

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Psalms of David

Psalm 103, Bless the LORD O my soul

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
NKJV Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Any of you who have children might be familiar with the feeling that they're always asking for something. "Can I have more food?" "Can I have some money?" "Can you take me somewhere?" Sometimes it can feel like we've only just given one thing before something else is asked for. Couldn't they have just enjoyed the first thing for a little while longer? Of course, although the stereotype is amusing, it's not really the only thing children do. I can think happily of times when one of my children have come to me and just said, "Thanks Dad." It's nice to know they noticed and appreciated something I did.

Do you know, sometimes I'm not so different to the children I described. Always asking things of people and not often thankful enough or attentive enough to good things people do for me. Worse still, I can be like that in my prayers! Full of requests to God. But not very often full of thankfulness. I wonder if that's true of you too?

As we finish our series in the Psalms today, we come to Psalm 103. It's a Psalm full of thankfulness. Perhaps the characteristic phrase in the Psalm is "Bless the Lord" which occurs in each of the opening two verses and the closing three verses. The Psalm is an invitation to worship. It's not a Psalm full of complicated theology, and a long list of practical instruction, but a reminder to be thankful, and a list of things to be thankful for.

Unsurprisingly, Psalm 103 has been the inspiration behind many hymns through the ages. The old hymn "Praise my soul the King of Heaven" was loosely based on this Psalm. Much more recently, the Matt Redman and Steve Angirisano song "10 thousand reasons", starts with the lines,

Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name

The song reminds us of the many reasons we have to bless God, with the lines

For all Your goodness
I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons
For my heart to find

And that's the invitation for us today. We want to find reasons to keep on worshipping God in Psalm 103. The first five verses give us reasons for individuals to be thankful to the Lord. Verses 6-19 give us reasons for God's people as a group to be thankful. The Psalm finishes in verses 20-22 with reasons why the whole world and everything in it should be thankful.

We'll go through the Psalm noticing some of the many reasons we have to be thankful to the Lord, but let's first remind ourselves that it is the Lord we are to be thankful to or bless. There is no one more worthy of praise. I mentioned before that I'm not often thankful enough to people around me. I don't speak as highly of some people as I should. And perhaps I speak more highly of others than they deserve. But make no mistake, there is no one like the Lord Jesus. No one is worthy of praise like He is. So as we go through the Psalm, above anything else, I want us to be pointed towards Him. We'll be reminded of many good things that are ours from God. But the Giver of these good things is better than the good things He gives. We want to see the Lord Jesus today, even more than we want to be reminded of good things we have.

Let's read the first five verses of the Psalm then.

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: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Psalm starts with this repeated invitation to "Bless the LORD, O my soul." There are some important lessons alongside this. Our praise is to be from "all that is within me." David isn't inviting his readers to tag on a short statement of thankfulness at the end of our prayers. No, blessing God is to occupy all of our being. It's not just something to think about if we have time amidst all the busy things that fill our lives. But blessing God is of first importance. The instruction to "forget not all His benefits" is a reminder that it's so easy to forget, and to be distracted with other things. So in these first two verses, I'm reminded of the need to deliberately invest time and energy in thinking about God's goodness and praising Him for it. So let me ask a challenging question. Are we offering to God the very best we can in terms of our praise? That doesn't necessarily mean what we say has to sound grand and fancy. But is what we offer the result of devotion and effort trying to get to know God more and enjoy our relationship with Him, so that we have something to say?

Did you notice some of the reasons in these first five verses that individuals have, to be thankful to God and to bless Him?

First, in verse 3, He forgives all our iniquities. God is the God who forgives. This was the great message of the apostles as they spread the gospel in those early days. Peter said of the Lord Jesus in Acts 13:38, "Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins." Peter loved to tell people how the Lord Jesus had died for their sins and that as a result there is forgiveness for sinners. When the apostle Paul recounted his conversion story, he told King Agrippa in Acts 26 that he had a God-given mission to tell people the gospel so that those who responded in faith "may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified" (v. 18). As you listen today, do you know that your sins are forgiven? Have you ever realised that you have sinned against God and asked Him to forgive you? If you have, then you can join with David in saying that He forgives all my iniquities. And you already have your first reason to be thankful to God. But if you've never asked God to forgive you, or you don't know if you've been forgiven, I want to remind you of the Apostle John's words in 1 John 1:9.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Here is the wonderful news of the gospel. God's forgiveness is available to anyone. Perhaps someone is listening today who has never been saved. You've never experienced God's forgiveness and just as you're listening, God has revealed to you that you have sinned against Him. But you've heard God's solution – "confess your sins, and He will be faithful and just to forgive you and

to cleanse you.” Would you do that? Would you tell God you’ve sinned against Him, and that you believe that Jesus has died for your sins? Would you take God at His word and believe that He is faithful and just to forgive your sins?

Next in our list of things to praise God for is that He “heals all your diseases.” I had to think about this one for a while because it’s evident that God doesn’t heal all diseases that believers suffer from. That’s true today and it was true in Bible times. Not every sick Christian gets healed. So, what did David mean here? I think he’s not actually talking about physical illness. Instead, I think he’s talking about spiritual sickness. That makes sense since the first three of these reasons to be thankful in Psalm 103 have to do with salvation matters.

Throughout the Old Testament there are examples of people’s sins being described in picture form like an illness. [A particularly striking example comes in Isaiah 1:5,6 where Isaiah says to a sinful nation:](#)

[Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruise and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.](#)

[Isaiah says these sinful people were like physically sick, diseased people. And I think it’s in this sense that in Isaiah 53 verse 5 we get the phrase “by His stripes we are healed.”](#) Isaiah 53 is one of those amazing chapters in the Old Testament that predicts the death of the Lord Jesus and the consequences of it. One of the consequences is that spiritually sick people are healed. And so, Psalm 103 reminds us that we were spiritually sick because of our sin. But the Lord has provided a way for us to be healed.

We get the next reason to be thankful in verse 4, “Who redeems your life from destruction.” It’s a reminder that because of our sinful rebellion against God, we were destined for destruction. That was what we deserve. But those who are saved have been redeemed. We’ve been bought by God, and now we belong to Him. In the New Testament Paul wrote to Titus to remind him that the Lord Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). 1 Peter 1:18-19 reminds us how precious this truth is by saying, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” The Lord Jesus died for us to redeem us. He gave His life so that ours could be spared from destruction. Perhaps we even get a hint of the hope of resurrection here. The word translated “destruction” in the New King James version is often translated as “the pit” or “the grave.” So perhaps David is thinking about more than just temporary physical destruction of the body but is thinking forward to judgement at death. But if you’re a Christian, that is no longer your destiny. Your life has been redeemed, and you belong to the Lord Jesus. For you, when you die, it’s not destruction and judgement that you look forward to, but everlasting life with the Lord Jesus in heaven.

Next, the Lord “crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies.” Isn’t that wonderful? As well as great salvation blessings, we can be thankful for the Lord’s ongoing kindness and mercy towards us. John MacArthur described loving kindness as meaning something like “committed love”, which I like. God shows “committed love” towards His people. Perhaps you can think of some evidences of that “committed love” in your own lives over the past week. If so, that could be where you start to respond today to David’s invitation to “Bless the LORD O my soul.”

Finally in this first section we can bless the Lord because He satisfies and renews in verse 5. It’s not that God gives us everything we could ever want. We know from experience that this isn’t the

case. But God is able to truly satisfy His people. He gives good things that He knows are for our good and He is able to make us satisfied with them. I don't know whether you'd agree, but I often think we can be very dissatisfied and find reason to grumble. But God is truly able to satisfy the believer. I'm challenged by this verse. I need to remember to praise the Lord for the good things He gives. And I need to remember to be satisfied by what the Lord does give rather than fretting about what in His all-knowing wisdom He chooses not to give me.

So, in the first five verses then we had reasons for individuals to be thankful and to bless God. He forgives, He heals, He redeems, He crowns, He satisfies, and He renews. I think already we have enough material to prompt praise to God. Is there something in these first 5 verses that causes you to lift up your heart and voice to God and praise Him?

You'll notice that in the next set of verses, verses 6-19, the words change from "your" to "our", "us" and "those." David is now speaking not just about individuals but about groups of people. He's now speaking to all of God's people. Praise is not just to be an individual thing, but something we enjoy doing with other believers. Listen out for some of the reasons as we read verses 6-19.

The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, his acts to the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them. The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

Verse 6 gives us the first reason for collective praise to God. He cares about righteousness and justice. God always work righteously. In an age when it's all too common for public figures to be caught out being less than righteous, it's good to be reminded that God never will be. He is always right in everything He does. And so, He notices when people are oppressed due to the greed or cruelty of others. And He cares about it. Sometimes leaders care about injustice when it's politically expedient to do so. But if there's no benefit in the polls, or if it seems a small matter, the rightness of a matter seems to become less important. Not so with God! He always executes righteousness. And God's people should be glad of that fact. Imagine if we praised and worshipped a god who was underhand, or oblivious to matters of right and wrong. Would that be praiseworthy? No – but God executes righteousness and justice.

In verse 7, we discover that God guides. He "made known His ways to Moses." We can bless God because He can give life changing direction. He did for Moses. And He can for you and me. God is able to make His will clear to His people. Perhaps some are listening today and are unsure about some next steps in life. Are you praying for direction? Have you asked God what He wants you to do? God can make known the way to you. And we can be thankful that we have a God like that!

In verses 8-14, we learn that God's people can be thankful because He is merciful and doesn't deal with our sins the way they deserve. God is merciful and gracious. He is slow to anger and

abounding in mercy. When you gather with God's people to worship, remember that you are not coming to a God who flies into rage very quickly. No, you are coming to a God who is merciful and is slow to anger.

Verse 10 is a wonderful verse. "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities." That's worth thinking about isn't it! How can this be so when I said that verse 6 tells us to bless God because He is always righteous? The answer to that question is only seen faintly in the Old Testament, but becomes clearer in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Himself died for our sins. He was made sin for us. He bore the punishment that our sins deserved. And God offers full and complete forgiveness to any who believe this wonderful good news and accept the death of Jesus in our place.

It's hard to know exactly how much of that David understood. I suspect from Psalms like Psalm 22 that he must have had some idea of what the Messiah would do, however faint his view. That's why David can celebrate in verse 12 that "as far as the east is from the west so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Is there a measure that we can use to tell us how far the east is from the west? No – the distance just goes on and on. And that's how wonderfully God has dealt with our sins through the death of the Lord Jesus. He hasn't dealt with us according to our sins. That would have only led to judgement and destruction. Instead, the Lord Jesus bore that judgement Himself. And so, God can say to those who trust Him that their sins have been removed from them as far as the east is from the west!

In verses 15-18, we're reminded that the Lord is timeless. He endures forever. We're definitely not like that. We're like dust. We are like flowers that spring up quickly and look pretty for a moment and then disappear. Near my house there is a road that is lined by cherry blossom trees. For a few weeks each spring, these trees burst into flower, and the variety of white and pink blossoms makes a sort of avenue down either side of the road that is really beautiful. For those few weeks, one of my favourite things to do is to walk up that road on my way home from work. If the sky is blue, it's a really pleasant walk. But you know, it only lasts a few weeks. The blossoms spring up really quickly, and then they're gone almost as soon as they appear. For the rest of the year, the road is lined by loads of trees with green leaves. It's nice enough I guess, but certainly not as pretty as when the blossoms are out. The flowers come quickly and go quickly. David says that human life is like that. Comes quickly. Lasts a short while. Goes quickly. But in contrast, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. God is not temporary, and neither is His mercy.

Why is that a reason to be thankful? I mentioned earlier about God's "committed love." Well, that didn't start with you or me! If it did, we might wonder what had ever happened before, or whether God would carry on being lovingly committed to His people in the generations to come. No! God has loved His people through all ages. He has always been merciful to those who fear Him. That was true in David's day, perhaps around 3000 years ago. And God was merciful before that to Abraham, to Noah, to Adam and Eve, and to many others. And God is still merciful today to His people. So many things around us change. But God does not! He remains the Same and He remains merciful. He will do so for generations to come. David speaks of "children's children" in verse 17. We won't be around forever to help our children's children, no matter how much we'd like to be. But God will be. He will be just as merciful to those who follow Him in our grandchildren's generation as He is to us in ours. And we can be thankful that things are in His control, and not ours!

There's a further reason for God's people to be glad and praise God in verse 19. "The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all."

God rules! We might worry about various situations, whether in our own personal circumstances or in the global events of our day. But God's people can always praise Him that He is in control of it all!

So, if in verses 1-5 we had some reasons to praise God as individuals and we thought about some of the things that God has done for us personally, then in verses 6-19 we had reasons for God's people to come together and praise God. When you next gather with the believers you fellowship with, why not think about His righteousness and justice. Why not think about His guidance. Why not think about how He doesn't deal with us as our sins deserve but through the Lord Jesus removes our transgressions from us. Why not think about how His mercy is timeless or that He rules over all. I'm sure that's enough material to prompt the worship of God's people when they come together.

We finish Psalm 103 with verses 20-22 where I think the scope is widened further still. The whole world should be thankful. Listen to the verses.

Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure. Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

In these verses angels are instructed to bless the Lord. The hosts, which I think means the stars and sun and moon – the whole universe – should bless the Lord. Everyone and everything should bless the Lord. We're reminded of His Word – that's something to bless God for. We're reminded of His pleasure – things are done just because they please Him, and we can see the glory of them and bless God. We're reminded of His dominion, His power and rule, and we can bless God for them. The whole world should be thankful and bless God.

So, Psalm 103 is a Psalm inviting us to worship God. It's not practical instruction, nor doctrinal teaching really – it's a call to worship and praise. So, the clear challenge for us is whether we'll respond to the invitation and use all that is within us to bless the Lord?

I've dealt with the Psalm by splitting it into ever widening spheres. We started off thinking about what God has done for us as individuals in verses 1-5. Then we thought about how God's people can worship collectively for things done for us. And then we finished looking even more widely to the whole world. I don't think the Bible has many strict rules for prayer and worship, but you might find it helpful to follow the pattern of this Psalm. Why not start off thinking about what God has done for you personally? Then think about what He does for you and the believers you gather with. Then think about what He does for the whole world. And having done all of that thinking, you'll be well set to respond to the invitation of Psalm 103.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Psalm 103, "Bless the LORD O my soul", talk T1433.

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