

Psalm 103

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[0:00] We are looking at a series of psalms. Matt started last Sunday by looking at Psalm 121, and today we're going to look at Psalm 103.

The purpose of these psalms is to help us understand God's help for us at our time of need. So all of these psalms address needs, and so today we're going to look at Psalm 103.

I want you to notice a couple things first about Psalm 103. It has 22 verses. The 22 verses correspond to the 22 letters in the alphabet.

It's not an alphabetical psalm, but it does have the number 22. And furthermore, the first line in Psalm 103 is, Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me.

Praise his holy name. And then look at the very last line in verse 22. Praise the Lord, O my soul.

[1:10] So it begins with praise the Lord, O my soul, and it ends with praise the Lord, O my soul. The expression, praise the Lord, O my soul, is like bookends on a shelf.

It holds one end and it holds the other end, and everything in between is steady. So this is a psalm that is clearly inviting us to praise the Lord.

So eventually, when we get to the application, you shouldn't be completely shocked if one of the application is praise the Lord. But we'll get there eventually.

The psalm does begin with praise the Lord. It does end with praise the Lord. It is the bookends of the psalm. I have a friend whom I asked the other day, Do you love your work?

And he says, Love? No, I like my work. And I said, Why? He says, Well, I know what I'm doing. The people are nice. The hours are okay.

[2:19] The demands are real. They're not too heavy. And, you know, it's a good job. And then I said, Why don't you find a better job that you would love rather than just like?

And he says, Oh, no. The benefits here are fantastic. I couldn't get better benefits anywhere than with this company. So what keeps me here is not the salary and the hours.

What keeps me here are the benefits. This psalm is about benefits. To be a believer, a follower of Jesus, a disciple, involves benefits.

And so let's turn to Psalm 103, and let's take a look at the first verse. Verse 1 and 2. Verses 1 and 2.

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and don't forget all his benefits.

[3:29] So what are the benefits that we are supposed to praise the Lord for? The benefits is the way he takes care of our basic needs. And these needs are then listed for us in verse 3.

By the way, if you take a look at the back, you will find out an outline of the psalm that I gave you. This way you can follow through and take notes if you want to.

You can think about it and discuss it later on in the week, so you'll have it at least in writing. So what are these benefits? And he says in verse 3 and 4 and 5, who forgives all your sins, who heals all of your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit or the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

I've been sick before. I've had cold. And didn't think I should go to school, so I called sick.

But I want to tell you, God, not only does he forgive our sins, but he heals our diseases, and even beyond that, he redeems our life from the pit or the grave.

[5:04] The last year and a half, the Lord didn't just heal me. He redeemed my life from the grave. If it were not for the Lord, I would not be alive this time.

I would have died about half a year ago. But God delivers our life from the grave, and for which I am absolutely most thankful, and give him all the praise and the honor and the glory for his extended kindness to me this way, and in many other ways as well, but especially this way.

So, he forgives all of our sins, who heals all of our diseases, he redeems our lives from the pit, who crowns you with love and compassion.

Again, love and compassion will be quoted five times in this psalm. That is the main benefit that he's going to focus on without ignoring the other ones.

But love and compassion will show up five times. As we read through the psalms, you notice them and put a mark, and you find out that you put five marks five times.

[6:16] And then, he continues, who satisfies your desires with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

Your youth is renewed like the eagle. Some of you may say to yourself, that sounds familiar. Where have I read that before?

Why do I recognize it? Where did it come from? Well, it comes from Isaiah chapter 40, verse 31.

Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength.

They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not be tired.

He renews their strength like eagles. And so, eagles can soar. This is an interesting metaphor.

Notice what he does not say.

[7:20] He says, he renews their strength like a turkey. Or like a duck. Turkeys don't soar.

Ducks don't soar. Even in my miserable shape today, I can outrun a duck. I really can. But God does not want us to be energized like a duck, or like an ing, like a turkey, but like an eagle.

I was in Los Angeles visiting one of my best friends, family member, and his house is at the top of mountain. If you look down, you see all of Los Angeles below you.

You can really see all Los Angeles. It's a fantastic place, and you can identify some of the buildings in Los Angeles. We were sitting there looking and trying to identify, oh, there's Hollywood Boulevard.

Yes, there is Mulholland Drive. Yes. And then an eagle flew by us. It wasn't even moving its wings. It just spread them.

[8:37] And it was floating on air. And with little effort, all of Los Angeles was underneath its wings.

God doesn't want us to catch our breath. God wants us to soar like eagles. One of the fun things I used to do when I taught at Trinity was to watch the soccer games all the time.

I think I attended every home soccer game there was. And I would start in August when the new recruits would come. And the coach, AJ may remember, the coach used to say, well, let's begin by, at a normal slow pace, let's jog three miles.

These were new recruits. And I would stay and watch them jogging for three miles. Some of them, who had stayed in shape, who were athletic, who had practiced, who did not just goof off during the summer, would do the three miles, and it was like a picnic, as if it's nothing.

And then some of them would arrive, huffing and puffing, and needed an ambulance to make the last hundred yards. They were not in shape.

[10:14] God wants to renew our strength, like eagles, so we can soar, rather than just crawl, to the finish line.

So, he satisfies your desires with good things, so that your youth is renewed, like the eagles. He's been addressing himself, bless the Lord, O my soul.

In verse 6, he stops talking to himself, and starts thinking about other issues. The Lord works righteousness and justice, for all the oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel. When you talk about justice and righteousness, and the oppressed, the first thing that should come to your mind, is Israel in Egypt, oppressed by Pharaoh.

And so, what God did, was to send them Moses. And the beginning of this whole adventure, was for God to appear at the burning bush, and to announce, I am Yahweh.

[11:30] I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name, Yahweh, I did not reveal myself to them. So, God is telling Moses, I am Yahweh.

Names are very important, in scripture. Names matter a lot. So, the name Abraham, isn't just any name, so you can distinguish it, from Isaac.

The name Abraham, means something. Father of multitudes. Isaiah, Josiah, Josiah, Joshua, all of them are related to the verb, to save.

Ezekiel, Chazak, are all related to strength, and might. Naomi, is related to pleasantness.

So, I happen to be an Arab, and my first name, is Samir. I'm not going to tell you, what the Arabic, name means, but I will tell you, what my name is, if I were Jewish.

[12:48] If I were Jewish, Shamir, means jailer. So, now you can decide, whether it fits, my personality, or not.

I hope it doesn't. But it would be fun, to be Darth Vader, who knows. So, God, is announcing, to Moses, I am Yahweh.

And then, in Exodus 34, he wants Moses, to understand, and the children of Israel, to understand, when we call, our God, Yahweh, what are we saying, about him?

And we have, this great passage, in Exodus 34, one of the greatest, verses, that tells us, about the nature of God. The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate, and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding, and loving kindness, and truth.

Four of those, are quoted here, in this song. We saw it already, in verse four. Love, and compassion. We're now, seeing it for the second time, in verse eight.

[14:02] The Lord, is compassionate, and gracious, slow to anger. Slow to anger, means very patient. Slow to anger, abounding, in love.

In Hebrew, they are, rachum, which means, compassionate, but also merciful. Chanun, gracious, the word, Hannah, and Anne, and John, all come from this root, chanun, H and N.

The word for anger, is af, but, but this is, slow to anger, not quick to anger, but slow to anger.

Patient, not explosive, like a volcano. And chesed, chesed is that fabulous word, that means so many wonderful things. Mercy, love, steadfast love, loving kindness, loyalty.

And God is saying, I am, compassionate, and gracious, slow to anger, abounding, and loving kindness, and truth.

[15:20] And here, the psalmist is saying, in verse 7, he made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel. And then he tells us, what he, what God made himself known as.

The Lord is compassionate, and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He now wants to illustrate, to us, what it means.

So in verses, in verse, 10, he does not treat us, as our sins deserve. He does not repay us, according to our iniquities.

He doesn't treat us, as our sins deserve, nor pay us, according to our iniquities. We do not, get what we deserve.

We deserve to be punished, but we are not. We deserve to be alienated from God, but we are not. We deserve to face his wrath, but we don't.

[16:29] He has not treated us, according to the way we deserve. That is the biblical definition of mercy. Mercy means, not to get what you deserve.

The other side of the coin, is grace. Grace is to get, what you don't deserve. We don't deserve his love, but he gives us his love.

We don't deserve, we don't deserve his mercy, but he gives us his mercy. So grace, and mercy, go hand in hand. And here he is saying, the Lord, he will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever.

He does not treat us, as our sins deserve, or repay us, according to our iniquities. So how much is that?

That is verses 11 and 12. As high as the heavens, are above the earth, so great is his love, for those who fear him.

[17:44] As far as the east, is from the west, so far has he removed, our transgressions, from before us. As high as the heavens, are above the earth.

Heaven's earth. That is thinking in space, what? Vertically or horizontally? Up and down.

As far as the east is from the west. East, west. So whether we think of space vertically or horizontally, it doesn't matter, because in either case, he does not remember us.

Well, we are celebrating the 50th landing, 50th anniversary, of the landing on the moon. It's been a lot in the news. So here's a simple question. How far is the heavens from the earth?

How far is the moon? From the earth. What about Saturn? Or Mars?

[18:53] How far is the sun? How far is the end of the Milky Way? How far is that? Well, as far as the east is from the west.

Let's think east. How far is Kenosha from New York? How far is New York from Kenosha? How about London?

How far is London from Kenosha? My own country, Lebanon. How far is Lebanon from Kenosha? Hong Kong. Beijing. North Korea. And the answer is, it doesn't matter.

The point is the vastness. The vastness. You can't even see it. You can't even touch it. It's not near you. It's not something you put in the drawer, in your desk.

[20:00] And every time you're angry, you take it out. And feel more angry about the other person. It's not like that. As far as the east is from the west.

As far as the heavens are from above the earth. That is how much he deals with us. Some of you may want to pray, Lord, make my boss that way.

Well, I hope he does. But then there comes the question. Why does he treat us like this?

Why does he treat us with mercy and grace? Why does he remove as far as the east is from the west? Or the heavens from the sky? The answer comes in verse 13.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

[21:03] For he knows how we are formed. He remembers that we are dust. He treats us this way because he considers himself our heavenly father.

The Lord's prayer does not begin with our heavenly boss, or CEO, or employer. It begins with our father.

God is our father, if nothing else. Of course, he's lots of other things, but he is clearly our father.

And so as a father, he treats us as a father.

I remember when my first daughter was born, Leila. I really didn't want to have any children. It was a mistake. And here it was.

She was born. And the strangest thing happened to me. In one day, in one day, we didn't date three months, or six months.

[22:09] We didn't go out, you know, to places. In one day, she had become the person I love the most in this world.

She was the dearest thing, the most precious thing, the most wonderful thing, my great pride and joy. And she did it with one look.

And I asked myself, where did all this bonding come from? I'm not unique. If you have children, I'm sure you remember those days when there were children, and they steal your heart.

I remember I used to go to faculty meetings, humming, Robert Ducky, you're the one. And the faculty would say, ah, new parent. And I said, yes, I'm a new parent.

I'd get to work and decide to get back in the car and go back home to play with my daughter. All that love came from the Lord.

[23:17] It was incredible bonding. Still, still today. In your teenage years, you come very close to losing it. In their teenage years.

But, it's a powerful bonding. I want you to see a wonderful verse about God our Father. It is in the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7.

Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. 7. 7. 11. In Matthew. If you then, though you are evil,

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good

gifts to those who ask Him?

[24:24] And the point is, I can love my daughter to no end and would do anything for my daughter and I'm a lousy sinner. I do not love God with all of my heart.

I am not as holy as he is holy. I'm not compassionate as gracious as he is. I know my sins. I don't need somebody from the outside to tell me I'm a sinner.

I keep good records. I know I'm a sinner. But the remarkable thing is as a lousy sinner, I can love my daughter that much.

How much more so our heavenly father? You sit and think about it. How much more so does our heavenly father love us? And he's not a sinner.

And he's not tainted by evil. And he doesn't live under the fault. If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does your heavenly father know how to give good gifts to us?

[25:40] So why does God treat us like this? Because he's our heavenly father. Because he's our heavenly father. That's why. That's why he treats us with compassionate and graciousness, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and truth.

That's why he moves the east as far as possible from the west. And as high as the heavens are above the earth. Because he is a good father.

If you had growing up difficulties with your parents, if your father was not the ideal parent, I would advise you, first of all, to forgive him if you can.

Ask God. If you need to forgive him, forgive him. If you can't, ask the Lord to help him, to help you forgive him. And then, don't make God like your earthly father.

Our God is not like our earthly fathers. Infantly better. Infantly greater. Infantly nicer. Powerful. Wise.

[26:53] Good. Well, moving on to the next section. That is in Psalm 103, verses 15 and following.

As for man, his days are like grass.

He flourishes like a flower of the field. The wind blows over it, and it is gone. And its place is remembered no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him. That's another quotation.

Compassionate and loving kindness. But from everlasting, verse 17, but from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him.

[27:54] We may be in great times or in bad times. Let's say, if you are in great time, the question always is, will they last?

Will they last? We were in a deep depression, and FDR was voted president.

And then we were in World War II, and FDR continued to be the president. He's the only president who served four terms. But four terms is not everlasting.

Even FDR died. Manasseh died. Josiah died. Hezekiah died. There is no guarantee that good times will last forever.

What about the goodness of God as our father? Is it just that we're age nine? Or 13?

[29:06] Or 16? How long will he be, this wonderful father? Look at this verse again. Verse 17.

But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him. From everlasting to everlasting, he doesn't change policy.

From everlasting to everlasting. But there is always one danger. The danger is, what if the Lord faces opposition?

What if God says, let my people go? And Pharaoh says, no. What if Jesus is to be born?

But Herod says, everybody under two, two and under, kill them, babies. What if there is opposition to God's will? Antichrists.

[30:15] People of evil. Stalin. Stalin. Hitler. The Khmer Rouge in Southeast Asia.

The Ottomans at the end of World War I, the way they treated the Armenians. What if there is opposition? God says, don't be afraid of the opposition.

Look at verse 19. The Lord has established his throne in heaven. His kingdom rules over all. God's love is everlasting and God's love is sovereign.

Rules over all. Nobody is going to stop God from being God. Nobody. Nobody. Such a being doesn't exist. And God is going to be sovereign.

He will be as kind to us as he wants to as he wants to be kind to us. Because his kingdom is everlasting. And we are members of his kingdom.

[31:29] We are his children. So this brings us to the application. What should we do in the light of this exhortation?

The most obvious thing is verses 1 and verse 1 and 2 and 20 through 22. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

If it helps to turn on the radio well that's good. If it helps to play a CD at home praise the Lord.

If it helps to go to your iPhone or iPad whatever works for you praise the Lord. But praise him on Sundays too collectively as a community as a group of Christians.

Let's praise the Lord. What's the second thing? The second application is this. Be thankful that God is this kind of God and not some other kind of God.

[32:33] If you study the gods in the ancient New East Anat Moloch Dumuzi God famous for their cruelty we thank God we have a God who is compassionate and gracious not cruel and mean sadistic and horrible we do not serve a sadistic God we serve a compassionate and gracious God you know you apply for a job and you think it's going to be the best boss and he turns out to be the worst boss we're not stuck in that situation we didn't apply at the wrong deity only to find out how mean and bad he is we applied at Yahweh he accepted our application he gave us the application to begin with and then accepted it what's the third thing third application is he begins by giving several benefits we looked at one of them primarily but let's go back to verses 1 2 and 3 praise the

Lord oh my soul and all that is within me praise his holy name praise the Lord oh my soul and forget not all his benefits who forgives all of your sins who heals all of your diseases who delivers you from the grave who crowns you with love and compassion who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle the Lord also works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed these are all his benefits look at your own life and say Lord I really need you in this area I remember when I was praying for my cancer I had a colleague who died of cancer two weeks ago God in his wisdom decided to keep me alive for which I'm absolutely gracious and thankful and filled with gratitude if you have other needs well this is only one psalm there are 149 other ones that you can read and nail it on the head so who is our God compassionate and gracious slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and truth and faithfulness let's have a word of prayer Lord Father we thank you first and foremost for being this kind of a God we are so blessed that you are like this and not some other horrible ancient new eastern deity like Anat we thank you because you extend to us our compassion and grace your compassion and your grace help us to be grateful help us to be brave enough to receive it from your hand help us to walk in your paths and thank you and praise you for who you are help us to rely on you and to trust in you first and foremost to take care of us whatever the need is we ask it in

Jesus name amen amen amen goodbye amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen yani