

Lasting Love

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[0 : 00] Will you turn with me now to the passage we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 103, looking again at verse 17.

We can read from verse 15 because these verses are connected together in the way that the psalmist is setting out the teaching of the passage. Psalm 103 at verse 15 As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it 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.

Especially verses 17 and 18, but as we'll see, they are set out as a contrast to what is in verses 15 and 16. So we really need to just look at them as they sit there side by side, these two pairs of verses, and look at the teaching especially of 17 and 18 this morning.

I had an experience last Friday, if you can allow me to be personal for a moment, which I think was significant, and significant for this occasion as well.

[1 : 24] I had chosen these verses, the Lord, I believe, had led me to these verses to form the basis of our thoughts this morning, verses 17 and 18, and I started preparing the sermon.

And I've been thinking for some time of loading up some of the written testimonies that are on the website to the sermon audio site, where the sermons are stored now for some time.

And as I came to load them up, the first one that I came across was Joanne's late father. I remember he wrote a testimony in the days leading up to the final part of his illness.

And we mentioned there that his mother, that's Joanne's grandmother, had been taken to hospital in July 1999.

And as Katrina, her daughter, was with her, she was being transferred to Regmore Hospital.

[2 : 26] And she said to Katrina, and this is as it is down in the testimony, I'll read it just so that you can follow it through with me. When my sister saw on the morning she was due to fly to an illness, saw my mother, my mother told her, I won't be coming back here.

She explained to my sister that the psalm she had read that morning was Psalm 103. For over it the wind doth pass, and it away is gone, and of the place where once it was, it shall no more be known. It is interesting, it goes on here, that the verse following this one, which she would also have read, contains a promise. But unto them that do him fear, though God's mercy never ends, and to their children's children still his righteousness extends.

When she died two weeks later in Inverness, and my sister reminded me of the verse she had read in Stornoway, I remember drawing the attention of the rest of the family to the verse with the promise.

That promise is being fulfilled here today. God's love extends to our children's children.

[3 : 44] I wasn't aware, I had forgotten, that that was part of the testimony. I was already, as I said, preparing the sermon. But I thought that was significant, that all that came together in the providence of God for today's service.

And I'm thankful that the family have allowed me to read that, and actually to bring it together in the way that introduces our text for us.

The child that will be baptized, the fact of her being baptized, is itself testimony. And a very poignant and yet very powerful reminder of the late Ian's words on that occasion.

Pointing out of his verse as the Lord's promise to his people. So what is the verse saying to us? Well, verses 15 to 16 set out for us the brief span of human life.

And that's a deliberate contrast with the everlasting love of God in verses 17 and 18. And as you read verses 15 and 16, we shouldn't actually think that it's there just to merely make the point that our days are short.

[5 : 08] Notice verse 14. The Lord knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. It's not just saying to us that our life in this world is all too brief and very uncertain.

But it's saying to us that the Lord knows that. And the Lord remembers that. And the Lord has made provision for us against that. That's really the wonderful expression that you find on the emphasis in verses 17 and 18.

So let's look at verses 15 and 16 just briefly. Just to introduce verses 17 and 18. As for man, his days are like grass.

He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. Even the most famous people who ever lived, they die just as other people die.

And not only that, but apart from their own loved ones, their memory is soon forgotten. If you had asked the rising generation in 1950 who Winston Churchill was, virtually every one of them would have instantly told you who he was, why he was significant, what he had done, why it was important to remember him.

[6 : 26] If you asked primary children today who Winston Churchill was, I doubt if many of them would even know who he was, what he signified, apart from perhaps recently when the anniversary of the First World War brought things like that into the teaching of our schools.

The fact is that our lives will come to an end all too soon. And however much we may feel that people will remember us.

Yes, our loved ones will remember us. The generations after us and our families, of course, will remember us, hopefully. But out with that, the circle of those who remember us diminishes very rapidly as the years go by.

And that's really what it's saying to us here. As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes.

These are the illustrations he's using. Like a flower of the field. His days are like grass.

Like a flower of the field. It's not even the flower that you look after in a greenhouse or on your windowsill. It's the flower of the field. It's the flower that's flourishing for a short time. And then along comes a gale.

[7 : 37] And the gale blows it. And it's gone. That's human life as David is setting out for us here. However strong we may be in the years of our strength. It's all too soon at an end.

But why is it telling us this? Is it so that we'll go about moping? Is it so that we have gloomy faces for the rest of our days? Is it so that when people ask us how we are, we'll say, well, we're all going to die.

And we'll just have our minds on death. There are some people you come across like that. When they ask you, have you heard anything fresh? Have you heard anything new? They're hoping, in a sense, that you'll have heard of somebody who's ill or somebody who's passed away.

And their next comment will be, well, death is not far from any one of us. And there's that gloominess and that emphasis on death constantly in some people's minds. It's important to think of death.

It's important to prepare for death. That's why the psalmist is giving it to us here. But it's not so that you'll be gloomy about the facts of life and especially about the prospects that God is setting out for us in the next two verses.

[8 : 43] It's rather so that knowing the brevity and the short span of human life, that we will turn to that which is lasting. That we will come to depend upon, not our own resources, because these verses 15 and 16 tell us our resources very soon run out and we can't get them back again.

But, you see, there's the contrast. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

He's telling us these things in verses 15 and 16. He's giving us this picture of the brevity of human life, the short span of it. Not so that we'll despair, not so that we'll go about with gloomy faces, but so that we'll turn to the love of God.

So that we will turn to bring to ourselves what God in his love has provided for us in Jesus Christ. Because in him and in the ways that God's love is revealed in him, the steadfast love of the Lord is seen to be everlasting.

Now what does that mean? Let's move on to the main part of the study today in verses 17 and 18. The steadfast love of the Lord.

[10:02] Here's the great contrast. What does he mean by the steadfast love of the Lord? Sometimes you'll find the word here in Hebrew translated mercy. Other times it may be translated loving kindness.

Here it's translated steadfast love, which really captures for us the two main elements in this word that's used in the Old Testament for the love of God.

It is something that includes the idea of faithfulness, but also kindness. So this word steadfast love includes both of these ideas together at the same time.

What it's saying to us is that this love of God, this covenant love of God, this love with which God looks after his people is a faithful love.

That God is faithful, that there's a faithfulness about it. In other words, God's love is steady. God's love is unchangeable. God's love is not diverted by something that happens in people's lives, even the lives of those he loves.

[11:09] It's not as if God is diverted from his purpose. Sometimes even the best of human love on our part is changeable.

Our love is sometimes grumpy in the mornings or in the evenings or when we're put out by something. We don't have that constancy. We don't have that continuance, that steadiness, that unchangeableness to our love because we're all too soon deflected from and diverted from the showing of our love, from the expression of our love, from the action that our love ought to take in showing itself to be love.

But God is never like that. His is steadfast love. His is unchangeable love. His is a love that's never deflected. His is a love that never turns from its objective.

You know, the Bible talks about an amazing thing. It talks about God chastening or chastising or correcting his people. When we live as Christians, we don't actually put ourselves out with the need to be corrected.

Our lives show that. Whether we occupy pulpits or pews, whatever place we have in the church or whatever, we always need from time to time to be corrected because we go astray.

[12:35] We go astray in thoughts. We go astray in actions. We go astray in words. We say the wrong things. We say things we regret. We need to be corrected as we turn sometimes from the kind of commitment we should have to the Bible, to the prayer meeting, to following the Lord as we should faithfully in life.

So what does God do? Does he give up on us? Well, if you read through Hebrews chapter 12, you'll find the very definite answer to that is no. The steadfast love of the Lord pursues his people so that when they do go astray and need to be corrected, he chastens them.

He brings means by which they are corrected, even if sometimes, even if very often, these means are painful because correcting a child is not easy.

It isn't simply that it causes pain to the child. It causes pain to the parent too. I'm not saying that God, as our Father, experiences pain the way we experience pain.

But nevertheless, we are saying that he takes means to correct us and hurt. But it's in love, as that chapter in Hebrews 12 puts it, that it is in love that he deals with everyone that he has brought to be his own child.

[14:03] And that love shows you, as it deals with us in our corrections, as God straightens out our lives when we've gone astray. This love does not give up on us, though we so frequently give up, in our love, in our expressions of it.

He has that same commitment too, in the steadfastness of his love, in the firmness and the steadiness of his love, to everything which itself is designed to hurt you.

The Bible tells us very clearly that following Christ, being Christians, living the Christian life, is going to meet with opposition.

It's going to meet with certain forces, certain things which work against us in the way that we seek to live for the Lord and for his glory and for his praise.

And God is as committed to keep you safe, to protect you, to actually give you the strength to go on and to overcome your difficulties.

[15:08] We're not saying that it's just Christians who have difficulties. Everybody has difficulties. But what we're saying is confining it to the context for those who love the Lord, for those who walk

in his ways, for those who keep his covenant, who remember his commandments to do them.

The way is not any easier for them than it is for other people. But God is just as committed to keeping them in the times of their trials and difficulties and failures as he is at other times too. And this word, steadfast love, this word in Hebrew, is not just that God is committed to his people. He's committed against everything that would harm them.

And so when you see, when you're on God's side, and when God is on your side, you can really then say with Paul in Romans chapter 8, If God be for us, who can be against us?

And he means everything that he can think of in that who. Who can be against us? Nothing actually against you ultimately. Even the things that in their own purpose and in their own mindset are against you.

[16:26] Ultimately, God will see it. Not only that you will overcome that, but that it will be beneficial to you. You will come out a better person through God's handling of your life.

His steadfast love is a steady love. It's a love which is dependable. A love which is unchangeable. But the other side of it too is that it acts in kindness.

And that's another element that comes into the word. Sometimes in the A.B. it's translated like that. It's loving kindness. It's not just thoughts of love. It's not just love in the sense of some type of emotional thing that reaches out towards those that God loves.

It is love acting in a certain way. It is love doing things. It is love that's shown in its actions. It is acts of kindness.

It is as the old theologians used to put it, it is benevolent love. A love that loves to show kindness to its objects.

[17:39] And we should never question that when we are familiar with the cross. Next Saturday and Lord's Day we're going to focus on the cross. The meaning of the cross.

The significance of the cross. Because the cross is Jesus' death. Jesus in his death. We should never ever question or even have a doubt as to whether God is kind or benevolent.

Or does things that benefit us in his love. Because that is the greatest proof of it isn't it? The cross itself. I'm sure everybody here knows the words of John 3.16.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That's the greatest act of love that's ever been shown and that ever will be shown.

The love that gave Jesus to the death of the cross in the place of his people. That's loving kindness.

[18:46] That's benevolent love. That's the love of God in doing good. That's the love of God in doing good. In great acts of kindness. And you can extend it as far as you like.

When God gives us laws and his commands that he claims our attention through. When he demands that we comply with them.

Is he being unkind to us? Is he being unkind to us to show us the things that are harmful in our lives? Is he being unkind to us and pointing out these things that will actually lead to disaster if we choose to ignore what he's saying to us?

Of course it's not. The world out there will tell you about this Bible as just a set of rules. And it will actually damage your life if you allow yourself to follow what it actually sets out for us.

And all sorts of different ideas as to how these scriptures are harmful to us if we really apply ourselves seriously to them. Well, listen to those who speak within the scriptures as to what the law of God and the promises of God actually meant to them.

[20:01] Read through Psalm 119. It's a long psalm. But it's worth reading through if only for the sake of noticing how often the psalmist praises God for his commands and for his laws.

Oh, how I love your law. It is my study all the day. It makes me wiser than my foes. Your word is a light to my feet and a lamp to my path.

God's kindness.

If we're careful enough to look for it, you will find God's kindness in many places that you would not have thought of if you hadn't just stopped to look.

It is the loving kindness of the Lord that is from everlasting to everlasting. So it's steady and it's acts of kindness.

[21:06] It's steadfast love. It's also, secondly, from everlasting to everlasting. Now that means, ultimately, it doesn't have a beginning because God doesn't have a beginning.

Nor does it have an end because God doesn't have an end. It's an eternal thing. It's always been there in God. And we can't get our heads around that.

It's just too much for us. And yet, that's what our Bible clearly tells us. As we've been seeing in the prayer meeting the last couple of weeks, the Genesis passage that begins the Bible in the beginning.

God created. Nowhere in the Bible will you find a page that sets out deliberately to prove the existence of God. People do that all the time.

They come to the Bible and expect that it's a book that sets out to prove God's existence. It isn't. It's a book that accepts it.

[22 : 07] It's God speaking from his own eternal existence and saying to us, this is what I want you to know. He doesn't set about proving his existence.

He takes it as a matter of fact. And then he speaks to us in his word. And so, it is from everlasting to everlasting.

But it's also here, particularly, to those who fear him. And on those who fear him, his righteousness to his children's children. In other words, what he's really emphasizing for us is that as we follow the Lord, as we are true to the Lord, as we seek daily to pass that on to the succeeding generations, God's promise follows us.

God's promise is that he will be our God, that he will be a God to us and to our children and to our children's children. Maybe our children will grow up not to accept that way for themselves.

We hope not, but it may happen. Does that mean that God's promise has not been true? No. What God is saying is, I am here for you if you will have me.

[23 : 21] I am here for you if you believe in me like your fathers did, like your parents did, like your grandparents did. I will actually then make you experience the benefits of this covenant, the benefits of this promise.

You will come to experience it for yourself. That this is indeed my promise to you. And I will not be short of keeping it. It's from everlasting to everlasting, his love.

And his righteousness, his faithfulness, or his uprightness, you might say, in keeping his promises. It applies all the way down through to our children's children.

But then you see, it's not just quite as simple as that. It is a steadfast love. It is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, on those who respect him, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

That's what it's saying. In other words, in verse 17, it's saying God's promise is sure.

[24 : 39] But in verse 18, it's saying God's promise has to be made sure to ourselves. God's promise remains sure whether we accept it or not.

Whether we follow it, whether we embrace it or not. But what God is saying is, in order to actually make this sure to yourself. In order to come to possess and to experience and to enjoy what I have promised to my people.

And what I have promised with a steadfast love. You have to come to receive it. To live by it. To keep my covenant. To remember my commandments.

To do it. In other words, we don't come to experience the benefits of God's covenant. We don't come to be saved just because our parents were good Christians.

We don't come to be saved just because we go to church. We don't come to be saved just because we preach sermons. We don't come to be saved just because we do the Bibles every day. We don't come to possess the promises of God to his people in any way.

[25 : 46] Because formally we like to do those things and we get a certain amount of pleasure in them. Good as they are. We are not saved with that itself.

We are saved by our coming to keep his covenant. And to remember his commandments to do them. Not just to know them.

Not just to know about them. Not just to know how parents kept them. Not just to know that we are passing them on formally to our children. But to do them.

We have to keep his covenant. What does that mean? Well a covenant as you know is an engagement between two or more parties here.

Between God and his people. A covenant is a contract if you like. Where on each side of it there is a promise made. The promise of God is.

[26 : 50] He will be our God. He will be a father to us. He will be one who looks after us. He will be our savior. And the promise is that. If we follow him.

If we walk in his ways. And if we pass that on. He will prove himself to be a God to our children. And to our children's children. The promise is never to be doubted.

But. We have to keep his covenant. There is our side of it. When you sign a covenant. When you sign a pledge. When you sign a bond. And both sides of it come into effect.

When you come to place your trust in Christ. When you sign if you like. On the dotted line of committing your life to him. Then you are committed to keep this covenant.

To walk in his ways. To be obedient to him. To live as he requires. To worship him. To be what you find in verse 13 there. The Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

[27 : 53] The fear of the Lord is not being afraid of him. It is not cowering in that sort of fear. This fear that the Old Testament and New Testament speaks about. Is respect.

And awe. And appreciation. And love. For God. And it is to them. They are the ones. Who come to enjoy his covenant.

Not enough for us today to know about it. We have to live it out. And we have to pass it on to our children. As we live it out. Which is why. At a baptism.

A parent takes those. That includes. That they will raise the child. That they will bring up the child. In the nurture. And admonition. Or in the training. And discipline of the Lord.

Because what that means. Is. That we are making every effort. Possible to us. To pass on to them. The things of God's covenant. They will have to come.

[28 : 57] To embrace that for themselves. They will have to come. To take their own stand. In relation to God. And embrace those things. If they want to enjoy the things.

Of God's covenant. We can't give them that. Spiritually. They have to come to embrace it. For themselves. And all that God requires of us. With regard to our children. Is that we bring them up. In that environment. Within the keeping of the covenant. As we keep it ourselves. And that we show them. That we are a people. Who remember his commandments.

To do them. Let me just finish by words. That. Jesus spoke. As you find that. In John chapter 15. Remember John 15. That. Jesus was teaching the disciples. Shortly before he died. In that upper room. As he taught them. Various things about. himself.

[29 : 55] And the need for him. To leave them. What was going to happen. And so on. And then he prayed for them. But in John 15. And verses 9 to 11. This is what he said. As the father has loved me.

So I have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments. You will abide in my love. Just as I have kept.

My father's commandments. And abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you. That my joy may be in you. And that your joy may be full.

You see. So many people in the world today. When you ask them a question. Do you think you would. You would. Have a sense of fulfillment.

Or joy. In your life. If you were to be. True to God. And to his commandments. The answer would be. Of course not. That's far too restrictive.

[30 : 55] That's just a negative way of living. That's just typical of Christians. And what they teach. There's a set of rules. You keep them. It narrows down your life. And you end up miserable.

Listen to what Jesus says. If you keep my commandments. You will abide in my love. And I have spoken this to you. So that my joy may be in you.

And that your joy may be full. How do you come to know true joy. Fullness of joy. Lasting joy.

Not by doing away with Christ's commandments. Not by throwing them out and saying. That's not for me. But by loving him for them. By saying.

Lord. These are part of your covenant relationship with me. To keep his commandments. To remember to do them.

[31 : 56] It's part of our ongoing relationship. With God. It's the route that we follow. To fullness of joy. Today. And today.

That's what the psalmist is setting out for us. The short span of human life. Deliberately contrasted. With the everlasting love of God.

So that we will fulfill our chief end. Friends. What is it? Why were we created? Well the first catechism. And the shorter catechism. Briefly but powerfully tells us.

Man's chief end. Is to glorify God. And to enjoy him. Forever. Let's pray.

Lord our God. We thank you today. For all the provision. That you have made for us. The entire content. Of your word.

[32 : 59] For everything that we know. Of its teaching. By way of command. And promise. We thank you. For your faithfulness. For your promise. For your steadfastness. And love to your people.

For every aspect. Of that relationship. That you have with them. For the way that you are true. To everything you have promised. Help us also. We pray. To be true. In order to follow you.

As we ought. To be true to your covenant. To be true to the requirements. You make of us. As we seek to walk. In obedience to you. Help us to delight.

Lord. In your ways. Help us to find enjoyment. In being true to you. And to look forward. In hope. And in faith. To the enjoyment. Of everlasting life.

In your presence. Hear us now. We pray. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well at this stage. It's important. That we remind ourselves.

[33 : 57] Of the importance. Of this occasion. Of our being. Observers. Of the sacrament. Of baptism. As well as. What it means. To the parents. Of the child.

And to the child. Herself. Two things. I think. Should fill our minds. As we come to this moment. First of all. Confession. Confession.

That we all. Ourselves. Need. What our baptism. Signifies. That is. The washing. Of our sins. By Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit.

And confession. That we ourselves. Have not lived. Even right up. To this moment. In the way. That we ought to have lived. In obedience.

To him. Baptism. Reminds us. Of our commitment. To Christ. As well as. His commitment. To us. And it's appropriate.

[34 : 52] That we come. With confession. Of our own limitations. Of our own failure. And come to seek. God's forgiveness. And restoration.

The second thing. Is. Consecration. That we come. To consecrate. Ourselves. Actively. To Jesus Christ. This is something.

That's. For all of us. Not just. For these parents. Consecration. To Christ. Is something. That is bound up. Without baptism. As baptized.

People. We are pledged. To be. His people. It's not. Taking communion. That makes us. Members. Of the visible.

Church. Of Christ. It is. Being. Baptized. We are received. Then. Into the visible. Church. Of God. Formally.

[35 : 50] That will not. Itself. Ensure. That we are saved. But it will be. To us. As we grow up. Something. That will be. A constant. Reminder. Of our need.

To take. To ourselves. As we said. In the sermon. The covenant. Privileges. Of God's people. And the covenant. Promise. That God.

Will be a God. To us. And so. As we come. To remind ourselves. Of that. It's important. That we come. Also. To be. For this family.

And for this child. A family. A spiritual family. In which. They will find. Encouragement. Help. Example.

As they come. To watch. Their little one grow. As they come. To pledge. To bring her up. In the nurture. And training. Of the Lord.

[36 : 47] I ask you now. To stand. Please. Both of you. Do you acknowledge.

God. The Father. The Son. And the Holy Spirit. One God. As the only. Through God. And you. God. Do you believe.

In the Lord. Jesus Christ. The only mediator. Between God. And men. Do you now. Promise. To bring up. Anna Jane. In the nurture. And training. Of the Lord.

Would you ask you. To stand. And please. Remain standing. After the prayer. Lord.

Our gracious God. We thank you. For everything. That brings us. To this moment. We thank you. For the significance. Of this. Event. Itself. We thank you.

[37 : 41] For the way. That it is. Accompanied. By your word. Which sets out. For us. And explains. To us. The validity. And the meaning. Of our baptism. We thank you. Especially.

For this child. We thank you. For her safe arrival. In the world. For your keeping. Off of us. Far. We thank you. For her parents.

We thank you. For the rest. Of the family. Grandparents. Great grandparents. Relatives. We bless you. Oh Lord. For your covenant. Promises. That they will indeed.

Follow us down. To our children. And our children's children. We thank you. For the evidence. Of that. Itself. Even here. This morning. We pray. Now.

That you would bless. This element. Of water. As we seek. To apply it. From its ordinary. To its sacred use. We bless you. Oh Lord. For your promise.

[38 : 34] That it will be. To us. A sign. And a seal. Of your covenant. Privileges. And blessings. To your people. Accept us. As we pray. As we confess.

Our sin. Cleanse us. And wash us. Through the Holy Spirit. That we may appear. Clean in your sight. And give us daily. The prayer of David. Long ago. Lord.

Create. In me. A clean heart. And maintain. The right spirit. Within me. Hear us. We pray now. For Jesus sake.

Amen. Anna Jean. I baptize you now. In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. One God. May God bless you.

And keep you. May God make a space. To shine upon you. And be gracious to you. May God lift up his countenance. Upon you. And give you peace. Eternal God.

[39 : 29] And our Heavenly Father. Be a father. We pray to this child. Be a father. To our parents. And to the entire family. O Lord. Be her companion.

As she grows up. Through life. As she enters upon. Her daily experience. As you have purposed. Make her. We pray. To be one. Who will. Come to fulfill.

The very things. That our baptism. Sets before us. We pray. That she will grow up. Indeed. In the fear of the Lord. That she will be. One. Who will take her place.

In your church. Actively. And who will. Walk. In a way. Of obedience. To you. And take delight. In your ways. Bless each. And everyone. Who belong to her.

In the family. Bless us here. We pray. As our spiritual. Family. Surrounding her. Today. We pledge. Ourselves. Anew. To you. O Lord. We seek.

[40 : 24] That we would be. Better than we have been. A family. Of people. Who will. Spiritually. Provide. That support. For one another. Through the things. Of life.

Help us. We pray. To depend upon you. And in all of these things. Accept our praise. And thanks. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. God's term.

God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless.

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