

# Psalm 103 (2/3)

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[0:00] Please open your Bibles to Psalm 103. We began last week. This week we're looking at verses 6-14.

! Psalm 103, verses 6-14. And I want to begin with a question. And it's a question I want you to ask in your head. To answer in your head as I ask it. And so here's my question, alright? How are you? How are you? Answer it. How are you? Now I want you to change your answer. How are you? Here's the answer. Better than I deserve.

How are you? Better than I deserve. Would you do that for me this week when someone asks you how you're doing? You say better than I deserve. There was a man in the church I grew up in. That was always his answer. When things were going well and life was happy and he was enjoying himself.

Then with a smile on his face he would say to the question, how are you? Doing better than I deserved. And when things were not so great. Still his response was better than I deserve.

[1:11] And I don't think that's a kind of quaint, twee phrase that he said. But it was a statement that came from a deep conviction. Both about himself and about the grace of God.

And it's the very same conviction I think that summarises verses 6 to 14 of Psalm 103. Do you remember the command in verse 1? Bless the Lord, O my soul.

It begins in verses 1 to 5 with this internal command. Bless the Lord, O my soul. It's internal. And then in verse 6 it moves to the external.

The psalmist calls for all those who've been forgiven. All those who've been justified. All those who are being sanctified. All those who've been redeemed from the pit. To join worship together. And bless the Lord. The personal praise moves into corporate praise. It goes from inside the heart to outside in the room.

[2:16] It goes from the individual in verse 1 to the corporate in verse 6. From his own soul to the people of God. And then there's a mood change. Can you look at verse 5?

Do you remember where we left him? He's left there, isn't he? He's soaring with the eagles. He's on top of the world. But in verse 6. He's with the oppressed.

One verse on top of the world. Next verse oppressed. That's very much how we can feel as Christians. That we live our lives in the world oppressed.

By the world and the flesh and the devil. And we can often feel marginalized in school. And society. And we can feel demonized for not compromising our beliefs. And yet the command comes to us again.

I want to argue. Bless the Lord. Three reasons to bless the Lord tonight. Number one. Because of what he has done. That's verses 6 to 8. Bless the Lord.

[3:17] Praise the Lord. Because of what he has done. Verse 6. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses. His acts to the people of Israel.

The Lord is merciful and gracious. Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You see that he tells us. That the Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

His righteousness. That means his commitment to act in line with his righteous nature. He acts in the right.

He is in the right. And so he acts in the right. His judgments are the carrying out of that commitment. And so he's shown us what his character is like. And his actions match that character.

But David is a far better preacher. Than just to leave us with the statement of the fact. He illustrates it in verses 6 to 7. You know when you're watching a TV series.

[4:14] And they're struggling for storylines. They do flashbacks don't they? And verses 6 to 7 you have a flashback. There's a flashback into real life history. He tells us that God has made known.

Those words remind us. That God in his great act of sovereign grace. And condescending love. Even though we don't deserve it. The Lord reveals himself to his people. That's the story of the Bible. Don't take for granted that God has revealed himself. He didn't need to. He has made known.

He did not leave Moses to somehow discover the truth. Or work it out for himself. He became Moses' instructor. As he's become our instructor. God alone.

Can reveal himself. And so we're taken back to the second book of the Bible. The book of Exodus. To the people of God. Oppressed in Egypt. And God delivers them out of Egyptian slavery.

[5:17] It's a famous story. He rescues Israel. He humiliates Pharaoh. He works righteousness and justice. For his people. He takes the people of Israel.

Through the Red Sea. And he leads them into the wilderness. And then he finally brings them to Mount Sinai. Where he will give them his law. God makes known his ways to Moses.

And his acts to the people of Israel. He saves them from slavery. He defeats their enemy. He provides for them. He feeds them. He protects them. And then he brings them to Mount Sinai.

And that is why some of these verses are familiar to you. So look at verse 8. As the psalmist sang this. The people of God. As they joined in. Would have had déjà vu.

The Lord is merciful and gracious. Slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love. And you might not realise at first. But that is a direct quotation. From Exodus chapter 34.

[6:18] And verse 6. And I think as we go back there. It actually sheds light. So keep a finger in Psalm 103. But come with me to Acts 34. The whole section is that Moses.

Moses is up on the mountain. Receiving the law from God. Moses the leader is up on the mountain. Receiving the law from God.

But the people are down the foot of the mountain. The story is very famous. It's familiar isn't it? The people say we don't know what's become of this Moses. He's up there for weeks.

Has he forgotten about us? And so instead of waiting for Moses. And waiting for God. You remember what they do? They create for themselves a golden calf. Moses in the end comes down from the mountain.

Carrying the Ten Commandments. And when he sees the commotion. When he sees what they've done. He smashes the Ten Commandments. At the foot of the mountain. Maybe he smashes them on the golden calf.

[7:22] We don't know that. But he certainly smashes them at the foot of the mountain. And it is a highly symbolic act. You know when I was a child. And I heard of the story of Moses. He's smashing the Ten Commandments.

I just thought to myself. Moses got a bit angry. Moses loses his temper. And so he smashes the tablets. The tablets are the bits of stone.

They're good. Not the things you write on. All right. Moses. And Moses. And Moses. Moses. And Moses. He smashes the tablets of stone. With the Ten Commandments written on them. And is he just losing his rag?

Is he just frustrated? No. It's highly, highly symbolic. What Moses does. Because in that golden calf. In the creating of that golden calf. The fact is that Israel have broken God's covenant. It's an important point to grasp.

[8:19] Moses is there meeting with the God who has redeemed them. Who's revealed his righteous acts. Who's rescued the oppressed. And Moses is meeting with that God on Mount Sinai.

He's formalizing the covenant. By which he would be God to Israel. That he would be special. They would be special to him. Amongst all the nations of the earth.

And he would bring them into the promised land. And yet at the very same moment. At the bottom of the mountain. Israel is violating the covenant. By making a golden calf.

By proclaiming this is our God. And then bowing down to it. Israel broke the covenant. Even as it was being made. And that's why when Moses carries the two copies of the Ten Commandments. In both arms. There's one for God. And one for the people. And he sees what they've done. He smashes them. Because that is what Israel have done with the covenant. And then in chapter 33. [9:17] Israel intercedes. He pleads with God on behalf of the people. And God spares them. God did not have to spare the people of Israel. Because they had broken the covenant. God had every right to destroy Israel.

There and then. But he turns from punishment. And he does not give them what they deserve. And it's right after that. That God writes two new tablets for them.

That's what happens in chapter 34. In fact the heading in my Bible is right. Isn't it? The covenant renewed. The covenant has been broken. And yet in chapter 34. The covenant is being remade. And God didn't have to do that. But he's chosen to renew it. And after the new tablets are made. We read in verses 6 and 7. Let me start with verse 5. The Lord descended in the cloud.

And he stood with Moses. And he proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him. And proclaimed. The Lord, the Lord. A God merciful and gracious.

[10:19] Slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. And that is the phrase that David uses in Psalm 103. And so David has this particular instance in mind when he says it.

He's thinking about this picture of God's mercy. That the very people whom God had just delivered out of bondage and slavery in Egypt. By breaking the bonds of their captivity.

By leading them to freedom in the promised land. He's brought them through the Red Sea. He's given them manna. He's brought them to the mountain. And instead of bowing down in worship of Yahweh for all those blessings.

They spit in God's face. And they turn aside from him. And they make an idol. That they make out of their earrings.

And their necklaces. And their bangles. And they form it into a golden calf. And they bow down and they worship. But God did not utterly destroy them. He stopped his punishment.

[11:26] And he showed his mercy. And that verse in Exodus 34 becomes a mantra. It becomes the confession of faith of the people of God throughout the Old Testament.

It appears in Psalm 86 verse 15. In Psalm 145 verse 8. In Nehemiah 9 verse 17. In Joel 2 verse 13. The Lord is merciful.

He does not give us what we deserve. He is gracious. He gives us what we do not deserve.

He is slow to anger. It's a beautiful thing isn't it? God is slow. And my dad is 91.

And he's known Remarkable Health until the last couple of years. But now my dad is 91 and everything is slow. Drives me nuts. I ring on the phone. Conversations take an age.

[12:30] I ask him a question. And it's slow. We walk to the car. It's slow. Eating is slow. Answering the door is slow.

It's not a compliment is it? If I said of some of you. He's a lovely chap. He's a little bit slow. Slow.

That's not a kind thing to say is it?

But it is with God. God is wonderfully slow. I think of Noah. Building the ark for 120 years. Preaching righteousness. Preaching judgment to come.

God is slow to anger. I think of the nations. In the promised land. God spoke to Abraham. And he gave those nations 400 years of warning. That judgment was coming.

He is slow to anger. Think of the preaching of the gospel. 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9. God is patient with you tonight. Why are you here?

[13:29] Because God is patient with you. He's not willing that any should perish. But that all should come to repentance. We should praise God. For his slowness. His slowness in judgment.

His slowness to anger. He is abounding in steadfast love. The covenant love that will not let Israel go. A covenant love that will not let me go.

That will not let us go as his people. For some reason. done but secondly bless the lord because of what he will not do look at verses 9 and 10 can you see the knots there's four in there bless the lord

because of what he will not do he will not always chide nor will he keep his anger forever he will not be angry forever he does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities there are four knots he will not always chide he will not keep his anger forever he will not deal with us according to our sins he will not repay us according to our iniquities bless the lord for what he will do what he has done bless the lord for what he does not do and we don't use the word chide do we i don't anyway what does it mean it means to strive with someone scold rebuke it's that family of words to contend angrily with someone that's usually um from a position of authority to correct behavior it can be sometimes from an inferior to a superior jacob in genesis gets i'm crossed with laban and he tries to angrily collect correct him he chides him and the people of israel in the wilderness they they don't have water in numbers 20 and they quarrel and they grumble at mooses and at god and they chide him they say why have you brought us out here to die it's a dispute and there will be times when god will dispute with us at the life of the christian there are times when god painfully confronts us there are times out there where we know the lord has rightly disciplined us but he will not always chide in both those cases that i mentioned that of jacob and the people of israel they bring a charge they bring a charge they make an accusation we know wonderfully don't we from romans 8 that god will not bring a charge against his people it's that legal sense he will bring no lawsuit against his people he will not contend with them so who will bring any charge against god's elect it's a beautiful thing he will not always chide then he will not keep his anger forever there's something um says david about god's very nature that dislikes staying angry there is something about god's very nature that dislikes staying angry god's wrath is real david knows that he believes that he is aware of that but martin luther put it this way he put it saying that wrath god's anger is his strange work anger is an is an alien attribute of god and so think about that with me for a moment it is called into existence by something external to god's own person god was not angry in eternity and before the foundation of the world god was not angry in eternity was he god the father the son and the holy spirit they existed in perfect blessedness happiness joy but when sin entered into god's world he is angry there was a time before the world was made when there was no anger at all in the heart of god for there was no sin to provoke it the bible tells us equally that there will be a time in the future when in the new heavens and the new earth there will be nothing to rouse god's anger for all things in heaven and on earth will be reconciled to him he does not deal with us according to our sins the root word the deal there is is the same word as benefits in verse two god could repay you with wrath because of your sins but he repays you with undeserved benefits so bless the lord and he does not repay us according to our iniquities it is not quid pro quo and so for every single one of us we have never suffered what we deserve to suffer we've never suffered what we deserve to suffer there's um the famous stories now of napoleon is a bit hackneyed but um the the um young deserter from the army is brought before napoleon!

and napoleon determines that the man should be shot and at that point the young soldier's mother comes forward and begs for her son's life and she cries out have mercy on him she pleads with napoleon have mercy upon him but napoleon replies defiantly he doesn't deserve any mercy and it's at that point the mother exclaimed if he deserved mercy it would not be mercy David is reflecting isn't it on the undeserved kindness of god towards him he's remembering a time when the lord ceased stopped his punishment and he did not deal with god's people according to their sins nor repay them according to their iniquities and david wants you to see that god limits his punishment upon his people and therefore he shows us mercy and so verses 11 to 14 they flow out of what he has done and what he will not do and we bless god for what he's done for what he will not do but we bless god because of his love and can you again see the distance from verses 11 to 14 we've moved verse 1 from my very own soul to the people of god in verse 6 to the uttermost part of the universe 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 his 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 just can you see the magnitude of god's love for as high as the heavens above the earth so great is his love for those who fear him children do you ever play this game with your mom and dad do you ever say um how much do you love me how much do you love me how much how much do you love me this much love me that much do you love me that much uh that much how much do you love me that much how much do you love me the arms are wide not this much this much this much no no this much but when david plays that game with god his arms aren't are just not long enough when it comes to demonstrating how much

god loves him the universe itself cannot cannot cannot cannot tell you it is it is not big enough there's no tape measure long enough to measure god's love for his people the comprehensiveness of god's forgiveness can you see it it is as high as the heavens are above the earth so great so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him and then verse 12 as far as the east is from the west so far does he remove his transgressions our transgressions from us i think the picture is slightly different from verse 11 in in verse 11 you you have this just incomprehensible incomprehensible incomprehensible height but in in verse 12 i want you to picture you go to um you see a sign and one side of the the sign says east on one side one side says west and you've got to choose to go one way or the other you can't go both directions you can't see the sunrise and the sunset at the same time and david is giving us this picture that when god forgives us he puts our sin and us in two different horizons and so when god is looking at our sins he's not looking at us and when he's looking at us he's not

[23:58] looking at our sins he has justified us god has found a way of detaching our sin from us so that he can condemn the one without condemning the other it is a timeless beautiful illustration in verse 13 the tenderness of god's compassion as a father shows compassion to his children so the lord shows compassion to those who fear him i don't think you can read psalm 103 without thinking about the prodigal son the prodigal son who said to his father remember we talked about it last week he said i wish you were dead and he goes off into the far country and he squanders the wealth that his gracious father has given him and he's in a terrible way he's he's he's in total degradation and he thinks the servants in my father's house live better than i do i'm going to go home and he he goes home he's rehearsing the speech his name he feels awful he's aware of his sin he's aware of his iniquity he's aware of his rebellion and he goes home and we're told that the father is there outside the house looking and waiting for his son and the father we're told he does what no middle east man would he he runs to his son he showers him with with blessings that's the picture isn't it as a father shows compassion to his children you you children here tonight you you know that your dad sometimes occasionally very occasionally gets angry with you i know but but you will know what it is that your father shows compassion upon you those times when when you when you know you've done wrong where you where you where you know that you deserve hiding uh where you you know that you've done wrong and and yet your father shows compassion on you you know those moments can you see the repeated word verse 13 compassion compassion and then in verses well in verses 11 to 12 you have these immeasurable distances as high as the heavens are above the earth as far as the east is from the west but in verse 13 it's intimate relationships isn't it and then in verse 14 it's one of the most precious verses in the bible bless the lord because what does god know he knows your friend and bless the lord because of what he remembers so we move again don't we from the cosmic extremes of the universe the heights as high as the heavens are above the earth and the breath as far as east is from the west infinite measurements and then we come to verse 13 and 14 i google earth you know google earth it's not it's not as trendy anymore is it but um i love it isn't it you google earth you go on it and you you start off in outer space and you type in your postcode and you go from outer space to the globe uh to the continent to the country to the city to the borough to your street to your very home god says i know your frame i remember that you are dust the word frame there um it's it has the meaning of pottery and so you're you've got the potter's wheel and there's a purpose isn't there so if you make a cup why have you made a cup to drink from if you make a vase on the potter's wheel it's to put your flowers in

and and god made you he knows you he knows what you're meant to be he knows what you're meant to do god knows how you were made he knows the purpose for which you made he knows how you look he knows who you are he knows your constitution your temperament your weakness your strengths he knows your frame and then it tells us he remembers something and again we've got to keep remembering remembering that that when the bible uses the word remember we mustn't think that he's forgotten something and it comes back to his memory oh yeah i forgot that as if god's memory needs jolting no when god remembers he is recalling truth to act in psalm 113 verse 14 he remembers a rich biblical term he remembers that you are dust where dust occurs about 110 times in the bible in the beginning that the lord god formed the man out of the dust of the ground in genesis 3 after the fall the serpent is told you will eat dust adam is told for you are dust and to dust you will return gordon wenham he died last year he was an old testament scholar and um he's got this brilliant chiasm all right and so he says um you were created from dust and you live independence and you grow and you flower and you give and you depend and then to dust and the whole of life is framed within this movement of dust to flowering job says do you remember and you have made me like clay and you will return me to dust it's it's a really beautiful reminder of our limitations when i was growing up in the 1980s the prime minister was a lady called margaret thatcher she wasn't particularly well liked in south wales but she was called the iron lady the iron lady the heavyweight boxing champion of the world was called iron mike mike tyson and that prime minister has died and that boxer is a shadow of what he was both are from the dust we're reminded aren't we every funeral you've ever been to from dust to dust it's an amazing thing tonight that the lord knows every single thing about you there's not a molecule that he didn't personally design he understands the complexity of your brain the unpredictability of your feelings the subtlety of your genetics he understands the powerful influence of your upbringing the lust of your flesh the temptations that afflict you he understands the mystery of birth the terror of death he knows the temptations of satan there's nothing about a human being which god does not know he knows when the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak he knows when i'm fearful and overwhelmed he knows but there's an even better truth to this verse isn't there that in the incarnation the lord of heaven became the dust of the earth that jesus took on our humanity in its fullness he was fearfully and wonderfully made in mary's womb he assumed our nature to redeem it and he steps out to accomplish our salvation and when he kind of steps out into his public ministry he's baptized and jesus the father cries out from heaven this is my son with whom i'm well pleased he lives a dusty life his father knows his frame and remembers his dust

he lives for you he goes to the cross for you he is risen for you he ascends to heaven for you and he is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high for you that's why rabbi duncan could say wonderfully couldn't i could need that the dust of the earth is on the throne of the majesty on high and our savior has been given a resurrected body we will one day share in that because the first man adam was from the earth a man of dust and the second man is from heaven as was the man from the dust so also are those of the dust as is the man of heaven and so just as we've born the image of the man of dust we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven 1 christians 15 a minister that i knew i recently heard that um on his deathbed his final words were thanks be to god for remembering the dust of the earth there's so much in these verses let me give you one thing there's a doctrine of sin here can you see it verse 10 talks of my sins that is my falling short my not hitting the mark in verse 10 it talks about iniquity the the bias of my heart to always go astray like the bowling ball that i i bowl down the middle of the green and yet it always goes astray and then in verse 12 it talks about my transgressions my outright rebellion where i say to god i'm going to live my way i don't care what you're saying and i'm guilty of all those three this week and so are you and it's possible isn't it when we understand our hearts to despair of them my falling short my veering off in the wrong direction my outright rebellion and so look at the what these verses what they tell you that god can do for you tonight that if you will call out to god if you will trust in his son the lord jesus christ he will not deal with you according to your sins he will not repay you according to your iniquities he will remove your transgressions from you and that is wonderful wonderful comfort for the believer but it is only for the believer as if you have not trusted in the lord jesus christ tonight if you've not given yourself to him and come on your knees and pleaded with god for his forgiveness these promises are not for you but if you will tonight where you are seated admit your sin admit your iniquity admit your transgressions trust jesus christ he will forgive you he will redeem you he will not treat you according to your sins so let me ask you the question how are you better than i just died let's pray