

“A Recital of Praise – Part 1”  
Psalm 103  
(Preached at Trinity, May 15, 2012)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last Christmas I attended a recitation of elementary school students at a Classical Christian school in Jackson, Tennessee. The girls were dressed neatly in matching dresses and stockings, while the boys sported kaki pants, sweater vests, and ties. With excellent poise they sang and recited various pieces of poetry, catechisms, and other literary works they had committed to memory. One of the highlights of the program was the recitation of Psalm 103 in its entirety. The multitude of youthful voices shouting forth with exuberance the words of this psalm captivated the audience.
2. This is indeed the purpose of **Psalm 103**; to turn our eyes towards God with all manner of expressions of praise. But while other psalms are addressed to other people—to the righteous, or to sinners, to the Gentile nations, or to Israel—**Psalm 103** is addressed to the writer; the psalmist is speaking to himself. “Bless the LORD, O my soul.”
3. He is reminding himself of the multitude of God’s blessings so that his life would be a continual expression of gratitude and praise.
4. **Psalm 104** serves as a companion to this psalm. Together they praise God as both Savior and Creator, Father and Sustainer. Derek Kidner wrote, “In the galaxy of the Psalter these are twin stars of the first magnitude.”
5. Words cannot express the fullness of this psalm. Charles Spurgeon wrote: “There is too much in the Psalm, for a thousand pens to write, it is one of those all-comprehending Scriptures which is a Bible in itself, and it might alone almost suffice for the hymn-book of the church.”
6. So we find here a wonderful exercise of looking into the heart of a believer.
  - A. This must be our own heart; a heart preoccupied with the consideration of our great God; to be captivated with Him. There is no greater activity, no higher consideration.
  - B. This is true worship. True worship is not about the outward symbols. It isn’t about a particular style of music or a particular arrangement of the service. True worship will always be a matter of the heart. It will always be an expression of our inner most being—of our heart.

**Matthew 15:8 KJV** - "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me."  
**Psalm 103:1 KJV** - "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *bless* his holy name."
  - C. By speaking to his own heart David is also speaking to each one of us to praise God from the fullness of our being.
7. It is my prayer that this psalm will cause each believer to be renewed in the praise and worship of God. And I also pray that as we consider the greatness of God and His goodness the unbelievers here will feel compelled to cast aside everything else to worship this great God.
- I. The Recitation of Praise – **Verses 1-2**

II. The Reasons for Praise – **Verses 3-19**III. The Realm of Praise – **Verses 20-22**I. The Recitation of Praise – **Verses 1-2**

## A. “Bless the Lord”

1. The word for “bless” is בָּרַךְ *barak* carries more than one meaning
  - a. On one hand it refers to God’s goodness bestowed upon His people by His grace. God blesses us with all manner of His goodness. **Verse 2** adds: “And forget not all His benefits.”  
A man is most blessed who find’s Christ as the highest of all blessings, the root of all joy.
  - b. On the other hand the psalms sometimes speak of us as blessing God.  
**Psalm 34:1 KJV** - "I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth."  
**Psalm 134:2 KJV** - "Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary, and bless the LORD."
2. In this sense the word literally means to kneel or bow the knee. It carries the idea of praise which is how the NIV translates it. The Geneva Bible also translated it this way. **Psalm 103** is a psalm full of gratitude and praise to the God of all grace and mercy.
3. Literally it is to ascribe to God all of the praise and glory He is due.

## B. The psalmist sets himself to kindling his passion of praise and worship

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul. נַפְשִׁי
  - a. What is the soul? There are two views of the composition of man  
The dichotomous view and the trichotomous view.  
The first says we are made up of two parts: body and soul  
The second says we
  - b. Both views have some strength Biblically
  - c. With the trichotomous view we consist of three parts: body, soul, and spirit  
*Body*: our flesh and blood  
*Soul*: that which makes us alive – the word can be translated “life”  
*Spirit*: the essence of our being. That which distinguishes us from the animals.

Paul seemed to speak of all three:

**1 Thessalonians 5:23** – “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In Ecclesiastes both man and animal are said to have a spirit  
**Ecclesiastes 3:21** - “Who knoweth the **spirit** of man that goeth upward, and the **spirit** of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?”

- d. I hold that the Bible seems to teach the dichotomous view – that the Bible most often presents the soul and spirit as synonymous terms.
  2. Our soul, or spirit, is the essence of our being.
    - a. It is that part of us that survives the grave into eternity.  
**Matthew 16:26 KJV** - " For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"  
**Matthew 10:28 KJV** – “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”
    - b. Our soul is what distinguishes us from the animals. Our soul is our connection with God; it enables us to commune with God—that part of us that thirsts after God.  
**Psalm 42:1 KJV** - "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."
    - c. With the fall our soul became darkened, blinded—unable to know and approach God properly.  
 With regeneration our souls are restored so that we might once again seek God properly.
    - d. Since it is on the level of our soul or spirit that we commune with God and worship God, the Psalmist is pressing his soul to give himself to the fullness of God’s worship.
  3. The Psalmist is talking to himself – He is seeking to kindle the fires burning in his bosom.
  4. These are flames that burn within the heart of all of God’s people but God’s people can fall into sinful negligence.  
 We can become forgetful  
 This was God’s warning to Israel  
**Deuteronomy 6:12** – “beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”
  5. David often spoke to his own heart, taking charge of his passions
    - a. We saw it in **Psalm 42**  
**Psalm 42:5 KJV** - "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance."
    - b. In this psalm David is taking charge of his heart  
**Psalm 103:1 KJV** - "Bless the LORD, O my soul"
  6. But David’s desire it to praise God with every molecule of his being: His mind, his will, his emotions – everything!  
**Psalm 103:1 KJV** - "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *ble*ss his holy name."
- C. “Bless His holy name”
1. David is drawn to worship God in the fullness of God’s holiness
  2. As we contemplate God’s holiness our hearts are prepared to come before him properly – in holy reverence. To come before an infinitely holy God demands preparation.

- a. It demands imploring the influences of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts, that He would help you shut out all other thoughts, that He would help you consider the God you are worshipping.
- b. It demands examining your heart, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and confessing and repenting of your sins.
- c. It demands entering into His courts with praise.  
**Psalm 100:4 KJV** - " Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, *and* into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, *and* bless his name."
- d. Fellowship is good and it is good to greet one another, especially visitors, but conversation should be kept to a minimum.  
Harvey Newcomb wrote in 1843 – “Shut out all thoughts except such as are calculated to inspire devotional feelings; and, if in company, avoid conversation. Whatever may be the nature of such conversation, it will be very likely to produce a train of thought which will distract and disturb your mind during public worship.”

C. Forget not His benefits

1. The word for “benefits” refers to a reward or recompense. Every blessing comes from God is by His wondrous grace.
2. Forget not. Do not allow the rich blessings of God to be forgotten. It is said that when God blesses men they are excited to bless Him.
3. There is another aspect of this, however.  
The word is גְּמוּלָה (gemuwl) which refers to a recompense. It can be taken to be blessings for righteousness or curses for wickedness.  
**Psalm 28:4 KJV** - "Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert."  
**Psalm 94:2 NAS** - "Rise up, O Judge of the earth; Render recompense to the proud."  
**Isaiah 3:11 KJV** - "Woe unto the wicked! *it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.*"
4. We should not forget the danger of sin.
5. But the chief focus of this psalm is all about praise – do not forget the rich blessings of God.  
In the next stanza the psalmist begins to list some of the blessings that must not be forgotten; blessings that must bring forth praise.

II. The Reasons for Praise – **Verses 3-19**

A. **Verses 3-5** – We find a list of personal blessings received – These are blessings enjoyed by the redeemed.

1. The forgiveness of sin – **Verse 3** - "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities"  
This is the chief of all graces. Notice the word “all”  
He’ll speak of it again in **Verse 12** – the glory of justification  
"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."
2. Healing from disease – **Verse 3**

- a. All of us can testify that God continually and habitually heals us from sickness. He is worthy of all praise for this grace. We should praise Him for our good health.
  - b. But the context points more to our great pardon of sin – the plague of plagues. The Bible always maintains this connection:  
**James 5:14-16 KJV** - "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. <sup>16</sup> Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. "
  - c. George Horn wrote: "What is pride, but lunacy; what is anger, but a fever; what is avarice, but a dropsy; what is lust, but a leprosy; what is sloth, but a dead palsy?"
3. Protection in life– **Verse 4** - "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction"  
The word for "destruction" refers to the grave
    - a. How many times has God saved you from death?  
David's testimony demonstrated God's mighty hand of protection over and over. From the jaw of the lion or the bear's paw, the sword of Goliath, or the javelin of Saul, or from Absalom or the multitude of other enemies.
    - b. But again, the context would direct our attention to the issue of sin. He has delivered us from our spiritual death, awakening us to our sin and condemnation.
    - b. He has delivered us from the curse of death brought about by sin. "O death where is thy sting?"
  4. For His love and mercy – **Verse 4** – "who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies"
  5. For the riches of His blessings – **Verse 5** – "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good *things*"
    - a. He gives us the blessings of the joys of life. The monks thought God was honored by the denial of all pleasures. The truth is God grants us good things to enjoy
    - b. But only God can satisfy the soul and there is no joy like soul joy. "Bless the Lord O my soul." There is no satisfaction like Christ.
  6. For maintaining the vigor of our youth – **Verse 5** – "*so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*"
    - a. God often blesses with strength and vigor into old age. Moses could testify of this.  
**Deuteronomy 34:7 KJV** - "And Moses *was* an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."
    - b. But it is gloriously true that God continues to increase our spiritual vigor as we age.
    - c. Finally we shall enter into the state of eternal youth where we will never age nor will weakness plague our bodies.

- B. **Verses 6-19** – We read of God’s love and compassion towards His people
1. **Verse 6** – God executes righteousness & justice on behalf of His people.  
The presupposition is we live our lives in the midst of oppressors but God will vindicate us in the face of our enemies.
  2. **Verse 7** – Just as God led Moses through the wilderness He will lead us through this life—our current wilderness as we journey towards our eternal home.
  3. **Verses 8-10** – God’s wonderful mercy & grace in Christ – He is patient with us, slow to anger, plenteous in love. He doesn’t give us what we deserve.
  4. **Verses 11; 16-18** – His infinite love
  5. **Verse 12** – His infinite forgiveness. This is one of the most precious verses in the whole Bible. It reflects the glory of justification. It is particular – “From us.” But it is available to all. Most consider this a small thing and forfeit it.
  6. **Verses 13-15** – His infinite condescending compassion towards our weakness
  7. **Verse 19** – His sovereign reign over all – He is worthy of all praise – “Bless the Lord, O my soul”

### III. The Realm of Praise – **Verses 20-22**

The final stanza raises God’s praise into the heavens – their praise serves to encourage us

- A. To the angelic realm  
**Psalms 103:20 KJV** - "Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word."
1. They are mightier in strength than human beings, yet they are always faithful, always praising God
  2. **Verse 21** – They continually do God’s will
- B. Should we not too be fully committed to God?
1. Should we not be consumed in doing His will?
  2. Should we not be consumed in His praises?
- C. Finally, the psalmist presents the universality of the praises of God. God’s praises are all inclusive, all comprehensive. His realm is infinite and His praises are infinite.  
**Psalms 103:22 KJV** - "Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion:"
1. His dominion is throughout all of creation – to the ends of the universe.
  2. God is to be praised “in all places”
  3. And we must join in the praise. The psalmist concludes as he began:  
**Psalms 103:22 KJV** - "bless the LORD, O my soul."

### Conclusion:

1. What a blessing that God would be mindful of us – mere specks in the fullness of His creation.
2. And what a blessing that we can join in the chorus of praise.