

* The Heights Baptist Church * Series: The Psalms *
* Topic: Praise the LORD! * Psalm 103 * 5/18/25 *

MAIN POINT

Part of our worship should involve remembering and reflecting on God's faithful love toward us, and remembering all of the blessings He has bestowed on us.

INTRODUCTION

What kinds of things do people tend to remember?

What kinds of things do we tend to forget?

We tend to remember traumatic events, and things that haven't been resolved. We tend to forget things are routine, and things that have been resolved. In today's Psalm, we will be reminded of the blessings God has given us, and reminded to praise Him for them.

Psalm 103 is a Psalm of praise. One commentary introduces it this way.

"A Psalm of joyous praise, in which the writer rises from a thankful acknowledgment of personal blessings to a lively celebration of God's gracious attributes, as not only intrinsically worthy of praise, but as specially suited to man's frailty. He concludes by invoking all creatures to unite in his song." Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown introduce this Psalm as follows in their commentary on the Psalms.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 103:1-7

In verses 1-2, who is David telling to praise God?

Three times David tells his soul, and all his inmost being, to praise God. And three is a number of divine completeness. He is telling himself to continually praise God, and that this praise should not be just a ritual of going through the motions. It needs to come from our inmost being.

Note to study leader: As people answer the question below, consider making a list of these attributes of God on the white board.

David tells himself to not forget all God's benefits. What benefits does David list in verses 1-7?

He forgives all our sins; He heals all our diseases; He redeems our life from the pit; He crowns us with love and compassion; He satisfies our desires with good things, so that our youth is renewed like the eagle's. He works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, and his deeds to the people of Israel.

The psalm goes on to say that God redeems our lives from the pit. What do you think this means in your own words?

It's important to regularly remember the work of God on our behalf. We should reflect on the wonderful reality that God has restored us to Himself through Christ, apart from whom we had no hope of a life with God. We may desire to leave our past in the past, but it's important to remember the past from which we have been saved in order to remember to thank God for our salvation. Remembering who God is and what He has done for us and is doing for us should lead us into passionate worship.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ PSALM 73:25 AND 2 TIMOTHY 2:22

In Psalm 103:5, we read that God satisfies our desires with good things. What do you think it means that God satisfies our desires with good things?

This verse is not saying God will satisfy all of our carnal desires. As we walk closely with Him, our desires will align with His desires. And He will bless us with fulfilling these desires in our lives.

How does your relationship with Christ bring satisfaction to your life?

What kinds of things tempt us to forget that only our relationship with God can truly satisfy us?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 103:8-12

How would you summarize the attributes of God described in these verses, and the blessings we receive as a result?

God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and full of faithful love. Even though he is obligated to no one, He does not treat those who come to Him as their sins deserve.

Considering verses 11-12, how much does God love us, and how completely does He forgive us?

His love for us is beyond our understanding. And His forgiveness is complete.

“No matter what storm you face, you need to know that God loves you. He has not abandoned you.”
Franklin Graham

How should grasping these two truths affect the way we process our past sins that we’ve already confessed to God?

We may rank the severity of our sins in our own minds, subconsciously thinking God couldn’t have completely forgiven us for some of our worst sins. But we are justified in Christ. In a sense, when we re-confess a sin from our past, God could reply with, “What sin?” Christ’s work on the cross has completely satisfied God’s justice, and He has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ JOHN 14:15, 1 JOHN 3:18 AND 1 JOHN 4:7-11

John explained that not only is God the source and standard of love; He is love. Love originates with God, and He is consistent and perfect in expressing love and supplying to us the love we are to show others. Through the cross of Christ, we see God’s passionate pursuit of us, His love on display.

How do most people determine who is deserving or not deserving of their love? How is God’s love different?

What happens to our efforts to love each other if we aren’t focused on Jesus’ love for us and our love for Jesus?

Love is God’s very essence. And God did more than shout down from heaven, “I love you!” He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die on the cross. That’s the nature of love—it’s more than mere emotion or sentiment. True love is intentional and leads to action. The more we understand the depth of God’s love for us, the more we are freed to love each other.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 103:13-18

We previously read in verse 5 that our youth is renewed like the eagle's. While God certainly renews those who are His, it does not mean He undoes the curse from Eden. Dust we are, and to dust we will return (Gen. 3:19). How are we described in these verses?

We are dust; we are mortal; we are like grass. We are like a flower in the field, which flourishes for a moment, and then then a little while later, when the wind blows, it is gone, without a trace.

How does God view us, in light of our human frailty and mortality?

God remembers our human frailty and has compassion on us. Think of Jesus in the state of extreme sorrow in Gethsemane, after telling his disciples to watch and pray, and instead finding them sleeping. Jesus compassionately said, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16

Why are the truths of Psalm 103:17-18 so important to us in our frail, mortal condition?

Our life in these mortal bodies is very temporary. And yet, God's love for us is eternal. Our bodies are weak and are wasting away, but inwardly we are being renewed day by day. So, we shouldn't lose heart! This inward renewal relates to the earlier description of us being renewed like an eagle.

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'"
Psalm 92:12-15

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 103:19-22

How does David end this Psalm based on all of the benefits from God he has described?

He praises God for His sovereign reign. Then he directs all of creation, including both the spiritual and physical realms, to praise God.

"Psalms are a beautiful song of faith that breaks into a song of worship."
Pastor Randy Hahn, The Heights Baptist Church, sermon on March 16th, 2025

APPLICATION

What are some practical ways I might remind "all my inmost being" to praise the LORD?

What are some practical ways I might remind myself to "forget not all His benefits"?

Consider praising God by praying through Psalm 103 this week.

PRAYER

God we praise you and thank you for the many blessings you have poured out on us. Thank you for forgiving our sins and redeeming our lives from the pit. Thank you for crowning us with love and compassion, and that you renew us and satisfy our desires. Thank you for revealing your will to us. We thank you for your compassion and grace. Thank you for removing our sins as far as the east is from the west. Thank you for remembering that we are but dust, and for continuing to love us from everlasting to everlasting. We praise You that You are on Your throne in heaven, and that Your kingdom rules over all.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 103

103:1. The traditional view is that David wrote Psalm 103. In verse 1, he called on himself (his “soul”) to praise “Yahweh.” In poetic parallelism, he repeated the summons to himself in different words. The phrase “all that is within me” referred to his total self, and the words “His holy name” referred to God in His separateness from humans, His exaltation.

103:2. David continued to encourage himself to praise the Lord. David knew the danger of taking God’s provisions for granted and wanted to retain a keen awareness of the undeserved blessings he and his people enjoyed. The repetition of the words “my soul” in verses 1-2 mark the psalm as deeply personal and has prompted the view that David designed it for people’s personal worship. David urged himself not to forget all God’s benefits. The Hebrew term rendered benefits means “deeds” or “dealings” and refers to God’s gracious, merciful acts (deeds of undeserved love) on His people’s behalf.

The threefold repetition command David gave himself to praise God represents the highest form of worship (Isa 6:3). The Hebrew word translated “benefits” (gemul, from gamal) means paying back what is deserved (28:4; 94:2; 116:12; 142:7). It most often describes God’s paying sinners back via divine wrath and retribution toward the enemy (Isa 59:18), but here it describes us praising God for His blessings, as described in this Psalm.

103:3. The word “Forgives” (Heb soleach) is common in Leviticus and Numbers, but here it is further developed, as it will be in Isa 33:24, 43:25, and 55:7. In God’s conditional covenant with Israel, He heals Israel physically and spiritually. The Lord heals both body and spirit through forgiveness, providing a sense of wholeness (147:3; Isa 53:5). We as the church can take spiritual application from this. We also should not associate all physical distress with any specific unconfessed sin in our life. God does discipline His children, but suffering is also part of living in this fallen world, and also a means by which God draws us closer to Himself.

103:4-5. The word redeems denotes the payment of a ransom price. The Israelite redeemed his firstborn (Ex 13:1-16). The family redeemer exacted revenge for wrongful death of a near relative, and he adopted the responsibility of raising a son to carry on a dead brother’s lineage (Dt 19:1-13; 25:5-10; Ru 3:8-9). Pit refers to Sheol, the place of the dead. The people of God are adorned with covenant loyalty and mercy, like a wreath of honor or esteem presented to a dignitary or king. These verses convey a sense of divine providence and peace, so that youthful strength is renewed (lit “renews itself”) like an eagle (Isa 40:31; 57:10).

David has recounted some of God’s gracious acts for him and his people. David began listing God’s merciful acts with His forgiveness. With the statement, He forgives all your sin, David continued to address himself. David wrote from experience and celebrated God’s incredible mercy. The Hebrew word translated forgives means “to send away, let go” (“to pardon”) and conveys continuous action. The term translated sin means “moral crookedness,” “going astray,” or “guilt.” David declared that God is ready to forgive people’s wrongdoing with the implication that they repent as a condition of pardon.

Next, David reminded himself that God healed all his diseases. Most likely David had physical, mental, and emotional healing in mind. The word diseases could indicate sickness or general affliction, both inward and outward. Yet in a real sense, no matter the cause of physical, mental, or emotional difficulties, God is the Source of healing. He also gives peace of mind, serene confidence in His loving care. Thus, we pray for recovery from our own suffering and we intercede for others.

God acted as David's kinsman-redeemer, his Next-of-Kin who rescued him from bondage. The term redeems could convey the senses of protection and restoration. It has the idea of liberating someone through payment of a price. The Israelites were redeemed from slavery in Egypt through God's mighty acts. To celebrate this truth, they redeemed their firstborn sons by offering sacrifices, reflecting their sons' being spared during the tenth plague. God had delivered (rescued) David from the Pit. The phrase the Pit was a designation for Sheol, the place of the departed dead. An alternate view is that the Hebrew term rendered Pit means "destruction"—anything that could have taken David's life. Either way, David stressed that God had pulled him back from the brink of death so that he continued to live. The emphasis is on God's granting recovery, not effecting resurrection, as one interpretation suggests.

Not only had God pulled David from the clutches of death, but He also related to David with faithful love and compassion. The Hebrew verb translated crowns literally means "to surround," "to compass." The noun means "crown" or "wreath." The verb has the sense of God's freely giving His blessings. The Hebrew term rendered faithful love means "loving-kindness," "mercy"—the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament word grace. The term rendered compassion (literally, "compassions") has the sense of attentive tenderness. The crown God bestowed was composed or crafted of covenant love and compassion. In addition, God gave David good things in abundance. The word satisfies has the sense of receiving more than enough, of being filled. David's emphasis was on the abundance God supplied, which renewed his youth like the eagle. Because of the eagle's swift movements, it symbolized strength and vitality (see Isaiah 40:31). Its size and comparatively long life added to the image. Because it renewed its plumage, it also may have symbolized youth.

103:6-7. David broadened reasons to praise God that included other Israelites as well as himself. The phrase acts of righteousness referred to God's fulfilling His covenant obligations (and perhaps to the benefits listed in vv. 3-5). Justice had the force of upholding the rights of people who were deprived of them. The oppressed were people who were wronged, who were victims of extortion. The background of David's confident assertion was God's delivering the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. The Old Testament emphasizes that God is on the side of the oppressed. He champions their cause. Although the comparison of God with a father does not occur until verse 13, verses 2-6 support and define a compassionate father's character. Be aware that as God's child you enjoy the benefits David outlined. David stated that the Lord had "revealed His ways to Moses" (v. 7). Ways could refer to God's methods of dealing with people, His directives for life, or His overall purpose. Figuratively, it could allude to God's commands or revelation of His character. Furthermore, God had "revealed ... His deeds to the people [literally, "children"] of Israel." The Hebrew word translated deeds means "acts" and can have the sense of God's severe or mighty exploits on His people's behalf.

103:8. David continued to outline the benefits God gave His people. These benefits flowed from God's character. David's statement in verse 8 echoes Exodus 34:6b, where God partially revealed His character to Moses. In Psalm 103:8, David listed four qualities of God's character demonstrated in His dealings with His people. First, the Lord is compassionate. Yahweh, the faithful covenant God, is merciful. Second, God is gracious. The word gracious was used only of God in the Old Testament. The verb means "to show favor" with the implication that God's favor is not based on people's deserving it but is a facet of His character. The noun form means "grace." Third, Yahweh is slow to anger. He is forbearing and suffers long with people's sins. He does not nurture ("keep") His anger. Fourth, God is rich in faithful love—covenant love; loving kindness; goodness.

103:9. David used a courtroom term to stress that God did not carry His legitimate quarrel or contention with His people to the full extent. He would not always accuse them; He would not constantly find fault with them and berate them. Rather, He would deal with their sin and would not continue punishment beyond that point. Furthermore, God would not hold a grudge against His people. Unlike humans, He would not nurture His anger with a view to unleashing it for personal satisfaction.

103:10. David was acutely conscious of God's great mercy. The Lord had not dealt with the Israelites as they had deserved. Their sins were many. The Hebrew term rendered sins comes from a word that means "to miss the mark," "to not follow the right path." The Israelites often had failed to meet God's standards, to perform their covenant duties. The term translated offenses comes from a word that means "to twist or bend" or from a term that means "to commit error, to go astray." David had in mind deliberate acts of moral perversity, crookedness, or error. These wrongs against God called for severe consequences, yet He had not reacted vindictively. He did not deal out to them the devastating consequences for which their wrongs called. This truth stressed that God's purpose is to return sinners to His "right paths" (Psalm 23:3) by exercising mercy. He delights in pardon, not punishment.

103:11-12. The introductory word for connects what follows with verses 8-10, especially verse 8. Because God is rich in faithful love, He did not mete out what the Israelites' sins deserved. In verse 11, David returned to his emphasis on the scope and depth of God's faithful love, which is unique and unequalled. Unlike many people's expressions of love as an emotion, God's love is unconditional and constant, never wavering in intensity.

David used the greatest expanse he knew to describe the vastness of God's loyal, covenant love. The distance between the heavens and the earth was beyond measuring. This shows us God's steadfast love is great (strong, powerful), so great it is beyond our mind's ability to calculate.

This incalculable, unfailing love was directed toward people who feared Him. The Hebrew term rendered fear has the ideas of awe, reverence, and honor (respect). People who followed God—who revered Him and sought to keep His covenant demands—experienced His constant kindness. They also experienced His forgiveness. Transgressions were acts of rebellion against God's authority. The root Hebrew word has the force of willful revolt, of defiance. To David, the greatest lateral distance was east to west, sunrise to sunset. God's removing His people's willful disobedience that far pictured unmitigated forgiveness. Implied is that God's forgiveness followed the people's confession and repentance. David was not describing God's easy tolerance of sin but His willingness to extend grace to repentant sinners.

103:13 A godly father disciplines his child not out of malice, but because he loves him (Heb 12:3-13). The Lord demonstrates mercy and compassion toward His children through forgiveness of sin and blessing, in spite of their weaknesses.

103:14 The Hebrew word yetser (what we are made of; "our formation") comes from the verb yatsar, which denotes the shaping of clay by a craftsman into an acceptable vessel. God's intimate knowledge of His created beings affirms their origin and frailty.