

Psalm 103

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[0 : 00] I wanted us to look this morning at Psalm 103. We've spent this week learning verses 10 to 12 in Holiday Bible Club. And I've just been hugely struck as I've read through Psalm 103 each day.

At the end of Holiday Bible Club, I'm always thankful. Thankful we've got through it. Thankful it's another year to Holiday Bible Club. But thankful.

Thankful for a summer. Yeah, it's my wedding anniversary this last week. I think next week is my anniversary since coming here. I'm thankful. And I think that's a characteristic of the Christian.

The Apostle Paul tells us what will be the characteristic of the terrible times. Within the last days from Jesus' resurrection to his coming again, Paul says there'll be periods where there'll be terrible times.

And he says something really interesting. He says one of the signs of terrible times in this world is people will be ungrateful. Absent from the general population will be this absence of a sense of gratitude.

[1 : 11] And in particular, there'll be no gratitude towards God. So people this week sat down to a good, substantial, tasty meal.

And they never considered an expression of thanks. Folk arrive home from a long journey that maybe have been dangerous at times with weather conditions. But no expression of thanks.

Some recover from a serious illness. And as they make their recovery, they send a card to the doctors and the nurses on the staff of the ward. But no word of thanks to God.

Some find themselves in a job that they really enjoy. It's got great benefits. They're satisfied in their work.

The salary is good. But there's no sense of gratitude towards the God who gave them it. And Paul says people living in the last days will be ungrateful.

[2 : 15] And of course, we're living in those last days. And one of the characteristics of the world is ingratitude. There's lots of opportunities out there to grumble.

It's grumbling that keeps the phone-ins on the radios going. If all grumbling was stopped and grumbling was banned, the BBC would have to reschedule, wouldn't they, their daytime programmes on the radio.

There'd be nothing to put on air on Radio 5. But this morning, I want us to come to Psalm 103, and it breathes in a very different air to the spirit of this world.

Here is a psalm that is full of gratitude. Notice, in this psalm, I don't know whether you picked it up, as I read it, there's no cry for help. In this psalm, there's no cry for deliverance, no mention of trouble.

It's full of praise for all that God is and all that God does for us. It's the song of a grateful man. And so while gratitude might be missing in the world, it has to be present in the church, where these words are known and sung and I hope loved.

[3 : 33] God's covenant people, one of the marks of a Christian is that they are to be grateful. And what an honour, what testimony it brings to the Lord when his people are thankful. What evidence it gives to the reality of his grace and kindness.

It's always been the case for the people of God. For 28 years, the Covenanters in Scotland suffered incredible persecution at the hands of a cruel regime.

Men and women whose only desire was to worship according to God's word and to live under the Lordship of Christ were hunted and pursued and persecuted and were put to death.

Those times came to be known as the killing times. They came to an end in 1688. But the last covenanter to be murdered in Grassmarket, Edinburgh, was a young man who loved the Lord.

Who even under severe persecution refused to yield. He was a young guy called James Renick. He was 26 years old. And such was the hatred of the governing authorities that even as they were putting Renick to death, they tried to drown out his dying words with drums.

[4 : 48] And so as people stood around watching this man being put to death, there were snatches of his testimony he heard. And among them were the words of Psalm 103 that he was saying.

It was the song of a grateful man. Bless the Lord all, O my soul, and all that is in within me. Bless his holy name. A young man facing persecution and martyrdom and imminent death.

And yet he's grateful. And that's what we want to be, isn't it? We want to be a grateful people. So how can we increase our gratitude? Let's see how this psalm helps us. First of all, I want us to see if we're going to be a grateful people, this psalm calls us to stir up our souls.

To stir up our souls. That's the first point. David does that here. Look at verse 1. Praise the Lord. 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. It's really easy to forget, isn't it?

[5 : 54] Forgetting is not a skill that you need to learn. It's not a skill that you need to practice very often. It's a characteristic, isn't it? We all forget. Some of us forget even important things, which we should know, and we shouldn't forget.

Birthdays. Anniversaries. Appointments at the opticians. Even crucial events in the life of the church, and in the kingdom of God, they can be easily forgotten.

The names of men and women who God has used greatly in the past, maybe whose ministry has come to us with particular benefit, we forget their names. How many in church remember this morning the name of John Wycliffe, or William Tyndale?

And yet it's because of those two men that you've got a Bible in your lap, written in a language that you can understand. It may be human to forget, but David in this psalm won't let it be an excuse, and nor can we.

He's saying it would be a terrible thing to forget all the benefits that the Lord has poured into your life. And it's as if he takes himself to one side, and he looks himself straight in the eye, and he says to himself, now David, don't you ever forget this.

[7 : 10] And you might say, well, it's easy to forget. Surely there are times when it would be virtually impossible to forget God's benefits for us.

So think, for example, of God's people. People who've witnessed God's power in a mighty way. They'd never forget that, would they? What about the people who God delivered out of Egypt? They wouldn't forget what he'd done. They saw his mighty deeds. They saw how God had rescued his people out of Egypt, how he'd defeated the Egyptian army. He'd opened up the sea for the Israelites, and then closed over the sea on the Egyptians.

You would think those people, they'd never forget God's mighty works. But Moses, their leader, knew that they would forget. He knew that when life became comfortable, and when everyone had their own home, and when there was no shortage of food, when people had a reasonable level of income, Moses knew that they would forget what God had done for them.

And so he stood before the people, before they moved into the promised land, and this is what he said. He said, when herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and your gold increases, and you have all that your heart desires, then your heart will become proud, and you will forget the Lord your God.

[8 : 34] It hardly seems possible, isn't it? He's standing speaking to these people who've seen God do such mighty works, and he says, you're going to forget it.

I know it. And they did forget. And it's a warning, isn't it, that when we live, like we do in comfortable times, a warning that in those times, in normal life, we may forget.

We may forget. And so our worship becomes very formal, and very routine.

And our prayers become just a form of words. And we take the blessings that we enjoy for granted. That's really what forgetting is. It's all of those things.

And so this psalm helps us, doesn't it? Because we need to speak to ourselves, like David did, praise the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

[9 : 39] Stir up your soul, and remember, and give thanks, and praise, of course. It must be more, mustn't it, than simply with lips. Giving thanks is something that we are to be engaged in.

Minds must be alert, and awake. So look at verse one again. Praise the Lord, all my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

Everything about me, Lord. It's not just that my lips are expressing a word of thanks. It's my whole being being engaged in gratitude. And so our minds must be alert, and awake, isn't it?

Somebody has said that we can come to church, and leave our minds at home. That we're present physically, and not someone else, isn't it? My wife sometimes says that to me, when we're on the table.

I'm there, but I'm not really there. And it can be like that in church. You can be here, but not here. You can sing the greatest, the best of words, and not be thinking about them.

[10:41] We can read the infallible, living, and active word of God, and yet not concentrate on it. Do you remember the warning that Jesus gave to the people of his day?

He said, these people, they honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. It's a tragic state to be in, isn't it?

The American preacher, Jonathan Edwards, said that there is no true worship that does not touch the affections. It's brilliant. There is no true worship that does not touch the affections.

So verses one and two. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name, all my inmost being. And so if we are to be a thankful people, we must stir up our souls.

Secondly, if we're to be a thankful people, we must count our blessings. Count our blessings. That's a familiar phrase, isn't it? People know that in the world. It's used sometimes by people who wouldn't be Christian at all.

[11:41] And they would want to say, count your blessings. Keep things in the right perspective. One of your friends is going down in the dumps, and he's complaining about how hard times are. And you say, count your blessings.

And what you mean by that, what they mean by that is, keep things in perspective. So you know children, the book, the room on the broom? You know the room on the broom? No, I've got the wrong book, isn't it? They all blend into one.

What's the one with the house? Is it? Say that again? Squash and a squeeze. How can you ever forget that? And so in a squash and a squeeze, children, you know that thing is that the woman thinks her house is, wise old man, won't you help me please?

My house is a squash and a squeeze. And so, taking your hen, what, and so, she thinks her house is too small, isn't it? And then they bring in the cow, and the ox, and the hen.

Yeah. And in the end, they get rid of all the animals, and the woman in squash and squeeze, she counts her blessings, because she realises she's got a massive house.

[12:46] And that's what people in the world think, it means by counting your blessings. Realise how fortunate you are. Realise you've got a big house. Realise you've got more than other people. But, we mean something much, much more than that.

We mean something much, much more than that. Spurgeon wrote about this psalm, he said, it's one of these overflowing parts of the Bible. It's the Bible in itself.

It's probably a bit of an exaggeration. But, but count, count your blessings. Know that everything that you have has come from your heavenly Father.

Don't forget, David says to himself. Don't forget. And then David sets them out for us. He lists them. He puts them into words.

He does a stock tick. I'm a book from a bookshop in Northern Ireland. It's closed for two or three days every January, because, and the shop is closed for a stock tick. I'm sure other shops do it too.

[13:48] And so they go around the shelves, and they make a list of their stock. And they compare it with what was in stock last year. And they compare it with the books that they've sold this year.

They take stock. We use that language, don't we? Taking stock. And what we have in Psalm 3 is a stock take. It is taking stock. And David looks at the blessings and the benefits that God has given him and the things that he does.

So let's look down with me. Look at the first blessing. He says, he forgives. Verse 3, he forgives all your iniquity. We've learnt this, children, haven't we, in Holiday Bible Club.

Verse 10, he does not deal with us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

It's where you need to begin when you think of God's blessings. There is no blessing greater than this. There's none so entirely undeserved. He forgives. He pardons every sin for those who trust his son.

[15:03] Every sin deserves punishment. Every sin shows that I am guilty. And yet, Jesus covers over my guilt.

Those sins separate me from God. But he forgives every sin. Every sin is pardoned, cast away, never to be remembered again.

It's as far as the east is from the west, which is unmeasurable. So that means you don't have to go through life with your sins hanging over you like a thundercloud, thinking they're pursuing you. Count your blessing. He forgives. Then it says, verse 3, doesn't it, he heals. Some people suggest that David is still speaking about forgiveness, that he's dealing with the fact that sin is like a disease.

So forgiveness is being delivered from the harmful effects of sin. That may be true, but I think there's a simpler way of reading it. God is the one who heals the body as well as the soul.

[16:07] And when anyone is healed, it is because God has healed them. And all healing is within his sovereign and wise purposes.

And all healing is according to his will. And gratitude is the right and proper response to that. And David, as you look down this psalm, he could clearly recognize this, that he had been restored to health and strength.

He'd been given energy. He'd been taken from the pit. And so, thankfulness is the proper response to that. Count your blessings.

He forgives. He heals. He satisfies. Verse 5. He satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. You're filled with renewed zeal and joy.

James says, every good and perfect gift is from above. It comes down from the Father of the heavenly lights. God delights to bless his people. And so, you mustn't be naive.

[17:14] You mustn't think what I've just said about healing means that there aren't struggles in the Christian life. The Christian isn't exempt from pain. The Christian isn't exempt from disease. Or sorrow or perplexity. But with the Christian, the person who's put their trust in Christ, there is satisfaction.

The Christian life is not to be austere and grim. There are good things which God gives. And they really are good things. There are things which he knows that are good.

He teaches us. He brings us into fellowship with other Christians. He gives us delightful food. He gives us friends. He gives you comfortable homes. Good things that he satisfies you with.

Count your blessings. He forgives. He heals. He satisfies. Count your blessings because, verse 14, he remembers. It's a beautiful verse, isn't it? He knows how we are formed.

He remembers that we are dust. That's a tremendously encouraging verse, isn't it? That he remembers we are dust. Somebody gave me an article to read before I went on holiday.

[18:26] They said, this will help you understand some of the complexity of humanity. It was an article on the genetic code of human beings. I could read about two paragraphs of it.

Let me give you the gist of it. What I thought was complex is even more complex than I thought. That's my scientific lesson for today. The human frame is so, so complex.

But there's one who knows it. He knows how you are formed. The one who has made you. He knows and remembers that we are dust.

So important, isn't it? The Lord remembers our limitations. The Lord knows when we get tired and are exhausted.

The Lord knows that our faculties are not what they once were. The Lord knows that we have fears. The Lord knows that we are weak.

[19:34] The Lord remembers that we struggle. And the wonderful thing in this passage is that he knows that and he remembers that. And not only with the infinite knowledge of a creator, but with the deep compassion of our heavenly father.

So verses 13 and 14. This knowledge is not terrifying. Verse 13. 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. What a comfort that is. What a blessing if you this morning are feeling weak and feeling vulnerable and feeling dust-like.

What a blessing that you have a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who became dust. Who is able to sympathise with your weakness. Who understands your pressures.

Count your blessings. He forgives, he heals, he satisfies, and he remembers. Now why do we as God's people enjoy these blessings? These benefits? And David says the answer to that question, why we enjoy these benefits, lies in what God has revealed about himself.

[20 : 48] Because the Lord, he is compassionate and gracious and slow to anger and abounding in love. I think David is still thinking about Moses.

You notice in verse 7, he's speaking about Moses. And if you know the story of Moses, there was a time when Moses went up on Mount Sinai. It was a very significant time in his life and his ministry. And we're told that the Lord came down in a cloud and he passed by in front of Moses. And the Lord said this, the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. The very things that David says here in Psalm 103. God has made himself known to Moses, to David, and to us.

And so we enjoy these benefits of forgiveness and healing and satisfaction and sympathy because God is compassionate. And he is full of undeserved favor.

[21 : 53] He is gracious and he's slow to anger and he's abounding in love. And so count your blessings but remember why you enjoy them. And so if we're to be grateful to people, that is what we want to be, isn't it?

We must not only stir up our souls and count our blessings, but my third point, and I really don't like my third point, but my brain had stopped working yesterday, is we must look into our hearts, which is normally very bad advice, all right?

Which will help you to remember it. And so the bewildering thing as you think about these benefits that so moved David as he remembered them, the incredible thing about these benefits as he sets them out and puts them into words, the bewildering thing is there are so, so many people in the world that would put little value on forgiveness of sins because they don't see sin as an issue.

They don't see it as a danger. And there are some people out there who would today in London, where we live, they'd have a completely different understanding of what good things are.

And they wouldn't interpret the good things as the things which God calls good. And there are people that would be horrified to think of themselves as dust.

[23 : 20] To think of themselves as weak and feeble because in the culture that we live, people worship the body, don't they? They're so proud of their looks and their muscles and how much they're on Strava and at the gym. And they think of themselves as sophisticated and they're not dust.

So what kind of person gives thanks for these benefits? Well, David describes this person in a lovely way. Look at verse 11. He says, the person who enjoys these benefits is a person who fears God.

And in verse 13, the person who enjoys these benefits is someone who fears God. And in verse 17, the person who enjoys the steadfast love of the Lord everlastingly is somebody who fears God.

And in verse 18, he says, this person is somebody who remembers God's covenant and keeps his commandments.

And when you take all of those terms together and you meditate on them, this is a person who has come into a living relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 39] Christ. This is a person who has come to know God and experience God. Jesus said, this is life eternal that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

And so if we are to be grateful people today, we are to just look into our hearts for a moment and ask ourselves, have I discovered that the Lord God, creator of heaven and earth is compassionate and gracious?

Do I know that this God, he is slow to anger and he's abounding in love? And do I know that it is only through faith in Jesus Christ that I can live as a grateful person? And so I fear him.

He is God and he is awesome and I bow in adoration before him and I remember his covenant promises and I want to live for him and I want to live gratefully.

Stir up your souls. Count your blessings. Look into your heart. And how can we be anything else but grateful?

[25 : 54] Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Let's pray together.