

“Forget Not”
Psalm 103
Mr. Bruce Stallings
December 24, 2020 • 9:00 p.m. Christmas Eve

I'd like to start by looking at Psalm 103. You might be thinking since this is Christmas Eve, “I don't think that's a Christmas passage.” It's not a typical Christmas passage, but those attending this service are not a typical crowd. There are many who don't have the luxury to come to services like this at this time for various reason and some are also not able due to the pandemic we are currently going through but this service allows you to connect communion with Christmas Eve. I believe those who are here see that. This is a beautiful Psalm, and the psalmist is seeking for himself, for the congregation, for all created beings, for the entire universe, for heaven, earth, and everything that God has created to praise the Lord and I would trust that this is our prayer on this Christmas Eve. Hear the Word of our Lord.

Psalm 103:1–22 says *[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!

Have you ever stopped to consider the stark difference between a family Christmas card picture and the reality of the family in the picture? We get a bunch of Christmas cards with beautiful pictures on the Christmas cards of the families who sent them. There's a difference between what you see in the picture and the reality behind the family shown in the picture. When you see some of those pictures you probably think due to the beauty of the picture, “Those kids must have wonderful parents.” But parents of those family pictures know the story behind the picture that was taken.

For example, we took a family Christmas picture many years ago where the picture came out really well but the story behind our family when that picture was taken was very different than the impression people probably had when they saw our picture. In this particular picture we

asked our son Jake to be Joseph, but he refused and his reasoning was because Joseph doesn't have a sword. I said, "Well, Jake, no one in the nativity has a sword." Jake says, "Yes, they do. The shepherds have swords. And I want a sword." I said, "Jake, there is no sword in the nativity." He demanded to be a shepherd with a sword. So to calm him down and allow him to be in the picture because mom wants a beautiful Christmas picture, we gave Jake a cane, which he called a sword. So then we said to our son Ben, "Then, Ben, will you be Joseph? We need a Joseph in the nativity scene." Ben said, "No, I'm not going to be Joseph. I want a sword. If Jake gets a sword, then I should get a sword." Again, I said, "Ben, there are no swords in the nativity scene." Then I said, "How about this? Would you be a wise man?" Ben said, "I don't want to be a wise man." I said, "How about a magi?" He didn't know what a magi was and said, "I don't want to be a magi." I said, "Ben, will you be a king?" He wanted to be a king because I've told him a king gets to wear a crown. He disappears and comes back with a sombrero. Ben then demands that this is his king's crown.

Then one of our daughters, Kit, declared that she was Mary. Her sister's name is Mary but so is Kit's but that's a story for another sermon. So Kit wants to be Mary, but she won't use any of her dolls to be the Baby Jesus. She has to go steal one of her little sister's dolls to be the Baby Jesus, which infuriates her little sister. She cries and cries and cries. Kit, the mother of Jesus kept knocking down her sister, the angel and they got in a knock-down drag-out fight. So we had to try to calm them down and finally we put Baby Jesus in the cradle. This picture took over four hours to take and with all that said, there is a difference between that beautiful picture and the reality of the story.

I think the same thing happens at the nativity and if we're not careful, what we do at Christmas is, we celebrate a snapshot of the nativity. We have all the proper things in place thinking Christmas is just the way that it should be and we look at that nativity and we celebrate the snapshot instead of digesting the reality of the story. Just if you wanted to know the reality of a Christmas family photo you received you would ask the parents and the same goes for the nativity. If you want to know the reality of the Christmas story, you would ask Joseph and Mary. I would imagine like any other family that Joseph and Mary struggled with the reality of the Christmas story, that it wasn't just this beautiful snapshot of a Baby in a manger. In your homes, please don't put the wise men in the scene. I think we all need to move them a few inches away just for accuracy sake. They are not there. The shepherds come, but this is not as pristine and beautiful of a scene that we might think.

An angel had told Joseph that this Son would be born and that he would call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. That's not a new phrase for Joseph. That's not the first time that the concept of a Savior has been laid out. Wouldn't Joseph have known the prophecies about a Savior? Wouldn't he have known a little bit, maybe not how to connect the dots, but wouldn't Joseph have known, that His Son was going to save His people from their sins? The shepherds encounter the angels and the angels make a declaration that "today is born to you in the City of David, a Savior who is Christ, the Lord." Luke goes on to tell us that the shepherds make haste. They go find Mary, Joseph and the Baby lying in a manger and when they saw it, they made known to them the same that had been told them by the angel and that this Baby would be a Savior. Mary would have understood the concept of a Savior yet not necessarily how it would all play out. Certainly both Mary and Joseph would have understood the concept of a Savior.

Scripture says without a blood sacrifice there's no forgiveness of sins. What blood sacrifice? Does this mean that Jesus is going to be like a Priest where He is going to go find a

perfect lamb and that is going to be the blood sacrifice? What is this blood sacrifice? When Scripture says that Mary treasured up these things and pondered them in her heart, I think it means a whole lot more than what most of us who have children did. When we had children, we all treasured up and pondered. We thought about the child. We were overwhelmed by the reality of having a child, what they would become and what would happen to them? Yet, I think it goes way beyond that. I think what Mary was pondering was how this Son of hers that she just gave birth to would be a Savior and in what way will He forgive His people of their sins.

I think as Joseph and Mary would consider the Old Testament prophecies, I think it's inconceivable that they wouldn't be familiar with Isaiah or wouldn't have heard the prophecies of Isaiah. At whatever level that they had heard the prophecy of Isaiah and his specific prophecy about a Savior, don't you think as Jesus grew that Joseph (dad) and Mary (mom) went to find out about these prophecies of Isaiah? Don't you think they wanted to know what the prophets of old said about a Savior and the way that this would play out? Isaiah 52:7 says, *[7] How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."* That's not hard for a mom and dad to digest about their Child.

Hear these next words from Isaiah which is a description of the Savior. Isaiah 53:3–12 says *[3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.*

[4] Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

[7] He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. [8] By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? [9] And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth.

[10] Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. [11] Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Can you imagine Mary and Joseph pondering all this about their Child? This would be hard to digest in many respects. Joseph and Mary would have eventually connected those dots but perhaps not that night. Although we do know they didn't understand fully that He would be crucified on a cross but this text is describing the function of this Savior that was prophesied. The description in this text doesn't quite fit that beautiful nativity scene. There's nothing wrong with the nativity scene. Just know there's a deeper story there. Just know that it's a beautiful story of Christ being born, but He is born a Savior. He is born because of sin, iniquity and to win people back to the Lord.

When the angel tells Mary that she is going to have a Child and that Joseph will not be the father of that Child, but the Holy Spirit will come upon her, Luke 1:38 records, *[38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word."* And the angel departed from her. I believe that same submissive, but at a much greater level, a response is going to be necessary when she has to say, instead of, "let it be done to me, according to Your Word" but "let it be done to my Son, according to Your Word." Are you a parent? Which would you choose? That's not hard. Fill in the blank. I don't care what it is. "Let it be done to me instead of my child." Absolutely. If it's painful, I'll take it before my children take it. "Let it be done to my Son according to Your Word" – that same submission was going to be called upon her as she mothered Jesus.

The full story of the nativity has to involve Him being a Savior. It has to involve this harshness. It has to involve this process of Him taking on the sins of the world. It has to involve Him bringing peace, true, genuine peace. I was repeatedly in the last couple of weeks drawn by the Spirit to this 103rd Psalm and as I tried to ponder the celebration and tried to understand the full story of Christmas as we come to the Communion Table, I think it captures for us the essence of what we're here to do.

The first thing the psalmist declares is that he wants to, "Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name." What is the first and greatest commandment? It is to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and he wants to praise the Lord with everything in him. This would include acknowledging or needing to acknowledge which parts aren't focused upon the Lord. What in my life isn't submitted to the Lord? What part of me isn't blessing the Lord or praising the Lord or worshiping the Lord or adoring the Lord? As I acknowledge and confess that before the Lord I can say, "Bless the Lord, Oh my soul and all that is within me." All of me should be blessing the Lord, praising the Lord, but I also want to know all about the Lord. I don't want the snapshot or just the pretty picture. That's fine to get me started, but I want to know the full story.

Then the psalmist says "Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all His benefits." In other words, I want to know everything about the Lord. I want you to know everything about the Lord and he begins to list some of these benefits. He declares, "Who forgives all your iniquity..." Pick your favorite word in that sentence. I'll take the word 'all'. Forgive all your iniquity – He will forgive all of our sins. The psalmist says that the Lord does not deal with us according to our sins, He doesn't repay us according to our iniquities. In verses 11 and 12 he says, *[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.*

We don't come to this Table to remind the Lord of past sins. We do come and confess present sins, but He has removed past sins. He's removed the guilt. He's removed the shame as far as you could possibly imagine. He says, "He forgives all your iniquity. He heals all your diseases." Jesus makes all things new and due to the fact we have an incredibly limited finite focus on, "He heals all our diseases" we actually think of diseases. Once again, we miss the key word, *all*. We will eventually get a new body, celebrate in the new heavens and the new earth and we will have all our diseases healed by the Lord who makes everything new. He redeems your life from the pit, literally rescuing you from hell. Redeemed is to be bought back, to be repurchased. He repurchased us with His Son. He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. We come into this world crowned by sin. Somewhere along the way, we decide to try to crown ourselves with other things, typically things of this world. What Jesus does to us, is He puts His

stamp upon us so, instead of identifying us to us, He identifies us as His. So He crowns us with steadfast love and with His mercy.

The psalmist goes on to say that He satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. May nothing in this world ever satisfy us, other than the blessings of the Lord, to know God and to worship Him. As we do that, then our youth is renewed, like the eagles. It reminds me in the Scripture of Caleb who at 85 years old says, “My strength is now, as my strength was then” (Joshua 14:11). Practically speaking, no, it’s not for we could prove that. Spiritually speaking, yes it is, because the Lord is still the source of Caleb’s strength. So as you come to this Table, forget not all His benefits. Come to the Table with the full story of Christmas. Don’t come to the Table in a snapshot. Don’t come to the Table simply to add Communion to a part of your Christmas tradition or celebration, but know what we come to the Table to do. We treasure, we ponder every aspect of the Lord. We want to have firsthand knowledge of the Lord, and we want to know everything about Him. So, we forget not.

I would put an asterisk here and say 2020 has been a hard year. Forget not though, don’t do what I’m inclined to do. So I’m speaking to myself as much as I’m speaking to you. You know what I want to do? I want to forget it and set it aside. I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I want to be done with it but don’t do that. Forget not, because it’s in years like 2020 to understand the Lord fully. What is it the Lord has taught us about ourselves personally in 2020? What is it the Lord has revealed about Himself to us that we wouldn’t have known maybe any other way? It took this. That’s our fault but it took this to get us to understand something about the Lord.

The psalmist would not have set aside 2020. How do I know that? It is because the psalmist said, “The Lord does not always chide.” What does that tell you? The psalmist has been chided by the Lord. He says, “The Lord is not always angry.” This means the psalmist has received the anger, the wrath of the Lord, not the full wrath of the Lord, praise the Lord, but the psalmist has received anger from the Lord. The psalmist has lived under that heavy hand of the Lord. Praise the Lord that He does not always chide, that He does not always exist in anger, but the psalmist also says that the Lord is merciful and gracious and slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. If you have been walking with the Lord this year, you can give personal testimony to that. You can say the Lord is so patient with me. The Lord is so slow to be angry. He should have been much more angry, so many more times angry with me. The Lord abounds in steadfast love.

We come to this Table in accordance with the very words of our Savior, who said, “Come in remembrance of Me.” Another way to say that is forget not. Come embracing the full story. As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. We don’t have the full story of Christmas if we don’t understand the Table. We don’t understand the nativity if we don’t understand the need for the body and the blood of Christ. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Most gracious Heavenly Father, we do embrace this calling of the psalmist, Lord. It’s our heart’s desire to bless You, to worship You with all that is within us, Lord. There is that, that we need to acknowledge that is within us, that isn’t a blessing to You that doesn’t praise You and honor You. We confess that before You. Lord, we want to know You, not simply know about You but we want to have firsthand personal knowledge of You. So when we pray, if there be any here who don’t know You personally, would You use the reality of the full story of Christmas to draw

them to trust in Christ as their Savior and as their Lord? Lord, would You lead us to your Table as we proclaim the sacrifice of Jesus, saving His people from their sins and we declare the call of the psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O, you His angels, you mighty one who do His Word. Blessed the Lord, all His hosts, His ministers who do His will. Bless the Lord, all His works in all places of dominion." Bless the Lord, O, our soul and all that is within us bless His holy Name. We pray in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.