

Bless the Lord

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You see it throughout the Bible. From Exodus, when a people are being called out to be God's own people, very shortly after they are rescued and delivered from Egypt, they begin to complain.

And they forget who God is. They worship an idol made of gold. And as they are about to go into the promised land, Moses says to them, when you've eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

[3 : 30] Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commandments. And going right through the Old Testament, you see a history of a people who forget and need to be reminded by God's word and by his prophets.

And you see that going right through into the last book of the Bible, Revelation, where there's a warning to the church at Ephesus. And that warning says this, You have forsaken your first love, Jesus Christ.

Remember the height from which you have fallen. And that is why the Bible is written. It is written to remind forgetful people today of everything that is important.

One of the great blessings that we have here at St. John's are guest services. We had two guest services last two weeks in the evening services.

And in these services, there's a simple sermon that talks about the gospel, about how Jesus saves us by forgiving our sins and giving us new life.

[4 : 35] The preacher who preaches these sermons is thinking of people who don't go to church, people who are searching for God. And yet, often it's long-time Christians who come and speak to us afterwards and say, That service was a real blessing to me.

And I found that curious at first, but I realized that it is because they have been blessed by God in their remembering of the gospel. Even though it is actually a given to people who don't know Jesus yet.

The Holy Spirit is working in them and us in a powerful way as we are reminded by God's word.

That's why it's a blessing. Jesus said in John, God the Father will send you the Holy Spirit, and he will remind you of everything that I have said to you.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, reminding us as we hear God's word. And Psalm 103 brings home to us that essential truth of the Christian life.

It tells us this, very interestingly, that the opposite of forgetting God and forgetfulness is praising God. Praising God is the activity of remembering.

[5 : 52] There's a very good thing called the Westminster Catechism, and there it talks about some essential things about the Christian life. And one of the questions says, what is the chief end of man, of human beings, men and women?

The answer is, it is simply to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Our mission statement as Christians is to praise God by the way we live our life.

To be about the activity of remembering him. And that doesn't come naturally to us, and that's why David has to talk to himself in the first five verses of Psalm 103.

He says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. And then, because he's forgetful, he says it again.

Bless my soul, and forget not all his benefits. That's a wake-up call to him. But it's a wake-up call to us as well.

[6 : 50] I don't know how your week has been, but all of us, I'm sure, have had certain parts of that week in which we found it difficult to praise God. It might be because things have been very good, and we congratulate ourselves and say, isn't it great how things turned out?

Or things have been very bad, and we wonder, how can God be blessing me right now in this darkness? And we forget who God is. We don't feel like praising God.

Well, David is teaching us a wonderful truth here. He is saying that you can command yourself to praise God. That praising God is an act of the will in which we urge ourselves to bless God, and we do it by remembering.

It's not dependent on emotions or great circumstances around us. It is dependent upon us acting on our will. Praises need to be informed by remembering.

It's the activity of remembering. And that's why great hymns and great songs in the church always give us the reason, remind us of why we praise God.

[7 : 58] We're reminded of the things of God so that we can praise Him. So I want to look at three ways that David calls himself to praise God.

There's three ways of remembering. First of all, look at verses 3 through 5. And in verse 3 through 5, he remembers God's word, and he sees illustrations of God's word in his life.

So in verse 3, it says, God forgave His people even after, and, sorry, verse 3, God who forgives all your iniquities.

He's talking to himself. The God who forgives sin. And David knows, as he says this, that God forgave the people of Israel when they worshipped that idol. He is one who had to bring his people back to himself.

David knew that as an illustration in his own life. He sinned in a terrible way, killing the husband of a woman that he wanted to have as his wife.

[8 : 59] So he knew the forgiveness of God that was absolutely necessary as an illustration of what he saw in God's word. And then going on in verse 3, I am the Lord who heals you.

And David knew the healing of God. We're going to see later on that he knows that people are fragile, that they all die. He knew that his baby died as well, through his sin, actually.

But he also knew that God heals as well, and that nothing is outside his healing power. In fact, that healing extends not just to physical healing, but to the healing of one's relationship with God, the healing of guilt, and the healing of grief as well.

His life he knew as an illustration of that promise from the Old Testament, I am the Lord who heals you. And then in verse 4, he says, who redeems your life from the pit, in other words, from death.

And here he is thinking of Job. He knew of Job being rescued from the pit. He also knew of the people of Israel being rescued from death in Egypt as well. And for himself, he also knew what it meant to be rescued from death, literal death, many times as enemies were against him.

[10 : 16] And he even thought of the end of his life. He said, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me. And he may not have known it, but he was looking towards Jesus who would save the world from death.

His life he saw as an illustration of God rescuing from death. And then working down to verse 4, he who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

And here he knew, in the Old Testament again, of a people who knew the love of God in the covenant. I will be your God and you will be my people. No other people could say that.

That was the crown of the people of Israel. And for David in his own life, it was far more important to him that God gave him a crown of his love and his mercy than that he was king in the greatest period of Israel's history.

It meant more to him. He was one after God's own heart. He saw the importance of the crown that God gives in his own life. And finally, the fifth benefit that he remembers is that he satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

[11 : 35] And David, in a wonderful way, expresses this. He says, in my own life, God is my strength. He is my shield. God is the one who renews me and makes me strong.

Not just physically, but spiritually. Who he is in relationship to God. And this was something that David would say over and over again.

He knew God as one who renewed his strength like the eagles. We need to see that these are not far away from us. In fact, they are brought home to us in Jesus Christ.

Because, of course, Jesus forgives. Because of his death on the cross, there is nothing out of reach of his forgiveness. He is one who brings to us reconciliation with God and calls us to forgive one another.

Jesus is the one who heals as well. That was part of his ministry because he would, in the resurrection, heal even death, which we look forward to. Nothing is beyond the healing power of God who has created us.

[12 : 36] And Jesus is the great healer. I think it's very helpful for us to see here that David is not saying that every disease that a person has will be healed. He is saying nothing is beyond God's power to heal.

And it's not limited to physical healing. Calvin said something very helpful. He said, blotting out, he said, blotting out guilt and the curing of corruptions within us as the Holy Spirit makes us new people are also how God heals us.

And he says, until the heavenly doctor treats us, we nourish within us not only many diseases, but even many deaths. God brings healing to us day by day in our relationship with him, in our emotional and spiritual and physical lives as well, renewing us day by day.

And that's why we see as we go down that the resurrection of Jesus is so important for us. The renewing of strength of eagles is about the resurrection life affecting us every day.

2 Corinthians 4 tells us that though we're outwardly wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. And that is a blessing that all of us experience who know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

[13 : 56] And finally, I should mention the fact that David knew him crowning us with love and mercy. Well, we put on Christ's righteousness in our lives. We pray to him to put on Christ and we put on his love and his mercy every day.

And I think that a very good exercise for us as Christians is to go through our lives, to take inventory, to even write things down and think about how is my life an illustration of what God has done?

How has my life been blessed in the ways that David was blessed, in the ways that Jesus says that he blesses us? What are the real applications of that in my own life?

And that is a testimony, to remember that is to be able to testify that to other people and to yourself. And that is a great praise that we give to God to tell out his blessings to us.

Well, secondly, besides remembering God's word and what he has done for us, David goes from himself to the whole universe. And he talks about the magnitude of steadfast love that God has for all of us.

[15 : 09] And that's why, and it's something that he gets from the Bible again. In verse 7, he says, he made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

And because of that, he knows, verse 8, the Lord is merciful and gracious, he is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Now again, David is simply repeating what Moses has written in Exodus 34 when he came close to God. The very character of God was revealed there and that is what David knew about God in his own life.

And the overriding thing that David will focus on here is that God abounds in a steadfast love that we simply do not deserve. You know, the reason that the Lord must be merciful and gracious and slow to anger is because we need his mercy.

We need his grace. We need something to be done against his anger, against all that is evil and sinful. And the marvelous thing is in verse 10 that God does not deal with us according to our iniquities, according to our sins.

[16 : 21] He doesn't deal with us according to them. And there can be only one reason for that. And that is in verse 11. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him.

And as we see more and more exploration by telescopes like the Hubble telescope, we see that this illustration gets larger and larger about the greatness of God's love for us.

God's love involves his anger. It's a just and perfect love with no room for evil and sin. But so great and powerful is this sin that it reaches even, or is this love that it reaches into sin.

And so great is this love that God is able to remove the transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west. Now I'm amazed at how appropriate that very ancient illustration is for us today.

Because of course we can actually measure the distance of the farthest apart that north and south can be by measuring the north and south pole distance. But you can never really reach east.

[17 : 29] And we know that here in Canada. You know we in Vancouver see the east as being Calgary. Or maybe Abbotsford as well. But Winnipeg sees Toronto as being the east.

And Toronto sees itself as the center of course. And so they see the Maritimes as being the east. And I think people in Newfoundland see Ireland as the east.

But what we see here is that you can keep going east indefinitely. And the same with going west as well. It is indefinite. And we need to know by this that God removes our sins with such power that the distance between us and our sin is incomprehensible.

It is infinite. And it's only by looking at the cost to Jesus dying on the cross that we can see the full extent and power of God's love for us in dealing with sin.

And so verse 10 takes out a new meaning for us with Jesus. It actually means that God deals with Jesus according to our sin. He doesn't deal with us according to our sin.

[18 : 37] He deals with Jesus according to our sins. He was pierced for our transgressions, Isaiah will say. And Paul will say that God demonstrates his love for us in this.

He reveals it to us in this that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. but as far-reaching and powerful as God's love is in verse 103 or in verses 11, verse 13 and 14 tell us something else.

It says that that love is deeply personal and close as well. So he says this, as a father pities or has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

And you can think of the illustration of this baptism that we just saw, that where we see parents with their little children and see the close and personal love that they have for them.

Well, God is the same way. He knows our frame, it goes on to say, our bodies, and he remembers that we are dust. So no matter how we might forget God and his great love for us, he remembers us.

[19 : 54] He knows our weakness, he knows our brokenness, he knows the things that we hide from even those who are closest to us, and he loves us, which it clearly says here.

The immense love of verse 11 that encompasses the universe is directed to you and to me in a deeply personal way. And it is a strange thing that our nature is to push away that love, because we think we don't deserve it on one hand, or because we don't think we need it on the other.

Well, David wants us to know, in verses 6-18, that the steadfast love is the greatest treasure that we can know in the world. The world tells us the greatest treasure would be this, it would be loyal friendships, or the perfect marriage, or the perfect family life, or a career that makes a huge impact on the world and is successful, or if you read the billboards, it's having your bank manager be nice to you because you won the lottery.

These are the great treasures of our world, and as Christians we would perhaps include all of that and a wonderful church life as well, with great preaching, and great music, and very effective ministry, a place where you're really growing in your faith.

But David says that these things are flowers, they are flowers that are very beautiful, they flourish, but the wind passes over them, and they are gone.

[21 : 22] It's very sobering what it says in verse 16. They are all temporary. As Christians, we need to see that there is something wonderful that happens next.

In that temporary aspect of the things that we call treasure, the love of God is one that lasts from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him.

The steadfast love, in contradiction and contrast to our own temporary nature, is something that goes on forever and ever.

It will never leave you. Its value is greater than all civilizations and cultures put together and all that is held to be valuable. And that love is upon you and upon me.

And it is the very activity of heaven. It is the activity of eternal life. And if that doesn't give you reason to praise, I'm sure David would say, then there is nothing that will give you reason to praise.

[22 : 22] It is the treasure beyond all treasure, the steadfast love of God in Jesus directed at you and me. And I'd like to close this sermon with the third thing that David remembers.

Besides God's word and besides the magnitude of God's love, David remembers that God is king and lord in verse 19. The lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all.

And because of Easter, because of the day of resurrection that we just celebrated, we know that it is Jesus who is on that throne and that it is his kingdom now that rules a world that forgets God. And he not only rules this world but every part of the universe. And that fact is a call to action for David. He says all heaven and the whole universe must act.

They must respond to God's lordship. They must praise God. It is the right way to respond. And David assumes this throughout the passage that we are to respond to God's lordship and his power and his activity.

[23 : 33] Notice verse 11 at the end. It says, so great is God's steadfast love towards those who fear him. And in verse 13, so the Lord pities or has compassion on those who fear him.

And then verse 17, his steadfast love everlasting to everlasting is upon those who fear him. The right response to God and his lordship is to fear him.

And this doesn't mean being scared away and pushed away from God. It means to know him as lord and king of your life. It means we look to him as the source of everything that is deeply good and truly good.

It means knowing that without Jesus you have nothing. But with Jesus you have everything. You are surrounded with Jesus by everlasting steadfast love that carries you and will never ever end. To remember that is to be transformed and to see our lives changed. because it means we will live for him. We will act. When David says bless the lord he doesn't mean sing a song.

[24 : 43] He doesn't mean just say praise the lord. He actually calls us to serve God and to live for him. That whole psalm is a call for action.

It is a call to serve God. And we are called to do that as we serve Jesus. So when we are called to bless the lord it means serving god as lord in our closest relationship.

Serving Jesus as lord in the way that we treat our co-workers or our employees. Serving God in what we do with our families. Serving him in the priority you put on learning and sharing the good news.

And serving him as lord in the way that you spend your money. Which for many of us is the most important activity that we have. It is our security. So that's the great challenge of this psalm this morning.

God in his word is saying to us remember. Do not forget. Do not forget that God has blessed you in Jesus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and here on earth.

[25 : 50] He has deeply blessed us. He has shown us who he is in his word for us. He has poured his steadfast love on us forever in Jesus Christ. And he is the king of the universe who we will see one day as Lord.

Our only response is to live for the praise of his glory. For this we give God thanks and praise.

Amen. Amen. This digital audio file, along with many others, is available from the St.

John's Shaughnessy website at www.stjohnschaughnessy.org. That address is www.stjohnschaughnessy.org.

On the website you will also find information about ministries, worship services and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy. We hope that this message has helped you and that you will share it with others.

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[27 : 08] . Thank you.