

“A Crescendo of Praise”

Psalm 103

So tonight we are continuing that mini series on the on the Book of Songs. Pastor Sae Young Park has already set the table for us very beautifully and a couple of weeks ago where he presented a wisdom psalm to us from Psalm chapter one, and then, last Sunday night, as all of us since Psalm 122 and our attention this evening is going to shift just slightly to a third type or genre of psalm in Psalm 103, and it is called a Psalm of praise. So if you take your Bible, turn with me now to Psalm 103 while you're turning, this is another one of the Psalms of David. David wrote over nearly half of the books, of the Psalms that we know by name. And, likely this one was written a little bit later in his life, because I think that's revealed to us by the fact of the depth of the awareness that he reveals, regarding not only his sin, but also the priceless worth of knowing that he's been forgiven. We're going to look at the entire Psalm. I'm going to read it now, out loud, as you follow along Psalm 103, beginning with verse one:

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 all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. Verse six. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his stead. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquity. 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. Verse 13, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him, for he knows our frame. He remembers that we are just as for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field. For when the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place is known no more. But the steadfast love 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 to do his commandments. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. Verse 20. Bless the Lord, O you, his angels, you mighty ones. You do his word, obeying the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Heavenly father, we do join now with the psalmist David in his desire to bless your holy name. You alone are God, and you alone are worthy of all praise. Teach us now and help us. Help us to

learn how to live. Exalting your incredible words so we might glorify your matchless name. We ask this in the name of your son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Well, this psalm or song of praise is filled with poetic beauty from start to finish. If you ever want to understand, looking at, the Book of Psalms, you have to realize you're looking at a hymnal. We are looking at the hymnal of the Old Testament church, the very hymnal that Jesus himself would have had in his hands, and even sung from as he was in the synagogues before he taught God's Word.

So this is a hymn just filled with poetic beauty, but also is a hymn that just stirs my imagination, imagination as to what the music must have sounded like. John one day is going to arrange this for us in a very beautiful setting, but I would love to have heard what it is sound like when David picked up his lyre and he played and he sang Psalm 103 himself.

Well, as David begins this Psalm, it's almost as if he starts out doing a solo. In the opening five verses, he simply sings personally about praising God for his own salvation. But then, beginning with verse six and going through verse 19, it says, though he has now invited the congregation in the nation itself to join him in this song, as they praise the Lord and focus on the providence of God as seen in his dealings with his people.

And then David finishes by proclaiming the preeminence of God over all creation. In verses 22-24, the heavenly host and all creation join David and the congregation in singing God's praise so we can kind of track with this crescendo of praise as it goes from start to finish. It starts a little bit softly, then it grows in volume. As more people join in, realizing how wonderful it is to be able to praise the Lord.

And finally, it's not just God's people here on earth, but it is all creation itself singing praise to Almighty God. So let's look now, beginning with David praising God for his own salvation again. In the opening verses, the psalmist begins simply by giving us a bit of a glimpse into his own. I think personal introspection. He is rousing his soul.

For some reason. We are not told the exact reason, but he is now talking to himself, saying, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Then in verse two, bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Twice in these verses David calls himself to praise the Lord, to bless the Lord, his, his Lord and his God.

But you know why would David need to do this? And what does he mean when he says, bless the Lord as compared to when the Lord blesses us? Well, I believe we can answer the why. The why behind what? Why is David even saying to himself, bless the Lord, O my soul, I think we can

simply look at our own walk with the Lord, our own personal experience, and we can identify those times where maybe it's just the struggles of life, the ordinariness of life.

Or maybe it's a relationship that's been strained, or maybe something else has gone on at work, or in home or the family. The extended family. Something is going on that has crowded our attention away from praising the Lord. It's so easy for us, isn't it, just to look at this level of life, to look at the things that we see on the horizon? Because they look so real, they look so tangible, and they feel so real when you're about to lose a job and, and things are just changing and you don't like the way things are going. But David is now calling us with him, as he calls himself, deliberately set your mind on praising the Lord. But now, as David goes on to say, bless the Lord, we know from Psalm one what it is to be blessed by the Lord.

And that Psalm we're told, blessed is a man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, and so on. We know to be blessed by the Lord is to receive from him the good things that he wants to bestow upon us, especially to know that we have been made right with God, no merit of our own, as we sang earlier tonight.

But we have been made right with God simply by the love of God in Jesus Christ. That is what it is for us to be blessed by the Lord. But what does David mean when he says, blessed Lord, is it remotely similar in any way? I think J Alex Motor can help us just a little bit by providing clarity with this statement when we bless, or rather when the Lord blesses us, he reviews our needs and responds to them. But when we bless the Lord, we review his excellences and we respond to them. So God blessing us. He looks at our needs. When we bless the Lord, we are declaring to God who God is from what he is revealed to us of his own excellence. Thesis on attributes the very nature of God Himself. And according to this, David now begins this particular psalm of blessing, praising God first for who he is. But then, almost simultaneously, he turns to praising God for what he has done because they kind of go hand in glove when we praise God just for who he is, what we know of him, we can't help us see how many ways he has worked in our hearts and our lives, and all the blessings that he has given to us. So David goes straight from praising God for who he is, to praising God for what he has done.

And he begins by, I think, sounding God's praise with what R.C. Sproul has described as the ultimate attribute of God. Summing up all of his attributes in one word, David praises God for his holiness. He says to us again, bless the Lord, O my soul. All that is within me, my emotions, my body, my spirit, my soul, bless his holy name.

So when we praise God for existing forever, absolutely separated from sin, God is show not us that he is so able to be God perfect and holy. He can't even look on sin and continue to be God. If that were possible. And when we bless him for his holiness, we are saying, Lord, you alone can meet this need. You alone are the one who can bring me holiness in some measure. So God,

who God is and what God does, can easily be summed up by that word, holiness. But then David turns his attention immediately from who God is to what he has done.

When he says, forget not all his benefits. Well, here the psalmist calls himself intentional, only to recall the wondrous things that God has actually done for him. David is aware when a man's thinking focuses on the undeserved blessings of God in salvation, his spirit is humbled. His heart overflows in gratitude because his thoughts now have been reordered by the priority of God.

It's almost as if David is reminding himself, and even at the same time us of what Paul would letters later say to set your mind on things above, not on the things of the earth, so that the default of our lives might be reset on what is eternal rather than temporary. And once we've regained this eternal perspective, then, like David, the goodness of God flows freely from our lips.

Now in rapid fire succession, David pulls out just five of the immediate blessings the benefits of God that he recalls, and he brings them to our attention. He praises God first for God being the one who forgives all his iniquity. Now, whenever you are reading in the Old Testament, you find many different words that we think might be synonyms for sin. We have sin, we have trespass, we have transgression, we have iniquity. I think the Hebrew word for iniquity is probably one of the most important words that we can learn is the word alone. And when we talk about God forgiving our iniquities, well, now I talking about God forgiving the actual trespass, the transgression against God, or against some one made in God's image. But he is also encompassing, forgiving the very consequences of sin. So when David says, the Lord forgives our iniquity, David probably knows full well what the consequences of sin look like. The baby died. The sword never departed from his house. He's been enduring the consequences of sin for some time since his sin with Bathsheba and yet here he says, God, you are the one who forgives iniquity.

In other words, you forgive even the wrongs that I've done and the price tag that I'm paying for it. And God, you even minimize somewhat the very judgment that I deserve. Bless the Lord, for he forgives our iniquity. He continues in verse three B it's telling us that God heals all of our diseases, whether they are diseases in this life, because of the consequences to our sin, or diseases in this life, because of just the general presence of sin overall.

But he tells us that God will heal us of all of our diseases, whether it be now in the life that we live temporarily on earth or in eternal life yet to come. In verse four, he moves on naturally, then to praising God for salvation itself. He alone delivers sinners from the pit of eternal spiritual death or destruction.

But more than this, he continues to bless God, continues to bless us beyond our wildest imagination. He cleanses. I'm sorry. He elevates us to the status of kings and queens. He, David

says. He crowns us. He crowns us with steadfast love and mercy. Well, God and his steadfast love and his compassionate mercy gives us these crowns at which we then can restore them or return them at his feet. Testimonies of his redeeming love. Then David in five goes on, that this God who is worthy to be praised personally by all who have been redeemed, is also the one who satisfies us with good, so that our youth is restored like the eagles. What a great parallel or beautiful parallel this is to Isaiah chapter 40, verse 31, where Isaiah tells us, they who wait on the Lord shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not grow weary. They shall walk and not faint. And here David is reminding himself, that's exactly what praising God does for him. So in these opening verses, David is pointed us to what God has done for him personally. But now, as he continues to move on, he looks to God's providential care for his people, both past and present.

Reflecting on God's goodness in the past, he turns to the life of Moses. He says in verse six, the Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. He's praising the Lord because the Lord is the one who righted every wrong that was being done for a better part of 400 years.

As Israel was oppressed by Egypt enslaved taskmasters. They didn't care. They were cruel, they were harsh. And now David praises the Lord for writing that wrong. David realizes, and he starts, I think, even to think through about that great moment of the Exodus, how God led his people out. And when he recalls the mighty acts of God the Lord made known to Moses, the acts to the people of Israel, he can't help but be thinking of all the different plagues that God sent upon Egypt, one after another, after another.

He can't help but recall also how God provided, the manner in the wilderness water from the rock, and led them with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. Yet despite all this, Israel continued murmuring, complaining, rebelling. And as we read in verse eight, the Lord proved that he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding instead fast love, even as judgment fell on Israel for its persistent sinning, and this stubborn generation perished in the wilderness, God vividly portrayed that he will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

Verse ten, he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. Well, God's perfect and holy wrath banished even Moses from entering the Promised Land. God would not reprove, reprimand, or rebuke, or take his children to task forever. God never judges the sins of the father or the mother on the next generation.

His wrath against sin is always controlled and it's always just so. Joshua would lead the next generation into the land that God had promised to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. God would prove himself faithful to himself, keeping his word and acting in keeping with his holy name,

rather than repaying sinners with the justice they deserved, or compensating them in full measure with the consequences of their sin. God, in keeping with his goodness and his grace, repaid good for evil. He bestowed countless benefits and blessings on those who were unworthy of his love. David now sets up what I think is one of the best comparisons or contrasts that he can imagine to help us comprehend something of the enormity of God's mercy and his love. Look at verses 11 and 12, 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?

Well, one of the things I really appreciate about Pastor Doriani on him was whenever Pastor Dan would stand up here and he would just rattle off some scientific knowledge as though he was someone who knew it, didn't just look it up online. I'm going to do my best to just take a little bit of imitation on Pastor Dan tonight. If we were to take an imaginary spaceship, launch that spaceship, and if that imaginary spaceship could actually travel consistently 153,000mph, that spaceship would take 26 days or almost a month to reach the sun. Because the sun is approximately 93 million miles away. But let's go further than that. I've had the joy. Pam and I have been with friends out in the out in the mountains of Colorado, away from the light pollution. Have you ever seen the Milky Way? I mean, seen it with your naked eye, without light pollution and just been overwhelmed by the enormity and the beauty? Well, the Milky Way, we're told, is 26,000 light years from the earth. And the light here, according to the scientists, is the distance that light can travel in a single year. And they say that that distance is 5.88 trillion with 80 miles. That's a light year. So David is telling us when he is showing us as far that the as far as the East is from the West, the Lord has taken our transgressions, that he also is showing us that that's how far away we are forgiving 26,000 times 5.88 trillion away.

So David now is given a great reason for us to bless the Lord. The steadfast love of the Lord is beyond human. Measuring his forgiveness as far as the East is from the West. That's how far God removes our transgressions from us. Now have the psalmist chosen to say, as far as the north is from the south now was still been a pretty far distance. But as you travel north at a particular spot in time, you're going to come across the polar ice cap of the North Pole, and suddenly you'll no longer be traveling north, but you'll be heading south. But because the psalmist says, as far as the east is from the west, he has given us something that is just incredibly immeasurable.

I want you to think about heading east on the equator, and you just continue heading east. Now. You can keep heading east and east and east, and you're never going to find west, because there's no point, magnetic or otherwise, at which our distance and our direction changes. So God inspired the psalmist deliberately to say farther than you can even imagine, those sins that you've struggled with when you are forgiven by God.

That's how far they are. And he, David, is calling not only himself, but the entire nation. In this section of this psalm to rejoice in God's incredible mercy and grace. He goes on in verse 13 as a father shows compassion to his children. So the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him, not only for God's loving kindness and his forgiveness immeasurably transcendent, but God also himself draws imminently close in compassionate love to those who fear him. He is tender with us as sinners, more tender, I think, even in the most caring and loving human father that we can ever imagine.

To paraphrase Derek Sidner slightly, if immeasurable distances are one way of expressing immeasurable love and mercy, the intimacy of the family is another. By the first, we are led out into a seemingly infinite space to walk at liberty. But by the second we are brought safely home. Now, when David in verse 14 says, For he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust.

Both of these words, he and we are very emphatic, for he knows what we are. David rejoices in the fact that God, who is so other than himself, understands perfectly well how weak and frail David as a man is, how weak and frail we as a people of God are. He says. He remembers that we are dust from dust we were made from to dust we shall return. And David takes this, moment just to remind us that God tenderly loves and cares for his own. He remembers just how creaturely we actually are. In verse 15, David amplifies this even further. He continues and says, as for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it and it's gone, and his place knows it no more within in comparison to our temporary existence, he says in 17 but the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant, and remember to do his commandments. Comparatively, now David has just ended up using picking any particular man or woman that's ever lived on the face of the earth. And he says, it's almost as if that particular man or that particular woman would never be remembered beyond their own lifespan.

Yeah, God's steadfast, immovable love extends eternally to those who fear him. This is now the third time in just seven verses that David has stressed the familial fear of the Lord, which leads to obedience. But now he adds a promise to the coming generations, the fullness of the covenantal relationship, enjoyed by one generation whose hearts are turned toward God, continues to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

Most assuredly, David in verse 18 is thinking back to Deuteronomy seven verse nine, and this promise remains steadfast and sure, because verse 19, the Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules. Overall, nothing can assail the throne room of God. No one can enter apart from a divine invitation. And though we do not see it fully actualized yet, David

is saying, God's kingdom extends not just to himself, not just to the nation Israel, not just to every believer, from every tribe and every nation, from every generation of mankind.

But he is ruling over the entirety of creation, all the affairs of men, of men and beast, angels and demons, over all times and over all ages. And is this truth, I believe, that leads David beyond praising God for his personal salvation and beyond the intentional praise of God for how he providentially cared for his people to the climax of the peak crescendo of this Psalm of praise.

Now David praises God for his preeminence over all creation. Look again in verses 20 to 22. What's more, the psalmist says, bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul, caught up in the magnitude of who God is and all that God has done, David now enjoins the hosts of heaven itself and all creation to sing with him. This song of praise. Angels are those who have ever since the moment of their creation, been before the face of the Lord, obeying his every command. And David here in lists, these mighty ones, are these warriors of strength in praising the Lord in verse 21, whether he's emphasizing another, the vastness of the heavenly host, or maybe even picturing some sort of other category of created order in the heaven above, David almost issues a repeat command bless the Lord, all his host, his ministers who do his will.

Later in the book of Hebrews we read, he makes his angels spirits or winds, and his ministers a flame of fire. And in Isaiah six, when the prophet was in despair over his sinful condition, it was one of his seraphim that flew to him, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and he said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. Clearly the host of heaven does God's bidding immediately as their of praise now categorically having encompassed the entire host of heaven, David issues the command yet one more time. Verse 22. Bless the Lord all his works in all places of his dominion, all the redeemed, and all the heavenly host there insufficient to give God the praise that is worthy of his name.

So David now enlists the entirety of all the created order, both animate and inanimate, in praising God, David blesses or praises the Lord for all God has done for him personally. He praises the Lord and invites others to do the same to celebrate all that God has done collectively for his people. And the psalmist now has rallied all the host of heaven and all creation to join in this song of worship together, rejoicing over God's providential care. We now have worked through this Psalm with his ever increasing crescendo of praise. How can we do anything less than praise the Lord? After all, this entire Psalm is in praise of Jesus Christ. He is the one who perfectly lived out everything that this Psalm describes. He alone satisfied the Lord's demands. He alone provided propitiation for our sins, taking the full wrath of God on himself, and only he is the firstborn from the dead, securing and guaranteeing a resurrection.

You know, I think it's important for us on occasion just to ask ourselves some questions. How long has it actually been since I was in awe of Jesus Christ, my salvation, and all that he has done for me? Maybe it's also important for us to spend some time retracing God's goodness, his benefits to us as a church. As we're looking ahead to Pastor Red getting here next week, we can look back and historically, we can trace the 65 years of blessing. After blessing. And we can bless the Lord, O my soul, all of his people together for all the things that he has done. And we can praise him. Even looking ahead to what he yet will do, because we do know the best is still to come. And I'm not speaking simply for us as a church, but I am speaking for us eternally. The best is yet to come, because the day will come when our lives reach the end of their journey. And God says to us, come home, good and faithful servant, and we will behold our Savior face to face, and we will bless the Lord, O my soul.

So beginning tonight, continuing tomorrow morning, let's make it our goal to begin every day as a dear saint in our church back in Colorado used to do. And the stone was one of Pam's mentors. And she shared with Pam that every day before I get out of bed, I take a least a full minute to do anything, nothing other than praise the Lord recounting his goodness. What would it do for us if every day we got up and we started just enumerating after one, after another, after another, all the blessings that God indeed has given to us, that we might bless the Lord for everything we know him to be, that we might bless the Lord for everything we know he has done, for all the glorious benefits of our salvation that are yet to be ours. Let's bless the Lord.

Father, we thank you that we can praise you, for you are worthy of praise. Lord, you alone are worthy of praise and great honor and glory. And help us, Lord, in those times where in the busyness of life, the cares of this life tend to bag us down and we lose sight of just how truly you have bestowed rich blessings upon us. Lord, would you help us to live in such a way that our lives actually reflect a heart of gratitude, a heart of gratitude for who you are and what you have done and what you yet will do as you tarry, either in coming back, or until that moment when you bring us home. Let us live and die as those who praise the Lord, so that others might see that there is a God in heaven who loves to restore men and women to right relationship with himself. He loves us so much that he sent his Son. And now, Lord, let us bless the Lord as we praise you for what you have done. In Jesus name, Amen.