

Psalm 103:13-17 - The Gospel According to Dust

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We've been singing tonight about our weakness, our need, crying out to our God from a place of humility and dependence upon Him.

This is what I call realizing our dustiness. When we come face to face with our creatureliness, with our limitations, with our own inadequacy, it happens in a lot of ways.

It's happened to me several times just in the last few days. Yesterday morning, I was on the treadmill, and I've always believed that you can always just go a little bit faster, right?

And just push yourself a little bit harder. And so every day on the treadmill, I think I'm going to go a little faster and a little farther than I did the day before. And yesterday morning, my lungs and my legs staged a protest.

[1 : 13] They argued with that point that I believe in so strongly. They said, stop! You can't go any further. And I felt my limitations.

This weekend, I was leading a meeting, and I needed to redirect a conversation that had taken a turn I wasn't anticipating and hadn't planned for, and it was my job to lead the meeting, and I didn't know how to help.

And I felt my inadequacy. Sunday, I got a call that the father of my childhood best friend was dying. He's one of those guys who was a professional athlete, someone you remember as a kid, admiring and looking up to and thinking he's strong and capable, you know?

And you're a kid, those adults who can do whatever they want, and you really think they'll always be there. And Friday, I'll speak at his funeral.

And I was feeling my own frailty. When have you come face to face with your dustiness recently?

[2 : 29] Perhaps receiving a diagnosis that you have no control over? Perhaps getting older, feeling aches and pains where you didn't know you could feel aches and pains?

Perhaps experiencing your weakness in fighting against sin? Perhaps getting older, feeling like a child, you didn't want to, but you clicked on it again. You said those hurtful words again.

You looked and envied again. And you felt powerless to do what you knew was right and wanted so much to do.

Regardless of our strengths and our plans and our attempts to control everything in our lives, we all face our dustiness time and again, don't we?

In this life, it's always before us. The Bible has a lot to say about this. I want to start by reading from Psalm 103 as we reflect just a few minutes tonight on the gospel according to dust.

[3 : 44] Psalm 103 at verse 13. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. 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. We'll come back in a couple minutes to Psalm 103.

But for now, just notice that it says God knows our frame. You may be used to hearing that in a different version. He knows how we were formed.

He remembers that we are dust. So it's pointing us back. We need to go back to the beginning of the story. God knows how we were formed, of course, because he is the mighty creator who formed us.

[4 : 58] God knows how we were born. Who formed us out of the dust of the ground. Genesis chapter 2. It's humble beginnings, right? Formed out of the dust of the ground.

Just a part of the creation from the dirt. Not apparently special or inherently worthy at this point. But then God breathes his life. Physical, spiritual, relational.

He breathes into Adam. And we're in his image. Mankind made in God's image. Man and woman set apart from the rest of creation to reflect his authority and his goodness and his dignity.

The reconfigured dust was to be glorious, right? That's the beginning of the story on dust, isn't it? It's what God had in mind. But you know how the story goes, don't you?

[6 : 04] Our sin disrupts the story. Even just in the next chapter. And in the midst of the curse that God pronounces as a result of man's rebellion.

Our dustiness is connected to our sin. The very ground is cursed. Genesis 3.17 Death enters. Physical and spiritual death now. God pronounces man will return to dust. To the now cursed ground that he came from.

From dust you are. And to dust you shall return. Lowly. Hopeless. Dust. I played a lot of baseball growing up.

And if you spend long summer days all day on a Saturday on a dusty little league field, you know for sure that the ground is cursed.

[7 : 09] Fields that are so dry and dusty that your lips begin to stick together. You can't even talk. It gets so dried out.

They're parched. A little bit of wind makes you turn your eyes from the stinging dust that's blowing. When someone slides at your feet, the cloud of dust that flies up.

No one can see anything for several seconds. The dust just sticks everywhere on every part of you. The whole field gets dry and torn up.

And you feel like you need a bath between every inning. It's not a pretty sight. That's what dust begins to picture through the rest of the Old Testament.

Almost every time it's referenced referring to the lowly. The downtrodden. The powerless. The unworthy. So when Job talks about his dustiness, he writes this in chapter 30.

[8 : 15] Now my soul is poured out within me. Days of affliction have taken hold of me. The night racks my bones and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.

With great force my garment is disfigured. It binds me about like the collar of my tunic. God has cast me into the mire. And I have become like dust and ashes.

What's it like? What does he say it's like? The most horrible things that he can imagine. The most painful. The agony that he's experiencing. All that suffering.

He says it's like dust and ashes. It's always been part of our creatureliness. Our finitude.

But now it's actually much worse through this part of the story. Dust is also highlighting our failure. Our inadequacy. Our disgrace. Isaiah connects dust with the results of our sinful rebellion.

[9 : 17] Chapter 5 verse 24. Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble. And as dry grass sinks down in the flame. So their root will be as rottenness.

And their blossom go up like dust. Why? For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts. And have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Because of our sin. We're like dust disappearing. We're pictured as this miserable little league field. Worthless.

Because we've rejected our true purpose. Refused to follow God's glorious design for us. And ended up being just blown away by a light wind.

There's nothing to us anymore. You and I have felt that. Haven't we? Yes. Weak. Limited.

[10 : 13] And finite. And frail. And also failing. Yet again. Inadequate for God's calling.

Unworthy of His glory. And when you get that low. That face to face with your inadequacies. You often give up hope of ever being anything more.

Don't you? Have you felt that? That predicament is what we must contemplate. Particularly on a day like Ash Wednesday.

But it's something we must consider regularly. Because the big question at this point in the story is. How will God respond? How will God respond? This is where we're stuck with these feelings.

How's God going to respond? What's His heart toward disgusting dust? Everything about us calls for Him to reject us.

[11:15] Suggests He should be repulsed. That pushes Him to feel disdain for such weak, pathetic wretches. You've got to feel the weight of that at this point in the story.

Especially for those of you who know the end of the story already. Don't read ahead. I know you know how He feels. But feel the weight of how we deserve for Him to feel.

You've felt the emotions before. When He felt distant. When you didn't feel His love. When you felt at the end of yourself.

And worthless and without hope. How does the mighty Creator God feel about pathetic dust?

And we make it back to Psalm 103. Let me read it one more time. As a father shows compassion to his children.

[12:14] So the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. Why? Where does the compassion come from? For He knows how our frame.

He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field. For the wind passes over it. And it's gone.

And its place knows it no more. Except who does? No one remembers you. But the steadfast love of the Lord. Is from everlasting to everlasting.

On those who fear Him. And His righteousness to children's children. Far beyond when we're gone. And forgotten.

Is His love. Do you see what this passage is saying? It's His compassion. And His love. And what's in between? Our dustiness.

[13:09] Our weakness. The fact that we disappear quickly. And yet His compassion. And His love. Are driven towards us.

By that. His compassion and love come. Not in spite of. But even because of. Our dustiness. That's the verdict.

God loves dust. That's good news. Look at the heart of your God towards you. When you're face down. At the end of your rope.

With no hope left. Blown off the stage. And forgotten by everyone else. The place you live. Doesn't even remember you anymore. But His heart is tender compassion.

Steadfast love. From everlasting to everlasting. Never running out. John Calvin says it this way. Speaking of these verses.

[14:11] He says. David here. Annihilates. All the worth. Which men would arrogate to themselves. And asserts that it is the consideration of our misery. And that alone.

Which moves God to exercise patience. Towards us. This again. We ought carefully to mark. Not only for the purpose of subduing the pride of our flesh.

But also that a sense of our unworthiness. May not prevent us from trusting in God.

The more wretched and despicable our condition is. The more inclined is God to show mercy. For remembrance that we are clay and dust.

Is enough to incite Him to do us good. Amen. Remembrance that we are clay and dust. Is enough to incite God.

[15:08] To drive His heart of compassion. To do us good. I'd call that the gospel according to dust. Yes. From dust we are.

And to dust we shall return. But God says we are beloved dust. He loves us so much. That He sends His Son to rescue us.

To die the death we know so well we deserve to die. And we feel the weight of it. To live the glorious life we were created to live. But we've never really gotten a glimpse of what it could look like.

He never stops loving us from everlasting to everlasting. And His righteousness He gives one generation to another after you're gone.

Making us right one generation after another. Amazing. See this may be the most astonishing part of the whole story. The story of the gospel according to dust.

[16:10] You remember that glorious intent that God had. When He formed us out of the dust of the earth. What He created us for. That's still His plan for us.

He's making us right again. After many long, hot, dry Saturdays on those dusty little league fields.

I finally made it to the state tournament. At a minor league baseball stadium. And I remember walking up the dugout steps of this amazing stadium.

And just marveling at the beautiful field. The grounds crew had just finished up polishing it up. And it looked magnificent.

They took that same dust. And with the right care. And the proper amount of water. It worked just right. For my money, if you love baseball or landscaping.

[17:13] You can't do much better than the beauty of perfectly manicured green grass. Surrounding perfectly watered brown dirt.

It's tough to beat. It's a beautiful thing. That's dust looking and functioning the way it is supposed to be. Right? This is where God is going with the story.

Y'all. This is what He's been up to since creation. And what He's still doing. Paul writes in a couple of places about the first man. Adam. Who failed and brought disgrace and sin to all of us connected to Him.

And then he speaks of the next man. Jesus. The second Adam. Who succeeded and brought honor and life to all of us connected to Him.

In 1 Corinthians 15 he explains it this way. The first man, Adam. Was from the earth. A man of dust. The second man, Jesus.

[18:18] Is from heaven. As was the man of dust. So also are those who are of the dust. And as is the man of heaven. So also are those who are of heaven.

So listen. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust. We shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Listen. We are limited. And we have failed. We have borne the image of the man of dust quite well. Haven't we? We have walked in Adam's footsteps.

We have felt his pain. And we are wanting to take a good long look at that tonight. And through this season. And see that reality about ourselves. But the hope in Christ.

Is that we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. The glorious image we were designed to reflect. We will be restored to. As a beautiful part of God's glorious creation.

[19:21] That He makes back the way He always intended. So Christian. You can admit. Your sin. And all its horrible effects.

As you begin this Easter season. You can stare your weakness. Your failings. Your grief. Even death itself.

In the face. Tonight. You can smear dust and the ashes of death. On your body tonight. And yet rejoice.

Because it's not the end of your story. It's not all that's true about you. You can rejoice because God the Father loves dust.

You can rejoice because Jesus the Son stared death in the face for you. So that you would be remade.

[20:20] In His glorious. Perfect. Image. And that's good news. Let's pray. Father we thank you.

That though we are weak yet you are strong. That from the time you created us. You have also designed to recreate us.

In your image. To bear your likeness. To reflect your glory. And so Father as we begin now.

To see our frailty. To acknowledge our sin. Would it be your grace that allows us to look at it straight on. Would it be the hope of life everlasting.

That allows us. Even to stare at death tonight. And tell it it holds nothing over us. Because of our Savior.

[21:28] It's in His name that we pray. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org