

Psalm 103:1-22 Thankful for God's Favor Falls Ch. AM 11/26/2023

Do we take God's grace for granted? Too often, we all tend to do this, so God provides reminders that everything we have is a gift. Psalm 103 is God's guide to us to make this correction.

**David addressed this song to His own heart; we remind ourselves to express thankfulness for God's favor.**

**1. On a personal note. (v.1-5)**

Psalm 103 is unique because of its audience. Rather than being addressed to God, to the nations or to Israel, this Psalm started with David writing to himself.

Did you ever write yourself a note? Note to self - set the alarm before going to sleep. Note to self – take that sweater out of the load of laundry before putting it in the dryer.

But this Psalm contains much more important notes to self. This Psalm reads like a personal faith statement, or like a diary or a last will and testament. David was writing to himself about the most important things in life.

The first word of the Psalm presents David's theme of his note. Bless!

SI - Seems backwards for us to bless the LORD. the baker makes cookies for US! Seems backwards for us to bake cookies for the baker.

If we switch the word 'bless' to the word 'praise,' it is understood.

This wonderful Hebrew word BAROOK can be used in two directions. God blesses man, and man blesses God.

Thinking about God's excellencies, and responding to them.

So in verse 1, David was blessing the LORD Himself, and inviting us each to do the same thing. We each review that God's name is The LORD, and that a core quality trait of God is holiness, and as we are making ourselves freshly aware of those truths about God, we begin celebrating with joy. Bless His holy name!

All this is personal for David, who wrote "*O My soul*" twice. And "*all that is within me.*" We can learn this from David. You and I must tell to our own souls personally, when we are alone in prayer, what to think and how to view the world. We each individually tell ourselves that God's excellencies demand a response of celebration from all that is within me.

Verse 2 tells us why – so that David would not forget, and you would not forget, and I would not forget. Forget not what? Forget not all [God's] benefits! It is right at this point that many need a reminder. They had been focused on this day, this week, and whether or not the current concerns would turn out as we want them to turn out. Right here we need a reminder of the biggest and most important benefits from God to me, from God to you, from God to David. Like what? Forget not all His benefits, like what? Verse 3, David catalogues a timeless list for starters.

Verse 3 – forgives all your iniquities, heals all your diseases. We can have forgiveness instantly, but physical illnesses are part of our lives by God’s arrangement until, in heaven, every physical illness and every moral infirmity will be gone.

A big step was made in that direction when our LORD God sent His Son Jesus into the world and in Matthew 8:16-17, both sin and sickness were symbolically brought to Jesus to fulfill God’s prophecies and love, the people alive during the days of Jesus “...brought to [Jesus] many who were oppressed by demons, and [Jesus] cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. *This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”* David and Isaiah, Matthew and Jesus, all agree that we are to not forget these benefits of God – that He forgives all our iniquity, and He heals all our diseases. This is accomplished by the coming of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus. David and Isaiah foretold it, Matthew witnessed it, and Jesus accomplished it. Bless the Lord, O my soul. We are not taking it for granted today.

Verse 4 – redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

The Lord Jesus fulfilled this when He acted as our next of kin redeemer who made all of our needs His own.

The pit – of course there are dangers in this world that can be so described, and yet the bigger meaning of this word pit is the dread possibility in the next life that we would have been far from God in the ultimate pit. Instead, we have been redeemed by the steadfast love and mercy of God. Steadfast love is a decision and commitment, centered in the will of God, expressed in the covenant of God, and unchanging despite human behavior. Mercy is from the heart of God, surging up to take over and change the entire picture of how God relates to us, certainly undeserved and unmerited.

Verse 5 – “...satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

Did you ever see a bird that seems like it really struggles and it takes a lot of energy to get air and fly, barely making it from the ground to a tree branch? Not an eagle. An eagle is a picture of tireless strength, like a buoy out in the water, that year-round never stops floating energetically up out of the water. A buoy never sinks. An eagle always soars with strength. An eagle pictures the strength with which God equips His people. We each remind ourselves – because of God’s salvific benefits to me in Christ Jesus by faith, I can soar through this broken world with spiritual strength from above, strength like people have when we are young. Bless the LORD, O my soul, for the everlasting grace of God to me, for living through times like this.

## 2. Good reasons to worship Him. (v.6-18)

We have studied the grace of God, mercy of God, favor of God, blessings of God, and God's steadfast love got mentioned.

King David's central focus in this next section is verse 11, where David turns our attention to the steadfast love of God for us. We bless God, we praise God, we worship God, because of His steadfast love for us. God's overshadowing, over-mastering, unchanging love for us. *"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him..."*

Verse 11 is as important to verses 6-18 as the conductor is important for a choir. It is like single-file choir members entering and climbing a platform to sing, appearing from the right side stairs and the left side stairs. First stair on the right is verse 6-7, pairing with the first stair on the left is verses 17-18. Second stair on the right is verses 7-8, pairing with verses 14-16. Third stair on the right is verses 9-10, pairing with the third stair on the right, verses 12-13. It is too confusing to preach it in that order, so simply remember the structure all ties back to verse 11.

Here is a quote from Pastor Neil Tolsma's excellent book, This is Love, Tracing the Love of God throughout the Biblical Story. On page 114, after Pastor Tolsma quoted our verse Psalm 103:11, (by the way, he quoted our Psalm four times in his wonderful book) Pastor Tolsma wrote, "True mercy is more than a love that simply pities. Mercy is God's love in action. The gracious Lord in mercy did what needed to be done in order to redeem His undeserving people...He does not simply feel for His people, but forgives and restores them." Yes, Pastor Tolsma expressed what David expressed. The highest reason for us to worship God is that God's love for us took action to save us. Let's fill in the other verses.

Verse 6 – the love of God never compromises His righteousness and justice. SI - it was in the news that a state trooper pulled over a car with tinted windows. Come to find out that the motorist was himself a retired police officer who 27 years earlier had helped a woman deliver a baby. Now that baby boy had become a state trooper, who had pulled over the man who had saved his life on the day he was born. The young state trooper let the retired officer go with a warning, no ticket. Controversy ensued. Is that right? We need never question whether God lacks righteousness, or that God lets certain people get away with things but not other people, since God is the righteous head of the whole universe. The LORD never loves certain people and fails to love other people fully, by adjusting His holiness or lessening His standards. The Lord's righteousness is never compromised in order for God to love us.

Sometimes, it looks to the human eye like some wrongs have gone unrighted and times of oppression have gone unrelieved. However, The Lord sees to it that this is not so. Our souls can bless the LORD, because He works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Verses 7-8 show what the God of love has made known. God has made known His righteous ways to Moses and God's righteous actions to the people of Israel. Always, there is the stamp of God's right dealings on all of God's ways and all of God's actions. Consider the classic incident when Abraham spoke to God about destroying the wicked city of Sodom when there were still some righteous people left in it. Listen in, as Abraham nearly confronts to The LORD about His consistency in Genesis 18:25, "*Far be it from You to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*" The LORD showed His correct dealings to Abraham, to Moses, to David, and to all the Apostles. Here in verse (8) eight, God's revelation to Moses (which is found in Exodus 34:6) is spelled out here. Basically four things 1) that God is merciful, yes God has compassion for the innocent people in the ancient city of Sodom, 2) that God is gracious, 3) that God is slow to anger, which is a patient restraint before God implements His just wrath against crimes and 4) that God is abounding in steadfast love, and that is the character trait of God that is always present, and never changes. God is love. God is steadfast love. God is abounding in steadfast love. God is abounding in steadfast love that takes actions to redeem His people.

Verse 9 David stated the same truths, in a different way. This time, the truth about God's loving character is seen in how God does NOT deal with our sins. Verse 9, our loving God is NOT always chiding, and He is NOT always keeping His anger forever. Verse 10, our loving God is NOT dealing with us according to our specific faults, and NOT repaying us according to the perverse bent of our inner natures. Then verse 11 is our central verse about God's love. Then, verses 12-13 flow out of verse 11, as an alternative to the NOTs of verses 9-10. Here David wrote the way God DOES deal with our sins. Verse 12 – as for our willful actions of rebellion – that is, whenever we know it is wrong and we do it anyway – God takes those transgressions of ours, and He removes them from us as far as the east is from the west! In verse 13 – in sharp contrast to verse 9 where God will NOT keep forever His anger against us in His role of our judge, here in verse 13, God's permanent status toward us is revealed in His role as our Father. "*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him...*"

Verse 14-16 – God knows our frame, that is, He knows our process of formation, He knows our weak condition, that is, dust, He knows our limits, that is, our days of life are as brief as the lifespan of grass, He knows our weaknesses, that our best moments are as fleeting and fragile as a wildflower in the field, He knows us in our brevity like wind passing over and then we are gone, and He knows our impact is like a blade of grass – its place remembers it no more. So what?

Verse 17 has a contrast. But. In sharp contrast to all of our weakness is God. Because God knows us in all of our utter weakness and extreme frailty, God has chosen to reveal to us His stability, His unshakeableness, His strength, His impact, His enduringness, namely, His steadfast loving, merciful, righteous dealings with us. In verse 18, the LORD sees to it that not just His steadfast love, but also His righteousness are towards those who live His covenant.

Verses 17-18, *“But the steadfast love of The LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments.”*

In verses 6-18, we have good reasons to bless and worship the Lord!

### **3. Everyone, worship God with me! (v.19-22)**

Verse 19 – How are we to interact with the One who has *“established His throne in the heavens...”* and whose *“...kingdom rules over all...”*? What is our response to the One who rules over all? How should we relate to the One who gives life and health and breath? Should we bow down? Should we sing stand and sing? Should we paint a large painting on the side of a barn? Should we put together an impressive display of airplanes flying in formations and designs? Should we write poems? Should we build a large cathedral for God? How are we called to respond? Does God have any instructions for us through King David here?

The answer starts with observing the angels of heaven. That is fitting. We need creatures who daily observe the protocols of God’s presence and God’s worship to show us what is appropriate as we seek to relate to such a lofty being as the God of heaven.

Basically, the lesson from the angels is – we respond to God however God wants us to respond to Him. We read carefully verse 20 – *“Bless the LORD, O you His angels, you mighty ones who DO HIS WORD, obeying the voice of HIS WORD.”*

The angels teach us to do God’s Word. We must keep obeying the voice of God’s own Word. We must do whatever God says to do.

In other words, we must not get creative. We don’t make it up. Don’t create an airshow of airplanes swirling around to praise God, because God did not ask for that. What has God asked for? How does God want to be worshipped?

Verse 21 – *“Bless The LORD, all His hosts, His ministers, who do His will! (v.22), Bless The LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless The LORD, O my soul!”*

In order for us to respond to the LORD the way that the LORD wants us to respond to Him, we will do God’s will. We will obey God’s Word. We will keep His commands.

We have come full circle back to the start of our Psalm. Bless the LORD, O my soul is exactly the first words of the Psalm, now repeated at the end of the Psalm.

The ending paragraph emphasizes the same thing as the starting paragraph – Bless The LORD!

Did you catch it? Genuinely. In my soul. Worship God in your soul.

No need for a big beautiful cathedral, no need for an airshow.

The LORD whose kingdom rules over all simply asks for your soul, your mind, your heart, your attention. Your true admiration. Your whole being. Study His Word. Present His Gospel. Talk about His grace. Go over the Words of David and the sacrifice of the Son of David. Sing to Him. Sing praise to Him. Bless the LORD. We are called by God in His Word to join with all of His angels, all of His ministers, all of His works, in all places of His dominion, and praise and thank the LORD for His grace to you and me.

*All that is within me, bless His holy name. Forget not His benefits....He forgives your iniquity...He heals your diseases.....He redeems your life from the pit....He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy....He satisfies you with good....*

Our souls celebrate. All that is within us celebrates The LORD.

### **Conclusion:**

A young man arrived at church worship service more than slightly distracted: tests for school were coming up, papers loomed heavy, he was exhausted. He wanted a nap, instead of church. He wanted to stay home and watch something on TV. He didn't want to think deeply about the Bible or about anything else. To be honest, he desired a hundred things other than church and seeking Christ's presence. Then worship began, and they sang these words: "I will glory in my Redeemer, My life he bought, my love He owns. I have no longings for another, I'm satisfied in Him alone."

Was he singing a lie? What do we do when we are just not into it?

Our singing in Sunday worship is about deciding to proclaim magnificent truth about God's character and mighty works. Our singing in church is about making music in our hearts to the Lord together as His people. Ephesians 5:19, says "...*singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.*" What do we do when our hearts do not match up to the words we are singing? Answer - we go ahead and sing, trusting God to use these very words of these very songs to re-align our hearts and bring about the truth that we are singing!

This is not hypocrisy. This is not a lie. This is honesty. It is — to borrow a phrase from Augustine — one of God's ordained means for God "to create what He commands." God commands us to bless the Lord. We echo that and command ourselves, O my soul, bless the Lord! This is an honest assessment of the deficiencies of our distracted and struggling souls, and a declaration of faith in the

God who raises our dead affections to new life. As we are willing to give grace-driven effort to seek God's help and to trust God in our singing, then act of worship itself, by the Spirit, becomes God's a faith-creating agent in our sanctification, and our souls follow our voices, and we bless the LORD for real.

We were made for the praise of His glory.

Blessed The LORD, o my soul.