

Bless the Lord, O My Soul

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Bible Verse: Psalm 103
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Well, we have a very very sweet and lovely Psalm for our study tonight, Psalm 103. I invite you to turn there with me as we return to our yearlong quest through the Psalms. Psalm 103 is our blessed text for this evening from God's word. I'm going to read it in its entirety and then we'll go back and go through it here this evening.

1 A Psalm of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; 3 Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; 4 Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; 5 Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle. 6 The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel. 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. 14 For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust. 15 As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. 16 When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer. 17 But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, 18 To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them. 19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all. 20 Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word! 21 Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will. 22 Bless the LORD, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion; Bless the LORD, O my soul!

Now this is truly a majestic Psalm. It is a beautiful Psalm of worship and what we find in this Psalm of worship is that at the core of true worship is a true understanding and a true acknowledgment of who God is. As we think about worship, I speak to most of you as Christians, I realize that some of you are not, but for those of you who are Christians, somewhere in your heart there is this deep desire that you have to render to God worship that is worthy of him. You want to acknowledge him and give him praise of which he is worthy. Well, it brings us to an opportunity here as we approach Psalm 103 is to realize that true worship is grounded on a true knowledge of him, and if I can go back to a theme that I tend to harp on again and again and again, is that we must come to understand the goodness of God if we are to worship him appropriately. If we harbor suspicious thoughts of him, if we think that he's not really good to his people, or we harbor resentment over his dealings in our lives, our efforts to worship at best are tainted because we're not ascribing to him the fullness of love that his goodness is worthy of, and Psalm 103 cures us of that dilemma.

Now a little bit of context, a little bit of background. One of the things that I've really come to love studying through the Psalms is kind of seeing how groups of Psalms fit together. Psalm 103 is coming near the end of Book IV of the Psalter. There are five books in the Psalter, Psalm 90-106 constitute Book IV of the Psalter, and tonight's Psalm opens and closes with a call to bless the Lord, and stay with me here, I'll connect that with the Psalm 90-106 reference in just a moment. It opens and closes with a call to bless the Lord.

Look at verses 1 and 2 with me, "A Psalm of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits." He sets the theme right from the start, you see that, right? He repeats himself. The theme of this Psalm is to offer blessing to God and that is the conclusion of the Psalm as well. He comes back to it at the end, verse 20, "Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word," verse 21, "Bless the LORD, all you His hosts," verse 22, "Bless the LORD, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion; Bless the LORD, O my soul!" His soul is enraptured with worship and the fact that he opens and closes the Psalm with the same theme indicates that everything in between is designed to support and undergird and expand on that theme so that the middle part of the Psalm is teaching us the reasons that we offer praise to God.

Now Psalm 103 is setting a pattern for the remaining Psalms in Book IV, Psalms 104, 105 and 106, and I just want you to see this. I thought about doing a whole message on this but that would have been a little bit of overkill probably. Psalm 104 opens and ends in the same way. Verse 1 of Psalm 104, "Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty," and thus I bless your name. At the end there in verse 35 of Psalm 104, it ends, the latter half, "Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD!" And so you see the same theme and the same structure, Psalm 104 opening and ending with, "Bless the LORD, O my soul." Psalm 105 in like manner, slightly different vocabulary. Verse 1, "Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples." And then at the end of Psalm 105 in verse 45, it ends with, "Praise the LORD!" And then Psalm 106:1, "Praise the LORD!

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting." And at the end of Psalm 106 and at the end of Book IV, therefore, you see this grand climax, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, 'Amen.' Praise the LORD!" Now that's a pretty impressive arrangement when you think about it. It is kind of a preview of the end of Book V, the end of the entire Psalter where there's just this grand finale of fireworks of, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!" in Psalms 146-150, and so it's building up to a climax here.

Now Psalm 103 is answering a question, you could say: why should we praise, bless and give thanks to the Lord? Well, here's where an understanding of the Psalms and their context really enriches your understanding of them. It's perfectly possible and proper, I suppose, to preach Psalm 103 in isolation and just to read it and consider it in isolation, but when you understand the context in which it occurs, there's an even greater richness and texture to it that you might miss if you were just kind of picking and choosing favorite Psalms along the way.

Book IV of the Psalms opens with Psalm 90-92, we studied this several months ago, and they display the Lord as our dwelling place, that our soul finds its home in the Lord, and we are secure in him even in the midst of our earthly mortality, that's Psalm 90, 91 and 92, and he's worthy of praise for that because he's our dwelling place. Well, in Psalm 93-100, we saw a series of Psalms that extol God as King and he is our King, and so we honor him as our great and reigning King. There's just this multiplicity of roles and functions and means by which God ministers to our soul and the role that he has in the lives of his believing people. He's our dwelling place, we can rest in him no matter what happens. We can rest in him even when death is knocking at the door. He's our King. He's great. He's mighty. He's majestic. Bless his holy name for that. Psalm 101 showed him as a God committed to holiness and justice. Psalm 102, the Psalmist goes to him in the midst of affliction and finds refuge there. What I want you to see is that without going through a whole review of those 13 Psalms, is that Book IV of the Psalter has been showing us the majesty of God in very specific ways. He's a dwelling place. He's a King. He's a God of justice. He's a God to whom the wounded and afflicted can go and find a sympathetic ear and a God of comfort.

Now when you take all of those together with that very brief review, when you take all of those together you step back and you kind of look at Psalms 90-102 collectively and you realize how great God is and the majesty of the different ways that he has revealed himself to his people. When you see that collectively, you understand that Psalm 103 is beginning the necessary response of praise. The only proper response to a God like that is to praise him, to honor him, to bless his name, to give thanks to him. There is no other possible conclusion that you could come to and what I started to say earlier is this, is that for us to really worship and honor God as he deserves we must, yes, I'm going to say this again, there should be nods of saying, "Yes, I've heard this before," we must get rid of that carnal leftover from our old man that doubts his goodness. We must be thoroughly convinced that God is good to his people because he is. He is good to his people and we need to stop doubting that and embrace with all of our hearts and with all of our souls the

idea that God is good and that I trust him always to be good because he is an unchanging immutable God, and when we start to worship from that perspective and we don't harbor in the deep recesses of our minds, "I don't know, I don't know if I can trust Him or not. I don't know if He's good or not. Why does God do this to me? And why am I suffering like this? And why did So-and-so get away with that?" Now we've just got to banish all of that. God is our refuge, God is our dwelling place, God is our King, God is holy, God is just, he's a refuge for the afflicted and the washing of the word on your mind cleanses you from all of that other carnal disbelief and leaves you with a heart that is ready to respond to him and to bless his name.

Well, what does it mean to bless the Lord? Well, we could say it like this, when the Psalmist is talking about blessing the Lord, he is expressing thanks and praise to God because God has given to his people out of the goodness of his being. I'll say that again: when the Psalmist says bless the Lord, he's expressing thanks to God, praise to God because he's given to us out of the abundance of his goodness and God's kindness, his faithfulness are the grounds of our praise. Beloved, your life rests upon the loving and faithful nature of God. You see, we don't worship him out of a sense of craven fear as if he's going to smack us if we don't, we worship him because he's good, because we trust him, because we love him. In the redeemed heart, there is this sense of admiration and adoration for God for the intrinsic worth of who he is that is independent of the circumstances that he gives us in life even. We praise him just because he deserves it. So we bless God by praising the good that is intrinsically in him. We could say it another way, out of our position of inferiority, we honor his superiority. From our inferior position, we recognize and honor him for his superior position and thus we bless the Lord.

Now in Psalm 103, David gives expression to these lofty themes and he walks us through them in a wonderful way, and by the time he's done, he's not content to simply worship God himself, he's calling on all of the created order to join him in worship. "It's not enough that I worship God," David says, "I'm calling on all of you to worship God. In fact, I'm calling on the angels in heaven to join me in this worship." There is just an explosion of a loving heart in this love and praise to the God that he is worshipping with.

Well, we'll break it down in four sections here this evening, different aspects of the call to praise, and first of all, it opens with a personal call to praise. A personal call to praise if you're taking notes, that's our first heading this evening. David opens this Psalm and he is in a soliloquy, meaning that he is in a dialog with himself, he's speaking to himself as this Psalm opens and he addresses his own soul with his words. Verse 1 there he says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits." Notice the emphasis on "all." You know, Jesus said in Matthew 23 that the greatest commandment was, what? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. You see an Old Testament echo of that, an Old Testament preview of that when David is saying essentially the same thing speaking to himself, "I'm calling on all of my inner man to honor God and to bless Him in what I'm about to say." Now he speaks to himself in a way so that others can see the example, but as he opens this, David is

speaking to himself, he's looking at himself in the mirror and says, "This is what you must do." He speaks to his own heart and tells his own heart how to respond to God.

And the word "soul" here, he's addressing the totality of his mind, heart and will. He's doing this and he's doing what you are under responsibility to do on a day-by-day basis yourself, David is calling to his own remembrance the benefits that God has given to him. Once in a while, I don't know when we last sang it here in Truth Community Church but there is a well-known older hymn, "Count your blessings. Count your blessings, name them one by one." And the idea being that you exercise your mental energy, you exercise your mind to recall what God has done so that you can respond properly in praise. You see, as I've said in the past to you, your most important preacher is not me, it's not John MacArthur, it's not anybody else that you've heard on the radio or that you see on tv, your most important preacher is yourself as you call yourself and you require from yourself and you speak to your own heart and say, "Enough of this trembling anxiety. Enough of this fear. Enough of this doubt. You, my soul, you remember who God is, call to mind what He has done for you and worship Him accordingly in response," so that you take yourself at hand, you look at yourself in the mirror and you say, "This is how you will respond to your God." And you speak to yourself rather than letting your feelings run away with you and carry you into doubt and worry and panic and all those other places that your carnal heart will take you if you let it. David is not doing that. David is rousing himself to praise and he recalls the benefits of God.

What are these benefits? He lists five specifically in verses 3 through 5. Let's look at them just ever so quickly. He says in verse 3, number 1, "Who pardons all your iniquities. Bless the LORD, O my soul." Who is the Lord? He is the Lord who, he does this, he pardons all your iniquities. Number 2, he heals all your diseases. Number 3, he redeems your life from the pit. Number 4, he crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion. Number 5, he satisfies your years with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle. He's speaking to himself and he's telling himself, "You remember what God has done for you," and it would be appropriate for every one of you in this room tonight, those of you listening over the live stream, it would be important and it would be appropriate for every one of you to step into David's sandals and to speak to yourself this same way even as we are studying the Psalm together tonight. David reminds himself that God has graciously blessed him with the forgiveness of sin, he pardons all your iniquities. My soul, remember all of your rebellion, remember all of your sinful words, thoughts and actions, and realize here in the New Testament era that at the cross of Calvary Christ bore all of that and paid the debt of all your sin.

"Bless the LORD, O my soul," he's pardoned all your iniquities. He's forgiven your sin. Notice that he leads off with that spiritual blessing of utmost importance. He puts that first at the list. Secondly, he lists the recovery from sickness. He heals all of your diseases. Now obviously, you know, at some point the Lord brings about our death, our days are appointed by God, but as we go through life and as we go through the ups and downs of physical well-being, we should always understand that when our health is restored to us, it's a blessing that God has given to us. Thirdly he says there in verse 4, he redeems your life from the pit, the pit being a reference to death. God has delivered us

from death. You know, some of you have come close to death through illness recently, some of you have come close to death through vehicular accidents and other things that have taken place, well, understand that God is saving your life from the pit, saving you from a premature death, and you remember that and you realize that the protecting hand of God has been on me and, "O God, I thank You for that! I wasn't ready to go yet. I have things here still to do for You. I have people I still love and people that depend on me and, God, You spared me from that. O God, thank You! Bless Your holy name for how good You are to me!"

He goes on and mentions other spiritual blessings. There at the end of verse 4 he crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion. Christian, isn't it true if you would stop complaining just long enough to think about it, isn't it true that God has just shown you throughout the years of your walk with him loyal love? He has shown you compassion in the ways that he has dealt with you? When you have sinned against him and confessed it, he has brought a sense of peace and forgiveness to your heart that you didn't deserve, isn't that true? I ask you, isn't that true? He's done that, hasn't he? Well, then you should be blessing his name for being like that to you.

Then on top of that David lists out material blessings. He satisfies your years with good things. You know, we enjoy the love of human relationships, we enjoy the fellowship of fellow believers. We enjoy good meals. We enjoy a beautiful sunset. We enjoy the change of the seasons. And on and on it goes. Your lives are just saturated with these good blessings from God that you don't deserve but that he has freely given to you. He's freely given his Son to you, my Christian friends. He's freely given everything besides that and promised never to stop. "O LORD, we bless Your holy name for all of the goodness of Your hand toward us!"

So David is calling upon himself to remember all of these things and to respond to God with praise, and so as David writes this, he's looking at his life, he's speaking to his own heart, and he realizes that he has enjoyed a good life. He has had vitality and he's had strength. Now you and I and, you know, across the spectrum of God's people, the details of that obviously vary in our personal experience, we don't all enjoy the same level of material comforts, not everyone has the same kind of life or family relationships that others enjoy, but that's not the point. The point is for us to look at the life that God has given us, recognize the good that has come from his hands and give thanks to him, and every one of us here tonight, every one of us especially that is in Christ, has a fivefold reason to respond to God in the exact same way that David did.

Christian, look at it there again with me in verse 3. I'm kind of dwelling on the point here, kind of parked the car and we're getting out to look at the view here. Christian, isn't it true that God's pardoned all your iniquities? The blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin, 1 John 1:7. Ephesians 1:7, we have redemption in his blood at the cost of his own dear Son, a bleeding, dying Savior was given for you in order for your sins to be forgiven. Isn't that grounds to bless the Lord no matter what else is happening in your life?

He heals all your diseases. Even if you're suffering physical illness right now, isn't it true that in the past you've gone through periods of severe illness and now you come out on the other side and you're able to enjoy life again with the strength and vitality that you thought you had lost? You come back, some of you know that greatly by personal experience, I've been by your side in your hospital beds. Well, that's grounds to thank God.

He redeems your life from the pit. We know his lovingkindness and compassion. Our years are filled with good things, and only the most hardened heart and ungrateful heart couldn't look at this and see things that are true in your own experience, and for the sake of those of you that are here and you're not in Christ, I just want to encourage you that as you're hearing these words and you kind of harden your mind against this, I want you to realize what a dreadful thing that is for you to do. God's been good to you too. Even if you're not saved right now, God's been good to you and you should be looking at these things and asking the Spirit of God to soften your heart so that you would give your Creator the praise that he's due. There's no excuse for anything else. Seek the Lord while he may be found.

Now so this Psalm teaches us to speak to ourselves and we need to speak to ourselves and we need to speak to ourselves like this because we are prone to forget. You are prone to wander. We are prone to complain and you need to set a standard in your spiritual life that says, "I'm not going to live at that level anymore. God helping me, I'm going to move out of this complaint about the circumstances in my life, I'm going to remember and call to my mind the many blessings God has given to me, and I'm going to be thankful to Him in response to that and trust Him for the other stuff that I don't understand or that I wish I had. I am not going to live life and I'm certainly not going to respond to a God like this from a spirit of ingratitude and complaining. Nothing could be more wrong than for me to think about my God that way." I don't mean to be dramatic here but if we're not going to respond to settle it in our hearts that that's how we should respond to God, then we ought to just get up and leave because these are the things that are true and this is who God is and we love him and we worship him for it.

Now so David opens with this personal call to praise. Well, beloved, our personal experience is grounded in an even broader history of the dealings of God with his people and that's a wonderful thing to remember. As an individual Christian, and it's easy for us to lose sight of this and it's part of my responsibility to remind us of this repeatedly, is that our personal experience of salvation is part of a broader plan of redemption that God is working out for countless people throughout the ages and throughout the world. We are part of a bigger picture. There is more to redemption than how it affects me and that can be a source of great encouragement if we remember this second point here this evening as David goes on to make a corporate call to praise. In this next section, David expands the grounds of praise beyond his own personal experience.

In verse 6 and 7, we see him saying this, he says, "The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed." You see, it's no longer just personal and unique to him. He's expanding out horizontally to encompass the people of God. Verse 7.

"He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel." And what David is saying here is that God is a God who shows compassion to the helpless. That's what he did for the nation of Israel, he heard their cries for help in their Egyptian bondage, he delivered them miraculously through the Red Sea and after a period of wilderness wanderings, he delivered them into their own land and they became their own nation in a land flowing with milk and honey. Think about it, it occurred over a period of centuries. God heard the cries of his people in the midst of their desperate situation where they were oppressed by their Egyptian taskmasters and what did he do? He had mercy on them. He had compassion upon them. He delivered them in a way that is recorded for us in Scripture to go back and read in the book of Exodus and in the following books of the Pentateuch and Joshua, we go back and we see the wonderful way that God delivered his people.

Now beloved, what David is saying here is this, it's simple but it's profound, he says that action of God in delivering his people illustrated something important about his character that we are to remember and to praise him for, and what is it that that deliverance from the bondage in Egypt did and what did it show to the sons of Israel? Verses 8 and 9, it showed them and it shows us even today by the continuing testimony of the word, it shows us this that, "The LORD," Yahweh, "is compassionate and gracious, He's slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever." God in delivering Israel was displaying the fact that he is a compassionate gracious God to his people; that he does not retain his wrath against his people in an unending way. His anger is but for a moment. His favor is for a lifetime and in New Testament terms we could say, "Yeah, it's for a lifetime and it stretches out into an indefinite eternity as well." And as a result of that, beloved, David's point here in Psalm 103 is that display of his compassion means that his people should bless his name; that they should honor him for his mercy because he has not shown them the judgment they deserved, rather he has shown them forgiveness and grace and kindness and mercy and patience, all of which should engender this unrestrained response of honoring him.

Look at verse 10. This is true of every one of you here, Christian or non-Christian alike. Every one of us, this is true. Verse 10, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." He has not given you what your sins deserve. You may think in your carnal mind that God hasn't dealt with you kindly or hasn't given you everything that you deserve or, "Why don't I have this or that that So-and-so has that I don't have?" But that's a very bad way to think. That's a pagan way to think. The way that you're thinking about God should start as this, "Here I am a guilty sinner apart from Christ, here I was a rebel against God, defying Him, indifferent to Him, indifferent to His word," some of us used the name of Christ as our favorite curse word for a time, all of that dark sin deserving great judgment and yet here you are tonight, you are not on the receiving end of judgment at all. God has blessed you. God has been good to you. If you are in Christ, God has pardoned all of your sin and accepted you as righteous, made you a child in his family all for the sake of Christ and his imputed righteousness to you. God has not dealt with you as your sins deserve.

For those of you that are not Christians, kind of going back and forth, it's a bit of a tennis match here tonight, isn't it, as I go back and forth like this, but for those of you that are here and you're not a Christian and you, for whatever reason, have not come to Christ, you've refused him for whatever reason, you explain that in your own mind, even you, God has not dealt with you according to your iniquities. You're here enjoying life and good health and God is offering Christ to you in the proclamation of the Gospel, once again showing you kindness rather than bringing immediately upon your head the judgment that your sins deserve.

Now so God is just like that. He's just like that. He doesn't deal with sinful men according to their sins, at least during the course of their earthly lives. There will come a time when his patience will come to an end, there is a coming day of judgment that injects a healthy sense of fear and reverence to any thinking man, but as we sit here tonight God has restrained his hand against you, God has been good to you, even those of you that are not in Christ, God has been good to you and not given you the punishment that your sins deserve. Now beloved, I want to tell you that puts you under a responsibility to praise him and honor him, put you under a responsibility to bless his name. You have a duty to come to faith and repentance in Christ because God does not, you know, lightly do this. We're in this position because of a great sacrifice that his Son made for the world.

So here we are, coming back to the believing people, here we are in this wonderful position. He's forgiven our iniquities, he's healed our diseases, he redeems our life from the pit, he's crowned us with lovingkindness and compassion, he's satisfied our years with good things, and everybody that's a part of the believing people of God share in those common benefits. Wow. And so what, then, do we see? What do we conclude about the nature of the grace of God?

Look at verses 11 and 12. David is very concerned to impress upon us the importance of these spiritual blessings and he says in verse 11, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth," how high is the sky? How far into the remote galaxies do you want to go to see how high the heavens are above the earth? You say, "Well, that's an infinite distance." Yeah, that's the point, right? "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him." Verse 12, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us." He's using nature to make his point here and his point is this: he is expressing immeasurable incalculable distances, an incalculable distance from earth to the remotest part of the third heavens. He is making a calculation. He's expressing immeasurable distance as far as the east is from the west. "Well, that could go on for infinity," you say. Yeah, and precisely that's his point. Immeasurable distances here – watch this – are expressing immeasurable love and mercy. You cannot count this. You can't quantify how good God has been to you, how good God has been to his people.

On the positive side, verse 11, his loyal love goes to the heavens. On the negative side, our sins have been infinitely removed from us. Scripture talks about them being buried into the depths of the sea. "Their sins and their lawless deeds, I will remember no more." Isn't that amazing? Whatever the throne of judgment is going to look like, I'm sure we

can't imagine the incomprehensible awful majesty of that time that's described in Revelation 20:11-15, we can't imagine just exactly what that will be like to see and experience, but to realize that at the day of judgment God is not going to hold a single one of our sins against us, he won't count any iniquity against us for those who are in Christ because Christ paid for it all at the cross, this is incalculably great and it is incalculably important. This is a matter of eternal importance that God has removed our transgressions from us and not just a little bit, look toward New York and then look toward Los Angeles and beyond them across the oceans and you're starting to get a fraction of the measure of how much God has separated your sin from your account if you are a Christian here tonight. You say, "But I can't even see Indiana from where I'm standing, let alone California, let alone across the ocean to Hong Kong. I can't see that far." Precisely. Do you get it? This is what he's saying. This is beyond comprehension. This can never be brought back to count against you. That's how much God has blessed you in his compassion.

Israel in the Old Testament entered the Promised Land. At the end of our sojourn, we'll enter into heaven and what we see here is that God gives great blessing to his people even despite their sin. God has poured all of this blessing out upon you despite the multitude of ways that you've sinned against him and still do. You see, the point here is to not make you feel bad about having sin or to remind you of your indwelling corruption, that's not the point, that's only the setting for the greater point that God's compassion and his loyal love on us is so astounding and amazing that he doesn't hold any of that against us.

So in verse 13 David says, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." Here he is the eternal Creator, the sinless holy Creator, and we are finite sinful creatures and God looks on us not to despise us in that condition but to show mercy and compassion to us in it. So as you meditate on these things and you realize how this Psalm opens and closes, you realize that this is designed to feed and inform your sense of, "Bless the LORD, O my soul! That You've been like that to me? God, I'm grateful. God, I'm grateful. Bless Your holy name."

Now thirdly he goes on, he moves from the personal to the corporate, here in the third section he gives an eternal call to praise. An eternal call to praise. David steps back from the lofty themes of the immeasurable grace of God and he returns to the common theme of man's transient life. This is a common theme in the Psalms. It's a common theme in Scripture. It was spoken about even in Psalm 90. In fact, go back to Psalm 90 for just a moment to remind you of this. Psalm 90:3 for example. Moses here prays and says, God "You turn man back into dust And say, 'Return, O children of men.' For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away." Verse 9, "all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away." Verse 12, "teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of

wisdom." Moses there meditating on the brevity of life, the transient nature of life, that even if it goes on for 80 years, it's just like a flower that sprouted up in the morning and is wilted by the heat and gone by the evening day. So quick, so passing, so transient is life, Moses' prayer in Psalm 90 is, "Lord, help us in the midst of that."

Well, here in Psalm 103:15, go back there now with me, now in verse 15 David is picking up on that same theme of the transient nature of life and he says in verse 15, "As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer." He says, "This is man, here today, gone tomorrow. He lives for a while but then he's gone and he doesn't even know when his appointed day will be." How fragile, how transient, how temporary we all are and yet what David is doing here is he is praising God and he is only referring to the transience of man to provide another basis for us to praise our God for because in contrast to our passing nature, God's love for his people is eternal. It is everlasting. It is never-ending.

Look at verse 17 and the contrast that David makes. He says, "But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them." What David is saying here is this, is that for those who truly know him, for those who truly are among the people of God, the loyal love of God transcends even the passing nature of our earthly existence. It will know no end. God's love for you once it has been set upon you, it is eternal and it never changes, and even though your physical life will pass away, even though the world in which you live will pass away, the love that God has set upon you will not pass away because it is from everlasting to everlasting. God determined it in the counsels of the Triune Godhead in his decrees of election for his people and it will continue until we are with him in the unending unfolding ages of eternity so that we who are creatures of dust, we who will soon enough, to use the words of Luther, the crass words of Luther, we who soon enough will be food for the worms, we who are like that have deposited in our souls an eternal, gracious gift from God that will never end.

I've been thinking about this a lot over the past several weeks. If you think seriously about life and you think seriously about the nature of death, it brings you to the point of exasperation that Solomon expressed in the book of Ecclesiastes. If you're only looking at life under the sun, you realize that everything is vanity; that everything you do ultimately is going to pass away; that the best of your relationships are temporary, even your closest family relationships, they're all temporary because sooner or later we're going to stand at the bedside and say, "Good-bye, mom. Good-bye, dad. Good-bye, son." This is inevitable. This invisible reality is permeated through all of life.

Now people try to find their way and to fight their way out of that by finding things of significance or living for pleasure or just denying that it's ever going to happen and not ever thinking about it, but denial doesn't solve the problem and the point that I'm making here is this, is that you cannot find the answer to your transient existence and the ultimate vanity of human life, you cannot find the answer to that within the bounds of the life in

which you live because everything associated with this life is going to pass away, everything that you touch with your fingers is eventually going to crumble like dust. Sooner or later this is unavoidable and if you doubt that, stop by any cemetery that you want to and the headstones will silently support everything that I'm saying to you here this evening.

Now when you think about life from that perspective, it can be overwhelming. The blessing that we have as Christian people, the blessing that we have as the people of God is that the answer to that dilemma has been given to us from outside our realm. God has injected himself and has shown grace to us of an eternal nature that lifts us out of that temporary matter of life and gives us that which is eternal and lasting so that we find our security, we find our meaning, we find our hope, we find our reason for existence in something that is above and beyond this life, and the sooner that you and I understand that and grasp it, the sooner we can have an abiding peace and we can look at the reality of our coming headstone and not be intimidated by it because death has lost its sting because there is no fear in life, there is no fear in death because, verse 17, "the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him." My life meaning is not rooted in whether anybody remembers me five years after I'm gone or not. That's a matter of utter indifference to me.

What gives my life, what gives your life significance is only this, that the love of Christ is everlasting and it is unchanging and if you are in him, you have the answer to every need of your soul and everything that gives meaning to the passing nature of your life. And if you're building your life on anything else, Jesus says, you're building it on sand. In fact, let's turn there, I just have to make this point here. Look, in the teaching of Jesus, you either build your life on these truths that we're talking about tonight or you're wasting your life. There is no in-between. Jesus said in Matthew 7:24, he said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall." In the original language it has the sense, there's a boom to that, the fall was GREAT and it just echoes and reverberates as you finish the sentence as you read that.

Beloved, especially you young people and young to me is anything under the age of 60 these days, okay? Now I've had a shifting definition of young as life goes on. You young people, I don't know how to appeal to you except to plead with you to take what I'm saying seriously here. I understand that you're caught up in, you know, "Who am I going to spend my life with? What am I going to do for a living? Where am I going to live? What's going to happen to me?" You've got business interests and all of that's fine as far as it goes, but you must come to understand and think and meditate on these things because sooner or later when it's all said and done, the love of your life, the business of your life, the travels of your life, they're all going to be over and done and then what? When all of your dreams come true, what then? Only in Christ and only in these things

that we're considering right here can you find an answer that answers all the eventualities of life. Everything else is sand and if you've ever build a sand house on the beach, a sandcastle on the beach, you know what inevitably happens, right? The water hits it and it falls. Don't let that be your life. Don't let that be the outcome. Let these realities prompt you and cause you and motivate you to ask for help from the Holy Spirit that you would not waste your life but that you would love Christ supremely and build your life on him because I'll say it again, for those who truly know Christ, God's love transcends that passing nature of our earthly existence. Someone who is in Christ can be breathing their death rattle and be at utter peace knowing that God's love will not abandon them even in their hour of distress. This is the love that he sets upon those who fear him there in verse 17. So if you're here, you're weary of life, you're weary with the struggle of sin, look at this God, realize a gracious God is offering mercy to you and calling you to cast your life upon Christ, to set him as the ultimate object of your affections and priorities. The one like that, the one who sets his heart there this Psalm says God will redeem your life from the pit forever. Man, there's nothing better than that.

Well, time is escaping us here. Fourth and final section, David offers this universal call to praise. A universal call to praise. So he's gone from a personal call to praise, to a corporate call to praise, an eternal call to praise, and now a universal call to praise. As I said earlier, he's so swept up in blessing God that he calls on creation itself to join him in praise. Verse 19, "Yahweh has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all." And he addresses the spiritual beings, "Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!" This is amazing, David is commanding the angels on what they are to do in response to this revelation. "Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will. Bless the LORD, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion." God is no localized deity, he's not just the God the United States, he's not just the God of Israel, he's God over all. He reigns over all things everywhere and as a result of that, what David is saying, because God is like that, because he is God everywhere over everything, then everything everywhere ought to respond in worship and bless his name. He bids all the works of God to bless their Creator.

But what I love about this Psalm and it reminds me a bit of the end of Psalm 19 for reasons that we don't have time to go into tonight, but in the end he circles back to himself one last time. He's just had this expanding scope of the call to worship, he's gone from addressing himself to considering all the people of God to an eternal praise that extends to all of creation, and then he lands the plane right back where it started from, although David didn't know planes in his day like we do. He comes back right to himself and he says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul!" He hasn't been, he's not content to address everyone else, he's got to end by coming back to himself one last time and realizes that ultimately he's responsible for his own response and he tells himself, "In light of all of these things, my soul, you bless the LORD. You praise Him. You give thanks to Him. You worship Him with an assurance that He is good, gracious and faithful to His people."

Ah, I love this Psalm, but while David addresses himself at the beginning and the end, ultimately he wrote this as a pattern for all of God's people throughout all of the ages to

consider. So beloved, the question is this: will you join in the praise for all of God's benefits? Will you join in the corporate praise of God for the way that he has blessed his people from generation to generation to generation, amen? Will you honor him for an eternal salvation that far transcends the inherent worth of your passing life? Do you personally have this kind of praise in your heart for this God of whom we've been speaking? If so, I know you're joining in the praise and honoring God in your heart right now. If not, I appeal to you one final time, turn to this Christ who offers mercy to you. Don't walk out apart from him. His intentions and his promises are good and he offers it to you right now.

Let's pray together.

Our sovereign and gracious God, we join with David and we bless You from the depths of our hearts. You have forgiven our sins in our Lord Jesus Christ. You have rescued our mortal lives from the pit and one day we will enjoy resurrected bodies in Your presence forever and ever without end. Oh, how great Your compassion on unworthy sinners, how wonderful Your mercy to transient passing creatures like us, that You would lift us out of the despair of death and the misery of our human condition and set us in such an ineffably wonderful and majestic place as this. We bless You for our Lord Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection opened the gates of heaven to us and we bless You for his ongoing intercession for us even at Your very right hand as we speak. How inestimably wonderful is Your love for Your people. May all creation join in the praise of Your worthy name, O God. For the sake of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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