

Psalm 103 (1/3)

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[0 : 00] Please turn your applause to Psalm 103. Psalm 103. We're going to slow down for next. Every single one of us was created for praise.

We see that, don't we? You go to watch the football. You go to watch the football. And how do you watch the football? You sit there quietly with your hands underneath your thighs.

You don't hear. You cheer. And you shout. And you sing. And you sing praise songs about your team. You go to the opera.

Some of you go to the opera. At the end of the opera, what do you do? Do you sit there in silence and nod? No, you don't. You get up. I'm told. You shout, don't you?

Bravo! Or something like that. Bravo! You go to the gig. How do you stand at the gig? You just tap your foot? You don't, do you? You join in, adoringly, singing the lyrics.

[1 : 23] We were created for praise. Everywhere we look in our culture, there is praise. And all of us knows that this is the kind of natural need of our hearts.

And so, think of your teachers, kids in school while they write on your books. For many of you, you love it, don't you, when they write well done. Excellent work. Good job.

High five. A pat on the back. Thumbs up emojis. As human beings, we are created for praise. And Psalm 103 is a psalm of pure praise.

Everywhere you look, there's just praise. Good news praise, gospel praise, eternal praise. Pure worship. And the only name describing who God is in Psalm 103 is the name Yahweh.

It is the name, the Lord, that was given to his people and his people alone. The great I am who I am. The eternal one. And the psalm focuses on who God is and what he's done and how he relates to people.

[2 : 30] And it focuses on his salvation, how he saves, how he rescues men, boys and girls like you and me. And there's no real mention of the historical circumstances.

So, we don't know when it was written or what led to it being written. There's no mention of an enemy. In Psalm 103, there are no requests. There are no petitions. There are no complaints. There's no clouds on the horizon. There's no hints of disappointment. There's no sadness, actually. It is a psalm of joyful, thankful, overflowing praise.

And it is a great place for you and I to go in our constant fight for joy. Because it is a fight for joy, isn't it? To rejoice, again, I say rejoice, the command, Paul says.

And every line of Psalm 103 encourages you and I to worship God with a humble and grateful spirit. For the Lord is good and his mercy endures forever.

[3 : 36] And he is kind and he is loving towards you and I. The first word of the psalm is bless. And somebody sneezes. And someone says, bless you.

And somebody tells you a sad story and you say, ah, bless. Somebody says something encouraging to you and you say, ah, bless your soul. Or they say to you, ah, you're leaving blessings.

What on earth does it mean? Well, when the Lord blesses us, he looks at our situation, he reviews our needs and he responds to them. And when we bless the Lord, we review his excellencies, how excellent God is, and we respond to them.

There's a difference, isn't there? When God blesses you and me, we are helped and we are strengthened and we are made better. We've made better off than we were before. We've experienced God's blessing and it has changed us.

But when men and women and boys and girls bless God, God is not helped and God is not strengthened and God is not made better off. Man's blessing of God is an expression of praising thankfulness.

[4 : 52] And so when the Old Testament speaks of blessing God, it doesn't kind of give you a process of increasing God's strength. But when Psalm 103 says, bless the Lord, it is saying, exclaim gratitude and thanksgiving.

Spurgeon says this, he blessed you. And so bless him in return. Bless his name, his character, his person. Whatever he does, be sure that you bless him for it.

Bless him when he takes away, as well as when he gives. Bless him as long as you live, under all circumstances. Bless him in all his attributes, from whatever point of view you consider him. Now look with me at the psalm.

It is structured beautifully. Look at verses 1 to 3 and there are four alls. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgives all your iniquity. Who heals all your diseases. And then go to the end of the psalm, and verse 19.

[5 : 56] The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. And verse 21. Bless the Lord, all his house, his ministers who do his will.

Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion. And there's another one thrown in verse 6, an extra one thrown in verse 6. All of me. It's an all-in psalm.

It's the psalmist's way of saying that you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. A way to bless the Lord with my conscience, with my judgment, with my imagination, with my affections, with my desires, with my memory, with my thoughts, with my hopes, with my senses, with my every act.

And can you see that the call to worship in Psalm 103, it is personal, it is fervent, it is rational, and it is specific. This God who rules over all things, and all good things for all persons, I need to praise with all my heart and mind and soul and strength in every place.

And all creatures need to do it as well. Can you see the trajectory of the psalm? So verses 1 and 2, there's a double call to worship.

[7 : 26] Bless, bless. And then you look at verses 20 to 22, and again there is bless, bless, bless, bless. Psalm begins with a personal call to worship.

It ends with a personal call to worship. And in between it goes all around the world and into outer space. It traverses the infinite universes.

It moves from verses 1 to 5 from his own soul to verses 6 to... 6 to 19 to the people of Israel.

And verses 17 to 19 to the whole of the universe. Three concentric circles. My own soul. The people of God. The whole of the universe.

And it calls for everything in existence to bless the Lord. But it's a psalm for believers. It's a psalm for the redeemed.

[8 : 26] Three times it refers to the fear of the Lord. It refers to those who keep his covenant. It's a psalm for the people of God, for the church. Psalm 103 closes on book 4 of the Psalter.

And there's three other psalms that finish it off. And they all begin, 104, 105, 106. They all begin bless the Lord. And the start of book 4 is Psalm 107.

And that begins with bless the Lord. It's like the blessing at the end of book 3 spills over into book 4. And some say it's written by David in his old age.

It's written by David as he looks back and he reflects. There may be some truth in that, isn't it? As you get older, you've got longer to reflect on the mercies and the blessings and the providences of God.

And as David looks back on his life, he's accumulated this massive record of God's dealing with him. He looks to see how God has provided for him. And he sees that this eternal God alone is worthy of praise.

[9 : 33] I want to see the first of this calls to worship in the psalm tonight. It's an internal call. Can you see it starts with a positive command? A command for the believer, the worshipper, the true worshipper.

To tell something to his soul. He speaks to himself. I hope you talk to yourself. I find talking to myself a great help. Talk to yourself. And tell yourself, bless the Lord, oh my soul.

That's where all true worship starts. It starts in the soul, in the heart. There's no organ at the start of verse 1.

There's no praise band. This is the soul of the believer crying out to himself and saying, bless the Lord, oh my soul.

It's the internal bubbling over of a soul that is reflecting on God and his character and his saving grace. The soul of the believer is in the heart before it ever shows up in the room.

[10:41] The heart is worshipping. And the heart can only go as high in worship as it can go deep in theology. The elevation of our hearts and souls in praise and adoration of God directly corresponds to how we know God.

To our depth of theology. So what I mean is this. A supernatural knowledge of God leads to superficial worship. And so we are instructed here to call out to our own souls and bless God. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me. What does it mean? All that is within me. Well, we've said it. I mean, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. For you to gather your faculties together. And to take your mind and your will and your emotions. Everything that was within you. And to praise and bless the Lord.

Second statement in Psalm 103 is there, isn't it? Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. And can you see this joy? This unencumbered delight is tied to his holy name.

[11:58] Extricably tied. Our God is set apart. He is different. He is other.

He is our Father who art in heaven. And yet hallowed be your name. This God is different to every other God.

His name shows how he has revealed himself. And he is to be treated with the deepest of reverence. So there is the positive command. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless his holy name. And here is the negative command. Do not forget. Do not forget his benefits. Forget not his benefits.

That's what you tell your soul. Do not forget. Benefits is a good translation. Some translate it as sufficiencies. But note, can you see how exhaustive it is?

[12:56] Look what it says. Forget not all his benefits. Forget none of them. Not one of them. Note every benefit, every mercy, every grace.

He is saying, do not miss any of them. There is a little hymn. Count your blessings. Name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

And that is how you are to live Christian life. With a constant unending recognition and remembrance. And cataloging it.

Of all that the Lord has done for you. And so the older you are, and the longer the less, isn't it? The older you are, the more spontaneous your praise becomes.

Because you have seen, haven't you, that his mercies are new every morning. And great is his faithfulness. Many of us here, for decades upon decades, have no benefits of God.

[14:00] And so there is a fountain of praise in the human heart as we remind ourselves and re-record what God has done. We are those who worship in the Spirit, says the Philippians.

And we remember the benefits of the Lord. So we live our lives recording in our mind every benefit God gives you. Every grace. Every mercy.

Every good gift. Every providence. Every answered prayer. Every kind word. Every time a fellow Christian comes to you and ministers grace to you.

And you fill up your life with remembering the benefits of salvation. And so forgetting is sinful.

Is it too much to ask? I forgot my time. Please remember his benefits because he doesn't remember your sins. And the benefits from God, they come non-stop, don't they?

[15:04] No one who has ever lived could catter them all. None of us comes close to worshipping God the way we should. It's what he deserves, but it's also what he commands.

That you never miss a heavenly gift. That you live constantly in sheer joy. Even the psalmist who wrote this psalm would fall short of that. If somebody says to us, they are living on benefits.

That is not a positive thing in our culture, is it? That's not viewed in a positive way. It's not seen to be an admirable thing. Sometimes we need those benefits and we're grateful for them.

But none of us want to live on them. My eldest brother is an engineer and he's found himself being made redundant a number of times through no fault of his own. And for quite a long period of time he was unemployed.

And he said he found the walk each week to the Joel office so hard. Humiliating is the word that he used. He was on benefits.

[16:14] Well, it's not humiliating, but when it comes to this world. And when it comes to the Christian life, I wonder whether you understand that you live on benefits.

You live on benefits. There's a positive command, bless the Lord of my soul. And there's a negative command, forget. Do not forget. Let me just say here a little bit on the word forget and remember in scripture.

We often think of forgetting as it just slipped out of my mind. But remembering in the Bible leads to something.

It always leads to something. It's not like a kind of fact that you just kind of plucked out of the mind and you say, I remember that. Remembering in the Bible always means bringing to mind and acting.

So you think of how God remembers. It's a big theme in scripture. It's not as if God had forgotten Israel in the exodus when they slipped out of his mind. God remembered and he acted.

[17 : 20] He brought to mind and he acted. That is the picture. When we come to the Lord's table tonight and we are told to do this in remembrance, that doesn't mean we shut our eyes and try to remember what Jesus looked like on the cross and close our eyes and think about what he did.

No, we are to bring to mind and so to act. That's why the Lord's Supper has been given. And so do not forget. Do not forget all his benefits.

But let's go through the list of his benefits. And the first is forgiveness, isn't it? Verse 3, who forgives all your iniquities. Forgiveness. What's the first benefit you ought to forget tonight?

You start with the complete pardon for your sin. That is the essence of the gospel. It's not the whole of the gospel, but it's the essence of it. It's the firstfruits. That God forgives the sins of those who come to him in repentance and faith.

And so the good news of the Lord Jesus, it's not about a better life or a happier life or a more fulfilled life. It's not just about fixing your circumstances. It is about forgiveness of sins, the cancelling of the debt.

[18 : 27] It is about that you, without the Lord Jesus Christ, are on your way to hell. But the Lord will mercifully forgive your sins if you will repent and come to him. Through the provision that Christ has made on the cross.

And that's where you start. You start with remembering God's forgiveness for your sins. It's why Psalm 103 in the Reformed tradition has often been read when it comes to communion service. I don't actually know that. Johnny Gibson told me that. But because none of you are familiar with the Reformed tradition, you'll believe I can't find it anywhere. But it's the right thing to do, I think. Psalm 103. As you come to the Lord's table. The sins that were passed over in the old covenant have been propitiated. They've been dealt with in the new. They've been paid for by the atoning death.

By Christ's covenant obedience, the many are made righteous. They're put into the right. Reuben's got a lovely line that he uses, doesn't it, on Sunday mornings after the confession of sin and the assurance of pardon.

[19 : 28] He says, in Christ, confessed sin is forgiven sin. And so Psalm 103, before we come to the Lord's table, confronts us tonight with our guilt.

Before the Lord. And yet we perceive by faith the great gift of God's grace. And then we respond with gratitude that makes us want to bless the Lord. Notice the word all.

Can you see that verse 3? I want you to see that. It's not some of your sin. What sins tonight do you believe that God cannot forgive?

Underline the word all, all, all, all. Paul Tucker was a Baptist minister who used to come from London and Surrey, preaching the church that I grew up in.

He was quite deformed. He had a hunchback. He had a wig. And he suffered terribly with asthma. He was a very memorable preacher. He was a great preacher.

[20 : 31] And one time he was in hospital. And a man was wheeled into the bed next to him. And the man eventually came out of his coma. There were no little TVs in those days.

And so you had to talk to the person next to you. Can you imagine how terrible that was? Mr Tucker, Reverend Tucker, said to him, what's the matter with you? And to talk. And then later that night, he said, I tried to take my own life.

I've tried to take it five or six occasions. But I kind of lose my nerve. And I don't go through with it completely. And I end up here. After a while, Mr Tucker said, why is it that you want to take your life?

The man replied, I was driving a road. Mr Tucker thought, well, we've all done that. I took a corner, the man said, and I should have slowed down, but I was in a rush.

Well, we've all done that. The back end of my car slid. I killed a mother outright pushing a pram. I went to court. They sent me to jail.

[21 : 35] And the family was screaming at me. And I can't get rid of what I've done, so I want to die. Now, what do you say to a man like that? Now, we've all driven like that, haven't we?

But we all realise, don't we, the horror and the utter unbearableness of having done that. There's not a person here that can't imagine that happening or getting close to that happening.

Well, they were together in the hospital for many weeks. And Mr Tucker explained one verse to him every day. I wonder which verse you'd choose. This was the verse.

The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Day after day. The man was converted.

He never tried to take his life again. He died many years later in his own bed of a natural death. And that's how precious the blood of Jesus is. It's capable of taking away sin.

[22 : 37] It's capable of taking away the worst sin that you can imagine, which he'd probably already done. He suffered enough. The sheer violence of what you feel on your sin was poured upon the Lord Jesus and his blood shows us that he didn't die in bed.

He violently suffered so that your sin and my sin could be taken away. He forgives all your iniquity. And then the second thing, can you see it?

He heals all your diseases. And what does that mean? He heals all your diseases. I think he's talking about diseases of the soul, but I think he's talking even more broadly than that.

Let me read to you from Isaiah chapter 1. Where we read in verse 5, There is, and we've got to be careful here, a connection between sin and healing.

Death, sickness entered the world because of sin. There was no sickness in the Garden of Eden.

[24 : 05] There was no diseases. And so only the sin bearer can remove the curse. The restorative work, well we see it, don't we?

When Jesus came in his earthly ministry, he gives a trailer, doesn't he, of what will be fulfilled at the end of the age. And yet it's also experienced partially in this life.

It's teaching you and I that only the sin bearer can remove the curse. So in the drama of the Gospel, Jesus demonstrates that he alone has authority from God to forgive sins and heal diseases.

You can go to Mark 2. And we find Jesus in Mark 1 and 2 fulfilling Psalm 103 verse 3. And so we thank God for the healing that he does give in life.

But we know, don't we, that is a foretaste of the complete healing that will come for God's people.

With the redemption of our bodies on that final day. I don't know whether this illustration works, but think of a man in America who's on death row.

[25 : 14] He's been sentenced to death for his crimes. But his other problem is this, he is terminally ill with cancer on death row. He has a death sentence from the court, but he also has a death sentence in his body.

And so even if, somehow, if he could be released from death row and he could be released from the court, he is still facing death in his body, isn't he? And so I think Psalm 103 is saying that not only have you been forgiven and your debt have been cancelled, but also the death penalty in your body is being reversed.

That one day the Lord Jesus Christ will transform your nature. That one day he will do this fully in that time of glorification.

And so bless the Lord for forgiven sin and a transformed nature. Thirdly, this benefit that you are not to forget, verse 4, is he redeems your life from the pit.

He redeems your life from shale, the place of the grave, from hell, from destruction. You have forgiveness here. You have justification here.

[26 : 35] You have sanctification there. You have redemption. He redeems your life from destruction. And so we read this from the other side of the cross, don't we?

And we know that we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. In 1912, the Reverend J. Stuart Holden was vicar of St. Paul's Portman Square in London.

And he was looking forward to a trip to New York. And he was going to speak at a Christian conference at Carnegie Hall. Even ministers in those days enjoyed jollies to America.

And J. Stuart Holden was really looking forward to speaking in New York at a Christian conference in Carnegie Hall. But his wife suddenly fell quite seriously ill the day before he was due to sail. And

the vicar, with much regret, cancelled his ticket aboard HMS Titanic.

And this unexpected deliverance prompted Stuart Holden to moat the ticket for the Titanic in a frame to which he added the word, Psalm 103, verse 4, who redeems your life from destruction.

[27 : 44] And again, I think, like you have the heals all your diseases, I think in this redeems your life from the pit, I think you have both temporal, what we experience now, and final.

There are both these things in mind. I've told you before, haven't I, we've talked about it before, that every single one of us can think of a time when the Lord miraculously spared our life.

Every single one of you will be able to think of a time, if you search hard enough now, when the Lord miraculously delivered your life. There has been a time in your life where you nearly died.

I can tell you about it, isn't it? I told you about it before, that I had been preaching in South Wales, I wasn't feeling very well on the train, and so I walked up the train, I opened the window, and I put my head out of the window of the train to get some fresh air.

And it was at that point that I felt another train zoom past. And I can remember it clearly because I had hair. And I felt my hair like that.

[28 : 47] Like millimetres. And I'd have been in eternity. He redeems your life from the pit. Don't forget that.

Don't forget that temporarily, temporarily, and don't forget that eternally. He redeems your life from the pit. Verse 4, don't forget that he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. It's committed love he's talking about.

Committed love by determined acts on our behalf. He shows us compassion. And he bestows upon us dignity and honour. He crowns us.

What sin has done, it has dragged you down to the pit. God has entered into that pit. And he has elevated you. And he has honoured you by making us heirs of God.

Joint heirs with his son. So the best Bible illustration is Luke 15, isn't it? The prodigal son. Son goes to his father and says, give me the money that I have when you're dead.

[29 : 46] And he goes into the far country. He wastes it. He squanders it. And he's living with the pigs, which for a Jew is pretty horrific. Well, it's very horrific. And he's made a mess of his life.

He's ruined his life. And he comes to his senses and he begins to walk back to his father's house. And he thinks, I'd be better off in my father's house as a servant. And do you remember what the father does?

The father runs to him. He sees him afar off. And with great joy and tears, his father embraces his son and welcomes him. And what does he say? He says, bring the best robe and put it on him. Honour him. Put a ring on his finger. Crown him. And put shoes on his feet because this son of mine was dead and is now alive.

He was lost but now is found. It's a picture, isn't it, of honour. It's a picture of authority. And the robe and the ring speak of honour and authority.

[30 : 46] The shoes speak of sonship in a world where slaves walked barefoot. And so we see in these verses what we're not to forget. That if we are in Christ, if we are part of the people of God, we've been justified, we've been redeemed, we've been forgiven, we've been sanctified, we've been glorified.

And then finally we are ministered to. Because he satisfies you with good. So that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

Psalm 37 verse 4 says this. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

I think sometimes we're quite nervous about saying this. But if you walk with the Lord, he will satisfy your soul. It doesn't mean that Christians never experience hardship or sickness or poverty or pain. It doesn't mean that all your immediate needs are immediately met. But again, can you see the partial and the whole theme again of Psalm 103? Satisfaction has begun and one day it will be whole.

[31 : 58] Isaiah 40 takes up the same image. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary.

They shall walk and not faint. And again, as we come to the Lord's table, it is so appropriate, isn't it? The partial and the whole. We eat of the bread and we drink of the wine.

We have a picture there that Christ is able to satisfy your thirst. He is able to satisfy your deepest longings. All you need is Christ. And it is a picture of a meal that is to come where one day you will

be satisfied totally unholy.

And we live in that gap. But we know satisfaction now. And then we will know it greater. It's a picture that though our outward nature is wasting away as we wait on the Lord inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.

The eagle is what? It's a symbol of strength and power and vigour. And so don't forget.

[33 : 09] Can you look with me in the verses again? In verses 3 to 5. Can you see the present tense? He forgives.

He heals. He heals. He redeems. He crowns. He satisfies.

The Christian life is a present, continuous life of ongoing blessings. Can you note the freeness and the unreservedness of them?

Can you note the richness and the variety of them? Can you note the constancy and the continuance of them? And this praise that is called for is individual and is fervent and is incessant. Because sin is forgiven. Its power has been subdued. Its penalty has been averted.

[34 : 17] And we are honoured. And we are supplied by God. And so the Lord has given you much to remember.

And so hear God's command, doesn't it? Bless the Lord. All my soul. And all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

Bless his holy name. And so let me ask you tonight. Do you know anything of this? Do you know what it is to praise God?

To glorify the God who made you and to enjoy him? Because what are you going to do with your iniquity?

Where are you going to run to, Sinamahan? Where are you going to go to deal with your greatest problems? With your guilt? Are you going to live for the praise of someone else?

[35 : 21] Are you going to live for the praise of yourself? You're a fool if you do. Because bless the Lord, all my soul. And all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Do not forget.

He is the only one. Who can forgive. Who can heal. Who can redeem. Who can crown. Who can satisfy. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Thank you.