

Bless the Lord O My Soul

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Bible Text: Ephesians 3:14-21; Psalm 103

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In the grand tradition of the Protestant Reformation, this church's elders call you to worship for a second time on the Lord's Day in order to be taught from one of the Confessions of the church, the Heidelberg Catechism. Today we're taking a break from that. We're going to be examining another Psalm. And in conjunction with that Psalm, we're going to read from scripture in Ephesians chapter 3. Ephesians chapter 3, we're going to read Paul's prayer in verses 14 through 21. Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 14.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

And then you can turn with me to the book of Psalms, and we're going to read together Psalm 103. Psalm 103, and then as I preach the word to you this afternoon, I'm going to ask that you keep your Bibles open if you are able to follow along. Psalm 103 is a Psalm of David. This is the word of God.

1 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 not all his benefits, 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our

iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. 13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. 14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. 17 But the steadfast love 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 to do his commandments. 19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. 20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! 21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! 22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

This is indeed God's word. Psalm 103. Psalm 103 is the favorite Psalm of almost all of the elderly saints in my congregation. Almost all of the older people in my congregation tell me that Psalm 103 is their absolute favorite Psalm and that's not a coincidence, that's because most of the older people in my congregation are Dutch. Most of them were born in the Netherlands and Psalm 23, which we looked at this morning, is the favorite Psalm amongst the English-speaking world, but Psalm 103 is the favorite Psalm of Dutch-speaking people. People in the Netherlands have Psalm 103 as their all-time favorite Psalm and there's lots of interesting reasons for that. Psalm 103 is one of the first Psalms that Protestants began to sing on a regular basis. So in the 1500s, there was a group of Dutch refugees that went to London, England, and they started creating a Psalter hymnal, and they started off with 10 Psalms and two hymns. That's the only ones they had, 10 Psalms and two hymns, and Psalm 103 was one of the Psalms that they began to sing. So it was one of the first Psalms sung publicly by Protestants. Another reason I think Psalm 103 is a favorite is that it has some similarities with Psalm 23. It's a very, very personal Psalm. It's not historically situated. It's not obviously historically linked to a specific event and that makes it like Psalm 23, a Psalm that is quite general and that we can apply to various different situations, and it also has some very memorable imagery in it, and these things all contribute to it being a favorite Psalm in the Dutch-speaking world.

There is another reason why this Psalm is so popular in Dutch culture and in Reformed Church life in general and that reason is also important for us in our understanding of the Psalm this afternoon. 400 years ago, there was a very famous synod in the Netherlands called the Synod of Dort and that created the Canons of Dort, one of our confessional documents, and what they also did at the Synod of Dort is they created a bunch of liturgical forms to be used by the churches in regular church life and we have a bunch of forms in the back of our book of praise, and they're based on those old forms that come to us from the Synod of Dort. So for the last 400 years in Dutch Reformed Church culture and all churches that trace their ecclesiastical heritage to that, we have been using these forms and specifically the Synod of Dort decided to include Psalm 103 as part of the form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper Table. And so millions and millions of people

over the last 400 years have celebrated the Lord's Supper millions and millions of times all over the world with the words of Psalm 103 ringing in their ears.

So you can look at that. For instance, you're to open your book of praise to page 607. You'd see at the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the doxology part, it says after the communion, the minister shall say, "Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord has now nourished our souls at his table, let us together praise his holy name, and let everyone say in his heart, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgives your iniquity, who heals your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy." For 400 years, people have been celebrating the Lord's Supper and repeating those words along with the pastor. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide. He will not keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him."

Millions of people spread across the world have heard those words or said those words at the celebration of the Lord's Supper Table. The moment where they had the bread and the wine or the taste of the bread and the wine in their mouth, they have heard the words of Psalm 103. You could say that they tasted Christ in the sacrament and then they also got to taste Christ in the Psalm and I think that's another reason why Psalm 103 is a favorite Psalm in Dutch culture because it's closely linked to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and it also teaches us something about how we ought to read this Psalm. Reading Psalm 103 should leave you with the taste of Christ in your mouth. Singing Psalm 103 should leave you with the taste of Christ in your mouth. There are a lot of things we could say about the Psalm, I'm not going to go through it verse by verse like we did this morning with Psalm 23, some of you were worried about that and thought it was going to be a very long sermon. We're not going to be able to do that. This Psalm is just pure gospel. It's the very center and focus of so much of what we do as a church and why we believe and live the way that we do. This afternoon, I'd like to simplify it. I just want to talk about three different themes that we find in Psalm 103, three different themes and I'd like to draw those out for you, and my prayer is that by the end of the sermon, you can taste Christ in your mouth as you sing Psalm 103.

So the title of the sermon is, "Bless the Lord O My Soul." Bless the Lord O my soul, and we're going to talk about three things. We're going to talk about the Lord's compassion, and we're going to talk about the Lord's love, and we're going to talk about the Lord's forgiveness. Aren't those three great topics? We're going to talk about the Lord's compassion, the Lord's love, and the Lord's forgiveness.

So let's start with compassion. If you were to go to the book of James, James chapter 5 verse 11 says the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Compassion and mercy, he's full of it. Psalm 145 says that the Lord has compassion on everything that he's made, but in

Psalm 103, we read about the Lord's very special fatherly compassion that he has on you, on his covenant children, a very specific compassion he has on you, those who believe in him. So look at verse 13 to begin with. Verse 13 says, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him." So some of you did not have or do not have a father who showed or shows you compassion, but you have a heavenly Father who does. And some of you have an earthly father you've been blessed with who is a very compassionate man and a very compassionate father, and then you must know that your heavenly Father is even way more compassionate than your earthly father.

The Lord is compassionate, verse 14, "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." So the Lord is compassionate in the fact that he never forgets that he formed us from dust and the Lord never forgets that that earthly weakness is still in us. The Lord never forgets that when he looks at you, he remembers you were made of dust and that he expects you then and he knows that you will be weak and he has compassion on you for that.

I've got three children and all of those children are quite close in age, and that made me, as a father, sometimes make the following mistake and maybe some of you parents might be able to resonate with this. My kids are close enough at the age that sometimes I would get frustrated with the youngest child because the youngest child was not able to do exactly what the oldest child was able to do. I sort of thought, "Well, if your older brother should be able to do it, well, then you should be able to do it." And I would get, "Well, how come you can't do this?" And I would forget there was a two-year difference between them. So I sometimes forgot that and so because I forgot that, I lacked compassion. I sort of forgot that, "Oh yeah, they're two years younger. They're a little bit weaker." I would forget that and I would lack compassion on them. Happily, God never makes that mistake. God never makes that mistake. God never overestimates your capacity. The Lord understands who you are and he understands exactly where you're at and what you're able to do and he's compassionate on you. He remembers that you were made of dust.

You can think of maybe a little child who wants to help mom or dad with a big bag of groceries and they want to try to pick up the bag of groceries all by themselves and they struggle with it and they obviously can't do that, can they, and they need help with it. I think in a similar way, adults sometimes do the same thing. We sometimes can have an unrealistic idea of our own abilities, of our own strength. "I can do this by myself. I can fix this situation on myself. I should be able to deal with my problems with myself and not need help. And I can deal with the deep suffering in my life. And I'm sure I can deal with the difficult sin in my life." And then we can get frustrated with ourselves, "Well, how come I just can't overcome this problem? Or how come I can't get this done? And how come I just can't push through this challenge or this difficulty?" It's because we have an illusion about ourselves. We overestimate our capacity. We think we can lift a big heavy grocery bag all by ourselves. And God is never under any illusions about what you are able to do or not able to do because he knows you better than you know yourself. And the Lord, like a true compassionate father, looks at you in your life and he sees you

struggling away with that big heavy grocery bag of life and he sees you sort of flailing and unable to deal with the weight of your sin or the weight of judgment or the weight of your suffering, and he has this infinite and perfectly accurate knowledge about you and your weakness and he knows you, and he has compassion on you. He doesn't say something like, "Come on, lift the grocery bag already." No, he's a good father. He has compassion on you.

Like a father who shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him, and his compassion is the reason why verse 8 says that he's slow to anger. Are you slow to anger? Sometimes there's parents that are really quick to anger. Sometimes there are parents that seem to just be looking for a reason to be angry and the kids know it. The kids can see it from a mile off. They can tell when mom and dad are in a bad mood and when they should stay out of the way. Sometimes they can see their parents walking around just looking for something to pick on or something to be angry about; sometimes you get teachers like that too. Everything's bothering them and they're quick to anger and they're lacking in compassion. Well, think about this, the Lord God your Father has every reason to get angry with you and your sin. Between your original and your actual sins, the Lord has a lot of reasons to be angry but that's not how our Father deals with his children. It's not how he deals with his children. Instead, he's compassionate, and he remembers we were just made of dust, and he remembers that we're human, and he's slow to anger.

In my experience as a pastor, I've been a pastor for 10 years now, it's true that there are some people that live like God is never angry at any sin. It's true that there are people that live like that and they need to be shaken out of their delusion and they need to understand the Lord's wrath against sin. But within the church, it's been my experience anyways, that something that is opposite is true, that there are many people that somewhere in their back of the head think that the Lord is sort of permanently angry at them. "I'm sure the Lord loves me, but he doesn't really like me because frankly, he's pretty angry with all my sin." Sort of the idea that God's sort of looking over your shoulder all the time and if you had to imagine what his face looked like, it would have a frown on it. A big frown. I had someone once tell me that they imagined God the Father always standing behind them holding a big hammer. I wonder if any of you here today are kind of like that. What an absolutely terrible way to live as a covenant child. In Psalm 103, we have a description of a God who is compassionate and slow to anger. As a child of God, if you're a child of God, if you're a covenant child, if you're putting your faith in the Lord, it is much, much, much, much, much more biblical to think about God looking over your shoulder with a smile on his face. That's more biblical if you're a child of God.

So Psalm 103 is an Old Testament Psalm, but can you taste a little bit of Christ in this Psalm? Jesus is the compassion of God because of our fragile frame. God the Holy Spirit stitched Jesus Christ into the womb of Mary. It was compassion for us, his children, that God the Father sent his Son into the world and so think about this, Jesus Christ knew the Psalms. He grew up with the Psalms. He grew up singing them. He probably had them memorized. Jesus knew Psalm 103. He would have sung it. And Jesus would have understood that the reason that he came to earth was to show the compassion of Psalm

103 to God's people. He would have understood that. In Mark 14, Mark 20, Mark 6, we hear these repeated words, "Jesus had compassion on them." You read through the gospel so often, Jesus had compassion for the people in front of them and it wasn't just sort of like a distant pity, like, "Oh yeah, I kind of feel sorry for them." Jesus, Hebrews 4 says, is the high priest who can empathize with our weaknesses. In Luke chapter 7, verse 13, Jesus' compassion is stated like this, I quote, "His heart went out to her." That's a beautiful way to describe compassion. His heart went out to her. That's how the Lord acts or continues to act toward you. When you sin, when you can't get out of that bad habit, when you can't stop doing that thing that you know you shouldn't be doing, when you feel stuck in your life, you feel like you're not progressing, you're not able to conquer something difficult, when you feel helpless and frustrated and perhaps misunderstood and then worried and guilty and ashamed, the Lord's heart goes out to you. That's what the Lord does, he shows you compassion. His heart goes out to you because he remembers you're just dust. He remembers.

When you're struggling with that grocery bag of life and you're hard pressed by the weight of sin and judgment, then I ask you to please remember Psalm 103. Remember the taste of Christ in the sacrament and in the Psalm. Remember his body broken and his precious blood poured out. Remember that because you are in Christ, God the Father is slow to anger with you and when he looks over your shoulder, he's smiling and he's filled right up to the brim with compassion for you and he remembers you're dust.

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" That's the theme of compassion. Let's do let's do another theme from the Psalm. Let's do the theme of love. I'm going to read a couple of verses. We'll start at verse 4, "who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy." Now look at verse 8, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Now look at verse 11, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him." Look at verse 17, "But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children."

The expression steadfast love, that's actually just one word in Hebrew, it's *chesed*. It's the *chesed* of the Lord. It's one of those words that's very difficult to translate into English just with one word. So in the ESV, it says steadfast love. In the ASV, it says loving kindness. The King James Version says plenteous in mercy. The New Living Translation says filled with unfailing love. The Message just says rich in love. It's all an attempt to translate this one word and this one word as I said, it's not a feeling really. It's not an emotion. It is a deep, enduring, loving loyalty that never goes up and never stops, never gives up and never stops giving up and is unfailing. It's a love and a loyalty that includes action towards someone who is in need. The Lord's *chesed* and God is abounding in this kind of love. He's rich with it. He's filled right up with it. He has plenty of it. He's full of *chesed* and steadfast, unfailing, loving kindness and mercy toward us. That's who God is.

And that steadfast love, it's as high as the heavens are above the earth. So this is a poem, right? So he's using poetry, using a poetic lyric to describe this mysterious truth. The

heavens is the sky, the stars when you look up on a clear night, and so when David wrote this Psalm, he could have looked up into the sky and when Jesus sang this Psalm, he could have looked up into the sky, and if it's a clear night tonight, you could look up and see the same stars that David and Jesus saw. The nearest star that we can see is 4,000 light years away; that's the nearest star that we can see without a telescope. You kids know what light years are? Well, space is so big that you can't really use kilometers. That's too small. So we use light years to measure distance in space. So a light year is a unit of measurement, and it's the distance that light travels in one year and that's about 9.5 trillion kilometers. And trillion is a million million. So light in one year will travel 9.5 million million kilometers. To give you an idea, if you were to circumnavigate the whole earth, the earth is about 40,000 kilometers in circumference, but a light year is 9.5 trillion kilometers. And the farthest star that we can see, if you look up in the night sky, is 4,000 light years away, about 38,000 trillion kilometers. This Psalm is saying that ridiculously large number, that ridiculous distance that you can't imagine, that is the closest human estimate we have to understanding how big and how great the love of God is for his children. That's what the Psalm is saying. In other words, you can't even imagine it. You can't imagine how big the love of God is for his church. It's beyond your comprehension, which is exactly what Paul says in Ephesians 3, where he says the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. It surpasses understanding. The love of Christ is so big and so great and so awesome, his love toward you, toward your church, toward me, it is so big that I literally cannot imagine it. That's the teaching of scripture. You literally have no idea, it's beyond your understanding. And you think God's frowning at you? All kinds of people can let you down in life, all kinds of people can look at you with a big frown, but God's love for his church is so great and so big, you can't even imagine. You can't.

The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, says verse 17. God has no beginning, right, and God has no end. You can't really understand that. Well, his love also doesn't have a beginning and end. It's limitless. It has no bounds, right? So God is love and his love for us is limitless, it's boundless from everlasting to everlasting. This is an Old Testament Psalm, but can you taste the love of Christ in it? John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Romans 5:18, "But God shows his love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus would have known Psalm 103, he would have probably memorized Psalm 103, and he would have sung Psalm 103, and Jesus would have understood that it was his job as the second person of the Trinity to bring the chesed, to bring the steadfast love of the Lord to earth, to God's people. That was his task. And we know that because in his high priestly prayer in John 17, we read this, as Jesus prays for us, he prays for you and he prays for me and he says, "Father, I desire that the world would know that I have loved my disciples as you have loved them and that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them." He's basically praying that Psalm 103 would just become ingrained down into your minds and your hearts, it would become ingrained down into your minds and hearts. I think the ancient Dutch people of the time of the Synod of Dort understood that and so they said, let's put it in the Lord's Supper form because we want to just ingrain this into the hearts and the minds of everybody in the church of Christ.

It's what Paul prays for in Ephesians 3, that we might understand the height and the depth and the length and the height and the width of the steadfast love of God in Jesus Christ. Or how have Reformed believers said it for 400 years as we take the Lord's Supper? Jesus taught us to understand that as often as we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we are reminded and assured of, does anybody know the next line? His hearty love and faithfulness toward us. They could have said, his chesed love. Our spiritual forefathers were very, very, very wise in binding Psalm 103 to the Lord's Supper. In the sacrament and in this Psalm, we taste the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. Isn't that beautiful?

I've only been a pastor for 10 years, but I've still remained convicted of this: the biggest challenge of the Christian life is not that you learn to love God more, your biggest challenge, my biggest challenge in the Christian life is to grasp and to understand how much God loves us. If we could only get that right. We need to learn from those Dutch ancestors who sought to teach us that, that we need to know how much God loves us.

I remember a long, long, long time ago someone making the comment that it's not a good idea to have the bumper sticker that says Jesus loves you because does Jesus love everybody that drives behind you? You could have a conversation about that. Sometimes I think that people find it difficult within the church, under the sacred canopy, within the church of Christ, to look at somebody else and say, "God loves you." Do you ever tell anybody that? If you can't tell people that here, where can you tell them? As brothers and sisters in the Lord, we should be able to look at each other and say, "God loves you, brother, and God loves you, sister." Are you able to do that? My own church at this moment in the sermon, I ask people to turn toward each other and say to your neighbor, "God loves you." I won't, I won't ask you to do that today. If you belong body and soul to your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, you should be able to say to other people who belong body and soul to their faithful Jesus Christ, "God loves you." And you should be able to say it yourself, "God loves me. God loves me. Despite all of my sin and suffering, despite all of my weakness and my faults, despite all of the stupid secret things that I hide from everybody else and he sees clearly, despite all the things you know about me and that you don't know about me, God loves me and he has compassion on me and he remembers I'm dust and he loves me." You can say it to yourself out loud now, "God loves me. My compassionate heavenly Father remembers that I'm dust, and he loves me to the stars and back." That's Psalm 103 and that's why we sing, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name," because it's good news.

"Bless the LORD, O my soul," compassion, love, let's talk about a third final theme, let's talk about forgiveness because forgiveness is really the Lord's expression of his compassion and his love. That's what it is. Forgiveness is God's expression of his love and his compassion. You get that directly from Psalm 51. Psalm 51 says this, listen clearly to the logic, "According to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgression." So God's love and compassion is expressed through his forgiveness.

Look at verse 10 of this Psalm. "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities." Verse 12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." So those are poetic lyrics again to express absolutely beautiful but mysterious truths. So east and west are not points, they're directions, and so east and west are indefinitely, they're eternally distant from each other. And so when God removes your sin from you, as far as the east is from the west, he's saying that he's deemed that he cannot, he will not put it back on you. He will remove your sin infinitely and eternally away from you, as far as the east is from the west.

Now, all of you have different human relationships, different day-to-day relationships, and some of you have relationships where when you do something wrong, that other person doesn't let you live it down. They perhaps keep it in their back pocket to pull out in an opportune time and tell you about it. They always bring it up when you've done something wrong. There's a famous story in my wife's family where her grandfather and her grandmother were having an argument and her grandmother said, "Oh, we don't argue that much," and he was like, "Oh, yes, we do," and he ran to the bedroom and he took out a paper calendar and he had marked all the days on the calendar for like the last year that they had had arguments. That's not forgiveness, that's keeping a record. God does not do that. God doesn't have a calendar in his back pocket with a list of all your sins. He doesn't because he removes them as far as the east is from the west, which means that he does not bring them up again and he doesn't hold them against you. He doesn't refer to them when you do the same sin again.

Sometimes for us when we do something wrong and our conscience rightly bothers us, we are driven by the Spirit to repent and that's good, but then sometimes what happens is that our conscience keeps on bothering us even after we've repented and asked for forgiveness. So sometimes a true believer, someone with living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can pray for forgiveness and then even though they have been forgiven, they are plagued by guilt and plagued by shame. Maybe you are someone here this afternoon that is experiencing that. Maybe you have a particular sin in your life that you committed and it kind of haunts you. Maybe you have a particular pattern of sin in your life that you maintain guilt and shame about. Maybe it was something that you said to somebody or something that you did to somebody and you can't take it back. Maybe it was something that you said or did to somebody who's no longer alive. Maybe it was some really shameful sexual sin. Maybe it was something so dark and deep that you never want to mention it out loud. If that's the case, brothers and sisters, you've got to hold on to Psalm 103. You have to hold on to this Psalm. You have to have your conscience confirmed or conform to the truth of scripture, that if you fear the Lord, if you believe in the Lord, your sin is removed from you as far as the east is from the west, that the Lord has taken your sin, and he has cast it into the eternal transcendent space of his love and his compassion, and he has drowned that sin forever in the ocean of his grace, never to be seen again, and never to be mentioned again, and never to be brought up again, never, ever, ever.

Psalm 103, it's an Old Testament Psalm, but can you taste the love of God in Jesus Christ in this Psalm? I think the imagery here is interesting. The imagery of a couple of these verses sort of makes a cross. It talks about the steadfast love of the Lord being as great as

the heavens are from the earth and then that our sin is removed as far from us as the east is from the west. Makes sort of the sign of a cross, doesn't it? On the cross of Christ, the love of God was stretched from heaven to earth, and Jesus was nailed, his arms stretched wide as if to say, "I love you this much, and I remove your transgressions as far as the east is from the west. Father forgive them," he says, "for they know not what they do."

Jesus Christ knew Psalm 103. Jesus Christ would have sung Psalm 103 like we're about to sing Psalm 103. And Jesus Christ would have understood that it was his mission as the second person of the Trinity to bring the forgiveness of God to the people of God. And so for 400 years, Reformed believers have taken the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Christ, and they've heard these words at the Lord's Supper Table, "Take, eat. Remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins. And we believe that the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ was poured out for the complete forgiveness of all our sins." And then as we eat the bread and drink the wine, the body and blood of Christ, and we taste the forgiveness of Christ, you could say, in our mouths, then immediately afterward, we hear ringing in our ears that Christ has removed our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west, the words of Psalm 103.

Brothers and sisters, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I don't care how deep and dark your sin is. It's been removed. It's gone as far as the east is from the west. You are forgiven. Some of you perhaps need to look me in the eyes right now and hear that clearly for yourself personally. If you have truly repented and have put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. You're forgiven. That sin, it's removed as far as the east is from the west. So you can sing, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not his benefits, his compassion, his love, his forgiveness for all of you who fear him."

Two concluding words and then we get to sing this song. First a word for those of you who might be here but have not yet put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The comfort of God's compassion, his love and his forgiveness is only for those who fear him. You cannot claim the comfort of this Psalm if you do not believe. I'm not saying you need to have a strong faith, but you need to have a true faith in a strong Savior. You can have faith just as small as a mustard seed, a mustard seed faith that might cry out, "Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief." Trust Jesus. Fear the Lord. Offer your life to him, your heart to him promptly and sincerely. Know and experience by true faith his compassion, his love and his forgiveness. And if you're not sure what that looks like or what that means in practical life, then ask whoever you came to church with today or speak to one of the elders of this congregation.

A second word for all of you who do believe, for all of you who have put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and who belong to him body and soul. I'd like you to notice this, the beginning verses of this Psalm are very personal. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" But if you go to the end of the Psalm, by the end of the Psalm, the Psalmist is calling out the whole broader world and all of creation to join in our personal praise. "Bless the LORD, O you his angels. Bless the

LORD, all his hosts. Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion." So it moves from personal praise to universal proclamation, from private worship to public witness. That's the movement of this Psalm. So when you sing this Psalm and then you take this Psalm with you for your personal comfort into your week, which I truly and dearly hope you do, you're also called to go out into all the world and sing, "Bless the LORD, O my soul." You're called to go out into all of the world and call all of the world to join you in singing praises to God in whom you have put your faith through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let's sing together Psalm 103.