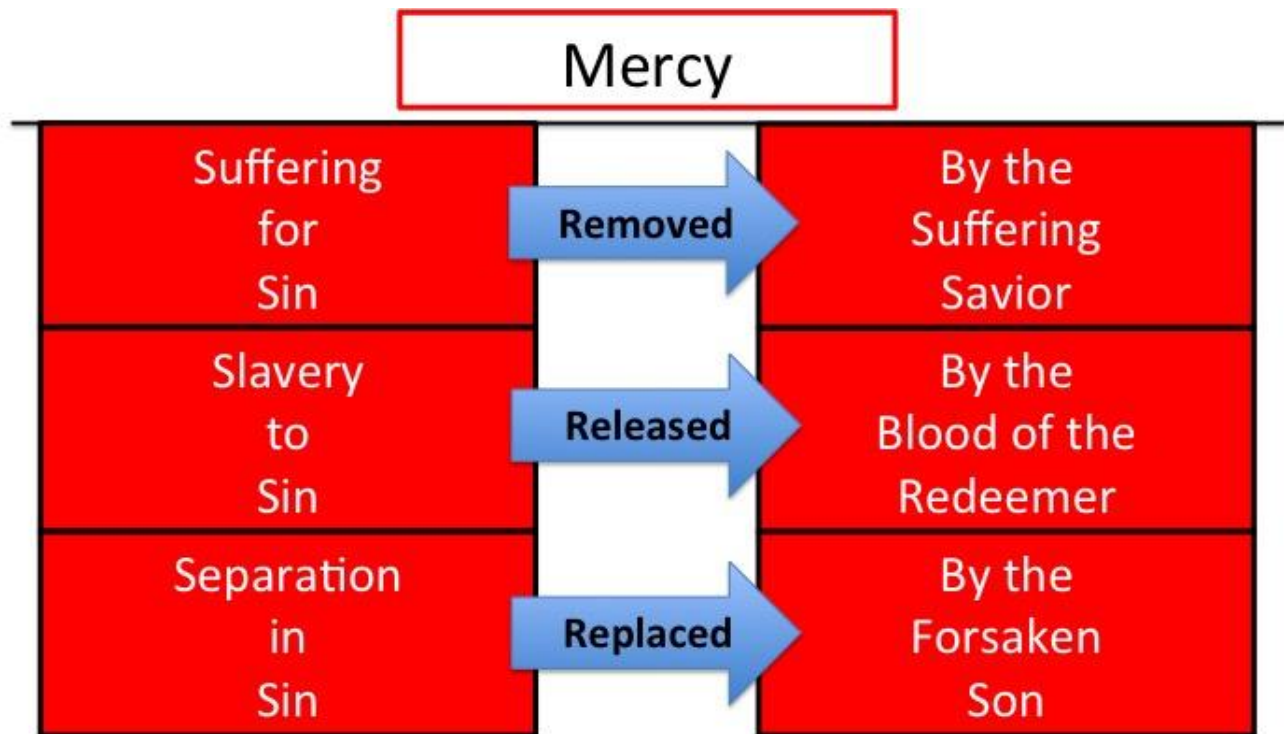
3 Merciful Subtractions

3. Separation in Sin

- **Replaced by the Forsaken Son**

*“He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not **deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.**”* Psalm 103:9-10

Jesus suffered so you wouldn't have to. Jesus was bound to your sin so you could be free. Jesus was forsaken so you could be accepted. That is why God “does not deal with us according to our sins,” – He can deal with us according to Jesus' righteousness and love. Here is a visual of these three merciful subtractions:



1. ***The suffering we deserve has been removed by the Suffering Savior.*** He endured the full punishment you and I should have faced for our sin. He drank the cup of God's wrath so it would not fall on you or me.
2. ***Our slavery to sin has been released by the blood of the Redeemer.*** He paid the price to set us free – the price of His own blood. He was bound to our sin so we could be free from its bonds.
3. ***The separation from God we deserved has been replaced by the One*** who cried out from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" We should remain IN OUR SIN forever but Jesus became sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. He was cast out into darkness so we could come home into light.

And that transitions us **from mercy into grace**. Not only has God mercifully subtracted our suffering, slavery and separation, but He has graciously added four wonderful gifts.

Mercy to Forgive



Hope –
A New Confidence

Wholeness –
A New Condition

Happiness –
A New Capacity

Healing –
A New Creation

Grace to Give

From bottom to top – God has given us:

1. **Healing** – we are a New Creation in Christ
2. **Happiness** – we have a new capacity for joy in Christ
3. **Wholeness** – we have a new condition in Christ – no longer fragmented and conflicted but now united to the Lord and;
4. **Hope** – we have a new confidence for our eternity.

Let's walk through these four gifts of grace.

4 Gracious Additions

1. **Healing – a New Creation**

“Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases... who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Psalm 103:3,5

David wrote this Psalm **1,000 years before Jesus was born** - and yet the Gospel is crystal clear in every line. David prophetically expected a day when sins would not only be forgiven through a perfect sacrifice but when something totally new, something gloriously unexpected would be provided: **an internal healing and spiritual transformation** through which “all our diseases” could be healed and by which our youth could be “renewed like the eagle’s.”

During his earthly ministry Jesus healed many people physically, but those physical healings were a sign of the greater spiritual healing Jesus came to provide. Remember when **the paralyzed man** was lowered on a stretcher by four friends so he could see Jesus? The Lord did not heal this man right away but first said, **“Son your sins are forgiven.”** Then, to prove he had the authority to

forgive the man's sins, Jesus told that lifelong paralytic to get up and walk – and he did! The physical healings proved Jesus' authority to give us the spiritual healing we really need.

One day Jesus will heal ALL OF YOUR DISEASES. When he comes back he will make all things new and all pain and suffering and death will be gone forever – we'll cover that in a minute. But Jesus has already dealt with our primary disease – the root cause of all the other problems we struggle with. He has dealt with our sin not only by forgiving us in his mercy but by making us new in Himself. Here is how Paul says it in 2 Corinthians:

4 Gracious Additions

1. Healing – a New Creation

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Jesus called this **“regeneration” being born again** because the transformation is so significant for you spiritually as your birth was for you physically. At the moment you were born you started breathing oxygen. In the same way when you were reborn spiritually you started breathing the new air of the Holy Spirit. Before you were born physically your lungs were developing, awaiting the time when they would suddenly change from processing oxygen through your mother's umbilical cord to taking it in directly from the outside air. In the same way your spiritual heart was cold and dead until that moment when your faith met God's grace and that heart of stone was replaced with a heart of flesh that could pump the blood of God's own LIFE into you.

The Bible describes this immediate transformation as **being IN CHRIST. Before this you were IN SIN and UNDER God's WRATH.** After that moment of salvation you were IN CHRIST as a new creation, “the old has passed away, behold the new has come.” Or in the words of Psalm 103, all of your diseases were suddenly healed so that your youth was renewed like an eagle. You used to struggle along, crawling on the ground spiritually – once you were reborn in Christ **you were given wings to fly.**

C.S. Lewis says trying to get someone to be good – to really be good – apart from Jesus inside of them, is like trying to teach an egg how to fly. He says **you “must hatch or go bad.”** Those are the only two options – be reborn as a new creation connected with Christ or remain in your natural state and continue to be corrupted by your sin.

4 Gracious Additions

2. Happiness – a New Capacity

*“Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, **who satisfies your desires with good... as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.**” Psalm 103:3-4,11*

Do you see how God's grace stretches so far beyond His mercy? He not only wipes out our sin debt, he crowns us with his steadfast love; he satisfies us with the goodness of His presence. **His love for us is so great it can only be compared in size to the vastness of the cosmos!**

As a new creation in Christ, **you have a new spiritual heart** with a new capacity for joy and love and obedience. Before Jesus you struggled to crawl, now in Christ you can spiritually fly. Do you

remember your first love for the Lord? Do you remember when you first realized how good the Good News really is?

I remember being at a Challenge Youth Conference and hearing a speaker say, ***“Nothing you do can make God love you more. Nothing you do can make God love you less.”*** Even though I had grown up in church and Sunday School and youth group I heard that teaching and thought, “That can’t be right... There must be things we do and then God loves us more; and things we do and then God loves us less...” The truth of the Gospel began to break through in my heart as I realized that the good news was even better than I had thought.

God has loved us PERFECTLY in Christ – COMPLETELY. We can’t make him love us more or less because His love for us is already INFINITE and it cannot change! “He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.” And once you begin to taste the goodness and love of God you realize how much better HE is than anything in this world. “He satisfies your desires with good things” by giving you more and more of HIMSELF; by pouring more of His love into your new heart.

4 Gracious Additions

3. Wholeness – a New Condition

“The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children...” Psalm 103:17

Before the believer is made new in Christ we were slaves to our sin – bound to it, defined and controlled by it. The image of God in us gave us a conscience so we knew those sins were wrong but we had no ability or desire to fight against them. So we were terribly conflicted people.

Non-believers are divided in heart and mind. Part of them knows what is right and knows they ought to worship only God. But another part only loves themselves and wants to insist on their own way. They may do some good things but even then their motives will be self-serving.

Apart from Jesus people CANNOT have integrity – they cannot be WHOLE but will always be divided – knowing there is a right and wrong but being utterly unable to do it.

But the believer, ***when you were given a new heart, you were finally made whole.*** The penalty for sin was paid and the power of sin over you was broken. You are no longer a slave to sin but are now bound heart, mind and body to Christ. Some sin still remains in your life but it no longer defines or controls you. God’s love is always upon you, from everlasting to everlasting. And “his righteousness” is what DEFINES you – and is even passed on to your children, grandchildren and on.

One more gift of God’s grace:

4 Gracious Additions

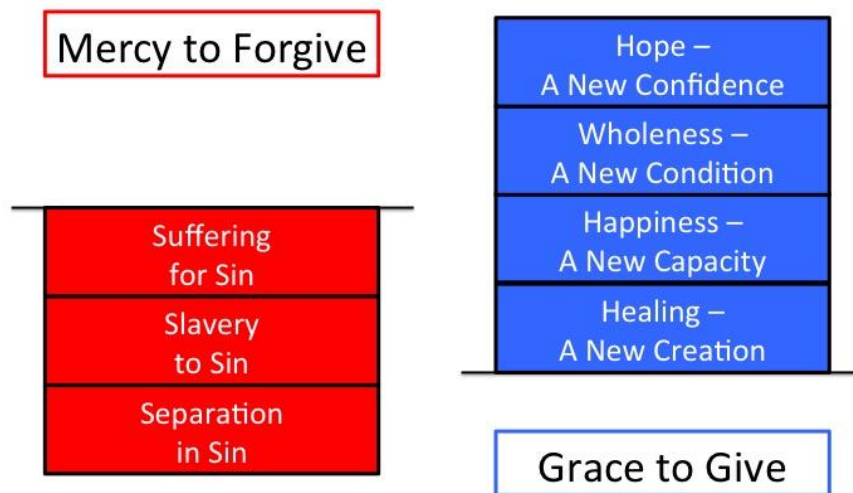
4. Hope – a New Confidence

“The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed... the Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” Psalm 103:6,19

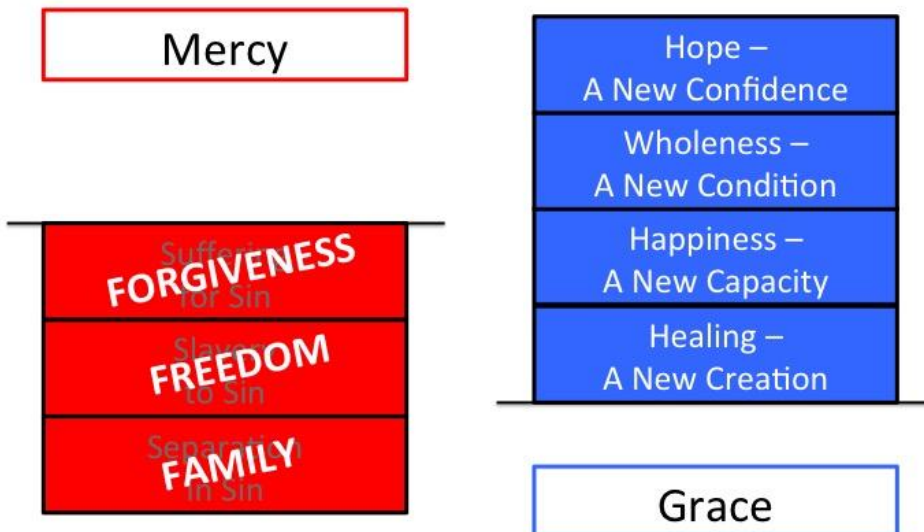
On top of everything else we have in Christ, we have this **blessed assurance about eternity**. God will set everything RIGHT in the end. He will restore the whole world to peace and harmony. He will ensure justice for every single person on earth. His kingdom rules over all and when Jesus comes back to reign directly here on earth it will be a reign of perfect righteousness and justice.

In this world we will have trouble – we will go through various trials and tribulations as part of God’s plan for us – how He grows us and uses us for His glory. But all of our sorrows and pain, all of our fears and worries will disappear in the instant we see Jesus. ***He will make all things new*** and the light of His glory will illumine the world.

So here is the summary: we deserve suffering, slavery and separation, but God has mercifully removed those curses and instead given us infinite blessing in Christ.



- The Suffering Savior purchased our forgiveness.
- The blood of the Redeemer has released us from our slavery.
- The Forsaken Son of God has taken our separation and brought us into the family of God.



On top of those merciful subtractions, God has graciously given us healing, happiness, wholeness and hope. In Christ we have the fullness of mercy and overflowing grace – we have “every spiritual blessing” in Him.

Are you THANKFUL? I hope and pray that the mercy and grace of God has moved our hearts to be filled with gratitude. When we realize what we deserve from God it should humble us before Him. And when we realize what He has given us in Christ it should fill us with joy and thankfulness.

There is a handout in your worship program today that goes through Psalm 103 listing what we deserve contrasted with what we’ve been given in Christ. Use this Psalm as a gratitude tool for you this week – pray through a verse or two every day and give thanks to the Lord for all that you have in Christ. Remember 1 Thessalonians 5:16 -

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

May we be THANKFUL people – overwhelmed with the mercy and grace of God to underserving sinners like us!