

Psalm 103

Verse 1-It is always appropriate to praise God. Even before we praise and thank Him for His infinite benefits towards us, we thank Him for Who He is. He is the Lord. [When this word is in small capitals in the KJV in the Old Testament, it refers to Jehovah, the Covenant God of Israel.] When the word exhorts us to bless His name, it means for us to bless Who He is. The name in Scripture often stands for the person. It would be good to meditate often on the **attributes** of God, such as His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, holiness, mercy, lovingkindness, etc. The prophet beautifully writes in Isaiah 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

I have some notes pasted in my Bible that I would like to share with you:

"The soul finds its greatest joy and most profound delight in the contemplation of God, not self."
(Author unknown).

"The chief spiritual employment of the Christian should be to live in consideration and admiration of the wonderful love of Christ, to dwell on it in his thoughts until his heart is warmed, until his soul overflows with praise, until his whole life is constrained or influenced." (Author unknown).

"Looking unto Jesus, constantly, trustfully, submissively, lovingly; the heart occupied with, the mind stayed upon Him-that is the whole secret of practical Christianity"-A. W. Pink.

"Christ's love should ceaselessly occupy our hearts and shape our lives." (Author unknown).

The word translated "bless" is in the imperative mood. This is a command. We don't wait until we feel like blessing God, we just do it. Thankfully, even if we are undergoing severe trials and don't feel like blessing, usually when we obey God and bless His holy name, we begin to feel like it. There is something that is released in the soul of a child of God when he or she begins to praise God. The psalmist wrote in Psalms 22:3, "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." The word "inhabitest" means to "dwell, have one's abode." The Lord is present when His people praise Him! This is true individually and no doubt when the saints are met in the congregation. The apostle wrote in 1 Peter 2:5, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Paul also writes about this in Ephesians 2:21-22, "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

This praising of our God should be a constant practice. It is written in Hebrews 13:15, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." We are encouraged in Psalms 71:8 to, "Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day." David wanted to grow in this activity. He wrote in Psalms 71:14, "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more." The word "bless" here is used in the sense of praising, extolling, saying something good about.

I like the comment by H. C. Leupold on this psalm: "As it progresses this psalm swells into ever fuller chords of praise of the Almighty."

Verse 2-After we have reflected on the goodness and perfections of our covenant God, it is time for us to give Him profuse thanks for all His benefits toward us.

Verses 3-5- The psalmist now lists some of those benefits:

As Leupold so cogently writes, “Among the separate blessings that especially call forth the praises of the Lord, **forgiveness of our iniquities** very properly stands first.” “Iniquity” is “perversity.” To be perverse it to turn from what is right; to turn to an improper use; to distort; to twist. This is reminiscent of Isaiah 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The psalmist writes that He has forgiven **all** our iniquities! How this should cause us to shout with joy. Especially is this so when we consider the holiness of our God. The prophet writes in Habakkuk 1:13, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...” The New Testament writer confirms this in James 2:10, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

Thinking of this blessing, even if there were no others, should cause us great joy and thanksgiving. We should be able to always identify with H. G. Spafford as he wrote these sublime words, “My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought; my sin, not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”

The comprehensiveness of this forgiveness is emphasized later in this psalm as the writer also mentions the words “sins” (v. 10), and “transgression” (v. 12).

I cannot conceive of a more beautiful passage that sums this up than Lamentations 3:22-23, “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”

The writer next states that He **healeth all our diseases**. From the context here the emphasis is probably on spiritual diseases. Speaking of sin, Christ said in Matthew 9:12, “But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” However we do know that the Lord can and does heal bodily diseases. He does not always choose to do so, despite what the charismatics erroneously teach. Paul prayed that what was probably a physical affliction be removed from him, but the Lord let that affliction remain to keep Paul from being exalted and said to him, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” When we are sick we should pray for healing as is made plain in James 5: 13-16. It is also true that when our bodies are glorified and there is no presence of sin, which is the cause of sickness and death, all our diseases will have been healed. Paul made this plain in Philippians 3:21, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

Next it is said that He **redeems our lives from destruction**. There are many things which could destroy our lives. Without God’s grace we would each make shipwreck of the faith. We could destroy ourselves physically or spiritually. The redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ is not confined to our glorification; it has vast implications in our lives on earth. All our blessings come from God the Father, earned and mediated by Jesus Christ. Ultimately, of course He has redeemed His elect children from eternal destruction. In Romans 9: 22, Paul calls the non-elect “the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” Speaking of the enemies of Christ Paul writes in Phil. 3: 19, “whose end is destruction.” Also speaking of those who do not know Christ, Paul says of them in 1 Thess. 5: 3, “sudden

destruction cometh upon them.” Referring to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, Paul says of them that know not Christ and obey not the gospel in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;"

In contrast, even though many of the Lord’s children have been persecuted and some have died excruciatingly painful martyrs’ deaths, Jesus says of some of those who have been killed for His sake, "But there shall not an hair of your head perish." (Luke 21:18). Yes, He does redeem the lives of His children from destruction.

Next, He **crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercies**. What beautiful words these are! How comforting that the Creator and Sustainer of this universe would be kind and tender with such rebels as we must confess that we are.

Speaking of this crowning of the saints, Charles Spurgeon preached “Our Lord does nothing by halves, he will not stay his hand till he has gone to the uttermost with his people. Cleansing, healing, redemption, are not enough, he must needs make them kings and crown them, and the crown must be far more precious than if it were made of corruptible things, such as silver and gold; it is studded with gems of grace and lined with the velvet of lovingkindness; it is decked with the jewels of mercy, but made soft for the head to wear by a lining of tenderness.”

No wonder David could write near the end of his life, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

He also **satisfies our mouths with good things** and our youth is **renewed like the eagle’s**. God blesses His people even unto old age. He renews them. David said "He restoreth my soul..." Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:16, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

It is good to see God continually feeding, satisfying, strengthening His people even when they are physically old and feeble. A beautiful description of this is given in Psalms 92:12-14, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing..."

Caleb was blessed with great physical strength in the Old Testament which could serve as an illustration of the spiritual strength with which God blesses His people all the days of their lives. He said in Joshua 14:11-12, " As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said."

A song writer wrote an inspirational song depicting Caleb’s attitude:

The challenge how is here. What cause is there to fear? I will follow to the place where God has called. And though the task ahead is great, there is no need to wait; God's command is "conquer cities fenced and walled."

This mountain I shall own, But not for me alone. For my children I shall claim this Promised Land. Because the word of God is sure, the future is secure; All the power we need is in God's mighty hand.

Take courage and be strong. We'll sing the victor's song. All the blessings God has promised we may claim. So let us hasten to obey. Our Savior leads the way; He will help us win the battle for His name.

Give me this mountain, give me this mountain; To the land where giants grow. That's the place I want to go. Give me this mountain, this very mountain, I shall conquer in the power of the Lord.

-Frank Garlock

Perhaps the classic passage that pertains to this wonderful truth is found Isaiah 40:31, "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Verses 6-God's people who have often been oppressed and mistreated by their enemies have drawn comfort from the fact that, sooner or later, maybe even after their deaths as martyrs, the Lord will execute righteous judgment on their enemies. This allows them to follow the example of the Lord Jesus, though He was terribly mistreated, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:" (1 Peter 2:23). A very interesting passage that may throw some light on the eventual execution of righteous judgment is found in 1 Timothy 5:24-25, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid." God's people are also comforted by the words of the Lord Himself in Luke 18:7, "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?"

There are some edifying comments by Matthew Henry on this verse:

Man's injustice shall receive retribution at the hand of God. Mercy to his saints demands vengeance on their persecutors, and he will repay it. No blood of martyrs shall be shed in vain; no groans of confessors in prison shall be left without inquisition being made concerning them. *All* wrongs shall be righted, *all* the oppressed shall be avenged. Justice may at times leave the courts of man, but it abides upon the tribunal of God. For this every right-minded person will bless God.

Paul very comfortingly wrote in Romans 12:19, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Servants or employees should be governed and comforted by this truth. Employers and others in authority should be duly warned and influenced by it. This is made plain by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:5-9,

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he

receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Verse 7-Here the psalmist gives the premier example of what he had just written. The wicked Pharaoh had terribly and unjustly oppressed the nation of Israel. The people had groaned and cried out to God for deliverance. God sent Moses to be His agent in their deliverance. God graciously revealed Himself to Moses and revealed His “ways” to him. This is a broad expression and covers both the ways in which He operates in His providential government of the world and also the ways in which He would have His people to walk, as revealed in the Ten Commandments and in other revelations of His law.

This was a sovereign, gracious act of God. He did not so reveal Himself to the heathen nations that dealt with Israel, including Egypt.

God has graciously granted to His people to know His ways today as He has given us the Holy Scriptures and the blessed Holy Spirit to enlighten our understanding of the Word of God.

God also made know His acts to the children of Israel. Commenting on this, John Gill writes:

His works, his wonderful works; his plagues on their enemies the Egyptians; his redemption of them out of the house of bondage; his leading them through the Red sea as on dry land; his feeding them with manna in the wilderness, protecting them from their enemies, bringing them into the land of Canaan, and settling them there...

Verse 8-The psalmist now begins to reflect on the nature and being of God. One attribute is that He is “merciful and gracious.” This expression is no doubt a quotation from Exodus 34: 6. This passage from Exodus is a quotation of God’s own statement about Himself. Here He is graciously conveying to His people a revelation of His inmost being! God wants His children to know how merciful and gracious that He is. This reminds us of Hebrews 6: 17-20, and of Ephesians 3: 18, 19.

The Hebrew word is used 13 times in the Old Testament and is translated “merciful” 8 times and “compassion” 5 times. The often rebellious nation of Israel had abundant proof that He is indeed “slow to anger.” The Lord does not have just a little mercy. He is “plenteous,” or abounding in it.

Verse 9- The psalmist writes that He will “not always chide.” This verb is also translated “strive.” Very interestingly, another meaning of the verb is “to conduct a case or legal suit, sue.” Leupold remarks on this: “According to the peculiar flavor of the verb used, this means that, whereas the Lord would have a legitimate cause for striving with Israel, He does not carry it through to the bitter end.” A somewhat parallel to this is found in Isaiah 57:16, where the Lord says, “For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.”

If we would be thankful for our Lord’s abatement of His righteous anger, we would imitate Him and follow the injunction of James 1:19, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:"

Verse 10-This verse contains one of those blessed understatement of Scripture! This is reminiscent of what David wrote in Psalms 130:3-4, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall

stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." God never deals with His children as they deserve to be dealt with. This is pointed out in Ezra 9:13, "And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this;"

The reason for this glorious truth is explained by John Gill: "The wages of sin is eternal death: the reason why God deals not with nor rewards his people according to the due desert of their sins is because Christ has bore them, and the chastisement of them, and made satisfaction to divine justice for them..."

Verse 11-This great love and compassion of our Lord is really incomprehensible, but the Holy Spirit gives several comparisons that cause us to be in awe and wonderment. One comparison would have us reflect on the incalculable distance between the heavens above and earth. To our limited human sight this appears to be infinity. We have all heard of the vastness of space, and finally reach the point that we know we cannot really comprehend such distances. And this is only an illustration from the physical universe that does not fully convey the vastness of God's mercy!

However, to avoid presumption, the writer makes it plain that this mercy is only for those who fear Him. Those who own Him as **Savior** must also acknowledge Him as **Lord**. Consider the sobering words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 7:21-23:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Verse 12-The writer uses a second comparison, whose sweep is as vast as the first. East and West never meet! Because we have north and south poles, one can reach the north pole and then begin to go south. One can reach the south pole and then begin to go north. However, if one were to begin to go east, he would just go on and on and never be going west. Albert Barnes says of this concept: "That is, he has put them entirely away. They are so removed that they cannot affect us any more. We are safe from all condemnation for our sins, as if they had not been committed at all.

Consider the following passages:

Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

Isaiah 44:22, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."

Verse 13- The third comparison may be the most effective of the three here given. This is something we can readily relate to, the relationship of a good father with his children. This is so powerful that God calls Himself the Father of His children. He is infinitely more merciful to His children than are earthly fathers to theirs. This is pointed out in Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good

things to them that ask him?" When he is speaking of tenderness towards the children of God, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,"

H. C. Leupold says of this verse: "The force of the application of this comparison gains a special emphasis in the Hebrew in that a tense form is used that stresses the fact that the Lord 'has *always* pitied those who fear Him.'" The expanded meaning of the word "pitieth" is "to love, love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate, have tender affection, have compassion."

Verse 14- This is not an excuse for sin, but it is comforting to know that God knows how weak we are. It would also behoove us to realize how weak we are. Then we would not be lifted up in pride or become complacent and careless. We must realize that according to John 15:5, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

Jesus Christ also warned His disciples to remember how weak they were and consequently how watchful they should be. He said in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:
the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

If we tend to get lifted up in pride we must remember what we are made of—dust. We must remember what God told Adam in Genesis 3:19, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." We are frail, subject to decay, and tend to soon sink when under a heavy load. God knows this, pities us, and gives us daily the strength that we need. We are comforted by Deuteronomy 33:25, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Verses 15 and 16- In the Oriental desert-like conditions, grass, like virtually all vegetation, is very fragile and of short duration. It takes no more than the passing of the hot wind of the desert over it on a hot day and the grass is gone. The prophet also writes of this in Isaiah 40:6-8, "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

Knowing this, it would be appropriate for us to pray the prayer of Psalms 39:4, "LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." Another appropriate prayer is found in Psalms 90:12, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

When we are in our youth and in the prime of our beauty and strength, we need to remember that we are only as a flower of the field, as a blossom. It opens with beauty and fragrance, but soon fades and perishes.

Verses 17 and 18- There is a great contrast here between the frailty of mankind and the mercy of the Lord. While it is almost impossible to overestimate the feebleness of man, it is certainly impossible to overestimate the enduring mercy of the Lord. God's mercy reaches from one eternity to the other. John Gill beautifully points out that in eternity past the mercy of the Lord was given to the vessels of mercy in the Covenant of Grace by the eternal decree of electing love. This mercy appears in time in regenerating and preserving grace and in God's providential watchcare over His people. It endures forever in eternal life in the world to come. It is impossible to adequately comprehend and describe this mercy of the Lord.

However, to prevent presumption on the part of those who might like to use grace as an excuse to sin, the writer says that this mercy is "upon them that fear Him." The mark of regenerate persons is that they have a filial fear of God. It is said of those who do not know the Lord that "there is no fear of God before their eyes." (Rom. 3: 18).

This mercy and righteousness is to "children's children." However this does not mean that the children of believers are automatically children of God. We can see this in the case of Jacob and Esau. They had godly parents, but Jacob was one of God's elect, while Esau was not. Here, in Psalm 103 there is a further description of those who are the recipients of this mercy and righteousness. They are the ones who keep His covenant and who remember His commandments to do them. This is not the cause of their salvation, but the evidence of it.

There is a similarity to this in Acts 2: 39. Peter preached to the people, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Only those children whom the Lord would call, with his effectual call, were included in the promise.

Verse 19- An excellent comment on this verse is made by Albert Barnes: "God is a Sovereign. His throne is fixed and firm. His dominion is not vacillating and changing. His reign is not, like the reign of earthly monarchs, dependent on the capriciousness of a changeable will, or on passion; nor is it liable to be altered by death, by revolution, or a new dynasty. The throne of God is ever the same, and nothing can shake or overthrow it.

John Gill has an outstanding comment on the expression "his kingdom ruleth over all." He writes: "Over all created beings; over angels, good and bad; over men, righteous and wicked; over the greatest of men, the kings and princes of the earth. Good angels are subject to him, devils tremble at him; saints acknowledge him as their King; the wicked he rules with a rod of iron; and kings reign by him, and are accountable to him..."

Family Bible Notes says of this expression of God's Sovereignty, "The government of God extends over all the works of his hands; nothing is so high as to be above his control, or so small and obscure as to escape his notice.

There is a majestic passage concerning God's sovereign rule in Isaiah 37:16, "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth."

Verse 20- The psalm closes on the climactic note of calling for doxologies from God's creation, both animate and inanimate. First, the angelic beings are called on to praise God. This is the holy work they are always engaged in. This is apparent from Revelation 4:8, "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." Angels have much to praise God for. He created them, and confirmed His elect angels that they would never fall as did the others. What else could they do but ecstatically and constantly praise God, seeing they are constantly in His blessed presence?

It is said that they "excel in strength." In the New Testament they are called "mighty angels." (2 Thess. 1: 7). In 2 Kings 19: 35 we learn that only one of these mighty angels struck 185, 00 Assyrians dead in one night! This is all very comforting when we consider that at least some of these angels are involved in protecting God's children. It is said of these angels in Hebrews 1:14, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

There is a beautiful verse in the song *Thorny Desert* which vividly depicts these mighty ministering spirits: "He whose thunder shakes creation; He who bids the planets roll; He who rides upon the tempest, and whose scepter sways the whole; Round Him are ten thousand angels, ready to obey command; They are always hov'ring round you, till you reach that heav'nly land."

These angels always, completely willingly, and joyfully do His will.

Verse 21- This is probably a continuation of the previous verse. The angelic beings are in other places in Scripture referred to as "hosts." For example, in Luke 2:13, "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying..." This is also true in Psalms 148:2, "Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts."

There is a possibility this verse is referring to the heavenly bodies, which are sometimes called "hosts." This seems to be the case in Jeremiah 31:35, "Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:"

Verse 22- This verse, which sums up what has previously been said, appropriately brings this glorious psalm to a close. The entire universe is to bless the Lord. All that the Lord has created, both animate and inanimate, is to praise Him. This is very plain from a careful reading of Psalm 148.

Every sensible being should bless God because He is their Creator.

The angelic beings should bless God because He is their Creator and Sustainer.

The saints of God should bless God like no one else, because not only is He their Creator and Sustainer-He is also their blessed **Redeemer!** Another verse from *Thorny Desert* shows that the redeemed saints have even more reason to bless God than do the angels: "Millions there of flaming seraphs fly across the heavenly plain. There they sing immortal praises: Glory, glory is their strain! But methinks a sweeter concert makes the heavenly arches ring; and a song is heard in Zion, which

the angels cannot sing.” That “sweeter concert” is the glorious song of **Redemption!** Let us constantly sing it!!!

Elder Zack Guess