

Forget Not and Praise

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[0 : 00] Well, morning again, and it'd be great if you could grab your Bibles and turn to Psalm 103. And thanks again to Mavis for reading so well. That was terrific.

I want to ask you, though, I wonder how you're feeling at the moment. If you're anything like me, and then perhaps you're feeling fed up. I mean, this situation we've found ourselves in has been going on for some time, hasn't it?

I mean, it's the middle of the school holidays and supposedly spring, but it's been a very cold and wet week. Although the sun is out at the moment, the kids are still stuck at home under lockdown, some of whom are driving parents mad.

Meanwhile, our friends and family in New South Wales don't even have to wear masks. For others amongst us, they're facing significant health issues, either for themselves or their loved ones. And others are still feeling the lack of work and income. And for still others, they're feeling fatigue, isolation, a lack of church community.

[1 : 08] Now, yes, there are signs of hope, like dropping COVID case numbers, which is fantastic. And an announcement today that might mean restrictions are eased further.

But given our premier's fondness for alliteration, you know, slow, steady steps, I'm not sure the restrictions will ease as much as we'd all like them to.

Which means we're still facing more weeks of restrictions. And so I wouldn't be surprised if you're feeling a bit fed up, too. But I wonder if that also means that we sometimes don't feel like praising God.

Whether our situation in life makes it hard for us to praise God. Israel found themselves in a situation that it was hard to praise God when they were in exile and had no king from David's line. In fact, the book of Psalms is actually divided into five smaller books. And you can see that on your screens there. And book three, which comes before our psalm today, book three is full of lament and questioning.

[2 : 19] It ends on a downer with Psalm 89 on the next slide, which says, Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?

You see, the state of the Davidic king directly impacted the state of the nation. And so book four today now gives us some answers to that question and some reasons to keep praising God. For both Israel and for us, despite our situation. So point one on your screens and verse one in your Bibles.

Have a look there. Praise the Lord, O my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. And just as Paul praised God in our second reading.

[3 : 27] In fact, our second reading from Ephesians 1 is like the New Testament version of Psalm 103, all the blessings and benefits we have in Christ. And we know praising God is the main application of the psalm because it not only begins with praising God, but also ends with it.

A praise kind of bookends the psalm. Now to praise God means to speak of his greatness, whether by thanking him for his greatness or goodness in prayer, or by speaking about his goodness to others, or even reflecting his character and goodness in life, such that it points people to him. But notice here, David, exhorts every fiber of his being to praise God. It's not just his soul, but all his inmost being, verse 1.

All that is within him. Here is wholehearted praise. I wonder, when was the last time you praised God like that?

Where you spent a few minutes in prayer, genuinely thanking him for his goodness, praising him for his greatness, before asking him for things.

[4 : 49] Or speaking to a friend about his goodness, or belting out a hymn or song in the shower or the car, if that's your thing. And if we haven't for a while, then could it be because we've allowed our situation to focus us on what God has not given us, such that we forget all he has given us?

Or perhaps to forget simply how great his benefits really are. But David says, forget not his benefits. Benefits like we heard in our second reading, but also here in the psalm, like verse 3. Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.

Not just some sins, did you notice, but all our sins. All the things that you are most ashamed of in your life. Those things you wish will never come out.

God forgives. Isn't that freeing? Is that not a reason to praise him? Or like healing all our diseases.

[6 : 02] And we often forget that every breath we take is from God who sustains our lungs and enables us to take it. And so how much more so every healing we enjoy, even via doctors.

For it's still God who enables our bodies to respond to the treatment. And so whether it's via medication or by God's direct intervention, it's all healing from God.

Even from a paper cut to a cold to cancer. It's all of him. And so look back in your life and think, how many times have you been healed from something?

That's God. And is that not reason to praise him? Now, of course, God will only heal some diseases at the resurrection when he gives us a new body.

Though part of us sometimes prefers that he might heal us from physical suffering now, even more than forgive us for our sins now. But I suspect that's because we also forget that sin is worse than suffering.

[7 : 21] You see, sin destroys our relationship with God while suffering can actually deepen it. That's why God doesn't heal all our diseases now.

And so it's far more important that God forgives all our sins now than heals all our diseases now. And yet he'll do that too at the resurrection, which is again reason to praise him, is it not?

A friend in my year at Bible College has three children whom he loves equally, but the first two were born with Downs syndrome. Now, his two children with Downs are hard work and his heart aches for all the things they miss out on in life.

But he remembers that God will heal their diseases at the resurrection. And he forgets not that benefit and can keep praising God.

Or verse four, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion. You see, we've been redeemed from the pit down here and have the privilege of being crowned up there.

[8 : 44] The pit refers to the pit of judgment, of hell, that no one can escape. The pit we deserve to be in because we've all sinned and have not treated God as God.

But God has lifted us from it. One commentator said on your screens that each of us who know the Lord should be very glad that he has come to rescue us from this place of terror and eternal torment.

Yet the words, very glad, are almost an understatement, aren't they? I mean, just reflect for a moment on that pit and what it really is that we've been saved from.

Is that not extraordinary reason to praise him? Especially when we realize what it costs him to redeem us from it. To redeem means to buy back for a price.

And as you know, the price of our redemption was the blood of Christ. That's how we've been crowned with love and compassion. God would only give his son for those he really loved.

[10 : 01] Us, incredibly. Is this not even more reason to praise him? Or verse 5, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

I hear the good things he satisfies us with are those things that renew our strength like food or sleep. A message from a mate.

A card or flowers from a friend. A funny moment in the family that makes you all laugh. I'm solar powered so seeing the sun outside is something that renews me.

But that too, along with every good thing, is from God. And so if you look back at every good thing or every good moment that has encouraged you, that you've enjoyed in your life, I wonder, could you count them?

I can't. Is this not more reason to praise him? I remember conducting a wedding where the best man forgot the rings.

[11:12] He has one job and he forgot. I didn't realise at the time I was leading the couple through the vows and I could see out of the corner of my eye some movement happening down the side of the church.

Apparently, the best man signalled to the bride's sister to borrow her ring and so they passed a substitute ring down the front and just as I said to him, do you have the rings?

He very, with a puff, said, yes, here they are. Just in time. What a save. Another person that I was about to conduct their wedding for, he actually forgot the date of his wedding and booked a camping trip.

He forgot before the wedding but only a week before. Sorry, he remembered before the wedding but only a week before. Or, we invited some friends around for lunch one day but they forgot to turn up.

They're not our friends anymore. No, I'm just joking. The point is, we all forget things, don't we? But David says, forget not these things.

[12:15] So, whether you're feeling fed up like me or feeling fine, either way, let not your situation cause you to forget. Rather, forget not all God's benefits that we might continue to praise Him with all our soul.

Of course, the one benefit that David highlights is God's love that he mentioned back in verse 4. The Hebrew word for love on your screens is chesed which Andrew Reid often spoke about and for good reason.

For it describes not any old kind of love but God's steadfast love. His kind, gracious, loyal love. His limitless love, if you like.

And that's what David now goes on to speak about. So, point 2 on your outlines and verse 6-8 in your Bibles. He says, the Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel. The Lord is gracious, sorry, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in chesed, love.

[13:34] Here, David reminds us of how God had worked justice for Israel, saving them from oppression in Egypt. But He also worked righteousness, you know, made them right in His sight, all because of His love.

In fact, verse 8 is actually a quote from Exodus, where God on your screens passed by Moses, who was in a rock and announced His character, saying, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

though, interestingly, when David quotes that here in our psalm in verse 8, he leaves off God's faithfulness. Did you notice that? Not because David doubts it, but because he wants to highlight God's love.

A love that saved Israel from oppression and made them righteous in His sight by forgiving them. verse 9, 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. You see, here is love from God that is gracious, isn't it?

[14:59] Grace means giving people what they don't deserve. And here, God does not harbor the anger that we deserve, nor treat us as our sins deserve.

Rather, He gives us the forgiveness we don't deserve. His love is gracious. What's more, it's immeasurable. You see the famous verses of verse 11 and 12?

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

When our son Tim was born back in 2004, I love you Tim, pretty sure it's 2004, we were given this book on your screens, Guess How Much I Love You.

And it's about a father rabbit putting his son to bed and the son saying how much he loves his dad. Like, on the next slide, the son saying I love you right up to the moon.

[16:08] And then he closed his eyes and then the father said oh that's far, said big nut brown head, the dad, that's very very far. But no matter how much the son loved the father, the father loved the son more.

And so on the next slide, the story ends with the father kissing the son good night. And then on the next slide, the father whispers with a smile, I love you right up to the moon and back.

It's a lovely story of a father's love. And the point is, no matter how much we love our heavenly father, he loves us more.

more. In fact, for David, it's immeasurably more. Because verse 11, the heavens where the moon and stars sat could not be measured in David's day.

They were just very, very far. And the point is, God's love is immeasurable, which means immeasurable forgiveness. as far as the east is from the west, verse 12.

[17:21] I mean, no matter where you go in the world, there's always an east and a west. In some senses, they never meet. That's how far God has removed our sins from us. And God's love is not just immeasurable, but it's compassionate, fatherly love.

So, verse 13 says, as a father has compassion, on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

God knows we are but dust. He knows how we are formed and that we are only human. So, just like a father might be angry with his children when they do the wrong thing and even discipline them, ultimately, the father will forgive them because he knows they are just kids.

Well, so too our heavenly father who knows we are just humans. What's more, his love is also everlasting, verse 15. He said, David writes, 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 its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

[18:59] See, unlike us who last only a little while on this earth, God's love is everlasting. And to emphasize the point, David says from everlasting to everlasting.

I mean, the word everlasting means forever. You only need to say the word once. But just like people might say, you know, whiter than white to make a point. So David says from everlasting to everlasting.

In other words, God's love never runs out. It is always with us. It's not as though one day we'll sin one too many times and God will say, oh, that's it.

Don't love you anymore. God's love never runs out. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that comforting? Isn't that a reason to praise him? See, God's love is gracious, immeasurable, fatherly, and everlasting. In a word, limitless.

[20:02] Which means he'll always forgive. And that's a relief. Because I don't know about you, but during this time of lockdown, temptation has not been locked down, has it?

Rather, temptation seems to have just changed a little. For example, a temptation to be selfish has perhaps grown. We don't see people very often, so we're not forced to be godly or to serve others like we would in our daily routine.

Instead, we're on our own in our homes, and so we can indulge ourselves more. We can be selfish more. Or the temptation to skip church has grown.

People won't see if we've missed a few weeks in a row and call us up, and so we can not log on and skip a couple of weeks and no one will know. Or we can be lazy when it comes to our prayer or care for others.

We pray less even though we have time to pray more, don't we? Or we put off calling that person, our conscience keeps telling us to call.

[21:10] Now, I understand that one of the paradoxes of this pandemic is we go out less but actually feel tired more. It's odd. I don't know if you've experienced that. But because of it, it's easier to sin when it comes to being selfish or lazy or ignoring our conscience.

Or perhaps for you, it's not just lamenting our lockdown and acknowledging our premier's mistakes or petitioning some worrying legislation that he's proposing, all of which we can rightly do, I should say.

But we cross the line by refusing to pray for him or grumbling against him or against God who put him in power. The point is we still sin. So isn't it a relief that God's gracious love does not treat us as our sins deserve?

Isn't it a relief that God's immeasurable love means immeasurable forgiveness? That his fatherly love means compassion? That his everlasting love means it'll never run out?

No, we have limitless love, love, God, which means limitless forgiveness from God. Not forgiveness to be free to keep sinning, I should say, but so that we're free from the burden of guilt and not

getting it right, that we might be motivated to please him and praise him, not only with our lips, but in our lives as well.

[22 : 45] Though I do need to say that all these benefits, including God's love and forgiveness, are only for those who fear him. And we're told this on your screens three times in the psalm.

Now for us to fear God means to revere him and to believe in his son, Jesus Christ, in whom all these benefits, Ephesians 1, are found.

For it's through Jesus God shows his limitless love the clearest. It's through Jesus God works righteousness for us. And it's by Jesus' blood that he redeems us, remember, from the pit and crowns us with his love as his children.

And so do you fear God and believe in Jesus? And for us who do, then will we forget not all his benefits and make time to praise him with all our soul, even despite our situation?

If not because of what he's given us, then because of who he is. So very briefly, point three, verse 19. The Lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all.

[24 : 08] Here we are reminded that the Lord is the true ruler over all, whether people realize it or not. This means he's not only in control of our state, but he deserves to be praised by our state, by all.

And so that's how the psalm ends in verse 20. David writes, Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly host, you his servants who do his will.

Praise the Lord, all his works, everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, O my soul. See, David tells himself in all created things to praise the Lord, whether angels or his heavenly host, who are actually other angels and us.

Did you see Melbourne in verse 22 there? Melbourne is part of God's dominion, part of where God rules, and so we too are to praise him, not just because of all he's given us, but because of who he is.

Some of you know Neville Mellor passed away last Sunday. He and Nancy are long-time members of the 9 o'clock Doncaster service.

[25 : 33] Last Friday was his funeral, and if you didn't get a chance to see it, then it's on our live stream page at the bottom at the end of the services. You can watch it later.

But Neville's lockdown actually started in September last year. His deteriorating health meant he could not make it to church for over a year, which he found very hard, and his ulcerated leg meant he found it hard to even leave his home.

Now, he had his mental ups and downs, but despite his ongoing pain and frustration, whenever I asked him how he was going, he would always say one of two things.

He would either say, I'm in the Lord's hands, or I'm still praising the Lord. Even after his last surgery, a few weeks ago, where they had to take off some of his ear because of cancer, he said to me, I'm still praising the Lord.

I can't hear Nancy very well, but I'm still praising the Lord. Now, how was he able to say this, to do this? Well, because he forgot not all God's benefits, including God's limitless love.

[26 : 52] So, whether you're feeling fed up with lockdown or not, whether today's announcement eases restrictions a little or a lot, can I encourage you this week to reread this psalm, to reflect on it, then when feeling fed up, sorry, that when feeling fed up, you might forget not all God's benefits, but instead praise God with all your soul.

let's ask for God's help to do that. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this reminder that no matter our situation in life, we have ample reason to praise you.

Help us, we pray, to forget not all your benefits, that we might continue to praise you with all our soul.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.