

February 25, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Psalm 103.

1. What makes God holy?
2. How do we emulate Hezekiah's response to God's bountiful benefits?
3. If God heals your diseases, why do you catch the flu (or does it catch you)?
4. If God sends your sins as far away as the east is from the west, why do you pay consequences for sins?
5. How does inanimate creation praise God?

BLESS THE LORD O MY SOUL **Psalm 103**

A couple of weeks ago, Tyler Leach sang the song titled *Ten Thousand Reasons*. It begins with the words of this psalm, "Bless the LORD O my soul, O my soul." But if you think about the reasons for blessing the Lord, can you come up with ten thousand of them? Given enough time and learning enough about God, His astonishing person and work, we no doubt would be able to list thousands upon thousands of reasons for blessing the LORD.

In Psalm 103, David gave us a few of those reasons. This psalm is a virtual catalog of God's traits and His works because of those traits. Here are reasons to bless the Lord. And frankly, a serious

consideration of those reasons will throw you into deep contemplation if not outright wrestling with God about the matters. Too often, like probably almost all the time, religious people and Christians alike say, "Bless the LORD" without giving serious thought to what "blessing" is and why we should do it.

Stop for a moment and think about a couple of these things. Should I bless the LORD because *He heals all my diseases (v.3)*? Someone with a terminal disease or a chronic illness might wonder how that actually works. Or someone might wonder, "If the LORD removes my sins as far as the east is from the west, why do I still pay consequences for those transgressions?"

When we get serious about the Bible and wrestle through the very difficult questions with God, we will be fully convinced that we have many good reasons to bless the LORD. Having matured through the LORD's instruction and discipline, we can say with confidence and sincerity, "Bless the LORD, O my soul."

The LORD Redeems (vv.1-5).

David calls for us to bless the LORD (v.1). How much? How long? The extent of our blessing is stated in the first part of the verse. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me (v.1a)*. So what does that entail? To bless is to endue with power for success, prosperity, fertility, longevity. It is frequently contrasted with a different Hebrew word that means "to esteem lightly, or to curse."

Regarding the extent of this "attributing power to God" involves every aspect of our being. The total person should be engaged in acknowledging God's power toward success. Specifically that means your thoughts, your emotions, your feelings, your plans, purposes and desires. That sounds really great, right? Sure. But now let's get real. How much time did you spend in the past week even thinking about God? How much time did you spend learning about God? How often did you ask God to guide your thoughts and deliberations? This statement does not mean that you should think about God's majesty for 60 minutes once each week on Sunday.

The object of our blessing is obvious and clearly stated in the last part of the first verse. We should bless *the LORD . . . bless his holy name (v.1b)*! Obviously, the object of our exaltation is the ever-

existing, self-existing Heavenly Father. When we bless Him, we exalt His holy name. His name is the sum total of all He is and all He does. His name is connected with every plan, law, and work of the LORD. When you think of the LORD's name, it is not an identifier, but the essence of who He is.

That is why many of the names for God in the Old Testament actually speak about one of His character traits. For example, the name Jehovah-jireh means "the Lord who provides" (Genesis 22:14). The name Jehovah-shaloom means "the Lord of peace" (Judges 6:24). The name Jehovah-nissi means "the Lord our banner" (Exodus 17:15). There are dozens of names or references to God's names like this that describe who He is.

One very important trait of the LORD is stated in this verse. He is holy. The LORD is holy because all of His traits render Him holy. "Holy" is the result of who He is. On one hand, we say God is holy because He is perfectly sinless. That is true. But on the other hand, we need to realize that God is perfectly sinless, not because He works at it, but because that is what He is. The LORD is righteous, just, faithful, showing steadfast love and so forth because that is what "holy" looks like.

Thinking of that conclusion, it should be easy and obvious for us to make the connection with our real lives. A most obvious way for the Lord's people to bless His name is to be like Him. Peter put it like this: *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:14-16)*. Maybe our practice of holiness should not be so much trying to act like God as it is yielding to the Holy Spirit who is working in us, conforming us to what we are.

Beginning with the second verse we see several reasons why we ought to bless the LORD. In a somewhat broad and general way, we ought to bless the LORD in light of His benefits (vv.2-5). We should acknowledge that the LORD is exalted and lifted up above all that humanity can imagine as great because of what He does for us.

To that end, David has warned us not to forget the LORD's benefits. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits (v.2)*. In an earlier psalm David referred to the LORD's benefits by writing *"I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with*

me" (Psalm 13:6). The LORD dealing bountifully is a good way to describe His benefits. We remember them all, right?

It would be nice if we could maintain that attitude all day every day. The sad reality is that we humans tend to minimize the LORD's bounty because we erroneously imagine that we are the source of our benefits. The tragic story of a servant of God, receiving great benefit from God, but then becoming proud of what he thinks he has done is repeated too many times in Scripture. Consider for example the story of Hezekiah.

The historian recorded that *In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the LORD, and he answered him and gave him a sign (2 Chronicles 32:24)*. The story goes on to reveal that God graciously healed Hezekiah of a fatal illness. But instead of being thankful to God, Hezekiah proudly showed off all his treasures to ambassadors from Babylon. We read, *But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32:25)*.

It is true that Hezekiah repented when Isaiah confronted him, but still consequences of his pride came to bear on the people. *But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:26)*. After Hezekiah died, God's wrath did come upon His people. Hezekiah's son was Manasseh who led Judah into such deep sin that God often pointed back to Manasseh's sin as the root cause for God sending Babylon to destroy the nation. The warning is clear and necessary. Let's be careful not to be lifted up in pride and imagine that we are self-sufficient.

Far better for us to exalt the LORD as we remember His benefits to us. Many of which are stated in verses three through five. Here we see five listed which seem to take on an eternal quality in other of David's psalms as well as in much of other Scripture. The first benefit is that the LORD *forgives all your iniquity (v.3a)*. When we confess our sins, the LORD takes away the forensic guilt connected with them. He sends away our guilt. Then, after we die, we stand in the LORD's presence clothed in Christ's righteousness because He cleanses and forgives.

Second, the LORD *heals all your diseases (v.3b)*. What an incredible benefit! No need for the Affordable Health Care Act. Then why do Christians have chronic illness and most of us will eventually have a fatal illness? How would we be able to die and go to heaven if the LORD heals all our diseases?

The world we live in is not heaven yet. That should be obvious. Therefore, the public statement by Gloria Copeland a couple of weeks ago reveals another misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Scripture which seems to be common with her. She said, “We got a duck season, a deer season, but we don't have a flu season. And don't receive it when somebody threatens you with ‘Everyone's getting the flu.’” “We've already had our shot,” she said. “He bore our sicknesses and carried our diseases. That's what we stand on.” “Jesus himself gave us the flu shot.”

Is that what this statement in our text means? The reality is that sin causes much sickness in this world and God's people are as susceptible to it as anyone else. The difference is that illness and sickness give the LORD's people opportunity to grow in His grace as we long for perfect wholeness in heaven. Derek Kidner wrote, “If relationship with God is paramount, this makes good sense, for sin destroys it [our relationship with God], while suffering may deepen it.” (Derek Kidner, *Tyndal O.T. Commentaries*, Psalms 73-150, Downer's Grove, Il.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975, p.365).

We do look forward to the day when the LORD's healing of our diseases will be completed. Looking forward to eternity and the LORD's benefits, we remember that *not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23)*.

The third benefit is that the LORD *redeems your life from the pit (v.4a)*. This can be a reference to a particular rescue from difficulty, an enemy, or even death. There are times when the LORD delivers us from death or difficulty. But more often in the psalms this idea refers to eternal redemption. For example, David also wrote, *Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit (Psalm 49:7-9)*. And he wrote, *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh*

also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:9-11). By paying the price for sin, the LORD Himself has redeemed us for eternity.

Fourth, the LORD benefits us in that He *crowns you with steadfast love and mercy (v.4b)*. Throughout life we are encouraged by meditating on the LORD's unchanging love and mercy. But for eternity we will rejoice in the reality that the LORD's love stands on His unwavering faithfulness to His covenants and promises.

The fifth benefit is that He *satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's (v.5)*. It is true that there are times in life when the LORD refreshes us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. But those times pale in comparison to the renewal we will experience in eternity. So shouldn't the recipients of those benefits, both now and in the future, bless the LORD? Of course we should. Furthermore, we have reason to praise the LORD because . . .

The LORD is Right (vv.6-18).

He works righteousness and justice (vv.6-12). In these verses there are seven statements that can all be viewed in the context of the Exodus story, which tells of the great righteous work of the LORD with people who did not deserve the LORD's grace and forgot His benefits.

First is the overall trait of the LORD that He *works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed (v.6)*. This is a general principle like those found in other wisdom literature. It is true, even illustrated in Scripture at times, that some oppressed people seem not to receive the LORD's justice and righteousness. However, because righteousness and justice are traits of the LORD, all of His works with all people must be just and righteous. How does this work?

Because every person is born sinful, every person actually deserves only judgment and condemnation from God. What we always receive to some measure is God's mercy and grace which we misinterpret as justice and righteousness. When an oppressed person is set free, say for example like a slave, that is because of God's mercy. Again, if we look at this principle in light of the Exodus, God

delivering Israel from bondage was because of His grace and mercy. God pouring out punishment on the Egyptian slave masters who oppressed them was justice and righteousness.

A current application of this principle can be made regarding Christians who are oppressed by wicked God-deniers. When the Christian is spared exposure and the resulting punishment or death, that is because of God's mercy. But the trials and sufferings of this age are not to be compared with the glory we shall experience because of God's justice, wrote Paul who suffered so much (Romans 8:18). Bless the Lord, O my soul!

Second, *He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel (v.7)*. The LORD was not obligated to reveal anything to Moses or the oppressed people. But God graciously and patiently revealed more to Moses than he wanted to know. Over and over the LORD displayed His just and righteous acts to the people. Instead of blessing the LORD, the people complained and criticized. They were not very good at blessing the LORD.

Third, *the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (v.8)*. This was the character that God graciously revealed to Moses. Moses had requested to see God. The LORD hid him in a crack in the rocks. Then *the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6)*.

Because God is merciful and gracious, most of the Israelites who rebelled against God died slowly over a forty year period instead of God killing them instantly at the golden calf incident. How is that an evidence of mercy and grace? God allowed them to rear the second generation who He graciously put in the Promised Land. In similar ways, God deals with us graciously and with mercy because He abounds in love that is rooted in His promises.

Fourth, *He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever (v.9)*. The LORD does not always contend with rebels nor does He strive against them (chide). The LORD does get angry with sinners who continue to sin. But He graciously forgives those who confess, acknowledge, and forsake sin.

Fifth, *He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities (v.10)*. If God dealt with us according

to our sins, we all would be in hell right now. Because God is longsuffering and patient, He draws us to Himself and shapes us like Himself in spiritual maturity. Especially in eternity, we will bless the LORD for not repaying us according to our iniquities.

Sixth, the LORD's unchanging love is incomparably great. *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him (v.11)*. The LORD's unwavering love is incomprehensible. He shows it to those who fear Him. This almost sounds like a paradox. Right or proper fear is mature, awesome respect. It begins as raw fear that God our Creator can destroy us in a moment and send us to eternal condemnation. That consequence of our sin is real and out to strike fear in every heart. But when we confess our sins and discover the love God has for us to forgive our sins, our elementary fear matures into awesome respect and love for Him.

Seventh, the LORD removes our sins completely *as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us (v.12)*. When we confess our sins and repent of them, the LORD picks them up, carries them away, and removes them from us eternally. In no way will the LORD bring up our sins to allow them to separate us from Him in eternity.

However, we might wonder why, if God so thoroughly removes our sins from us, do forgiven sinners pay consequences for sin? Why did God forbid Moses from entering the promised land just because he struck the rock? Why did God not allow the baby conceived by David's adultery to live? Why did God curse David's family and characterize it by murder and intrigue in payment for David murdering innocent Uriah? Didn't Moses and David confess their sins and repent? That fact is especially obvious when David wrote Psalms 51 and 32.

The reason God allows consequences for confessed and forgiven sins is to remind us that He is holy. If the moment a person confessed sins the consequences were also swept away, our prisons would be nearly emptied. If escaping consequences was as easy as saying a prayer, that would tarnish the holy character of our Creator and Sustainer. Yes, God removes our sin from us, but to varying degrees the sin may bring consequences in life.

The LORD pours out so many benefits for us because He is compassionate (vv.13-14). He shows the compassion of the perfect Father. *As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him (v.13)*. Here is the picture of the ideal father. A good father is motivated to care for his child by the compassion that wells up from deep within his heart. This compassion will cause a father to sacrifice in order to help and encourage his children. But all human compassion put together will not equal the compassion of God toward us who fear Him.

Because He is compassionate, the LORD knows our weakness. *For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust (v.14)*. While He guides our path, our LORD fully understands our limits. He knows better than we do what particular sin effects us. He knows when we fail, why we fail, and how often we fail. Therefore, the LORD knows in what areas we need to mature and what it will take to mature us.

We can trust the LORD to show compassion while He pours out benefit after benefit to us because He is eternally faithful (vv.15-18). We, in contrast to Him, are weak like flowers (vv.15-17). *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more (vv.15-16)*. A life span of 80-90 years is hardly a blip on God's screen of eternity. At best, our lives fly by like a flower that displays its beauty for a couple of weeks.

But while our lives are fleeting, the LORD is faithful to His people (vv.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 (vv.17-18)*. His love is changeless forever. Those who love the LORD, know the LORD, and desire to please Him will experience His unchanging love. Therefore, bless the LORD, O my soul.

The LORD Rules (vv.19-22).

His kingdom rules (v.19). *The LORD has established his throne in the heavens (v.19a)*. Possibly there is a literal throne in heaven (wherever that is). The LORD has established it for eternity. It is the

symbol of His authority. Therefore, because the LORD has established His throne, it is only possible that His *kingdom rules over all (v.19b)*. Satan is the power of this world only within the boundaries that God permits. For eternity the LORD who loves us controls all things.

Therefore, because of all these benefits, all creation should bless the LORD (vv.20-22). That includes angelic beings about which we know very little. *Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will (vv.20-21)!*

Even inanimate creation blesses the LORD. *Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul! (v.22)*. If we think this has to be mere symbolism, we need to remember that Jesus reminded the Pharisees who told Him to silence the people, *"I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40)*. The created things continually bless the LORD. If we would take time to focus on the things the LORD has made instead of being consumed with the products of human creation, we would hear them bless the LORD.

The heavens do declare the glory of God. Are we listening and watching? We who receive so many unbounded benefits from the LORD ought to be quick and consistent to bless His name.