



**Title: Bless the Lord**

**Passage: Psalm 103**

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- Good Morning Everyone!
  - As always I hope that everyone has had a wonderful week and was able to celebrate the birth of Christ with friends and family.
- Whenever Tom asks me to preach I am always excited to share with all of you.
  - But this time when I asked what passage I should teach on he told me I had the freedom to pick any passage I wanted.
  - Now to some of you that would be the greatest gift.
  - You can pick whatever letter, story, poem, you like out of the whole Bible.
- However, to a text book overthinker, like me, this is not a gift, but instead a curse.
  - To pick one passage out of the whole Bible is a daunting task.
  - But as I sat and prayed on what God wanted me to share a memory from years ago came to mind.



- While I was in college I would spend every summer working at a Christian summer camp in Branson Missouri called Kanakuk Kamps.
  - I loved summers there as we would spend everyone day from 7am to 10pm playing games, making kids laugh, and sharing the gospel.
- This particular memory came from my third summer when I was helping to lead the canopy tour at camp.
- It was currently in between the morning and evening canopy run when me and my team had free time to relax.
  - We were sitting in our cabin, which was refurbished from when the camp opened nearly 100 years ago.
  - To call it a cabin was a stretch, but it was built with 2x4s, steel wire, with multicolored canvas hung as walls to keep the sun out.
  - But it was ours and that was all that mattered.
- On the 2x4s in the ceiling were the names of many counselors that came long before us.
  - And on that hot afternoon we sat and stared at the rafters talking about those names.
  - Some we remembered and talked about
  - While others we had never met and all we could do was wonder what they were like.



- And Lastly, we looked at our names that we had scribbled on the ceiling.
  - Wondering if we would be remembered
  - Wondering if people would talk about us
  - If they would laugh about our jokes or recite our stories
  
- And I remember that a melancholy feeling came over me.
  - Because I knew that for the next few years what we did would be remembered.
  - But eventually the countless days, memories, scars, and stories I made at camp would only belong to me.
  
- However, later ,while I was still feeling this sadness, we were with all the campers singing worship songs about God and the Son he sent to save us from our sins.
  - I was reminded of the real purpose of why I spent 4 summers in hot, sticky Branson MO.
  - It was not to create a name or establish my own legacy.
  - It was to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and to establish his kingdom.
  - I was there so that Christ's name could be remembered, not mine.
  
- And that is beauty of Scripture
  - It was not just given to us teach us new things
  - But it was also given to remind us of old things



- Things that we learned while we were in Orchard Kids and Youth Group, but have forgotten through the busy, monotonous rhythms of adult life.
- And that is why we must stay in scripture
  - To continually remind us of the eternal things that this world works so hard to push from our minds.
- And I think there is no passage that better encompasses this truth than of Psalm 103
  - A Psalm called by Charles Spurgeon as “One of the most perfect Psalms of praise... glowing with love, and full of gratitude.”
- And that is why I want to talk about this passage today.
- Before we break down this passage I think as always it is of the utmost importance that we establish the context.
  - Psalm 103 is not a psalm of lament or a national song.
  - But instead it is a Psalm of remembrance that consists of a believer preaching the gospel to his own soul.
- It was written by David and was likely in the later years of his life
  - Most likely after the repentance of his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah.
  - And after God's continual deliverance of David from danger



- This is the Psalm of a Man who has had high highs and lows lows.
- And the Psalm of someone who has lived long enough to know how easy it is to forget.
- In Psalm 103 David addresses the issue of spiritual amnesia by looking both backwards and forward
  - David first looks backwards to the covenantal promises that God has made to his elect.
  - He then looks forward to the anticipated Messiah for hope.
  - He looks to the Kingdom of God.
  - And lastly he starts and ends in worship.
- And with that in mind lets unpack the passage.

### **The first instruction we receive is Preach to Your Soul (vv. 1-2)**

**1** Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!

**2** Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,

- David starts his Psalm with the phrase “Bless the LORD, O my Soul.”
  - This is an important note and sets the tone for the entire Psalm.



- David is making it clear that this is not a psalm to be shouted in the streets or declared to the nations.
  - But it is a Psalm that is meant for the soul.
  - It is a Psalm that is meant to be preached to ourselves in our quiet times and moments of solitude.
  - A Psalm for when we might have wandered away from God.
  - When our eyes, heart, and mind have drifted from the cross and have settled among the things of this world.
- 
- I would also say that this Psalm is not just for those responding to a spiritual forgetfulness
    - It is also for those who are still secure, but are wise enough to know our flesh is weak.
    - It is to be preached to our soul so that we might preserve and sustain ourselves when the world is hard.
- 
- But you might ask, what does it mean to preach to your soul?
    - I think John Calvin said it best, ““David does not address God directly, but stirs up himself to the duty of praising Him; for we are cold and sluggish, unless we are aroused.”
    - To preach to yourself is to stir yourself up.
    - To recenter yourself in front of the cross, so that we can do the work that was prepared for us in our salvation.



- This is the core idea of Psalm 103, but remains so important.
  - A temptation for Christians is to solely rest in the fact we are saved, and care little when we stop acting out our faith.
  - To simply say, “once saved, always saved” and not be bothered when we become “cold and sluggish” for the sake of the gospel.
  - What David is teaching here is that we must be diligent in remaining zealous, and understand that if the power of the Holy Spirit is not with us we will surely fail.
  
- David continues with “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,”
  - What we are preaching to our soul is not simply the grandeur of God, but also what God has specifically done for us.
  - David identifies that our ingratitude to God starts with forgetfulness, and not suffering or persecution.
  - I think that this is an important distinction because it cues us in the circumstance when we should be most on guard.
  - The season of ease and plenty is when we are in the most danger of falling into ingratitude.
  - When life is so easy you don’t find yourself falling to prayer or when life is so comfortable that the peace that comes in your quiet place is no longer needed.

This is the season where we have the capacity to forget all the good things that God has lavished upon us.



## **Secondly : Remember the Gifts of Grace (vv.3-5)**

**3** who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,

**4** who redeems your life from the pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

**5** who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

- David continues with verses 3-5 and begins to teach us the things that we must remind ourselves of.
  - What we see in these verses is that we must remember the benefits of God.
  - And firstly we must remember who forgave ALL our iniquities and heals ALL your diseases.
- Why is it so important that we remember the forgiveness of sins?
  - Because if we are not forgiven of sins we are alienated from his benefits.
  - It is only through the forgiveness of sins that we are able to experience the full benefits of God.
  - Now to David this promise had not been fully fulfilled, but to us we know that this is a call that we do not forget Christ.





- That we do not forget Christ and the work he did on the cross.
  - That we remember that this last Christmas season was not just about gifts and presents.
  - But is more importantly a reminder of our divine purpose in being purchased by Christ and chosen to be part of his family.
  
- We must not forget that before we were born again that we were as lost and as evil as the whole world.
  - We must not forget ““we were redeemed from the pit,”
  - We must not forget that we did not desire God, or want to be saved.
  - That we loved our sin and were not willing to part from it.
  
- We must not forget that God the Father, the creator of Heaven and earth, being rich in love and mercy, sent his son as a child, Fully incarnate as Human and fully God, to the virgin Mary.
  - We must not forget that Christ Jesus suffered and died a death he did not deserve.
  - He was buried and sealed in a tomb for three days only to rise again victorious over sin and death.
  
- We must not forget that this is the reason that we have been forgiven.
  - That Christ died for us, not because we deserve it.
  - But because he wanted to for the glory of the Father.



- And we must not forget that this forgiveness is received by faith, trusting in Christ Jesus alone, not in our works, but in His finished work, to the glory of God alone.
- Because if we forget this, if we stop preaching it our soul.
  - We forget the cost, by which we are saved.
  - We forget that the only reason we are able to be sons and daughters of God is because the Son died
  - We forget that Christ did not just save us to be saved, but he saved us for a purpose and a mission.
  - A purpose and mission to live our lives establishing his kingdom on Earth through the proclamation and declaration of the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ Jesus for the Glory of God and the salvation of the Church.
  - We must not forget that we are saved to share this good news, and to forget the forgiveness of our sins is to forgive the reason we live.

### **Third: Remember the Mercy of God (vv.6-10)**

**6** The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all who are oppressed.

**7** He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.

**8** The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.



**9** He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.

**10** He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

- David continues on and begins to speak of the Mercy we must not forget
  - He is teaching here how to God, justice and mercy are not opposite things.
  - And that God's righteousness is revealed in the method by which he restrains judgment towards his covenant people.
- An important note in these verses is that the audience that David is speaking of is not a universal world wide decree,
  - but is a declaration of the way that God treats his covenant people.
  - A people who God has worked righteousness and justice for despite their oppression.
- When you look throughout the Bible at the covenantal people of God there are a few interesting trends that you will notice.
  - One of which is the glaringly obvious struggle that follows God people.
- In this verse it uses the word "oppressed" sharing how God's people are those who are in constant need for God to act.
  - They are people who cannot set things right on their own accord.



- And throughout the Old Testament God's people time and time again must return to God after trying to do things their own way.
- A great example is from Exodus 1-3 where Israel is in Egypt
  - Israel is enslaved, powerless, outnumbered, and politically trapped in this foreign land.
  - As Exodus 1:13 states, ““They ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves.”
  - Israel by all standards of the word were oppressed
- And in their oppression nothing they could do could save themselves.
  - They could not revolt their way out
  - They could not negotiate their way out
  - They were stuck with no way out
- But while the people were suffering God acted.
  - Not because they were so moral or perfect
  - Or because Egypt was so bad.
  - But God acted to save the Israelites because he remembered his covenant. The Bible says *“God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel, and God knew.”*
- God was not looking at their merit or action, but simply the fact that they were his covenant people.
  - And for God's covenant people deliverance comes entirely from God's character and not from us.



- With this context we see the point David is making.
  - He is not currently asking and begging God to deliver him and his people.
  - But instead he is preaching his soul to not forget the works God has previously done.
  - If God did not forget the Israelites in Egypt, will he forget David and the Israelites of the time?
  - If he was faithful to his covenantal people then, will he not be faithful to his people now?
- So what does this mean to us today?
  - We know that today the covenantal people of God are not those born with a birth right.
  - But are instead those who have faith in Christ Jesus.
  - The covenant people of God are those who have been born again and have been adopted as God's sons and daughters.
- We the Church are God's covenantal people and just as David looked to the covenantal people of the past to remind ourselves of God's faithfulness, so too should we.
- When we find ourselves in need.
  - When we are afraid or hurt
  - When people are against us or go behind our backs
  - What do we cling to?



- Do we believe that we can be saved by our merit?
  - Do we believe that God owes us rescue only if we work really hard to save ourselves?
  - Will God deliver us?
- What we must remember and what we must preach to our souls is that God has never in the history of the world, forgotten or abandoned his people, and he never will.
  - And this is what we must cling to when we are tempted to believe otherwise.
- David carries on to verse 8 and says, “*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*”
  - In this verse David is building off the previous one declaring that it is not only important to remember the deliverances of God in the past and what he has done
  - But it is also important to remember who God is.
- In verses 6-7 we see God’s deeds in history and the interpretation of those deeds by revelation, but in verse 8 we see not new information, but instead the root cause of verses 6-7.
  - The root cause of the justice in verse 6 and the revelation in verse 7 is not simple retribution or instruction for instruction’s sake.
  - But instead it is because of the mercy that flowed from each of them.



- David is reminding himself that all of the works of God, even those which involve justice, all come from his mercy.
  - The deliverance of Israel was not deserved
  - And the revelation given to Moses was not earned
  - But it was given freely and sovereignly from God
- And what this teaches us is that as God's people we must position ourselves to remember that all things of God come freely and sovereignly from him.
  - When we need to be saved or need help
  - Or when we are unsure where to go or what decision to make, we must not turn to ourselves
  - But instead, the solution we must make is that we trust God will provide and care for us as he has for all his covenant people.
- The temptation of the world is to believe that you are the one who must make your way in the world
  - But that is not a Christian truth
  - It is a worldly moral saying
- The thing that marks Christians as totally unique and different to the world is that we are people whose solution is never just work harder
  - But we are people who endlessly turn to God to deliver us
  - Who have confidence because God has never forsaken or abandoned his people



**Next: Remember the Extent of Forgiveness (vv.11-12)**

**11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

**12** as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

- As David continues on he begins to remind himself of the extent of God's forgiveness
- I think one of the hardest battles that a Christian must endure is not always the temptation of sin
  - But it can be believing in the forgiveness of God.
- It is not hard for people to become paralysed under the fear of judgment because even though they have confessed their sins to God and other Christians
  - There is still a part of them that struggles to believe that God does not hold their sin against them
- What David is doing here is reminding his soul of the freedom that he has as one of God's people.
  - And David is not someone who is unmarked from Sin
  - He committed Adultery with Bathsheba or depending on your reading abused Bathsheba
  - He murdered Uriah the Hittite to obtain Bathsheba as his wife
  - He abused his power as king of Israel
  - And he failed as a father which lead to a rebellion





- David was someone who is closely acquainted with sin, but how can he declare so confidently that, *“12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”*
- We know that David felt guilt for his sin because in Psalm 51 he declares, *“3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*
- So how does it go from that to Psalm 103?
  - It is not because he forgot his sin
  - Or did enough good to outweigh it
- David was capable of moving on because he understand that it is not his responsibility to cleanse himself
  - David understands that repentance does not earn forgiveness and that confession does not cause mercy
  - God forgives because God is Mercy
- And once David understands this truth the difference in him is obvious
  - In Psalm 51 he is focused on himself
  - And Psalm 103 is centered on God
  - David realizes that the secret to the forgiveness of sin is centering your eyes on God and not looking away



- Now as David is writing this Psalm he declares that, “*12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*”
  - He is revealing that his sin is not just minimized or shrunk, but that it is gone.
  - And not just as far as North is from the South which is a tangible meeting point
  - You can travel north until you reach the North Pole and then at that point every direction becomes south
- But you can travel east forever and never arrive at “west”
  - They will never meet or converge, they are an infinite distance from each other,
  - And that is the distance our sin is from us.
- So, for the Christian that cannot believe that they are forgiven
  - The Christian that is haunted by the ghost of sins past
  - The one who every night is tormented by the memories of sin
  - Remember; the only source of peace that you will find is Christ Jesus
  - When you have put your faith in Christ Jesus and have joined his Holy family there is no more condemnation.
- Christ died for all your sins past, present, and future
  - The guilt, shame, and sin died with him on the cross
  - And there is nothing more to count against you
- So remember, as David did, that you are free



**Next: Remember the Compassion of a Father (vv. 13-14)**

**13** As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

**14** For he knows our frame;  
He remembers that we are dust.

- David continues on and writes of the compassion of our father
  - And reminds himself that God is not only a fair judge, but also a good father
- Whereas, we have all fallen short and at one point of time where all alienated from the fathers
  - We do not need to walk to the father as guilty prisoners awaiting wrath
  - But instead we get to approach God as a father awaiting his prodigal son

**Next: Human Frailty (vv.15-18)**

**15** As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;

**16** for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.



**17** But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,  
and his righteousness to children's children,

**18** to those who keep his covenant  
and remember to do his commandments.

- In verses 15-18 we find another shift in the Psalm
  - We move on from the way God sees us to see a spiritual reality that we must make peace with
- Verses 15 to 16 state, “**15** *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.*”
  - What David is bringing up here is an uncomfortable spiritual truth that we all must understand
  - “*Our days are like grass, the wind passes over us, and we are gone,*”
- For many people this verse is the promise that your greatest fear is truth
  - One day we will be forgotten
  - No one will know our name or any of the things we did
  - We will try to leave a mark on this world, but our impact is like a blade of grass in a field.
  - There for a moment, and then gone forever.
- This promise is something that could not be more different to the goals of the world



- Benjamin Franklin wrote *“If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead, either write things worth reading or do things worth writing.”*
- This could not be a more striking different
- Benjamin Franklin and the American Dream urges you to personally make sure you are remembered
- While the Gospel declares the world will surely forget you.
- So how do we respond to this truth
  - I believe John Chrysostom says it best, *“If you knew how quickly you will be forgotten after your death, you wouldn’t try to please any one but God.”*
- The Christian truth is a simply one
  - You can either live for people who will forget you
  - Or you can live for God who will never forget you
  - It is really as simple as that.
  - And that is what David is bringing to light in verse 15-16
- *“17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him”*
  - Those who fear God, the ones who truly know God
  - Will always know the love and recognition of God
  - As Jesus says in John 10, *““My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”*



### **Next: Remember The Kingdom of God (vv. 19-21)**

**19** The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,  
and his kingdom rules over all.

**20** Bless the LORD, O you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his word,  
obeying the voice of his word!

**21** Bless the LORD, all his hosts,  
his ministers, who do his will!

- David's final item he declares to his soul is the theological peak of this whole passage.
  - He describes how God rules in heaven over everything
  - He has armies of angels who do his will
  - And in doing so he declares the sovereign dominion of God
  - David is preaching to his soul that there is nothing that happens in the world at random, or by chance.
- God is Lord in the heavens, but his power and kingdom rule over all things
  - And all things are governed under his providence
  - This means there is nothing on earth that is not under his rule.



- And it means that nothing can happen without his permission
- On verse 19, Charles Spurgeon declares, “*“Jehovah reigns. His throne is fixed, His dominion universal, and His sovereignty unquestioned.” “There is no spot where God is not King, no moment when He abdicates, no event beyond His decree.” And he finishes with “This verse is a death-blow to atheism, chance, and despair.”*”
- The beauty of this passage is that it is a promise of the scope of the God we worship
- What we as Christians need to understand is that our lives are not a simple random series of events that if we get lucky can affect us in a positive way
  - The truth that David is declaring is that our God is big enough to handle all of those details
  - He is the God who has orchestrated all of these details
  - And he is the God who plan has never been thwarted
- This is the truth that we as Christians must cling to at the base of all
  - God is in control
  - Not the politicians
  - Not the presidents
  - Not Spirits, angels or people
  - God is the only one in control and this will never change



- And the beauty of this promise is that we as Christian do not need to live afraid.
  - God has planned everything
  - All we need to do is walk obediently the road he paved for us and see the beautiful things that he will do

**Lastly: Preach to Your Soul (vv. 22)**

**22** Bless the LORD, all his works,  
in all places of his dominion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

- And finally now the application of this passage
  - What we as church need to do is not try harder
  - No be smarter or more clever
  - What we need to do is simply model after David
- We need to go to quiet room and preach to our souls the truths that have been true since the days of David
- This can be prayer, song, scripture or whatever you need to remind yourself of the truths of God.
- Preach to our souls of Grace, Mercy, Forgiveness, Compassion, imperishability, and the Sovereignty of God
- And if your soul does not listen to you preach it again and again and again until all your soul can do is sing praise after praise of the glory of God
- Please Pray with me