

Nov. 25, 2018

Bless the Lord O My Soul

Psalm 103

Thanksgiving

LTS: Psalm 100

This being Thanksgiving weekend I wanted to take a Sunday to kind of jump forward in our study of the Psalms and look at a specific Psalm that expressly calls us to a life of thanksgiving and worship. Last week we looked at Psalm 25. This morning I would like you to join with me as we make the leap to Psalm 103.

Psalm 103 has been a delight to the church of Jesus for as long as the church as existed. I suspect it is familiar to everyone who has invested time enough to read through the Psalter. It's the kind of Psalm that just sticks with you. It's easy to understand, and unlike the Psalm we looked at last week, it has a simple structure that's easy to identify and follow.

Of course, various students of the word will divide it up in slightly different categories, but I think it is most natural to examine this Psalm according to three divisions, and I will add an introductory category to the beginning as an overview. As we will see in just a moment, David calls the entire cosmos (beginning with his own soul) to "Bless the Lord." What we are going to see in this Psalm is that David calls us to:

- Bless the Lord Specifically (2-14)
- Bless the Lord Soberly (15-16)
- Bless the Lord Majesterially (17-22)

Let's begin as always by taking a few minutes to read the Psalm in its entirety.

Read Psalm 103

By way of introduction and overview I want to frontload the outline with an additional category; namely,

I. Bless the Lord Expansively:

1. For this point I want us to consider the Psalm as a whole.

- A. I want you to see that David's approach to Worship in this Psalm is expansive. It starts out small and grows and expands. It begins with the presumption of a revelation of the glory of the Lord. I think it is safe to infer that behind the scenes David finds himself surrounded by the glory of God. It may be the mountains, the temple, the people of God. We don't know.
- B. Then, at some point he notices or perceives something of that manifest glory and what rises up within him the realization that the only appropriate response to the glory of God is to praise God. To Bless the Lord.
- C. But David realizes his inadequacy to worship God as he ought. So, he begins preaching to his soul! "Come on, soul!" Wake up! Be alive! Break free from your lethargy! "Let all that is within me! Not half of me! All of me! Bless the Lord!¹ Remember the goodness and lovingkindness of God, the blessings you have received from him and receive every day! Then vs 3-14 he comes up with an extensive list of benefits or blessings to praise God for.
- D. Then, finally, when he has done all he can do to preach to his own soul, he turns (v. 20) and starts preaching to the angels, and to the cosmos. Bless the lord you his angels! Bless the Lord all his hosts and "all his works!"
- E. I think all of us would benefit right from the start of this Psalm if we would consider how proactive David was with the lethargy of his own soul toward the manifest glory of God all around him, every day of his life.

2. So David blesses the Lord expansively.

3. Second, David calls us to...

II. Bless the Lord Specifically (2-14)

Read v. 1

1. David shows us what it means to "Bless the Lord.

- A. What does it mean to Bless the Lord? In the Psalms (cf. Psa. 97) a synonym is used. It's the word "Ascribe,". "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name." To bless (or ascribe glory) to the Lord is to joyfully reflect His glory back to Him.
- B. David is telling His soul to do that. He's telling his soul to Praise the Lord.

¹ These thoughts derived from John Piper's audio message on Psalm 103

- C. The term Soul: means Mind, Heart, mental and moral powers.² The soul of man was made to praise and bless God; to enjoy His friendship, to delight in his favor, to contemplate his perfections. The soul of man can never be employed in a more elevated act than when engaged in praise of our Maker.³
- D. And all that is within me... All my powers and faculties; all that can be employed in his praise – my heart, my will, my affections. The idea is, that God is worthy of all the praise and adoration which the entire man can render. Not one of his faculties or powers should be exempt from the duty and the privilege of praise.⁴

Read v. 2

2. Now David exhorts himself to actively strive to recall the benefits of living in relationship with God. And from this point he offers a lengthy catalogue of benefits he has experienced personally, along with those that are experienced by His people, Israel, and then by the angels and everything else.

3. O my friends, this is an essential characteristic of true Christians. We consider how blessed we are in having a reconciled relationship with God. We give thanks to Him for all that we have received from his hand. Paul tells us in Rom 1 that a mark of an unbeliever is his failure to give thanks to God, but as His children there's hardly anything we love to do more. So, we should not be surprised that David creates kind of a thanksgiving journal. In it he records some of the reasons humans should praise and worship God.

A. (3) He Forgives all our sins

- a. This is the beginning. Our relationship with God starts here. It is worthy of note that this is the FIRST benefit the Psalmist thinks of. It is of first importance that, above all else, God is a forgiving God.
- b. This is the first thing which calls for praise. He forgives all our sins.

B. (4) Heals all your diseases. There is some discussion in the literature about whether David is referring to Physical or Spiritual healing. The text itself doesn't specify. On the one hand, the prophet Isaiah speaks of our spiritual diseases for which Messiah will come and heal us. But on the other hand, we also know that when Yahweh came in the Person of Jesus Christ, he healed throngs of people from their physical diseases. I don't think we need to make a

² Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament*, (Grand rapids, Baker Book House, 1950), 74

³ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament*, (Grand rapids, Baker Book House, 1950), 73

⁴ Barnes, 74

decision on this. The fact is, God heals our sins, and every time we recover from an physical ailment, a fever, back pain, or whatever, that healing is a gift from God.

- C. (4) “He Redeems your life from the pit.” The pit speaks of the grave. For the child of God the grave is not the end. The sting of death has been removed for those who have been redeemed. Long before David came on the scene Job declared, “I know that my Redeemer lives... and even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. That is a thinly veiled reference to Resurrection!

- D. (4) “Crowns you with with steadfast love and mercy.”
 - a. The idea of a crown is that its something that beautifies and sets one apart. A crown indicates that we are related to the King.
 - b. This is what His love and mercy do. Not everyone gets it. The crown is only for those who are sons of God by faith.

- E. (5) “Satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”
 - a. No matter how old one becomes he can be young at heart in the things of God. He can have a heart that knows a satisfaction in life that the young only dream of.
 - b. In Psa. 90 David writes, “O satisfy us in the morning with you unfailing love that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Even in our old age we can Mount up with wings like eagles. What we may lack in physical strength we make up in spiritual vitality.

- F. (6) The Lord works righteousness and justice for the oppressed.”
 - a. David confesses that Yahweh is always doing what’s right. He has established righteous rules for man to follow; laws designed to ensure that justice is done and that the vulnerable are protected.
 - b. This doesn’t mean that no unrighteousness will be done, but that it is God’s will for righteousness to reign. And in the end we have the promise that He will right all wrongs. In the mean time we must follow the example of Jesus who, though he was treated with ultimate injustice, kept entrusting himself to Him who judges rightly.

- G. (7) “He made known [revealed] his ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel.”
 - a. One of the great blessings of God is that He has not hidden himself from us. To the contrary, he has revealed himself and invites us to know Him. In fact, v. 8 is a follow-up to v. 7.

- H. (8) “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger.”

- a. This is how God described Himself to Moses on the mountain when Moses pleaded with God to show him His glory. God said, “No one can see my glory and live.” So God put him in the cleft of the rock and declared his verbal glory:
 - b. “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger.” In other words, he is patient with His people. He’s not volitile, caprecious, or unpredictable. And there has never been a single day that He has not treated us better than we treat Him.
 - c. But there’s more...
- I. (8) God is “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” He is Ten Thousand times more faithful to us than we are to Him. He constantly overflows with faithfulness, love, mercy, and grace.
- a. Actually, verses 7-8 are lifted right off the page from Ex. 34. Here is the full quote:
Exodus 34:6-7
The LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...”
 - b. Theologians call this the Riddle of the O.T. How can God at the same time forgive sin but by no means clear the guilty (or leave the guilty unpunished).
 - c. Answer: The God has provided a way for sins to be righteously forgiven. It was foreshadowed in the temple sacrifices, but it was fulfilled in the final sacrifice of Messiah himself, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.
- J. (9) He will not always chide,
- a. Yes, sometimes he disciplines his children and it is a painful thing to be disciplined by the Lord.
 - b. Nevertheless, his discipline is temporary. One day we will see Him face to face and become like him in holiness and purity. Then there will be no need for correction.
- K. (9) nor will he keep his anger forever
- a. It is not his character to retain anger for its own sake, or for any personal gratification. He is not seeking our ruin but our good.
- L. (10) “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”
- a. Again, this is a great ground for thanksgiving and praise. God does not deal with his people according to their sin. Albert Barnes writes,

It is a matter for which we should render unceasing praise that God has not done to us as our sins deserve. Who of us can fail to stand in awe and to tremble when we think what God might have justly done to us; what sufferings he might have brought upon us, which would have been no more than we have deserved; what pain, what distress of mind, what anguish of bereavement – what sorrow, danger, sickness, losses – we might have suffered before the point would be reached at which it could be said that we were suffering more than a holy and just God might properly inflict on us.⁵

- b. Beloved, I think we will spend eternity praising and thanking him for NOT giving us what we deserved.

M. (11) Why does he treat us this way? Because,

- a. “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear him.
- b. How high are the heavens above the earth? Well, how far away is the nearest star beyond our Sun. Astronomers say that Alpha Centuri is 4.24 light years away. That’s beyond our ability to mentally estimate.

N. (12) As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgression from us.

- a. East and West are points in our apprehension most distant from each other, and as we can conceive nothing beyond them.
- b. So the meaning is, that we cannot imagine our sins could be more effectually removed than they are.⁶

O. (13) As a Father has compassion on his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

- a. Now here is something to thank God for. He has made Himself our Father. He has brought us into His forever family and treats us with grace and compassion.
- b. Why? Because...

P. (14) He knows our frame. **He remembers that we are dust.**

- a. He is not shocked by our weakness and frailness. He knows how easily we are broken down by trials and temptations.

4. O my friend, do you get David’s message? There is no lack of reasons why we should bless the Lord with all that is within us. So, we should bless the lord Specifically. We should render thanksgiving to the Lord specifically. But we should also...

⁵ Barnes, 77

⁶ Barnes, 77

III. Bless the Lord Soberly:

Read v. 15-16

1. David comes to the section where he compares man with God. What are humans like? We are like grass and like a flower that flourishes for a time in the field. But before long the heat come and the grass and the flower fade. They shrivel up and disappear, and no one even remembers where they once were.
2. This is a sobering reality, isn't it? Forget about leaving a legacy. Forget about the possibility of people remembering you when you're gone. As soon as your funeral is over people will begin forgetting all about you. My great grandchildren will see photos of me and say, "Momma, who was that man?" And she will say, "Gee, we should have put his name on the back of the photo, so we would know."
3. O My friend. Your life is shorter than you think! In just a moment the wind will pass over your little flower of a life and you will be gone. And not long after that you won't even be remembered.
4. What's the point? The Point is, your only hope is to secure yourself to something eternal; something that will not be shaken or even effected by death. My friend today is the day for your to bless the Lord soberly. Take honest stock of your life and cry out to God and say, "Dear Lord, you are my only hope! Jesus is my only Savior. I surrender to His Lordship over my life and over my eternity.
5. And that brings us to the final theme: David calls us to...

IV. Bless the Lord Magisterially:

1. By "magisterially" I mean that we should bless Him as our only majestic and sovereign King.
2. The message David wants us to hear is this: God Isn't Like Us! What is God like?

Read 17-18

3. How can the Steadfast love of the Lord be from everlasting to everlasting? It's because God is everlasting! God is eternal. He had no beginning. He will have no end.
4. Moreover, God is the Sovereign Lord over all.

Read v. 19

5. By what authority does God forgive sins? By what authority does he crown us with love and compassion? By what authority does He cast our iniquity as far as the east is

from the west? He does all these things – and ten thousand more – by the authority of His sovereign reign as King of all.

6. And with that thought in mind David makes his final call to bless the Lord when he writes:

Read 20-22

7. O beloved, have you forgotten His benefits? Do you realize how blessed you are to live in a reconciled relationship with God? Children, do you realize what a privilege it is to be raised in a Christian home! Bless the Lord! Ascribe to Him the glory due His name. remember His goodness and worship him according to his due.