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Luke 5:1-11

“THE HIDDEN BENEFITS OF BECOMING A CHRISTIAN”

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One day a man was interviewing for a job. After he found out the salary, he said: “That’s not enough. I make more than that now.”

But the employer said, “Wait. Have you considered the hidden benefits of this job? You get free medical insurance, a month’s paid vacation, social security, and a 20% discount on all of our merchandise.”

“Wow,” thought the man. “When you add up all the hidden benefits, this is great!”

How many people, when I talk to them about becoming Christians and about living God’s way, ask: “Why should I? I like the life I have. I’m not sure that I want to trade what I have for Jesus Christ’s promise of living forever---gambling on some sort of pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by. That’s up far off. I don’t even relate to it, with all that is going on in my life right now.”

These people don’t see anything but the basic package---heaven--- and that doesn’t always mean much to a person, who is earthbound and who has no spiritual values.

I just wish these people would look closer at all the ‘hidden benefits’ of becoming a Christian. I just wish they could see. For once, all of the good things, which God wants to offer them---right here and now, in this life, as a result of coming into a new relationship with Him.

That’s why I’m reminded of, when I read this Psalm, where David says: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.” Don’t overlook any of God’s benefits---the hidden benefits of being a Christian.

I believe that I can say, with David: if this life were all there was---if there were no heaven to come---I’m still glad to have become a Christian for the hidden benefits. God offers us “all this and heaven, too!” Please, my friends, “forget not all His benefits!”

Let’s take a closer look at the hidden benefits, which David has listed, for putting your trust in Jesus Christ, the son of the living God. Let me show you the “fine print.”

I’ve tried to lump these into four major benefits:

Health Insurance,
Personalized Care,
Guaranteed Satisfaction, and an
Unbeatable Retirement Plan

Consider God’s:

1. **Health Insurance Plan**

Verse 3: “Who forgives all thine iniquities; who heals all thy diseases;”

When God first chose a people for Himself, He chose the Jews. They later became slaves in the land of Egypt. While there---in the most advanced civilization of that day---God promised them that, if they would hear His voice and keep His commandments, He would put “none of these diseases,” from which the heathen Egyptians suffered, upon them (Exodus 15:26).

Ever since this time, God has had a special health plan for His chosen people---whether Jews, in the Old Testament, or Christians in our present time.

I believe that I will enjoy generally better health, because I am a Christian, than the heathen unbelievers around me. This is especially true, since I started following Jesus in my youth.

Now, mind you, I am not some sort of “faith healer,” who specializes in going around and healing everyone, who line up, by the touch of his hand. I do not even have a lot of confidence in the ones, who do that sort of a thing.

I do believe that God can and does miraculously heal people, without medicine and doctors...even those who are beyond the hope of medicine. Yet, I am not sure that it is always God’s plan to miraculously heal all of His children. He obviously hasn’t healed them all, beginning with the apostle Paul (who had some chronic ailment, which he called the “thorn in his flesh”) and the young missionary, Timothy (who was told to “drink a little wine...for his many infirmities”).

By health insurance, I don’t mean that every Christian will be spared from ever getting sick or having to suffer the failing health that comes with the aging process.

But I do believe that a Christian can enjoy better health, for having been right with God. I believe that, when God forgives all our iniquities, that the healing of many “of our diseases” just follows automatically.

I believe there are many **PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS**, with which a non-Christian must cope, that Christians wont have to endure, because of their faith and a healthy relationship with their Creator God! It is scientifically estimated that the majority of our sickness (estimates vary from 60% to nearly 100%) are caused by emotions, such as: guilt, fear, sorrow, envy, and resentment. Such emotional stress can cause high blood pressure, migraine headaches, arthritis, heart trouble, and other diseases too numerous to mention.

With all of our diet fads, we have at last come to know that it is not what we eat that hurts us. It is the things, which are “eating” us, that cause the sickness and pain. Resentment, bitterness, vindictiveness, and getting-even are “Killer Emotions.” And only as we are in such a relationship that we can “let go and let God,” can we ever hope to avoid these threats to our well being.

Unfortunately, doctors cannot dispense “peace of mind capsules.” However, these can come by a relationship of trust in a forgiving Savior and a loving heavenly father. John 14:27 spells this out so beautifully: “Peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,” This verse is saying that a new relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, can take care of these killer emotions, which threaten our health. How wonderful to discover this healing peace.

Nor need a Christian ever come down with many other **PHYSICAL DISORDERS.** Obeying God’s sex laws will prevent all manner of venereal diseases: the mental illness of syphilis, the blindness of gonorrhea, and the hopelessness of AIDS.

The most recent news is that AIDS is a threat even to some heterosexuals. If they had been following the laws of our God, they would not have this threat to their futures.

The Old Testament rite of circumcision has proven to drastically reduce the threat of cervical cancer to the wives of these religious men.

We are learning that Gods Old Testament dietary laws are better than what we have been prescribing in these so-called times of modern enlightenment. He kept them from eating cholesterol, as a part of their worship. He told them “the fat is the Lords.” Burn all that fat and grease on the altar, and don’t eat it. And that was Gods instruction to his people, three thousand years ago!

In a book (in our church library), called “None of these Diseases,” a Christian medical doctor outlines all of the diseases, which we will avoid, if we simply follow God and the teachings of his word. It is amazing!

Some of these sicknesses are **Emotional Disorders.** How much sickness is a result of guilt, from our sins, eating at us! But we do not need to live with guilt. Look at verses 10-12. “He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” God id anxious to remove that debilitating guilt from us and to set us free!

I’m simply saying that the man, who trusts the lord and follows his teachings, will enjoy physical and mental health, far better than his heathen counterparts. It is a “Hidden Benefit” of being a Christian.

The second hidden benefit, which Psalm 103 lists, is...

2. **PERSONLIZED CARE**

Yes, TENDER LOVING CARE and PERSONALIZED ATTENTION from almighty God (verses 4, 6-14).

God's people get the V.I.P. treatment! He fights for them, when they are oppressed (verse 6). He is patient with them---not like an employer or a ruler---but more like a father with his children (verses 8, 13 and 14), He directs their paths and gives them better than they deserve (verse 7).

These words are obviously referring to the way that God treated His chosen people, the Jews, in David's day. (There weren't any Christians yet.) And all along God gave them the V.I.P. treatment with His personalized Tender Loving Care.

Remember: God took the Jewish people over as His special project, while they were oppressed slaves in Egypt, unjustly made to work for nothing, just because of their race. In order to get them free from those stubborn rulers, God called Moses to speak up for them. When all diplomacy had failed, God destroyed the first-born children of the heathen in that land. He sent His death angel, one night, and destroyed even the emperor's heir apparent. But in every Jewish home, He "passed over" and spared their lives. Man, that's V.I.P. treatment!

Then God led them to safety and walked them right through the Red Sea. He pushed the waters back with a mighty wind. He dried the riverbed, so that they walked across on dry land. And, if that isn't first class treatment, then I don't know what is! Why, when the Egyptian soldiers tried to follow, they had to swim---for the wind stopped, and the waters closed in and drowned them all.

God also gave his people food from heaven. They called it "manna." All His people had to do was gather it every morning from their front yards. Closer than a seven-eleven, thank heaven!

And when they needed water, Moses just spoke, and it gushed from the rocks. And their clothes never wore out, and the sole of their shoes lasted for the entire trip. Talk about the V.I.P. treatment.

And when they finally took possession of that land, which God promised them, it was God who made the walls of the cities to fall down. And He used hornets to drive the enemies out of the territory. Boy, what a way to win a war! All this is what verse 7 is referring to: "He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel." God was giving them personalized attention!

And even when they griped and backslid, God should have just the ingrates off the face of the earth. But He was so patient. He took time to see them through. Verses 8, 13, 14 remind us of His patient, Fatherly care.

I don't know how much faith you have to believe these Old Testament stories!

I'm not sure how much we have a right to expect similarly miraculous treatment in our day. That was a special time in Gods program, and it took special measures.

But I do believe that God gives us lots of tender loving care and the V.I.P. treatment, when we become His own dear children through the new birth, which comes as a result of us putting ourselves in the care of Jesus Christ, His son.

I had a neighbor, whom I led to Christ. Gean led the wife to Christ, also. They were a young family, making a good salary, in a secure government job.

However, God called him to preach the Gospel. They would have to leave all and go off to be educated for that task. Just the thought of them, launching out on faith to follow their lord, scared me for them.

But on the next day, when he entered his office, he found a notice of a new G.I. loan, on his desk. It extended the educational benefits, for Korean veterans, an extra five years. There was his school money!

It's a long story that could go on and on...how God tenderly led them and provided miraculously for them. But the words of my friend sum it up best. He told me: "Jim, with the Lord Jesus---for the first time in my life--- I'm going first class!"

Now surely, it takes hard work. There will be many disappointments and challenges. But, in the end, you will be able to look back and see where you got the V.I.P. treatment. Gods personalized attention is a hidden benefit of the Christian life.

A third hidden benefit of being a Christian is what I call...

3. **Guaranteed Satisfaction**

Verse 5: "Who satisfies your mouth with good things..."

People are hungry. They seem today to be driven by insatiable appetites. Someone has said "never in history have people had so much and yet craved so much more."

The older generation sees all that the younger generation has, and they cant understand what drives these young people in their mad quest for more. Some try marijuana, and they go on to harder and harder stuff. But they never seem satisfied. Some try sex, but they go on from relationship to relationship. Some even try perversity, but they never seem satisfied. People want some possession. Then they soon lose the novelty and look for another, and another, and another. There seems to be no satisfaction---just that craving, that unsatisfiable hunger!

May I ask you today, my friend, are you "sated" or "satisfied?" Many are sated---stuffed full of everything that they can get---uncomfortably full of that which does not satisfy their real hunger.

An ancient Christian thinker once said that there is a God-shaped emptiness in every man. And we try to fill that empty void, but nothing else will fill it but God. How many today are frantically trying to fill it with all sorts of activities, pleasures, and possessions. But they come up “empty” again and again? How many few can say, as did the apostle Paul, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am in, therewith to be content”?

Well listen, my friend, when you truly follow Jesus, you can be satisfied. Jesus said: “Happy is the man who hungers and thirsts to be right with me, for he shall be (filled) satisfied” (Mathew 5:6).

One day Jesus met a woman, at a well. She was craving satisfaction so badly that she had tried five husbands and was now in a relationship with another man, outside of the bonds of marriage.

Jesus could see that she was thirsty for more than the water in that well. She was looking for something that could satisfy the thirsting in her innermost soul. So He said to her: “I can give you ‘living water,’ and you will never thirst again.”

Boy, that got her attention. And before that day was over, she became Jesus’ devoted follower and found satisfaction, for the first time. She ran to the city and told her neighbors: “Come and see the one who has met the need of my heart for the first time!”

Listen, friend! That same offer is still open to you and me. Come to Jesus and find Guaranteed Satisfaction!

Now, mind you, Jesus satisfies with “good things”...not necessarily what I may think is good, or what other people say is good, nor what is advertised as good...but what God knows is good for us.

I used to want ice cream all the time. I’d rather eat it than vegetables. But the quantities I ate were not good for me. I wouldn’t doubt that most of my elevated cholesterol came from boxes with Breyer’s written on the outside.

My parents told me to eat my vegetables. And I’m glad now that I did eat them, although I resented it at the time.

God gives us what He knows is best for us (Romans 8:28). And believe me, if we trust Him, we will be well satisfied in the end!

Not only that. We will also have **a renewed vitality**. “Thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s (verse 5).

This is referring to an eagle’s annual molting. Once a year, an eagle loses his feathers and gets a fresh set and a fresh look. They have a new vitality for living.

I so often meet people, who have “seen it all.” They’ve tried it all. Life has become a drag! Their youthful idealism is gone. Any real adventure in life is only a past memory.

Yet I have met Christians, who have walked close to God for years. They have labored faithfully for Him, often under great hardship. But they have a renewed vitality, even in their old age.

We once had a great retired minister in our church. In his heyday, he conducted a men’s Sunday School class, with over 900 members. And he was the pastor of one of the North’s great evangelical churches.

Well, eventually the years caught up with him, and it was time to move over and let the younger people take over. But what happened to the older man of God? God renewed him!

He needed a hobby; so he began growing unusual gourds. He eventually won the title of Gourd King of the U.S.A.”

He always had a sparkle in his eyes. He wrote books. And he continued to be a great teacher of God’s Word and an encourager of younger preachers, like myself.

I visited him on his death bed. He was smiling, while coming in and out of consciousness. I leaned over and said, “Do you know who this is?” I wondered if he could tell, at this point. He answered, “Yes, it’s big Jim!”

“Big Jim.” What a character! Even the shadow of death could not dim that God-given enthusiasm and sparkle of life. He was “like the eagle” –youthful ‘till the moment he passed out into eternity and into that world of endless youth!

I want that! Don’t you?

And we can have it, if we will walk with Jesus, like that old preacher had.

Jesus guaranteed: “If you lose your life for my sake, you will find life. If you clasp your life selfishly, you will lose it.”

Do you want guaranteed satisfaction, which is so rare in this world? Then “get lost” in the Lord and His Plan for your life! It is a hidden benefit of the Christian life!

IV.

But there is one more hidden benefit of becoming a Christian...

AN UNBELIEVABLE RETIREMENT PLAN

Verses 15-19

Just imagine an unlimited retirement plan, where you would be guaranteed to live forever in a mansion, to have all your light bills paid, with pleasant surroundings, where you don't have to worry about your neighborhood being overrun with vandals, with plenty to do, and continuous health care. Sound great? Well, listen to what the Lord promises His people:

A Mansion---“let not your heart be troubled...In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1,2).

No light bills: There is “no night there...Christ is the light” (Revelation 21:23-27; 22:5).

Pleasant surroundings: “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defiles, neither whatever works an abomination, or makes a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Revelation 21:27). “For without are dogs, and those who practice of the occult, and whoremongers (pimps and prostitutes), and murders, and idolaters, and whoever loves and makes a lie” (Revelation 22:15).

Constant medical care: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the streets of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be in it; and His servants shall (joyfully) serve Him” (Revelation 22:1-3).

It's just like someone told me: “Being a Christian may not pay the most now, but you can't beat the retirement benefits!”

Before you lightly turn away God's offer of love, think it through. If you are sick and tired, if you are guilty and afraid, if you are looking for something to give your life meaning, then come to Jesus. Come to the One who offers you life more abundant.

If you have begun to take your Christian life for granted...if you have lost the joy, then get back in step with Jesus.

If you started with Jesus years ago, but have begun to get weary in well doing, then remember: Most of God's benefits are proportionate to our faithfulness and length of service. If we quit the company, we can lose part or all of our benefits. So hang in there!

The Lord's service is the only place where these benefits are available. So let's “bless the Lord with all our souls, and let's not forget any of his (hidden) benefits!”