

PRAISE THE LORD, O MY SOUL

SERIES: LET US KNEEL BEFORE THE LORD, OUR MAKER



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Psalm 103
7th Message
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Christmas is a season of remembering. We turn our attention to the familiar and wonderful news of Jesus' birth, God with us. We honor tradition in our singing, holiday meals, decorations, and get-togethers. We connect with family and friends that are distant from us for most of the year, and recall our childhood excitement when we watch children enjoy Christmas festivities for the first time.

Continuing in this series of studies in Psalms, we turn now to Psalm 103. Its central theme is a call to remember the gifts of God and "forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

Psalm 103:1-2:

**Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my
inmost being, praise his holy name.**

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

Let me make an observation before we move further. This is a psalm of David. He is both teacher and learner. The first and last line of the song are exactly the same, "Praise the LORD, O my soul." David includes himself in the instruction to worship and remember the Lord.

In verses 3-5 there is a description of the gifts (benefits) of God that should never be forgotten. Each of these verses has pairs of concepts in them that are meant to be read together.

Psalm 103:3:

**who forgives all your sins and heals all
your diseases,**

It would be possible to misunderstand this as saying that no child of God should ever be sick. That is not the point being made here at all. Sin erects a barrier between ourselves and God. The barrier is removed

when God forgives all your sins. But sin also wreaks destruction in our bodies, sickness in relationships, and unhealthy emotions.

John Walker Lindh was raised in Marin County and converted to Islam when he was in high school. He traveled to the Middle East, received training from Al-Qaeda operatives, eventually joined the Taliban army, and fought against soldiers of this country. He was captured and is now serving a twenty year sentence in federal prison. His parents are actively seeking a presidential pardon for him and most public reaction has been negative—no mercy for the traitor. A president can release a man from prison, but cannot change the man or the angry citizens he will encounter upon release.

Jesus not only frees us from condemnation, but he enters into our world and heals illness, bringing light where there was darkness and life where there was death. Forgiveness and healing, restoration and renewal, go together.

Psalm 103:4-5:

**who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and
compassion,**

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

He "redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion" (Psalm 103:4). Near the end of his life, the Apostle Paul was in a dungeon in Rome. In the months before he was executed he was cold and lonely, abandoned by some he had counted as friends. After years of faithful ministry—planting churches, writing scripture, spending himself for others—he was in a pit.

Very few of us end up with the life we hoped to

have. The world does not give us what we long for and some of the people we trust will disappoint us. Living by faith, we get less of what we strive for and more of God's redemptive presence. Consider what Paul wrote from his lonely dungeon: "My life is forfeited, I am being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day." (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Redeemed from the pit, crowned with love and compassion.

In verse five we are reminded of God's good gifts that are not diminished by the aging process. Youth is renewed and our life soars with God's purpose and his approval even when our joints grow stiff and our strength wanes.

David turns next to lessons from the exodus.

Psalm 103:6-12:

**The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.**

**He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:**

**The LORD is compassionate and
gracious, slow to anger, abounding in
love.**

**He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;**

**he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our
iniquities.**

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

**as far as the east is from the west, so far
has he removed our transgressions
from us.**

Both Old Testament prophets and the writers of the New Testament use the period of Israel's wilderness wandering to sound a warning. The people failed in courage and refused to enter the promised land with God's direction. They complained about God's provision of manna and claimed to prefer their former slavery. He judged them in order to open their hearts to his blessing. His anger and accusation last only as long as it takes to unlock our hands to receive his gifts. His love is eternal and beyond all measuring.

In Psalm 103:13 it notes that the Lord of history is also a father to his beloved children. David wrote in Psalm 27:10, "My father and mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up." Near the end of his life he fought his own son in a bloody civil war. David had failed parents and was himself an inadequate father. The Lord is nothing like us.

Psalm 103:13-18:

**As a father has compassion on his
children, so the LORD has
compassion on those who fear him;**

**for he knows how we are formed, he
remembers that we are dust.**

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

**the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.**

**But from everlasting to everlasting the
LORD's love is with those who fear
him,**

**and his righteousness with their
children's children—**

**with those who keep his covenant and
remember to obey his precepts.**

God is a compassionate father, not an indulgent one. There is a story of a kid in Little League who

closes his eyes, takes a swing, and hits a dribbler to short. It goes through the legs of the shortstop, the left fielder throws it over the head of the second baseman, and the first baseman backing him up falls down ... meanwhile the kid runs around the bases. The boy's father, nudging a guy sitting next to him says, "that's my son who just hit the homerun."

God doesn't trick himself into seeing in us what isn't there—our dusty frailty is plain to him. Yet knowing what we are like, his compassion never fails. Each generation discovers it anew. The wanderers in the wilderness, despite all their efforts, could not turn God's heart away from his people. O my soul, do not forget his gifts.

The psalm ends with David as the choir director to the angels.

Psalm 103:19-22:

**The LORD has established his throne
in heaven, and his kingdom rules over
all.**

**Praise the LORD, you his angels, you
mighty ones who do his bidding, who
obey his word.**

**Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.**

**Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.**

Praise the LORD, O my soul.

Angels (mighty ones, heavenly warriors) sing God's praise. "All his works everywhere in his dominion" (Psalm 103:22) sing God's praise. Praise the Lord, O MY soul.

Lord, we thank you for the command to remem-

ber. Turn off the voices that trick, tempt, and lull us to sleep. Help us hear the singing and fill our hearts with song.

In Jesus name, Amen.

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