

Psalm 103 (3/3)

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[0:00] Please open your Bibles for Psalm 103.! And the power to me and the country.

So tonight, are you sick? Well, bless the Lord who heals you. Are you a sinner? Bless the Lord who heals you.

Are you on the edge of death? Well, bless the Lord who heals you. Are you deserving tonight's condemnation? Well, bless the Lord who gives us mercy that we don't deserve.

And so tonight we come to the final section, which ends with a rousing climax, as all of creation is called upon to praise the Lord.

So if you look at verses 1 to 4, there are four bless. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Then you go to the end of the psalm, and you have four blesses again.

[1:31] Verse 20, Bless the Lord, O you his angels, your mighty ones who do 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. Four headings. We see in verses 15 and 16, the transitory life of man. If you want to posher word, ephemeral. Transitory life of man, the ephemeral life of man. Verse 17 and 18, you see the eternal love of God.

And then in verse 19, thirdly, we come to the throne of God. And then in verses 20 to 22, we see the universal worship of Yahweh. The transitory, the ephemeral life of man.

Verse 15 and 16, As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it and it's gone.

[2:38] And its place knows it no more. Ephemeral means transient. It means fleeting. Just lasting for a short time.

It's like vapour. You boil the kettle. And when the kettle is boiling, there's steam, isn't it, that comes out the kettle. And it's there for just a moment. You can just see it for a very, very short time.

It's vapour that fades away so quickly. And the life of men and women and boys and girls is compared here to the grass, the grass, the flower of the field.

I think I misunderstood this phrase a little bit. And when it says that man flourishes like a flower of the field, I thought it was kind of acknowledging that beauty can come in the flourishing of the life of man.

And that is true in one sense. But as we read it carefully, it goes something more like this. As for man, his days are like the grass, like a flower of the field he flourishes.

[3:42] That is, the emphasis is not so much on the beauty as compared to a flower of the field, but to the brevity, the shortness of life. And of course, that's reinforced, isn't it, in the next verse, where it tells us that we're just a puff of wind.

A puff of wind is all it takes, and it's blown away, and it's forgotten forever. Truly, our lives are short. We are weak. It doesn't take much to extinguish us.

Let me ask you to put your hand up if you know the name of your grandfather. Put your hand up if you know the name of your grandfather. Put your hands down.

Put your hand up if you know the name of your great-grandfather. Okay. Put your hand up if you know the name of your great-great-grandfather.

Okay. One more. Put your hand up if you know the name of your great-great-great-grandfather. look at that, that's incredible credit to the Craddocks slightly ruins my point the truth is this isn't it

most people will not know who we are in 100 years and the most famous of us that people won't know we're like a brass we're like the grass tomorrow is the 10 year anniversary of the death of little baby Leila Gibson to Johnny and Jackie, do you remember that?

[5:23] little Leila was stillborn she knew life but she when she was born she had died just transient just a little bit of life we can think well that's an extreme example, most people live much much longer than that that's true but it doesn't change things very much does it?

Gregory of Nazianzus the great early church theologian wrote this our life on earth brothers is such that our existence is very transitory we play as it were a game on earth we do not exist and we're born and being born we are dissolved we are like a fleeting dream an apparition without substance the flight of a bird that passes a ship that leaves no trace Psalm 90 Moses wrote that Psalm and he says in verse 10 of Psalm 90 the years of our life are 70 even by reason of strength 80 yet their span is but to toil and trouble they soon go and we fly away even if we live to what we might refer to as a full life it's still very short isn't it?

it's very quick it's very frail and in that Psalm Moses goes on to ask the Lord teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom can you recognize tonight just how very brief and how frail life is and the need for wisdom in the light of that and so I think we need to apply it in this way that the shortness of human life ought to drive us according to Psalm 103 to deep humility when we consider how frail we are that ought to impress upon us the need for humility before God before the one who is the creator and the sustainer who are we to stand up to him?

who are we to make demands of him? who are we to rebel against him? we're nothing we're like the grass of the field it's there one day and it's gone the next we're just a puff of wind if he wanted to he could sniff us out who are we to stand up to God?

and we must acknowledge tonight our entire dependence upon him maybe you don't want to do that to take that posture of submission and humility before him that is the frailty the ephemeral life of man but secondly verses 17 and 18 point us to the eternal love of God let me read these verses to you they are remarkable verses aren't they?

[7:59] but the steadfast love of the Lord the covenant love of God 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 one of the greatest words found in the Bible is the word but it's found so prominently isn't it in Romans and Ephesians where our sin is depicted and we read there that God is he is but God is rich in mercy but God made us alive in Christ or but now the righteousness apart from the law has been revealed and here is a wonderful word again that appears to help us but God but the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting so can you see the contrast verse 15 and 16 we are frail we are feeble it takes just a puff of wind to extinguish us but you see if there was no but we would be in great danger who knows what could happen to us we're so frail aren't we we're so transient but God is not that way

God is not weak like us he is not frail and feeble we may be weak but he is strong our lives fade out quickly but he endures forever and in particular verse 17 tells us that it is his love his steadfast covenant love that endures from everlasting to everlasting how is it that his love endures from everlasting to everlasting well it's because he himself is from everlasting to everlasting Psalm 90 verse 2 tells us that and this is one of those places in the Bible where we ought to pause and we ought to say praise the Lord he is not like us praise the Lord that he is not like us he is not like us you see we don't need a God like us and we should not want a God like us no we ought to try to be like him but we should never want him to be like us instead we praise the Lord that he's not like us if he was like us it would be no good to us he would not be able to save us he himself would not endure forever he would not be our sovereign ruler he would not be God but he's not like us his steadfast love is everlasting

I've told you about this before but Gerhardus Vos the great theologian from Westminster Samarie kind of mid 20th century no from Princeton kind of early 20th century he was asking the question how do you know that God will never stop loving you how do you know that God will never stop loving you because he never began loving you he never began loving you Jeremiah 31 verse 3 he

has loved you with an everlasting love Psalm 103 verse 17 the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting the hymn loved with everlasting love led by grace that love to know but there's also something fearful in verse 18 isn't it there's something that could cause you alarm tonight in verses 17 and 18 the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness as the children's children to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments and that may be a terrifying thought to you because you recognise you've not feared him as you ought and you've not kept his covenant and you've certainly not remembered to do his commandments but let me reassure you for a moment because there is one isn't there there is one who feared the Lord all his days and there is one who kept the covenant and there is one who always remembered to do his commandments!

because we know don't we that the Lord Jesus Christ has done those things for us and he has done it fully and perfectly and we know tonight that the steadfast love of God therefore comes to us as it goes through Jesus Christ and as we lay hold of Jesus Christ as we trust Jesus Christ that love comes to us and so there can be no changing in God's love for us God's love for you tonight for those of you who are trusting in Christ is fixed it is unshakable and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus not even your own sin you think of God's love for someone like Peter Peter with all his failing with all his fumbling with all his denials for the way that the apostle Peter was forever putting his foot in his mouth always saying the wrong thing at the wrong time and it came to the point didn't it where he denies his saviour three times and he denies his saviour bitterly with swearing and with cursing have you ever done that have you ever sworn to your friends or to your neighbours when they say are you a Christian you say no I'm not a Christian I'd never be a Christian those swearing swear words as Christians have you done that you've not have you some of you might have I doubt it though but even if you have done that God's love would still be upon you through Jesus Christ even when we are faithless he remains faithful because God's love is not dependent upon our keeping his commandments it comes because Christ has kept his commandments in our place and so there's two basic kind of applications from this the first is it calls you to trust in Christ it calls us to trust in Christ and we are to trust in him to be saved from our sins to enter into salvation maybe that's what you need to do tonight but as Christians we are saved and we are to trust in him each and every day to wake up remembering knowing that we are forgiven because of

[15:07] Jesus Christ to remember I know each day that the eternal wrath of God was placed upon him so that the eternal love of God could be placed upon us what does it mean to believe in Christ it really means in its essence to trust trust and when I speak with people that are not Christians that are not believers I've kind of started to avoid words like believe and faith I don't know whether you've talked to people about believe and faith I find that they're really misused and they're often really misunderstood but the word trust I think is hard to mistake people understand the word trust and to enter into Christ to live the Christian life we have to trust him to trust that he has died for our sins to trust that he has forgiven us our sins to trust that we have no hope at all apart from him and we find that when we trust him we do not regret it because he gives us all we need so this calls this steadfast love for the Lord for us to trust him but secondly it calls us to receive his love you might think that's a bit strange way of putting it but I think it's important that we understand that we need to receive this love we might think it's strange because we often want to do something don't we give me something to do and so God's grace is very hard for us tell me how I can act on this but when it comes to the good news of Christianity when it comes to this good news of God's steadfast everlasting love the response is not to do something the response is to receive something trying to work for something is often easier than being given a gift think at Christmas time we often give to each other gifts but if somebody gives to you a gift that you weren't expecting how do you feel what do you say when someone in church gives you a gift and you haven't got them one you get in the car what do you say

I'm gonna have to get one back we just can't let it be a gift can we if I haven't given them a gift get back then we're not on an even level well actually at that point it's no longer a gift it's just an exchange of goods and we usually feel better about ourselves don't we we think we've earned

something if we think we've worked for it or we've given something back and we often think that we have to try to earn God's favour we tell ourselves I can't receive his grace until I feel like I deserve it once I do my devotional time my quiet time then I can feel forgiven but that isn't how it works God does not say do X and Y and Z and then you'll feel like I saved you do X and Y and Z then you can receive my love he says no simply receive God's love and his grace they are free gifts through Jesus

Christ he has paid the price so there is no cost to us no cost and so when it comes to this steadfast love which is from everlasting to everlasting!

let me ask you are you trusting him and have you received his love? the third section comes in verse 19 we've seen the transient life of man how quick and how fleeting it is and then there's the contrast isn't there to that in the everlasting love of God but can you see thirdly the heavenly throne of the Lord verse 19 I wish I could preach a sermon on verse 19 the Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all his kingdom rules over all that is his kingdom extends through all time and as our lives come and go as they pass by so quickly that is no bearing on the rule of God it continues and it endures through all of that his throne is to all ages David as he wrote this was under the rule of God in the same way that we are today there is no change he rules over all time he rules in every place there is not a single island there is not a single speck of the globe that you cannot go that you can go to that is not under his sovereign rule the

[20:19] Psalms tell us that he owns the cattle on a thousand hills the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of he is the great king who watches over his creation some have put it this way speaking of his sovereignty over all things there is not a single stray molecule in the universe no molecule escapes his rule or his control he rules over even the smallest details nothing is too small for him to notice or to govern Jesus says he provides for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field even as short as their lives may be and so we know tonight he will also govern us and he will also care for us perhaps we can think of it in this way think about the sovereign rule of God and the way that it was connected to the death of the Lord Jesus the tree that gave the wood for the cross on which

Jesus was nailed was created by him even knowing and ordaining how that tree would be used at the thorns that pierced his head were grown by him through his provision of rain and sunshine at the nails that pierced Jesus hands and feet were taken from the natural resources that God had placed in the earth when he spoke it into existence and when he spoke it into existence he knew exactly how it would be used the men who wounded him were given their life in their mother's womb through the power of the almighty God the tomb in which Jesus was laid was carved out by himself here is the point you must not think that your circumstances are outside of God's control just because things are getting difficult everything we experience every part of our lives is part of his perfect rule and reign and so whatever trouble you find yourself in it has been brought about through millions of small providences of

God that are coming together for his purpose and bringing about your sanctification being made like Christ and just as every detail in the death of Jesus had been orchestrated by God down to the smallest bit the same in your own life is orchestrated by God and so we can and we weigh and we must trust in his providence his perfect plan that if God is willing to do those things for his son whom he loves well surely he does them for us as well and just as it was not wicked or evil of God to do that to Christ so it is not wicked or evil of him to do to us and we may trust in his perfect plan the transient life of man the eternal love of God the heavenly throne of God and then finally in these last three verses we see universal worship of

God look at verses 20 to 22 bless the Lord are 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 bless the Lord all his works in all places of his dominion bless the Lord my soul the psalmist invites the angels the armies of God the hosts and all of his created works to bless him the word ministers in verse 21 there is referring to angels powerful heavenly beings what is a minister he's an angel and so I am the angel of IPC along with Reuben we are the angels and Andrew Cray too it just means messenger but as the psalmist calls upon all of cosmic creation to worship and bless the

Lord the focus is actually on himself so do you remember he begins by saying in verse 1 bless the Lord oh my soul and verse 2 bless the Lord oh my soul and then he finishes with that same phrase bless the Lord oh my soul but actually that phrase quite literally you can't pick it up in the English but when you compare it to the other bless the Lord and there's just a little difference let me show it to you so in verses 20 to 22 four times there's a call to bless the Lord can you see it in the first three it's to the angels and then to the hosts bless to call ourselves to bless him yes we're to call others that's made clear here as well but our primary concern should be to make sure that

[26:16] I am blessing the Lord at all times that I am the one that needs to consider all that he's done and we see that in the first part of the psalm he's the one who forgives who heals who resurrects who gives us good things we see in the second portion of the psalm that his abundant mercy is something that we've not deserved that's been poured out upon us in Jesus Christ and now we see his eternal power love and rule and all of this is meant to say to us bless the Lord oh my soul bless the Lord there's different categories aren't there look at the categories that are called to bless it's his angels and then it's his hosts the mighty ones verse 21 the hosts and then it's all his works so I've thought about this and those three groups actually don't need to be told to bless the

Lord they just do it as for the angels in Revelation chapter 4 verse 8 they're the heavenly creatures they do not see day and night saying holy holy holy is the Lord and what do the angels do in glory they spend their whole life blessing the Lord each day every day every moment and then it says and bless the Lord all his works but you think about creation around us and what is creation telling us Psalm 19 the heavens declare!

the glory of God these already doing it where is the silent voice who is the one that really needs to be told to bless the Lord where is the void amongst those who are blessing the Lord who ought to be it's us isn't it we are the ones who are not constantly doing what we ought to be in blessing the Lord and so we especially need to be reminded to bless!

more reason than the hosts and the works and the angels so think about it has Jesus Christ saved the elect angels in heaven which declare the glory of God is Jesus Christ the angels elder brother is Jesus Christ their shepherd did Jesus Christ obey the law on behalf of the angels did Jesus Christ suffer for the angels is he their prophet priest and king no that's only for us isn't it and so we rehearse those things to ourselves and we teach ourselves instructing our own souls bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name we began the psalm three weeks ago reflecting on the problem of forgetting and the need to remember and that is where the psalm ends as well and it may be isn't it that one of the greatest struggles of the

Christian life is forgetfulness us we need to remember let's not be those who forget the goodness of the Lord rather let's remind ourselves and every day and each day of God's greatness in the light especially of my frailty knowing how easily we can be snuffed out but knowing the everlasting love of God which is upon us the one who is our fortress and our strength and our refuge and our very present help in trouble bless the Lord oh my soul let's pray