

Satisfy My Soul

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[0 : 00] Oh, good morning, everyone. Isn't this great? I'd love to see it. It's been a while since! We've had it decorated like this, but isn't it great? And we're looking forward so much! to everything that's happening at the end of the week. So, yeah, we need to continue to pray, don't we? Well, Psalm 103. What a psalm. It's an amazing psalm, isn't it? And we're going to explore it a bit this morning, but we need God's help to truly understand it, don't we?

So, let's just ask him to help. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are such a great God and you have done marvellous things. And we feel so inadequate to express what you have done. But we thank you for all your many blessings. We pray now that you would, by your Spirit, move among us, speak to our hearts and to our souls, and may we just know your presence with us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So, I've called this Satisfying My Soul. You might have missed it, what with the Olympics and all the riots going on up and down the country. But two weeks ago at dawn, I don't know if you noticed it, slipped in the news there, on a Saturday morning, 4th of August, a stunning event happened on the island of Sicily. Anybody know what it was? No? Well, I'll show you.

Mount Etna. 3,300 feet high on the island of Sicily, 3,000 metres even. And it erupted again. It quite frequently erupts and it's sending plumes of steam and ash high up into the atmosphere, followed by a dramatic light show of molten rock and lava that had welled up from beneath the earth's crust. I'm no geologist, but that's how I understand it happens. It comes from deep within the earth's crust. And it wells up and explodes into the atmosphere from deep inside the earth. Well, what's that got to do with Psalm 103?

[2 : 22] Well, I don't want to over-dramatise things, but I don't think you can actually with this Psalm. This is a picture of the sort of thing we see described here in our Psalm this morning.

David, you remember, he's the shepherd boy who became the king of Israel, God's people, the Israelites, and he wrote a song which expresses his deepest feelings, his emotions that welled up from the depths of his inner being and it erupts into a kind of explosion of praise to God.

And he exclaimed, praise the Lord, O my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name. So what on earth brought this on for David? And this is what we're going to be looking at this morning. First of all, we need to look at what do we mean by the soul. We don't often talk about the soul, do we, these days?

And if you ask the average person in the street, I guess they would be pretty confused. So, you know, excuse me. Can you tell me what a soul is?

[3 : 36] I don't know, mate. Sort of fish, isn't it? The sort of thing they... You find it Dover, don't you? In it.

Well, okay. Mrs, do you know a soul when you see one? Well, yes, yes, yes. She lives next door. She's a wonderful, dear old soul. Or there's another guy over here and we say, do you believe there is a soul? Do you have a soul?

No such thing, old chap. We're all descended from animals. We've evolved out of animals. No such thing as a soul. At the end of life, that's the end of it. Forget it.

So, is that the sort of reaction we get about a soul? What's your understanding of what the soul is? David clearly believes here he's got a soul.

[4 : 38] Bless the Lord, O my soul. He described it as his inmost being. In other words, at the core of who he is as a person. And the Bible is very clear in many passages that we all have a soul.

Everyone in this room has a soul this morning. And it's essentially what distinguishes us from all other living things and animals. In Genesis 2-7 we read this, that the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And the man became a living being. And some versions translate that as a soul. The man became a living soul. In other words, God breathes that life into a person they become.

They didn't exist before, but the soul is created at birth. It's an amazing moment when we hear the cry of a baby for the first time, isn't it? And those of you that are mums and dads will know that.

A new human being has just been born. A wonderful new body, if all has gone well. Entering the world full of life and expectation. But what we're also seeing is the arrival of a new soul.

[5 : 50] A spiritual being. A human being. A soul. And it's really the essence of who that person is and will become. As a particular character, a conscience.

And most importantly, this sort of spiritual being breathed into the body by God. A lot of people don't believe that we have a spiritual dimension to our beings. But the Bible is very clear about it.

We do. And while our bodies do grow and develop into adulthood, they also begin to deteriorate.

Things start going wrong. And the older you get, the more you realise that.

And sorry, folks, they eventually pass away. We do die at some point. We never know quite when.

And David recognises all too clearly this in verses 15 to 16.

You'll see the life of mortals is like grass. They flourish like a flower of the field. The wind blows over it and it is gone. And it's placed to remember it no more. So is that it?

[6 : 55] Is that the end of everything? Well, I have to tell you this morning, no, it's not the end of everything. Our mortal bodies are just temporary houses or tents.

The Bible talks about, Paul in his letters talks about tents for our souls, our spiritual beings. And this is the amazing thing. They never die. They never die.

They live forever. Perhaps you've never thought about that before. At the resurrection, they will be housed in a new immortal body. Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians, verses 1 to 5.

Let's just read that quickly. 2 Corinthians 5, verses 1 to 5. So 2 Corinthians 5, 1 to 5. 5. with illness and suffering of various sorts.

We groan in a burden because we do not wish to be unclothed, but to be clothed instead with our heavenly being. And here there's this longing to be clothed with this heavenly being, this heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life, eternal life.

[8 : 34] Now the one who has fashioned us, just mark this, now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

So that is why we've been created. We have a soul and it's going to go on forever. So that's

important, isn't it? It's important to know the state of our soul and what's going to happen to it.

It really matters. It really does matter. And we've got to explore that a bit. But there's a problem

here, isn't there? There is a problem. For all of us human beings, everyone in this room, since our

first ancestors, we read about Adam and Eve, don't we, in Genesis, rebelled against our creator,

God, in the Garden of Eden, we too have all inherited that same capacity to rebel against our creator, God.

We either refuse to acknowledge that he even exists, as many people do in the communities around us, or we try to avoid any mention of him. We just don't want to think about him.

Or we just focus on the here and now and what the world around us has to offer and just ignore

him. And the Bible describes this as sin. It's this rebellion against God, this wanting to push him away and not have anything to do with him.

[9 : 52] And this is the problem that our souls have, our inmost beings, because they yearn, they long to have a relationship with the creator, God. Do you ever feel that?

Let me ask you, do you ever feel that sort of longing for something that really satisfied your soul, your innermost being? The Bible describes us as, our souls as being in a kind of slavery, oppressed, constantly dissatisfied with what life has to offer.

So we turn to other things. It may be a craving for success. Nothing particularly wrong in that, but in sport or business, anything that seems to give a purpose for living. I was very struck by, I'm a great fan of the Olympics, as Alison will tell you, ad nauseam.

But we, you know, one of my heroines is Keely Hodgerton. Do you see her win the gold medal in the 800 metres?

In my day, it was yards, you know, so it's 440 yards, I used to do, but 800 metres is too much for me. But she's great, isn't she? And she was there, streaking her head, got a gold medal.

[11 : 01] But in the interview, before she ran, it was on the sort of BBC adverts, if they have such a thing, she said, I used to live to run, but now I run to live.

Her whole life is about running, being, getting a gold medal. She got silver, she's now got gold. What happens next? Well, I want to break the next world record. That's what she lives for. She lives to run. And that's how we can be. We can sort of forget about our eternal dimension, if you like, and we just live for the here and now and try and be successful in that.

But these things never truly satisfy the soul. There'll be a time when Keely has to give up running, unfortunately, but it's true. These things don't really satisfy our innermost being, our souls. For some, life does get tough and we lose hope. We go around smashing things up in riots or turning to things to deaden our soul, perhaps. Alcohol, food, drugs, pornography, whatever it might be.

[12:05] We live without God and without hope in the world. The unfortunate thing is, if our souls are not truly satisfied in this life, to have that sort of learning and that longing truly satisfied deep within us and we pass away in that condition, our souls will pass into an eternity.

They don't die. They'll pass into an eternity forever, longing for this peace and satisfaction which they can never have. So it's so important, this, isn't it? It's so important to know that your soul is satisfied.

These longings that you have within us, both you and me, we have this longing within us that needs to know God and be satisfied. So how on earth can David be so ecstatic when he reflects on these things?

What's his secret? Well, we're going to find out. How did God satisfy David's soul? Verse 2, David instructs his soul.

So the first part of this psalm is about David instructing his soul, his innermost being, not to forget what God has done for him. God has done great things for David and he wants his soul to remember that.

[13:21] And maybe some of you this morning are feeling a bit struggling with your spiritual lives and your relationship with God. But we need to remind ourselves, as David says, praise the Lord my soul and forget not all his benefits.

In other words, look here, soul, don't forget what great things God has done for you. So what is it that God has done that's so amazing? We see that in verses 3 to 5. He forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.

He redeems your life from the pit. He crowns you with love and compassion and he satisfies your desires with good things so your youth is renewed like the eagles.

Now then, we can just briefly go through some of these things. We don't naturally recognise that we need to be forgiven. Certainly David did. I'm going to show my age now.

One of my favourite bands years ago, probably still is to some extent, is the who. And you might say, well, who are they? Well, they write a song called Barbara O'Reilly and one of the lines that always sticks in my mind in this is, I don't need to fight to prove I'm right.

[14:38] I don't need to be forgiven. Well, I'm sorry. Roger, adultery or whatever. I'm sorry. You do need to be forgiven.

We do need to be forgiven. David knew he did. You remember he committed adultery. That led on to committing murder. So he knew he had to be forgiven.

We might not have done things like that. But if we're honest with ourselves, we know that we're not perfect and we fall short of God's standards, of holiness and goodness. No one can stand up here, I'm sure, and say, ever since I was born, I've never done anything wrong.

We don't need to teach children to be naughty, do we? It happens. It's part of our, it's like a disease, like a virus that's in us. There's this inherent tendency to rebel against God, to do and think things that our consciousness tell us are not right.

And even after we're saved, sometimes we do that. We need to be forgiven. We need to go on being forgiven. And our sin-sick inmost beings need to be healed.

[15:45] So how are we healed and forgiven? Well, the next stanza says it, he redeems your life from the pit. In other words, God reaches out to you and he lifts you out of this pit that you're in, something you can't escape from yourself, and very often a pit of your own making.

And then as you cry out to him for forgiveness and restoration, he redeems your soul. He buys you back.

And I could tell you, I could take you to a room in a hall of residence at Reading University where I used to study, where I, one night, things have been going wrong in my life.

And I can remember lying in my bed and just thinking, I was sinking into this deep, deep black pit. It was horrible. And it was frightening. And so all I could do was look up and say what was written in a birthday card that my parents' pastor had sent me.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding. And so that's what I tried to do. And over a period of time, the Lord did rescue me out of that pit.

[16:57] He redeems your life from the pit. He's telling, David's telling his soul, look, soul, just look what God has done. He's redeemed your life out of a pit. He pays the price for your forgiveness so your soul can be released and set free.

And to some extent, David's being prophetic here. He didn't know the Lord Jesus Christ. We do. But he was looking forward to the time when the Messiah would be sent, this great saviour that the Jewish people were looking forward to.

Looking forward to that time when Jesus would appear in our world to die intentionally on a Roman cross at huge cost to himself and to his Father God. That he did that in order to rescue us and to save us so that our souls could be set free.

This is what David's reminding himself. Just think about these things. Just understand what he's done. Jesus took the punishment for all our sins and as we confess them to him, he sets our souls free.

We all need that, don't we? We need our souls setting free. And what's the result of this? O soul, as David was saying. He crowns you with love and compassion.

[18:09] Your relationship with God the Father is now restored. He welcomes you with open arms, draws you into his family. You no longer have to look for identity or satisfaction in anything else.

He satisfies your soul's desires with good things. Everything that's good and wholesome and lovely and beautiful. And the result of your soul is renewed.

It's like having a new life that bubbles up from within. A vibrant kind of spiritual energy. Your youth is renewed like the eagle's soul.

Is this what you long for? Is there something missing in your life that you're not experiencing these things like David has? Do you want to experience what David did? There is hope.

And if you're in that state this morning, can I urge you to pay attention just now to what David points us to. He looks away from his own soul and he looks up to his creator God.

[19:11] And the psalm really pivots on the next verse, verse 6. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. Maybe you feel oppressed this morning.

David wants us all to know that what he has experienced, so he points us towards God's character. Who is this God that we believe in? The God that we believe in here at Bethel. What's his character like?

What's he like? What is this about his astonishing grace, the undeserved merit that he bestows upon us? So, you know, if you are feeling oppressed in your soul, it's a bit like a heavy weight of guilt that sort of weighs you down.

Perhaps the way you've lived your life in the past or maybe the way you're treating others or have treated others in the past and it weighs on your soul or perhaps it's a particular sin that you can't shake off.

And even as Christians, as believers, we can slip into these habits that are just not good for us. Perhaps we're just feeling unable to cope with all the stuff that we have to put up with in this life.

[20:27] Things are happening with our families or things around us or looking out across the world and seeing what's going on there and we just don't know which way to turn. We're oppressed.

David appeals to us to look upwards and see how and why God puts things right. So these next few verses, 6 to 12, perhaps some of the most astonishing in the whole of the Bible.

I'm glad Richard put them up earlier on. I'm so glad they're recorded for us. So we may have this impression of God, I used to, that, you know, he's remote, he's harsh, he's ready with a big stick waiting to punish us when we stare out of line.

But just look at what God through David's psalm reveals about himself. So I want you, if you've never thought about this before, even if you have and you want refreshing spiritually, just take a look at these verses.

This is our God. This is the God that we want people to know around us. This is, you know, words fail me to describe what a wonderful God we have.

[21 : 34] this is what he's saying to you this morning. I am slow to anger. I'm abounding in love. I do not always accuse you or harbour my anger forever when you step out of line.

I do not treat you as your sins deserve or repay you according to your iniquities, those things you do wrong and think that are wrong. And just look at this, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is my love for you.

Just let that sink in. The depth and the height of God's love for you in the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll come on to that in a minute. And here's the most amazing thing of all, isn't it?

As far as the east is from the west, and if you start from here and go west, you think, well, I'll come back and finish up here. But I don't. You're always going west. You never stop going west if you go that way, or if you go east and the other way around.

So it's infinite. It's total separation of all your sins as you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just let that sink in.

[22 : 46] What a God we have, a gracious and loving God. How can this happen, you might say? Well, the reason God, who is righteous, he's just, if we do things that are wrong, he must hold us accountable for what we've done, the things that we thought, those evil thoughts that we thought, anything.

He's able to forgive us. Why? Why is he able to forgive us? Because of what he has done in sending Jesus. Jesus did nothing wrong. He lived the perfect life, and yet he was sacrificed for us, as we've seen, to redeem us, to buy us back, to bring us back into fellowship with this wonderful God.

I couldn't describe it any better than Isaiah here in Isaiah 53, 4-6, but he, Jesus, was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace and satisfaction for our souls was on him, and by his wounds we, our souls, are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each one of us, has turned to our own way, and the Lord, God the Father, has laid on his own dear son, the iniquity of us all. So he took the punishment, didn't he, and took it away.

So what do we have to do? How do we respond to this, this God working righteousness and justice for us? All we need to do, and this is the most amazing thing about the gospel of Jesus Christ, all you need to do is put your faith and trust in him.

[24 : 28] Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding of things. Trust and believe. Can I urge you to do that? So there's someone here this morning who's just never done that.

I urge you to do it to have your soul satisfied and to hope of eternal life. There's just something here before I close that we need to respond, to bear in mind when we respond.

Did you notice in verse 11 it says, so great is his love for those who fear him. God's God's love for God's love for God's love for It seems there that there's a bit of a condition attached to God's love and compassion.

Maybe that's holding you back. You don't fear God, you're not terrified of him. Is that what it means? We need to fear him if we are to receive his love it seems or his compassion.

So what is that all about? Surely fear produces dread and anxiety and I think as John mentioned last week can actually make us ill. If we have this real deep sense of dread or anxiety or fear it doesn't bring peace and satisfaction surely and the Bible's full of commandments over a hundred not to fear or be afraid.

[25 : 57] So why should we be afraid of God? Why should we fear God? We don't have time to look into all this. There's a sermon in itself but in this word fear but the way we understand it today has very negative connotations done it.

It's something to be dreaded. It does lead us to a kind of fight or flight response in us and it can lead to heightened anxiety levels and actually make us ill. But the fear of God is something quite different.

I really want to get this across this morning. It's very positive. It's a positive thing in the Bible. It's not a loveless dread of God but the same sort of attitude a child might have towards a father who shows unconditional love to him or her and occasionally has to discipline them.

But it's out of love for their well-being and the child knows that. See verse 13. As a father has compassion on his children so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. So it's a kind of awe or respect although that doesn't really capture it all. We would have for a loving father a delight to be in his company because we feel safe.

[27 : 07] One commentator puts it like this and I'm rather struck by it. The right fear of God is not the gloomy flip side of joy to joy in God.

Rather it is a way of speaking about the sheer intensity of the believer's happiness in God. The sheer intensity of the believer's happiness in God.

You'll see why David was so exalting and so excited when he reflected on these things. A delighting God is not intended to be lukewarm.

A joy in God is at its purest a trembling and wonder filled even fearful joy. Can you get that?

A fearful joy. For the object of our joy is so fearfully wonderful. It's awe-inspiring. It gets us on our knees as we look up. It's what it means by the fear of God.

[28 : 11] It's a kind of overwhelming sense of awe and wonder. It's amazing grace. It's compassion, as he says, everlasting love towards us. And it results in this kind of ecstatic wonder, love and praise.

And that's how we find true satisfaction. Our true soul satisfaction. And the other point to make here is that it lasts into eternity, from everlasting to everlasting.

As we said at the beginning, our souls don't finish when we die. They go on. They're alive. They go into the presence of Jesus if we believe in him.

And you can imagine that for those that are really struggling with life, what a joy that will be if you know your sins are forgiven, that everything is well with your soul, to look forward to that place where there's no more tears, there's no more anguish or anxiety or fear of the things that are going on around us.

It's a place of glory and beauty and the presence of God. And eventually our souls will be reunited with a resurrection body and we shall live in the new heavens and the new earth, a very physical place but with spiritual bodies.

[29 : 35] Do you want that? I certainly do. So the psalm ends up, you know, David's been reflecting on all these things, he ends up with a kind of crescendo of praise.

It points us to heaven. From everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him.

Yes, our mortal bodies do die, we have to admit, but our souls, the essence of who we are, what makes us who we are with a name and a personality and a conscience, everything else.

Our souls will rest satisfied and secure in God's love until we receive our resurrected bodies, as I've just said, that will never die. It says the Lord's throne is established in heaven, ruling over all things, and one day we shall be with him forever and ever and ever.

God. It's almost as if David cannot contain his desire to praise God when he thinks of these things for all that he is, all that God has done for him, and we can do the same.

It's a bit like when a conductor of an orchestra is calling in all the various instruments and singers to a kind of crescendo of something like the hallelujah chorus in praise to the Lord, the King of all the earth.

[30 : 54] Come and praise him, your angels. Come on. Come on, angels, join with us. Come in, you mighty ones who obey his word. Come on, praise, glory, the Lord. We shouldn't hold back when we're praising, should we?

We should delight in it because God loves it. Come on, praise him, you angels. Come on, you mighty ones, obey his word. Join in the chorus, all you heavenly hosts and you servants that do his will, and come out and sing for joy, all of creation.

everything will be restored. Everything will be made good and right and lovely. And it's a kind of precursor, isn't it, to the ecstatic praise there will be in heaven when we are united forever with our saviour Jesus, who's done so much for us on that cross.

The sacrificial lamb on the throne, as it describes in Revelation, he's won victory over all sin and death and suffering. I can only end really by just reading a couple of verses from Revelation 5, verse 11.

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels numbering thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders in a loud voice they were saying worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and

wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.

[32 : 30] Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them saying to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be praise and honour and glory and power.

Amen. Amen.