

Psalm 103 Praising the God Who Forgives

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Preacher: Sam Parkinson

[0 : 00] Good, we turn now to our Bible reading this evening and to Psalm 103. Sam Parkinson, one of our members of staff here, is preaching this evening and he's preaching on this psalm.

And you'll find it on page 502, if you're using one of the blue church Bibles. Psalm 103. And I'll read from verse 1.

Psalm 103 of David.

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.

Who forgives all your iniquity. Who heals all your diseases. Who redeems your life from the pit. Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. Who satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

[1 : 08] The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his way to Moses, his act to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

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. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. 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. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

[2 : 27] And his righteousness to children's children. To those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens.

And his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word. Obeying the voice of his word. Obeying the voice of his word. Bless the Lord, all his hosts.

His ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works. In all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Amen. May God bless to us his word this evening. Well, I hope you will have Psalm 103 open in front of you.

It will be helpful to you. I wonder how many of us tomorrow morning will get up and pray. I hope it's plenty of us.

[3 : 29] But at the same time, I also wonder how many of us will wake up with heads that are utterly empty. Minds wandering, emotions flat.

And with a greater longing for coffee than for God. Perhaps even we have felt, as we've sung today, occasions when we're singing great truths.

And yet our minds are wondering. Well, if that is us, then this psalm is for us. You'll see the inscription at the top.

It says, of David. And that tells us it's either by or perhaps about David, the great king and the great praise leader of Israel. And he and God, who has given us this psalm, gives it to show us how to call ourselves to praise God.

How to remind ourselves what God has done for us in a way that reawakens our love and our trust and our praise.

[4 : 38] It is a great call to praise God. It reminds us of the great truth of God's steadfast love. The love that will not let us go.

Now, if you are not a Christian and you're here tonight, that in a way makes it an even better night to be here. Because when we are talking about these truths that make Christians praise God, we are talking about some of the fundamental truths of Christianity.

You will see why we think our God is so, so good. So please do listen. Listen, and I hope you will discover just how good he is for yourself.

Now, we're going to look at this psalm in four sections. Firstly, we're going to look at praising God for his love for you in verses 1 to 5. Praising God for his love for you.

Secondly, we're going to look at praising God for his everlasting love in 6 to 19. Praising God for his everlasting love. Then we'll pause for a few moments on 17 to 18 for our third point and ask, who is this wonderful love of God for?

[5 : 55] And finally, fourthly, we look at calling others to praise God for his love. In the last three verses, calling others to praise God for his love.

So firstly, 1 to 5, we want to look at what it says about praising God for his love for us. So return to tomorrow morning.

We're starting our praise with cold hearts and sleepy heads. Now, what's the first thing to do? Well, this psalm offers us a good model.

It is to call ourselves to praise by remembering all God has done for us personally. Because what is easiest to feel is what affects you personally in yourself, isn't it?

Now, see how the author starts by repeatedly calling himself to worship. And then he reminds himself of what God has done for him to help him to praise as he wants.

[6 : 55] So verses 1 and 2. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

He, in a sense, is preaching to himself, isn't he? You know, he doesn't feel the way he perhaps should, even though he's the great song leader of Israel. So he tells himself, bless the Lord.

That is, praise him. Say how good our God is. And he does it repeatedly, because that is often what it takes when our hearts are flat and cold, isn't it?

And then he calls himself, his whole self, to worship. His soul and all that is within me. He wants this worship to be wholehearted, to call on all his feelings and on all his being.

And then he reminds himself why, why he should praise. He says in verse 2, forget not all his benefits. You know, he needed to say that.

[8 : 02] Like everyone, this psalmist here, he so easily, like you and me, forgot what God had done for him. He so easily forgot to feel thankful.

And it is far more so for you and me, I think, isn't it? We forget what God has done for us day to day. What he did yesterday, we can't remember today.

And what we remember tomorrow, who knows? And that's the great reason we don't feel like praising God most of the time. That's why we're sluggish. That's why our love is so often so very cold.

So let's call ourselves, our feelings, our own hearts to worship God by remembering. Because what he reminds himself of, we too can also remind ourselves of.

Because these are the great benefits that every single child of God shares. And he starts with the most basic, verse 3, who forgives all your iniquity.

[9 : 05] Now, if you are a child of God, then you are forgiven. Forgiven not just your wrong actions, what the Bible calls sins, but also the evil in your heart and your nature that made you do wrong in the first place.

What it calls here, iniquity. And if you are a child of God, you can thank and praise him for that. That all your iniquity, every gram, has been forgiven.

Swept away. And then, God also heals all your diseases. Now, perhaps these were particular diseases he was looking back on, thinking.

God answered a prayer to heal me there, and there are plenty of us here who can talk about that kind of prayer answered. But there must be more, because he says, all your diseases with such confidence.

And I think he must be looking forward to that day, which we will share with him, when every single illness will be healed and done away with. He was looking forward to that day when what Jesus bought for us would be ours.

[10 : 09] He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon us was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds, we are healed.

In the words of the prophet. And then he goes on. He redeems your life from the pit. That's a biblical image for the grave. From the place of the dead itself.

David was saved from death very many times. But he knew that something more was promised. He knew that God would rescue him from death itself. As he rescues you. And then he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

Remember, this is a king writing. But the crown he values most is the favor and the honor of having the steadfast love of God poured out on him.

Who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. This God will satisfy you with all the good that you need.

[11 : 09] Giving you much good in this life and far more when he has redeemed you from the pit. When you will have the buoyant, irrepressible strength of a soaring eagle.

Now if you are a child of God, all these blessings, every one, first to last, are yours. And if your heart is cold, as mine has very much been this week at times.

If your love is gone and your praise is empty. Remember these benefits. Remember what he's done for you. What he's rescued you from already. And what he will do for you in the future.

Call yourself to praise. Remind yourself of them. Now a lecture I heard a number of years ago which affected me very much was by the evangelist Rico Tice.

Some of you will be familiar with his name. And he talked about how every single morning he gets up and he reminds himself out loud. You know, Rico, your sins are forgiven.

[12 : 11] And he tells himself out loud. He is a child of God that Jesus has suffered for him. And so on. And then he goes out into the day having taken the gospel to heart.

And he advises others to do the same. And it's good advice. Take maybe these first five verses.

Tuck them in the front of your Bible. Or put them on the home screen of your phone. And when you wake up, go through them and think about them.

And think, God has done this for me. And sometimes it will take a little while and sometimes slightly longer. But it will slowly begin to kindle the warmth of love and praise for God in your heart.

Now secondly, our second section, 6 to 19, calls us to praise God for his everlasting love. And so if we've started with cold hearts and the warmth has begun to seep into them a little as we remember what God has done for us.

And our praise becomes slightly more heartfelt. We're able to move from praising God for what he has done for us to something a little harder. Praising him for what he is.

[13 : 23] For what he is like. For who he is. To fan that love in our hearts into flame. And he praises God above all for his steadfast love for his people.

Which you see in verse 11 right at the heart of the passage. It's a passage all about steadfast love. That is, the committed love of God for his people. The covenant love.

The sworn love of God. The love that will not let us go. Now David sees that love in this passage.

Shown in three ways. Firstly, in 6 to 8, it's made known in his mercy. Secondly, 9 to 13, it's shown in his forgiveness. And thirdly, it's demonstrated in his compassion.

14 to 17. So, 6 to 8, where his love is made known in his mercy. David thinks, you know, God has rescued me. But after all, that isn't so surprising, is it?

[14 : 24] Because that is what God is like. He looks back to the great rescue of God's people in the Old Testament. The rescue of the Israelites.

Enslaved by Pharaoh in Egypt. And then led out by Moses. And in that rescue of them, we see that God is a God of righteousness and justice.

One who will not stand for oppression as they were being oppressed. Who rescues the weak and the powerless. And then David remembers, he didn't just rescue these people.

He lived with them. He loved them. He made himself known to them. And when they rebelled against him, as they did, full of selfishness and blind to the goodness and the glory and the grace of God, God did not abandon them.

But he told them, The Lord is merciful and gracious. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

[15 : 26] God made himself known so that we would know, that they would know, so that all would know. And so David remembers how the kindness he has received comes from the very way God

has always been and made himself known to be.

And then we see that God sees that, sorry, David sees that his love is shown in God's forgiveness. Verses 9 to 12. Verse 9.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. You know, he may chide, that is, you know, tell us off, discipline his people, but only for a time.

Verse 10. He does not deal with us according to our sins. For as we've seen already, he is a God of righteousness and a God of justice. He will not punish us as we deserve, however cold-hearted and empty and rebellious we may have been.

Verse 10. He will not repay us according to our iniquities. And why? For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him.

[16:44] How high are the heavens above the earth? Can you measure it? Can you conceive of it? And if you can measure it, can you imagine it even then?

That's how great this steadfast, unbreakable, committed love of God is towards you if you are his. And his committed love will not let you go.

And so, in verse 12, as well as repaying, not repaying us for our sins, he removes them. He removes our transgressions, our disobedience to him. As far as the east is from the west, he says. How far is that? You know, you start traveling west. You know, when do you stop? He takes away our sins.

And he takes action for us. Not just forgetting, not just passing over them. He deals with them. Now, David could only see, of course, in a shadowy way how that would happen.

[17:45] And we have the great privilege of seeing clearly that Jesus died to carry them down to the grave, to the pit with him. And as if that was not enough, David sees his love demonstrated in the compassion of God.

Verses 13 to 17. God is a God of fatherly compassion. And if you look, the reason why he is a God of fatherly compassion is perhaps slightly surprising.

Verse 14. For he knows our frame. In other words, he knows what you are made of. He remembers that we are dust.

Dust you are, and to dust you shall return. He sees you. He sees what you're like. Not that you deserve him. But that you need him.

He sees that you need him. And that is why he has compassion on you. Verse 15. As for man, his days are like grass.

[18:57] He flourishes like the flower of the field. For the wind, that is, the hot, dry wind of Palestine, passes over it. And it is gone.

You know, wilted like a plant left in a hot summer porch. And its place knows it no more. Do you know who lived in your street 70 years ago?

If there was anyone in your street. 70 years' time, you will be remembered in the same way. Can you remember your great-grandmother's name?

What about her mother? And about what she was like? I'm sure most of us, at least earlier on in our lives, have some belief that perhaps we'll be remembered a little longer than most.

And if we've got far in our lives, we'll have realized that it's most unlikely. You know, I know, as some of you know, what it feels like to lie in a hospital bed and think, not very far from death right now, really.

[20:11] You know, not there, but wouldn't take much. And we'll all get there soon enough, won't we? We flourish like the flower of the field.

Life's good and can be beautiful in its time, but the wind passes over it and it's gone. God sees that fragility. God sees you.

And verse 17. The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

We can read those words, but I think they're actually quite hard to grasp. From everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him. You may die.

In fact, I think you probably will. But that love will never die. It will never weaken. It will never fade. It will never weary.

[21:15] I wonder if you know or remember how Jesus supplied some words, not unlike these. We actually heard it just the other week in the Mark drama, if you were there. He was faced by opponents who did not believe in the resurrection.

And Jesus said, as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him saying, I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And those are very strange words, in a way. Jesus is telling us that those who belong to God are living.

Why? Because they're immortal? No. Because they belong to him. Because God is their God, and he lives and he loves forever.

From everlasting everlasting to everlasting. And he holds on to them. You know, do you realize your mortality?

[22 : 28] Does it ever touch you? If it does, cling to him. Because the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

everlasting. This hall will crumble into dust. If you look carefully, you can see it has already begun. And this city will fall, and this world will pass away, and the stars and planets will return to the cold dust they are made from.

And every galaxy, and every universe, if there are more than this, will come to nothing at all. And you, if you are his, you will remain with him because he stands forever.

Let us fuel our praise. Let us fan it into flame by remembering him, his mercy, his forgiveness, his compassion that last so much longer than we could ever believe alone.

And with them, we will taste them forever and ever and ever with him. now, before we come towards the close of the psalm, we need to pause a moment and have our third point.

[24 : 09] Who is this love that we have been talking about for? We're looking particularly at verses 17 and 18. we've got to ask this question, who is this love for?

Because it is a love that we all need, isn't it? And actually, he said it very clearly already. Verse 11, those who fear him.

Verse 13, those who fear him. And here it is again, verse 17, those who fear him. And I've no doubt that this seems rather strange to many of us.

This is a prayer, thanking God, worshipping God for his steadfast love, for his forgiveness, for his compassion, for his gentleness, for the love that will not let us go.

How can fear come into a prayer like this? Isn't fear to do with punishment? And you know, it is easy just to explain it away, to say, this is just talking about reverence for God.

[25 : 26] And you know that is part of it, very much part of it. But there is more. Just look at this God for a moment.

Look at this compassion. Look at this kindness, this gentleness, this never failing love. And think for a moment. Do you not fear to reject a God like that?

To turn your back on him? Are you not afraid of rejecting that kind of love? Especially when you remember that he is also the God of justice and of might before whom the angels bow?

Are you not afraid of rejecting him? I am. I tremble at the thought and I fear what it would mean.

As the New Testament puts it, do you presume on the richness of his kindness and his forbearance and patience not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

[26 : 52] It's just as we heard this morning. If we know how good he is, how loving, how kind, if we know what he offers us, then we must fear, we must fear to turn anywhere else for life, to turn anywhere else for satisfaction or for hope.

We must be afraid of not grasping onto this God who offers to take hold of us and I hope that you fear him in that sense, that he will give us all that fear very, very deeply and particularly if you are not a Christian.

I hope you can see how important this is. That if he is this good, if it's true, that we must grasp onto him and trust him.

We must tremble to do anything else. And now verse 18 spells out for us what this fear means in everyday life. All those who fear him do two things.

They keep his covenant and they obey his commands. Now this psalm has made it very, very clear, hasn't it, what this does not mean. It does not mean that we qualify ourselves for heaven by doing good things.

[28 : 13] The whole psalm is full of that, of our need for forgiveness for everything wrong that we do. We get to heaven, it's very clear, by his mercy, not by our own self-effort, our own push at being virtuous.

So what does it mean? Well, the covenant is God's sworn oath of committed love to his people. And it's asking, will you commit to him as he will commit to you?

Will you keep his covenant? That's what it's asking. And if you will, then you are his. And will you live by his guidance? Will you remember to do his commandments?

Failing very often, no doubt, but in the direction and aim of your life, committed to love him and obey him. And I hope, I pray, that if you are here and you do not yet fear God, if you do not yet know this love that will not let you go, you will commit to him tonight.

That you will come to feel that fear of turning anywhere else, commit to his covenant and to remember his commands. sins. Because if we do not, our sins are not removed.

[29 : 31] We have rejected his love, we have clung to our own way, and we will wither away like the grass, way down with the punishment of our sins.

sins. And on the other hand, if we do, if we do turn to him and fear him and keep his covenant, this love is ours.

This forgiveness is ours, it's yours. Your transgressions are taken away and he becomes your compassionate father and his steadfast love will be for you from everlasting to everlasting.

I hope that we will all make that commitment because there is nothing better than to know this God and the love that will not let us go.

Now finally, we come to the last few verses of the psalm, verses 20 to 22, which are about calling others to praise God for his love.

[30 : 49] Now if you remember, we started with dull, cold hearts like mine in an early morning. We warmed them by remembering what God has done for us. We fanned them into flame by remembering what he is like.

And finally, in this last part of the psalm, we see what a heart of flame with love and praise for God is like. David's heart cannot contain itself.

He isn't just calling himself now to praise. He is calling the earth, all creation and even the angels themselves to praise God with him.

And when our hearts are warm with love for God, we not only ought to but want to. tell others about what he has done for us and how good he is and how rich his love is so that they can know it too.

And praise him for it. And David is in part talking about that. He wants all creation to praise God after all. But unbelievably, he goes rather further than that, doesn't he?

[31 : 56] He wants God to be praised everywhere his rule extends, which is of course everywhere, verse 20. His kingdom rules over all, even to the very heavens themselves where God's throne is established.

And then he says, bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word.

God. Now let's put our picture postcard idea out of angels, out of our heads for a moment. There are no angels worshipping God dressed in 90s, as far as the Bible has told us.

These angels are the mighty ones of the heavenly places. They are God's warrior champions, the great opponents of the devil and his angels. And whenever anyone meets them in the Bible, they fall at their feet in awe.

Quite often they fall at their feet as though dead, it says. They're tempted to worship them. And these angels, obedient to him in every detail, they are his hosts, verse 21.

[33 : 16] That is his great army. This is the angel army that surrounds the heavenly throne of the Lord of the universe. And we, you, with David, are to call them to praise.

I don't know if you noticed the end of one of the hymns we sang earlier. It's very much based on this psalm and it talked about asking the angels to help us praise God.

It's a wonderful hymn. It's a wonderful little verse and they're great words and I'm happy to sing them. But you know it's got this passage exactly backwards. This is the angel army that surrounds the heavenly throne which has praised him ceaselessly since before the world began and they have good reason to.

They see God's splendor. They see his glory. They see his wonder. They see his greatness. They saw his power in creation as the stars were formed.

They see his goodness. They see his purity. They see his love. But there is one thing they have never tasted and which you know. Something they do not know except through you and me.

[34 : 39] A mystery one Peter tells us into which angels long to look. A wonder Ephesians tells us that only through us is made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

And we have been thinking about it all evening. You know they're sinless. They've never done anything wrong. And they're not weak or fragile. They're always obeying the voice of his word and dashing hither and thither as he commands.

And they have never tasted what you've tasted. They have never tasted the patience and the forgiveness and the compassion of God. His compassion and gentleness for your frailty and his forgiveness for your sins.

And so they need you so they can see the greatness of God's love. So they can understand its depths and see its wonders and see how much further supernaturally further than anyone could ever imagine it goes.

So they can praise him as he deserves and as he has always deserved. Let's remember as we finish this psalm that one day our praise will no longer be cold or dull or hard hearted.

[36 : 14] and it will take us not just beyond that but beyond the highest joy you have ever known in this life. And you will sing before God his praises and you will put new messages in the hearts of the angels themselves giving them fuel for their eternal praises which you will sing with them when you are crowned with his steadfast love and mercy renewed in youth by his goodness.

When you are held through the ages by his steadfast love the love that will not and has not ever let you go. And you know they will look on you in wonder and we will call them together to praise our great God the God who is merciful and gracious and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. the Lord who loves you with a love that will never die. Let's pray to close.

Lord God our hearts are cold so often and yet your love is beyond all imagining and what you have done for us we cannot begin to fathom but we know that you have grasped us and held us you have had compassion in our weakness and you forgive us our sins and I pray we pray together that you will give us hearts to praise you to love you to bless you hearts hungry to see others know your goodness and kindness and praise you for it.

There will come a day Lord when we praise you as you deserve when we praise you with angels themselves put a little of that praise in our hearts now that warmth and fire of love for you because you deserve far more we pray it in Jesus name Amen Amen Now we're going for you sit we■