

Psalm 103

Thanksgiving for God's mercy
A Psalm of David.

Psalm 103: This hymn is one of the greatest praise psalms in the entire collection. The first section (verses 1-5), finds the psalmist expressing his intention to praise God for all "his benefits" (verse 2). Then with five verbs he enumerates specifically these benefits: "who forgiveth ... who healeth" (verse 3), "who redeemeth ... who crowneth" (verse 4)," who satisfieth" (verse 5). All of these actions speak of spiritual blessings, though physical benefits may be included. The next section (verses 6-19), which speaks of God's character, contains a veritable catalog of the benevolent attributes of God: "merciful, gracious, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy" (verse 8). These are amply illustrated in an attempt to convey their vastness: the greatness of His mercy ("as far as the east is from the west"; verse 12), and the greatness of His compassion ("as a father pitieth his children"; verse 13). Finally, in the conclusion the psalmist returns to the call that he gave himself at the outset, but this time he widens it to include all created beings and works (verses 20-22).

Verses 1-22: (Psalms 103 and 104), appear as an intentional pair designed to promote the blessing exaltation of God. This psalm represents a soliloquy in which David survey's God's goodness and encourages the angels and the works of God's creation to join him in divine praise.

- I. A Call for Human Praise (103:1-19).
 - A. Personally (103:1-5);
 - B. Corporately (103:6-19).
- II. A Call for Creation's Praise (103:20-22b).
 - A. Angels (103:20-21);
 - B. Works of Creation (103:22a-b).
- III. A Refrain of Personal Praise (103:22c).

Verses 1-5: By the pardon of sin, that is taken away which kept good things from us, and we are restored to the favor of God, who bestows good things on us. Think of the provocation; it was sin, and yet pardoned: how many the provocations, yet all pardoned! God is still forgiving, as we are still sinning and repenting. The body finds the melancholy consequences of Adam's offence, it is subject to many infirmities, and the soul also. Christ alone forgives all our sins; it is he alone who heals all our infirmities. And the person who finds his sin cured, has a well-grounded assurance that it is forgiven. When God, by the graces and comforts of his Spirit, recovers his people from their decays, and fills them with new life and joy, which is to them an earnest of eternal life and joy, they may then be said to return to the days of their youth (Job 33:25).

Psalm 103:1 "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, [bless] his holy name."

The word "bless," as applied to God, means to praise, implying always a strong affection for him as well as a sense of gratitude. As used with reference to people, the word implies a "wish" that they may be blessed or happy, accompanied often with a prayer that they may be so. Such is the purport of the "blessing" addressed to a congregation of worshippers (compare Num. 6:23-27). The word "soul" here is equivalent to mind or heart. My mental and moral powers, as capable of understanding and appreciating his favors. The soul of man was "made" to praise and bless God; to enjoy his friendship; to delight in his favor; to contemplate his perfections. It can never be employed in a more appropriate or a more elevated act than when engaged in his praise.

"And all that is within me": All my powers and faculties; all that can be employed in his praise: the heart, the will, the affections, the emotions. The idea is, that God is worthy of all the praise and adoration which the entire man can render. No one of his faculties or powers should be exempt from the duty and the privilege of praise.

“Bless the Lord” (compare 103:2, 22; 104:1, 35).

This Psalm of David is a praise Psalm beyond compare. It lightens my heart to the extent that I must stop my writing and take out time to praise the LORD with all that is within me as well. His is not the flesh of mankind praising the Lord, but the inner most being. Even as I type these words of praise, there is an overwhelming presence of the LORD. My heart is singing within at praise of the Lord. David cannot say enough to express what is in his heart here. We have said before that the heart of man is what he is. David's heart is overflowing with praise and adoration of the LORD here. We sing a little chorus of these verses here in our church. It would do all of us overwhelming good to stop and think of all the reasons we have for praising the LORD with everything within us. Of course, LORD here, is Jehovah.

Psalm 103:2 "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:"

“Forget not all his benefits”: These earthly gifts from God included:

- (1) Forgiveness of sin (verse 3);
- (2) Recovery from sickness (verse 3);
- (3) Deliverance from death (verse 4);
- (4) Abundant lovingkindness and mercy (verse 4); and
- (5) Food to sustain life (verse 5).

He has done great things for everyone that ever lived. He breathed the breath of life into each of us, and gave us life. Jesus gave His body on the cross to give us a new everlasting life in Him. One of the most loving and wonderful things He has done, is making the earth and all that it contains for a dwelling place for mankind. If we had a hundred pages to expound on the wonderful things He has done for each of us, it would not be half enough. All that we are, or ever hope to be, is because He loved us enough to provide it for us. The gift of salvation is the greatest thing He has done for us. Because of His great love, we will spend eternity in heaven with Him.

Psalm 103:3 "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;"

God removes the barrier that separates people from Himself by canceling the debt of sin ("all thine iniquities"), so that anyone can enjoy a loving relationship with Him. God's love removes a person's sins as though they never existed (103:12).

"Diseases": This is not a promise, but rather a testimony which should be understood in the light of (Deut. 32:39).

Most any physician in this land would tell you that he or she doctors you, but God heals you. Most of them will also tell you that they really do not understand why certain things help you to get well, they just do. Let's look at an Old Testament promise to forgive sins.

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Of course, this Scripture from Isaiah is really prophetic of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus has provided for all who will accept forgiveness. The Lord Jesus took our sin upon His body on the cross. In exchange for our sin, He gave us His righteousness.

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"

Praise God! He paid the price for us. One of the greatest statements in all the Bible is this next one.

Hebrews 8:12 "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Psalm 103:4 "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies;"

That is, who saves it from death when exposed to danger, or when attacked by disease. The word "destruction" or "corruption" here is equivalent to the grave, since it is there that the body returns to corruption (compare the notes at Psalm 16:10).

"Who crowneth thee": The idea here is not merely that God is the source of these blessings, but that there is something of beauty, of dignity, of honor, as in the conferring of a crown or garland on anyone (compare the notes at Psalm 65:11).

"With loving-kindness and tender mercies": Mercy and compassions. God showed mercy to him, evinced compassion, and these were so abundant that they might be said to be the crown or ornament of his life.

We realize that David was the Psalmist here, but he is looking prophetically to the forgiveness provided through Jesus Christ our Lord. David had been physically redeemed so many times

from the very destruction that he mentions here. I believe he is really looking for the Redeemer who will come after, who will be the substitute for the sins of all the people.

1 Timothy 4:10 "For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe."

David was much like many of the Old Testament prophets who were looking for the Messiah. David was fully aware that it was the Lord who kept him from the jaws of the lion, and it was this same Lord who was with him as he slew Goliath. The mercy of God was with him in all these occasions, but he was looking ahead to the time when the mercy of God would be shown to all men through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 103:5 "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good [things; so that] thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

"Youth is renewed like the eagle's": The mysterious way of the long-lived eagle symbolized strength and speed (compare Exodus 19:4; Jer. 48:40), which also characterizes human youth. As a general rule, a person blessed of God will grow weak and slow down less rapidly than otherwise (compare Isa. 40:29-31, which uses the same language).

Possibly what is intended here by "satisfieth thy mouth", is possibly speaking of the spirit of man which will be satisfied through the Lord. This at any rate, is an uplifting of the soul, which makes the receiver of this renewed like an eagle that soars to the highest through the sky. Many who have been truly blessed of God have experienced just this feeling. The Spirit refreshes the soul of mankind and makes them ready to minister.

Verses 6-14: Truly God is good to all: he is in a special manner good to Israel. He has revealed himself and his grace to them. By his ways we may understand his precepts, the ways he requires us to walk in; and his promises and purposes. He always has been full of compassion. How unlike are those to God, who take every occasion to chide, and never know when to cease! What would become of us, if God should deal so with us? The Scripture says a great deal of the mercy of God, and we all have experienced it. The father pities his children that are weak in knowledge, and teaches them; pities them when they are froward, and bears with them; pities them when they are sick, and comforts them; pities them when they are fallen, and helps them to rise; pities them when they have offended, and, upon their submission, forgives them; pities them when wronged, and rights them. Thus, the Lord pities those that fear him. See why he pities. He considers the frailty of our bodies, and the folly of our souls, how little we can do, how little we can bear; in all which his compassion appears.

Verses 6-19: The psalmist rehearses the attributes of God with which He blesses the saints.

Psalm 103:6 "The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed."

The major difference between divine love and what often passes for human love is “righteousness”. God’s love is in accord with His just character and holiness. His love hates what is wrong and embraces what is right.

The Lord, not only in the time of David, but even more so in the time of Jesus, came to help those who were oppressed. Jesus did not come to help those who did not need His help, He came to the lost, the sick, the demon possessed, the hungry, the blind, and in fact, He came to help the outcasts of society. The high and mighty felt as if they did not need Him. He came to those who needed a Savior. This same One who brought salvation for whosoever will, is also the Judge. It is Jesus that we will stand before on judgement day. He blesses, but if we refuse the blessings, He is the One who condemns to hell.

Verses 7-8: “His ways unto Moses”: Compare Moses’ request (Exodus 33:13), with God’s answer (Exodus 34:6-7).

Psalm 103:7 "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel."

This is another ground of praise, that God had "revealed his will." That this had been done in an indubitable manner to Moses; and that these revelations had been recorded by him for the instruction and guidance of his people. The word "ways" here means his laws. His methods of administration; the principles on which he governs mankind, and the conditions on which he will save people. There is no higher ground of gratitude to God than the fact that he has given a revelation to mankind.

"His acts unto the children of Israel": His methods of doing things have been made known to them. And his acts, his interpositions, have been in their favor.

We do know that Moses communed with God on the mount. Moses was in His presence for 40 days and nights. The beautiful thing to me, is the fact that Moses' head glowed with a light so bright when he came down the mountain, that he had to cover his head to keep from blinding the people. God filled Moses' head with the knowledge of Godly things on the mountain. God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt through mighty signs and wonders. The children of Israel were without excuse, because they had seen the greatness of God over and over on this journey to the Promised Land.

Verses 8-10: God’s love for His people is like a father’s love for a wayward and rebellious son, waiting anxiously for him to return home (Luke 15:11-31).

Psalm 103:8 "The LORD [is] merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy."

See the notes at (Psalm 78:38). The idea here is derived evidently from (Exodus 34:6-7), that great and glorious statement of God himself in regard to his own character. Our world is a different world under that statement from what it would be if that and kindred declarations had not been made. There is here a "progression" of thought; an "advance" on the previous statements. At first the psalmist referred to his own individual experience (Psalm 103:3-5); then he referred to the dealings of God toward the Hebrew people (Psalm 103:6-7); and now he rises to the general contemplation of his character as it relates to all mankind. It was a characteristic of God in respect to all, that he was kind, compassionate, and forbearing.

"Slow to anger": That is, patient; not soon excited. Bearing much, and bearing it long (see James 5:11; compare Exodus 34:6-7).

"And plenteous in mercy": Margin, "great of mercy." The Hebrew word means "much," or "great;" and the idea is, that mercy is not manifested by him in small or stinted measure. It is rich; full; abundant; overflowing and free.

No one knew this better than the Israelites. God forgave them over and over. Prophetically they were the harlot wife in Hosea. They were unfaithful to God, and He forgave them over and over. David could speak from firsthand knowledge of the forgiveness of God as well. The Lord had forgiven him of his discretion with Bath-sheba. Even we should not be quick to point a finger at him. If it were not for the mercy and the forgiveness of God, you and I would be lost too. We see from the following Scripture, that it is the desire of God for all to be saved.

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Psalm 103:9 "He will not always chide: neither will he keep [his anger] for ever."

"Not always chide": There will be a final day of accountability, both at death (Luke 16:19-31), and the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15). The Genesis flood served as a stark preview of this truth (compare Gen. 6:3).

We think of God as a loving and forgiving God, but He will not always look the other way. Just as there was a time when God looked on men in the time of Noah and was sorry that He had even made them, He is sorry whenever we continue in sin. He waited a very long time, before He turned His hot anger and destroyed all but Noah's family. He is patient, but there is an end to His patience. Chide, in this verse, means grapple or wrangle. God does not wrangle over sin. He has set an absolute, that there is no arguing with. He is tolerant, but someday will say, it is enough.

Psalm 103:10 "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

"Not dealt": God's great mercy (verse 11), and irreversible, complete justification (verse 12), have redemptively accomplished for us, by the death of Christ (compare 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), what we ourselves could not do.

Above all other things that God is: He is a forgiving God. He has not dealt with any of us according to our sin, because we all are guilty of sin and deserve to be crucified. He accepted the body and blood of Jesus as full payment for all of our sin and iniquity. Salvation is a free gift.

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:" "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

If I were to try to sum this lesson up, I would have to say that David has received total forgiveness for all of his sin. He is feeling overwhelming joy, knowing that all is well with his soul. He cannot find enough words in his meager vocabulary to express the gratitude that he has for this loving LORD. His heart is so full of praise to the LORD, that it seems it will burst. David is a changed man.

Let us take a look at what He has done for you and me, as well. The very first thing is, He furnished salvation free of charge to each of us. The very breath in our body is a gift from God. We could go on and on, but I think you have the picture. It is very little in return that we would praise Him with everything that is within us.

Psalm 103 Questions

1. Who penned the 103rd Psalm?
2. What kind of a Psalm is the 103rd?
3. What determines what a man is?
4. Who is LORD in verse 1?
5. In verse 2, David said forget not what?
6. Why was the earth made?
7. Who forgiveth all thine _____.
8. Who healeth all thy diseases?
9. Who have sinned and come short of the glory of God?
10. What wonderful promise did He make in Hebrews 8:12?
11. In verse 4, He crowns with 2 things, what are they?
12. Who is Jesus Christ the Savior of?
13. When were two times when God miraculously saved David's life?

14. What is meant in verse 5, by satisfieth thy mouth?
15. What, besides righteousness, does the LORD execute?
16. Who did Jesus come to help?
17. Who will we stand before on judgement day?
18. What special thing happened to Moses, when he was on the mount with God?
19. Why were the Israelites without excuse?
20. What great sin had God forgiven David of?
21. What does the word (chide) mean?
22. When does the Bible say that God was sorry He had made man?
23. In verse 10, we see God as a _____ God.
24. How did the author sum up this lesson?