

Psalms 103:1-5

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[0 : 00] Turn to Psalm 103, and as you do that, if you can this morning, try and think of the person who you listen to the most in the world. Nobody can quite get through to you in the same way that they can. When all other voices are closed off, they can penetrate into you. You might think maybe of your spouse, or your parents, or your teachers, or some inspirational figure, but do you know who that person really is this morning? Well, I do. Let me introduce you to them. The person that you listen to the most is you. It is you. No one talks to you as much as you do. The voice that you listen to the most is the voice that speaks to you the most in your head as you speak to yourself, as you make decisions, and as you engage with the world. And often that voice that speaks to us in our conscience and in ourself comes from all sorts of places, doesn't it? It comes from our hidden desires in our heart. It comes from a broken, sinful heart. Maybe it sounds like an angry voice speaking to us, or a pitying voice. But so often, if we're often, it's not a helpful voice, is it? It comes from within somewhere. And we realise this as David challenges us in this psalm to be more active in our inner conversation, if you like. Instead of listening to the natural voice that is there in ourselves, in our own hearts, we should, he says here, start talking to ourselves. God's message.

That sounds a little bit strange. That's what David does, isn't it? If you look at verse one. Bless the Lord. He's he talking to. Oh, my soul. He talks to himself, doesn't he?

I'm going to spend a couple of Sundays looking at this great psalm this morning and then next Sunday evening. And we'll see, as we look at what David says to himself, he starts speaking to himself as an individual, but his speech feeds off what God is doing in the church corporately. You'll notice as the psalm begins, it starts with him, doesn't it? But it gets wider and wider and wider. It goes from the me, to the they, to the we, to the whole earth and to the whole cosmos, to the angels. But for this morning, I do want us to pause and to think about the me aspect in verse one to five, particularly. So just listen to yourself. Just listen to yourself.

And do you need to change what you are saying to yourself on a daily basis, moment by moment? David speaks, doesn't he, that the chosen king, but the Christ. And the Christ in this psalm helps you, first of all, to preach to yourself. To preach to yourself. It's such a wonderful psalm, isn't it?

[3 : 32] It's a great psalm to open in worship. And often on a Sunday morning, we'll sing a version of this psalm as our opening hymn. And it begins with the word bless. If you look there, bless in verse one. That word is full of meaning. It's not a word that we use often, is it?

It has an association with knees, funnily enough, of bowing down and of kneeling, of adoring and thanking and loving somebody if we bless them. But when we hear those words, bless the Lord, how do we really feel? Really? Do we really want to? Are we here this morning because we want to praise and we want to worship? Creedly, we know it's true, don't we? We should worship God. But my creedal theology, what I believe, can be so different, can't it, from my everyday emotional theology, if you like. My heart theology, and I don't feel like it. I'm drowsy. And I'm slow in my heart. I'm cold in my heart. Worship the Lord. We know that's right, don't we? But maybe on a Sunday I'm here, but actually I haven't really turned up. My heart has leapt at other things this past week, but with the Lord it's still hitting snooze. There's little excitement there, if I'm honest. There's little relishing of him. And so the opening of the psalm here, David isn't just using poetic trickery here for something impressive. He's giving us a method when we feel like that. He's saying, isn't he, give yourself a good talking to. He is going to rouse himself here. He's going to address his own soul in this inner wrestling match, if you like. And he's going to grab himself and shake himself and interrogate and preach and shower his own soul with gospel truth. Wake up soul! He lays down some kindling, doesn't he? And he's going to pour on some gospel fuel and set fire to his heart. Just to warm up again. Just to warm up to the Lord. And as he does this, you get a sense it's not just a quick word. Not just a light chat with himself, is it? It's a comprehensive, holistic address for his

whole being. We think as he speaks to his soul, we think of one part of him, don't we, as this kind of wispy, ethereal bit. The bit that floats around in the sky when we die. But in the ancient mind, the soul stands for so much more than that. Stands for his entire being, who he is, at the core of his being. And he talks to every part of himself, doesn't he?

All that is within me, bless the Lord. He talks to his thoughts and his physical life, his bodily life. He talks to his social life and his church life and his entertainment life and his travel life and his financial life and his sex life and his bodily life. The whole thing, the whole of his life is gathered before him in this auditorium as he makes this speech. It's like he's addressing a crowd, isn't it? And he wants all of their attention. He wants every single part of him to wake up and to pay attention. You on the back row, listen to me. You down here, this part of me down here, listen. And no part of his life is allowed to switch off, is it? No part of his life is allowed to hold their affection back from the Lord. All of you, wake up, he says. This idea of preaching and speaking to yourself sounds strange, but it's not uncommon, particularly in the Psalms. Self-talking Psalms, Psalm 42. Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you in turmoil within me? Psalm 62. For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence. 116. Return, O my soul, to your rest. Praise the Lord, O my soul, Psalm 146. And it highlights, doesn't it, I think, I think the need and the obligation that you have in directing your own heart this morning? In actively changing how you think and how you feel about the Lord? It's a funny idea, isn't it, that? Because we assume that our feelings and our thoughts and our desires are the things that control us, don't we? That they are supreme and we cannot change them.

And actually, we shouldn't change them. It's just how I feel, we say. It's just the way I am. It comes from a way of thinking about life where feelings are king, where it feels right and so it must be good. And so don't challenge your feelings. Don't challenge how you think. You can't, actually. So just go with it. It's become one of the common deadly sins of our day, to challenge someone's thoughts and feelings. To question your own feelings.

Is this what God wants? But here and in those other Psalms, God is saying, get a grip of yourself. Get a grip of yourself. Take hold of yourself. You've got an obligation to take stock of your own thoughts and what you are telling yourself about life and about God.

[9 : 50] And you need to check whether that script actually matches the script God is giving you. The truth of the Gospel. And there is a point where we just can't keep being passive in our spirituality.

Waiting for something to happen to us. Waiting for the moment, maybe, when some disaster will happen to us and God will have to step in and wake us up and suddenly we'll be changed and we'll love him more. Thankfully, he does too that, doesn't he, for his children. But he's showing us, actually, that affection for God and worship for him issues from a decision that we make with ourselves to actively pursue. And we've got to wrestle with ourselves to do that with his help. We see some Christians and we know them, don't we? And they're here in this room right now. And it's clear they love the Lord. And it just comes out of them. And they exude with love for the Lord. But that is not a natural thing. We're not born loving the Lord, are we? Happy worship and exuberant and heartfelt love of the Lord is not a natural thing. But it ensues from hard talk. Happy worship comes from hard talk to ourselves and wrestling with ourselves. So the Christ shows us, preach to yourself, watch your own heart and guard your own heart. Come on, soul, wake up, wake up. Bless the

Lord, he says. But then the Christ tells us, doesn't he here, preach gospel to yourself. Preach gospel to yourself. And that's so crucial, isn't it? Because what actually is David saying that we should tell ourselves here? What is the content of the message he's saying we should say? If you're feeling particularly low and maybe you're lacking in self-esteem, there are plenty of other ways, aren't there, to improve that situation. You can listen to a song on the radio or you can watch a Disney movie. This kind of I'm a survivor mentality is everywhere, isn't it? You can do it, Chris. Miley Cyrus, I've no idea who she is, but I found this song. She sung this song, I can do anything, yeah, and I'll do it on my own. I'll get it done with help from no one. I came into this world by myself, so I don't need anybody else. And if you stick a fat beat behind that, it can get you pretty pumped. Positive mental attitude. Maybe that gets you a long way. It gets you so far in life and maybe it works to some extent, but that is not what David is doing here. He's not just giving himself a pep talk here so that he can get through a hard day or he can face some challenge. You can do it, Dave. The point of his speech is something quite specific here and something quite different to that kind of self-esteem pep talk. That the goal is worship, isn't it? He faces a challenge and a need for a kind of

internal pep talk, but it's not the challenge of just getting through the day or of meeting a deadline or of sorting the kids out or of passing an exam. It is doing those things and it's getting through everyday life with a praising heart and a praising soul. It is doing those things, isn't it? But with a love for the Lord, it is doing those things, it is doing those things. It is doing those things. It is doing those things.

[13 : 50] That is the big challenge that his soul faces. That is the big challenge that you and I face this week. It is the most worthwhile and the most important and the most difficult thing that we can do.

the most challenging thing for any sinner is to get the soul out of bed and it's to warm up and it's to delight in God we don't bless the Lord with all that is within us do we naturally? Not because God isn't good enough but because we just don't see it in him so he needs to preach gospel to himself, soul bless your God and what comes with that is him saying behold your God bless him and behold him don't forget his benefits and his benefits is another way of saying his dealings what he does in our lives what he's like, who he is and the forgetting is much more than just losing a set of car keys it's letting the knowledge seep into the heart and the emotions and of living it out and so what's the content?

it's gospel content, isn't it? and we see his most delightful praiseworthiness God here in the picture a gospel God with gospel work and a gospel message wake up soul, bless the Lord forget not his benefits and just look at some of the reasons just look at some of the doing words in verse 1-5 forgives heals redeems crowns satisfies renews and notice how it's not just for things in themselves is it?

wake up and worship not for the blessings themselves but the God who forgives the God who heals the God who redeems the gospel good news God himself he goes from the action doesn't he? to the person doing the action the focus is on the Lord the giver of the gifts and this picture of the gospel Lord is exciting and delightful and satisfying and wonderful someone you want to be around and please and bless and love and the enjoyment of this God leads him to the praise that's how it works isn't it?

[16 : 37] we know that what we naturally praise is what we naturally enjoy we praise the YouTube clip of the kitten juggling to our mates because we enjoy it we praise the best kebab shop in West Ealing to our mates because we enjoy it we praise most whatever we enjoy most C.S. Lewis said I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment praise is the appointed consummation of enjoyment so great when we experience something that good we just want to bang on about it don't we and if God is the greatest source of enjoyment the most logical and the most right and the most satisfying thing to do is to bless God and to praise him and if I don't do that if I'm not doing that if I'm not doing it with my whole being it's not because he's not worth praising and he's not the best it's because I can't see it the treasure chest is in the room but I'm facing the other way

I'm looking at something else he gives himself reasons to pray in God's gospel activity in his life in his caring compassionate picking up a wounded bird sort of thing healing and satisfying and giving renewed strength like an eagle soaring and these reasons come in pairs by the way and I'm not going to look at each one in detail but there is one pair in verse 3 if you look there forgiving iniquity and healing disease forgiving iniquity and healing disease and I just want to take a moment as an aside here to think about the diseases bit because there is some confusion on this I think is God worth praising because he really does heal your diseases does he really do that I mean literally does he heal we live in an age don't we with the best health care we've ever had we celebrate the 70th year of the NHS don't we but ironically we live in an age when health is our biggest worry as individuals and when it breaks down we fall apart don't we and in David's day they didn't think they had a right to perfect health in maybe the way that we do and if they did have health they knew it had come from God nowadays if we're ill for a bit and we get better we don't think it's God do we we think

I would have gotten better anyway without the help of God but God really is the healer when we get better using the NHS doctors sure he is the one who gives us relief when we bounce back from a cold when paracetamol works he's made the world in such a way that we can get relief he's graciously put limits on the curse hasn't he some will say though what about me what about my disease God might be able to forgive me and I can accept that but he can't heal me can he he isn't healing me and I'm still struggling with physical illness and disease or those in my family that are if

he would heal me then I'd be all out for him I'd be all worshipping him but he hasn't but one of the problems is that we struggle with the delay don't we in God's healing if I'm not healed now it doesn't mean that I haven't got enough faith or I'm not saying the right prayers the Bible is clear isn't it that total physical health is never guaranteed in this life not even for believers to the contrary but one day it will come from the

God who heals physically Paul says we groan inwardly as we await adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies he really is the healer it's a question of time isn't it God is so good to you do you realise that Luther has a great way of describing what God has done to us for us in the gospel he tells the story of a prince marrying a prostitute told this story before but it's so good and just imagine before the wedding Harry and Meghan's wedding Harry changes his mind and instead of an American movie star he heads into inner city London and he searches himself out the most shameful woman that he can find on the street she's enslaved to all kinds of habits she's a thief she's a liar she's unkempt hair falling out people gag at the smell as they walk past and he goes up to her and says look at you in the gutter let me say now leave all of this you and I are going right now this afternoon to Westminster

Abbey to be married and she gets up and they get married and then after the wedding he says you are going to come and live with me as my wife in the palace you are going to be a princess you are going to be the apple of my eye and I'm going to heal you and I'm going to wash you and satisfy you with all I have in my palace all my benefits will be yours oh my queen and David thinks this is how God has treated me the gospel God the Christ tells us here preach to yourself preach gospel to yourself remind yourself what God has done for you the Christ shows us this and thirdly and lastly he enables us to do this the Christ who gives us the voice what I'm saying this morning is not an easy thing to do and it's not a natural thing to do either we can't just snap out of it can we because actually this voice that David speaks to himself is not naturally a voice that we have it's an unfamiliar voice it's a voice that we can't muster ourselves on our own without

[23 : 48] God's help but this kind of striving this kind of talking to yourself we do see in the Christian person see it in the New Testament because of the hidden work of Christ's spirit working in us in regenerating us in transforming us in making us to be born again and when that happens there is a new voice there is a new person within us helping us to speak a new inner man if you like transformed in the spirit grabbing the microphone and saying soul behold your God what David describes here is an activity that only a born again person can do this gospel self talk and the Christ himself Jesus gives his spirit to us to enable us to do that and he does that as well by leading us to the clearest and most glorious display of the glory of the gospel

God to the Christ himself Jesus Christ is the place where we can see why God is worthy why he himself is the treasure in the room Christ is the culmination of God's gospel activity isn't he so we should say to ourselves behold your God behold your Christ Jesus Christ and delight takes hold of us when we see God's dealings with us in Christ where he not only heals!

us but he does that through his wounds his dealing with us in Christ is seen so clearly isn't it as he crowns us with steadfast love when he is crowned with thorns he forgives our iniquity by bearing our iniquity he redeems our life from the pit from death itself when going into it he satisfies as he hungers he renews as he dies don't we see in Christ the gospel God most clearly and most delightfully and most wonderfully at his most glorious so let's do it this morning we're going to do an exercise let's do it let's gather ourselves and let's talk to ourselves let's picture the conversation as we close you don't have to say anything bless the

Lord oh my soul I don't feel like it you know what happened yesterday let me sleep a little more I'm into something else I'm into someone else more right now my soul forgets not the Lord's dealings what has he done what is he like is he worth it is he the best my soul all that is within me wake up behold your God behold your Christ the one who pardons all your waywardness who heals your illnesses who restores your life from the depths who in time will restore your body the one who garlands you with commitment and compassion who satiates you in finery who renews your strength so that you will soar like an eagle wake up soul bless him let me close from

Martin Lloyd Jones Martin Lloyd Jones became a minister after he was a GP and he realised that many of the complaints of his patients came down to a deep spiritual illness he said this in his book spiritual depression have you realised that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself take those thoughts that come to you the moment that you wake up in the morning you have not originated them but they are talking to you

they bring back the problems of yesterday etc somebody is talking who is talking to you yourself is talking to you now this man's treatment in this psalm was this instead of allowing this self to talk to him he starts talking to himself!

[29 : 12] his soul had been depressing him crushing him so he stands up and says self listen for a moment I will speak to you let's pray to him to him!