

One Gracious God for Little People

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Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 01] Well, Happy New Year, everybody. Happy New Year. Where's the enthusiasm for 2022? You know, it's another year, right?

And it's sort of one of those things where I think with each, over the last few years, with each passing new year, I think there's been sort of, we've moved from a place of being, oh, I'm so glad that year's over to, uh-oh, what does the next year hold?

And as we move into this coming new year, I want us to start by looking back to the past. I think it's helpful to look back to the past. In fact, one of the most helpful things I find when we're facing all the anxieties, uncertainties, um, of our present age is to read a little bit of history and to understand that, uh, people have lived in far more tumultuous times than our own, as, as bad as ours are.

And the Lord has been faithful and good through all of that, too. And, uh, I want us to actually go back to the time and the place where we have one particular chapter of scripture written, Psalm 103.

Now, I don't, we don't know exactly when this was written other than the title, which says, Of David. So, uh, this is something from King David. But, uh, it helps us to know that that's when it took place because we want to get into a certain frame of mind when we're reading this psalm.

[1 : 37] Sometimes we open the Bible and we start reading it and we bring in the anxieties, the questions, the struggles, the doubts of our own time.

But it's helpful first to get into the frame of mind of why the psalm was written and then to bring it forward to our own time. So, we want to listen to it as though we were the original readers and we want to listen to it with the concerns that they carried.

And so, as we prepare to do this, let me, uh, begin with some, uh, prayer to God asking for him to bless our reading and understanding of his word. Our God and our Father, we thank you for this psalm.

We thank you for these words of wisdom. But we confess that unless you are at work this morning, we do not have eyes to see it. We do not have ears to hear it. We don't have a heart to understand it.

So, we ask for eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to understand. And Lord, I ask that we would not only read and understand this as it was written, but then learn how this connects with the real challenges, the real struggles that we face in 2022.

[2 : 47] Help us come to know you, who you are, and who you are for us in this new year. Amen. So, Psalm 103, it begins with this verse, verse 1.

And if you'll, if you take a look there, it begins with these words, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. And we just sang that, right?

That song, 10,000 Reasons, that we sang a few minutes ago is primarily based on Psalm 103. And in fact, this is one of the favorite psalms that, uh, that modern songwriters like to, like to write their songs based on.

But if you look at that verse, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Why do you suppose that David wrote that?

What is this verse meant to do for us? Well, first of all, we might think, okay, I've got this problem that I just, I just forget about the Lord.

[3 : 56] I get busy with life, I get overwhelmed with life, and I need to be reminded, I need to remember to, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm living to bless the Lord, to affirm him, to celebrate him.

And that's what I'm supposed to do. I need some motivation to, and reminders, and a kick in the pants to get back to worship. Because the problem is that, you know, functionally, I function, sometimes I function like an atheist, sometimes I function day to day as though God doesn't exist.

And I need to be reminded that, yes, he does, and that I'm here to celebrate and to worship him. And there's some truth to that, but I don't think that's actually the biggest concern that David had.

I don't think that's the biggest concern that his contemporaries had. Because as you read the Old Testament, read through it, the primary concern was not that the people of God would function as though there was no God.

The primary concern was not as though the people of God would function as though they were atheists, as though God just didn't exist and there was no divine being around.

[5 : 00] Rather, the primary concern is that the people of Israel would be polytheists. They would believe in many gods, polytheism.

And that they would live as though there were many gods, many gods that need to be worshipped, many gods that needed to be blessed. And so, when we read this verse with this mindset, here's kind of the message that's coming across to us, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name, and let no part of me bless any other gods.

Let no part of me bless any other gods. All that is within me, entirely devoted to the Lord. And so, what David is promoting is an undivided heart.

An undivided heart, exclusively loyal to the Lord and to no other gods. He's promoting the sense of a real covenant relationship with God, an exclusive relationship with God.

He's saying that when we bless the Lord, when we speak aloud these words of favor, these powerful words of affirmation, we speak them about the Lord and we speak them about no other God. Now, hang in there with me because maybe you're thinking, well, that's not an issue.

[6 : 25] I don't have a bunch of like little, little Baal statues or Asherah, in my mantle, I don't have Asherah poles in my backyard to worship these Canaanite gods. But hang in there with me because I'm going to connect this back to our present day and to our present problems and our present anxieties.

But we want to read through this psalm with that lens, with those glasses on, that this is a call to an undivided, loyal, affectionate response to the Lord.

We would expect then that the rest of the psalm is going to tell us what sets the Lord apart from other gods. What makes him distinct? What makes him unique?

What makes him like no other God that we might be tempted to worship? Everything after this verse is going to show how the Lord is different, why we are to celebrate him, why he is better, why he is so much better than any other God.

And here's how the Lord is different according to Psalm 103 of David. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

[7 : 41] Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgives all your iniquity? Who heals all your diseases?

Who redeems your life from the pit? Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy? Who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles?

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

[8 : 57] 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, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Bless the Lord. This is the Lord who is bigger. This is the Lord who is better than any other God.

[10 : 11] And there is an irony in the way that this psalm ends. Because in verse 19, David tells us how expansive his domain really is. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over what?

Just a small little portion of creation? Just a small little corner in the land of Judah? No, his kingdom rules over all. All people, all places, all times.

And so who does David summon to bless the Lord? Verses 20 and 21 tell us. He summons angels, mighty ones, hosts, ministers.

And that is so interesting because David is speaking to these powerful, these godlike spiritual beings in the heavenly courts. These are the beings that the Canaanites, that the people of his day, that all the nations around David would have said, hey, we need to worship these beings as gods.

We need to celebrate them. Look how powerful they are. Look how much influence they have over human affairs. We need to win their favor. We need to bless them. And David addresses these so-called gods.

[11 : 24] And instead of worshiping them, David says to them, you too bless the Lord. You bless the Lord. You speak words of favor.

You speak words of affirmation to the Lord. It's an amazing turn of events. I want to consider for a moment what a difference that makes. When we worship only one God.

I was listening to a podcast this week. The host was talking about the Israelites of the Old Testament. And he was not favorable towards the Christian faith or the Jewish religion.

He was contrasting polytheism from monotheism. The worship of many gods, polytheism, from the worship of one God, monotheism. And he was contrasting those polytheists, and he was sympathetic towards them.

He said, hey, Israel at the time, there was a conflict between polytheists who said, let's worship many gods, and monotheists who say, the Lord alone is worthy of worship. He alone is the one true God.

[12 : 33] And he described monotheists as intolerant, aggressive, holy warriors. They just can't leave other people alone to worship gods, all the gods they see fit.

They demand that everybody worship, that everybody in Israel worship only one God in just that one way. And so in his mind, to worship only one God, to be a monotheist, is to make you into a severe fanatic.

It's to turn you into the severe fanatic. Whereas being a polytheist is, you know, you're live and let live. You're accepting. You're casual. You know, you're tolerant of others.

Now, I'd like us to consider for a moment, though, what polytheism really does for people. And I think it's helpful to look at an example of one of the polytheistic societies of that time.

Here's one particular society, people group, that a Bible dictionary describes. And here's how it describes them. They were tolerant of other religions and did not impose their religion on others.

[13 : 36] They were tolerant of other religions and did not impose their religion on others. Now, that sounds great, right? In our culture, we'd say, that sounds really great. Imagine how wonderful those people must be to be around.

Let me complete the quote. They were tolerant of other religions and did not impose their religion on others. The king was the chief priest and Ashur's representative on earth.

Ashur, their god, was Assyria's true king and ultimately responsible for upholding order. So these religiously tolerant, accepting polytheists were the Assyrians.

And on Christmas Eve, BK was speaking about the Assyrians, that they were the big boy on the block. They were basically, if you were, it's sort of like the equivalent of, imagine yourself being a shopkeeper in Chicago in the 1930s and you need a big mafia boss to come in and help you.

The Assyrians were the mafia boss. If you were wondering, what were the Assyrians like? Imagine for a moment the Nazis, but with an extra mean streak.

[14 : 45] The Assyrians made the Nazis look like puppy dogs. They were that bad. They were horrendous. A couple years back, we were working through Old Testament history and I described to the foundations class, I kind of made the mistake of showing them some Assyrian artwork of what they did to their captives when they conquered a city.

And I think I traumatized a few people in my class with just the horrifying, awful things that the Assyrians did. But suffice it to say, we might think, oh, polytheism is a live and let live ideology.

Well, no. It's an ideology that, in the end, does enable vicious and cruel living. It enables it. It doesn't necessarily produce it, but it enables it.

It gives it permission to happen. And that's because, at its heart, here's what polytheism does to us, to our hearts. Here's what it does to our relationships. And I'll get to this in a moment because you're thinking, well, I'm not a polytheist.

How does this affect me? I'll get back to that in a second. But polytheism creates a certain kind of relationship with its many gods, with its pantheon of gods. It creates this give-to-get relationship.

[16 : 01] It creates transactional relationship. There's a transaction at the heart of that polytheism. And here's what it is. I will do good things for the gods.

I will keep them happy. And in turn, they will do good things for me. It's a give-to-get. I will do good things for the gods.

They will do good things for me. So I'll bring a goat from my flock, and I'll take it to the local temple, and I will sacrifice it to serve as food for the idol. And then that god will be happy with me.

I might bring a little bit of money, too, for the temple and its priests. I will bless the god of this temple. And then, now he is happy with me. Now he is going to shower favor on me.

He will give me good crops so that we can go through winter without being hungry and maybe have a little bit left over to sell and make a profit. My wife will now be able to bear children, and our children will survive.

[17 : 05] My family will remain free from disease. That's what the god will do for me. And that's the transaction at the heart of polytheism. It is a give-to-get. And it's a distant relationship.

You don't have a real relationship with this god. He sort of is elevated. He's up there. He might shower favor on you, but, you know, you better keep him happy or else he'll smite you.

And it's an anxious relationship. Here's what makes it so anxious. Because not only do you have to keep one god happy, when you're a polytheist, you have to keep a whole bunch of gods happy. You have to hedge your bets.

You're torn between a whole bunch of gods, any of whom could get angry at you, all of whom have the power to do you great harm. And you've got to run around and hope you're keeping enough of them happy.

And you've got to make sure your friends and family are keeping all of them happy too, because you could be really affected if your friends and family aren't keeping all the gods happy. Polytheism creates these corrupted relationship patterns that then trickle down, not only to the way we relate to the gods, vertical relationship, but towards one another.

[18 : 20] We start relating to one another in the same way. Polytheism creates patterns of anxious relationships, distant relationships, demanding relationships, transactional relationships.

It creates dysfunctional, toxic, sinful, destructive relationships like all of these. Now, maybe you are anticipating where I'm going with this.

Maybe you're expecting me to conclude, don't be a polytheist. Don't be like one of those polytheists out there. Remain a monotheist. Worship one god. And then that'll free you from anxiety, because you only have to keep one god happy.

But there's a problem. What if the one god you worship isn't good? What if you're putting all your eggs in one basket, worshiping only one god, and it turns out that god is not a good god?

What if he is just like all those other gods? What if he's a give to get? What if you have to perpetually keep him happy so that he doesn't smack you down?

[19 : 26] What if you need to earn his favor and trust so that he can then shower you with good stuff? What if he is distant and unknowable? What if he is severe and demanding? What if he is unstable and can change his mind at a whim, fly off the handle at a whim?

Well, then that's no better. We haven't gotten any better than polytheism. You still have an anxious relationship, distant, demanding, transactional.

Now, here is where we come back to Psalm 103. Psalm 103 doesn't summon us to any, just any sort of monotheism, any sort of one god worship.

It summons us to worship a god who isn't just great. He isn't just king above all gods, as BK read from Psalm 96. He isn't just the one true god and the one who we exclusively worship.

He's not only great, but he is a god who is good. He is good. And as we come to know this god, we learn that he is a god of good character.

[20 : 36] A good, good in nature, good in his essence. And we learn how to relate to him in worship. What happens is our relationship with him then spills over into our relationships with other people.

As we learn to develop this right and good relationship with a god who is great and good, we develop patterns of peaceful, intimate, gentle, gracious relationship with one another.

And any time when I look at people and I see those sort of patterns of relationship lacking, that fruit of the spirit lacking, it flows out of someone who has not yet come to learn the patterns of relating to a good, gracious God who is great.

This is how God relates to us. I'll expand on that in a moment as we work our way through Psalm 103. But all this I'm telling you right now because it sets up everything I'm about to say.

Maybe you're listening to this and thinking polytheism is a problem that's out there. Maybe in other countries in the world. Maybe in other people in our community. But here in the church we're all worshipers of the one true God.

[21 : 48] We're all monotheists. Here's what I'm getting at. We are immersed in polytheism. Saturated in it. And it has worked its way into our hearts too.

There's a big problem of polytheism right in this room. Now that might surprise you. Once again, it's not often that we go to one another's house and see little idols perched on their mantle.

You don't see Asherah poles in people's backyards. You don't go to save on foods and see them selling meat that was sacrificed to Zeus. You don't have to participate in idol ceremonies in order to be certified as an electrician.

Those were all things that would have happened in the ancient world. But nonetheless, we are immersed in polytheism and it's gotten into our hearts too. So what are the gods we worship?

What are these other gods? Let's think back to Psalm 103 verse 1. Remember what David says? He says, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

[22 : 58] Now, what are the gods that our little corner of the world encourages us to bless? Who does our culture say that we ought to affirm, that we ought to celebrate, that we ought to speak words of favor toward?

Lord. Here's what I'm going to put before you today. It is no longer angelic authorities. It is no longer heavenly hosts that we worship.

We've moved on. It is ourselves. It is human beings. It is the self that we worship and it is one another.

In our little corner of the world, we do not think of ourselves merely as human beings. We do not say, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you created him.

We like to think of ourselves as little gods. And we like to look at one another and see one another as little gods. And it creates deeply destructive patterns of relationship.

[24 : 06] We are polytheists at heart. Here's a picture, sort of a word picture, a metaphor of how we think of ourselves. I was down in Arizona over the holidays. And one of the fun things about being in Arizona is sometimes in the evenings, you'll look out across the horizon and you'll see hot air balloons.

I'm looking forward to riding in one of those someday. Anyone here ridden in a hot air balloon before? Nobody? Got one. All right. It's got to be pretty majestic being up there in a hot air balloon. No?

No? It looks majestic from down below. And that's actually a really great point. Being in a hot air balloon is a very different experience from looking out at these majestic balloons hovering serenely over the sunset, right?

Inside the balloons. Now think about what is it about a hot air balloon. It is elevated because it is filled with heated air that's lighter. It creates a sort of bubble and the bubble floats upwards.

Inside of a hot air balloon there is no substance. But you have to keep it constantly filled with hot air so that it can ascend to the heavens in this godlike state.

[25 : 15] But hot air balloons are empty inside. And they are very fragile and very vulnerable. You're floating up there, but what happens when a big storm comes along?

What happens if some sharp object were to come along and to slash open the balloon? What happens if another balloon veered off course and came crashing into you?

You're thousands of feet up. In this majestic looking but hollow and fragile structure. And now you're in danger of plummeting to the earth, crashing down, deflated and crumpled and broken on the ground.

And that is the modern self. That is what it means to be a human being in the modern world. We long to be elevated.

We long to ascend to the heavens. We long to fulfill that false promise that the serpent made when he said to Adam and Eve, you will be like God. You will be like him. We want to be great.

[26 : 21] The builders of the Tower of Babel, they rallied around their tower trying to elevate themselves, to make a name for themselves, to be great and godlike. And we, as individuals and as families, we want to be elevated ourselves.

We want to ascend to the heavens, powered by a blast of heated air. And so, we have our own version of Psalm 103 verse 1. One version is this.

Bless yourself and affirm yourself, O my soul. Fill that balloon with hot air and float up. Bless yourself. Affirm yourself. Believe in yourself. In order to be that good little hot air balloon God, you need to be filled with that heated air of blessing so that you can ascend to the heavens.

You can think highly of yourself. But here's the problem. Boy, our own voice is so weak and wavering, isn't it? Anybody here able to just keep affirming yourself all day long and never have any doubts?

Nobody can do it. Your own voice is too weak and wavering. So, what do you do? Well, you need the help of other hot air balloon gods. You demand that others fill you up with heated air too, that they lend their strength to you and support and affirm you.

[27 : 31] Bless me and affirm me, O my friends, and forget not all my needs. And you need, you demand that the people around you speak to you with respect and with love, and they always be there to support you, and they always do good things for you.

You need your husband. You need your wife. You need your parents. You need your children. You need your teacher. You need your boss. You need your employees.

You need your customers. You need your friends. You need your family, your pastors, your fellow churchgoers. You need them to fill you with hot air. And when they fail, when they fall short, don't you come, don't you start to deflate and sink down and feel anxious and feel upset and feel overwhelmed, and you're coming crashing down from the heavens.

If you're a hot air balloon god, the stakes couldn't be higher. It is so hard to live that way. That's why so many of us are overwhelmed. We are already living in a world that is uncertain, unstable.

We're already in these hardships. Storms are coming at us. And the last thing we need is to be hot air balloon gods. The thing about being a hot air balloon god is it's being a polytheist.

[28 : 56] Because you're surrounded not just by yourself, but there's all these other hot air balloons out there, and they need to be kept happy. They need to be filled with heated air, and they have power because they can shame you.

They can reject you. They can harm you. They can leave a nasty comment on your social media feed. We are frightened rulers.

We are like King Ahaz of Judah that BK talked about on Christmas Eve, and we're frightened by the powerful rulers around us, these powerful people around us, and we look to mighty Assyria for help, and we find that other people make very bad gods.

Other people make very bad gods. And that's what it's like to be a polytheist in the modern world, in our culture. That's what it looks and feels like. We're empty and fragile, floating, trying to float majestically in the sky.

If you're on Instagram, you do your very best to look majestic, to make a nice story, to make a nice photo, to look like your life is that hot air balloon. But it's a very different experience being in there.

[30 : 10] We live lives of hollow anxiety as we enter this new year full of unknowns that could sweep us and our families down from the sky. We've got COVID. We've got government restrictions.

We've got Russia and China. We've got troubling laws. We've got culture wars. We've got housing prices. We've got school problems. A whole host of personal crises that are unique to each one of us.

And we can never seem to keep all of the gods, all of these other people in our lives happy. We can never seem to keep them all happy. And they never seem to be doing enough to fill us up and to keep us aloft.

There's a better way to live than polytheism. There's a better way to live than that. There is a better way to face this new year. Here's the better way.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. And all that is within me, bless his holy name. It's time to come back down to earth and get out of that hot air balloon.

[31 : 21] It's time to be a human-sized human. It's time to let other people, the people around you, that you're trying to please, or that you're living in fear of, or that you're overwhelmed by.

It's time to let them be human-sized humans too. It's time to be a monotheist. It's time to bless one God, to bless the Lord, and only the Lord, without any rivals, with all that is in me, undivided.

You don't have your heart split, keeping a whole bunch of other gods, a whole bunch of other people happy. You are holy to the Lord, set apart for him. It's time to start talking again about the Lord.

Verse 2 tells us, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Let's stop forgetting him.

Let's start remembering him and remember what he is like. How often do you talk about the Lord? How often do you speak highly of him?

[32 : 35] Affirm how good he is. How often do you ask other people, Hey, do you remember how good the Lord has been to us? Do you remember?

That is what we were made for. We were not made to elevate the self, but to elevate the name of the Lord. We were not made to elevate other people, but to elevate the name of the Lord.

We cannot elevate God himself. He is already great, as we see. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, his kingdom rules over all. How do you elevate somebody like that?

Well, you don't, but the psalmist says, You can bless his holy name. You can elevate his name, his reputation. I think this is one of the great joys, for example, I have of being in a growth group.

It's an opportunity to meet together with other people, and we get to bless the name of the Lord together. Because we need help. We need to remember.

[33 : 39] And we need to forget not all his benefits. We need to forget not all the good that he has done for us. And we need that because we are always in danger of falling back into polytheism. And we need to recover our worship, undivided worship of the one true God.

And we want to worship not just any God, but a God who is good. Consider the God we are a blessing. Look at verses 2 through 7.

What is this God like? It does no good for us to worship only one God if he is just like us. If he acts the way we do, or if he acts the way that other people in our lives act.

How is this God? What is he like? How is he eager to act? Verses 2 through 7. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Who forgives all your iniquity. Who heals all your diseases. Who redeems your life from the pit. Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

[34 : 45] Who satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. In verses 2 through 7, they tell us all about the way that the Lord acts.

If you want to learn a lot about somebody, don't just listen to what they say about themselves. Watch the way that they act. This is how God relates to people. This is how he relates to the people that are in his covenant, who are in that relationship with him.

He forgives. He heals. He redeems. He honors you with loyal love and mercy. He satisfies you with good things. He is not like the Assyrian.

He is not a God harsh and cruel, spring-loaded to smash his hammer down on you. You come alive again when he acts.

[35 : 51] He brings justice. This is how, this is the first movement of his heart. This is how his heart wishes and longs to act toward his people. That is how he's made his way known to us.

He acts graciously. Any good that we have comes from the hand of the Lord. What good things are there in your life? They came from the hand of the Lord.

How has the Lord done these things to you? He has done these good things for you. What comes to mind when you think back to the last year? What good has there been? Do you speak about that good to one another?

Do you say, look at what the Lord has done for me? Look at what the Lord has done for us. Do you set aside time?

Do you find opportunity to speak about these things with one another? And even to speak about these things with people who do not know the Lord. Because they of all people need to hear. Look at what the Lord has done for me.

[36 : 54] Now look at the pages of scripture. What has the Lord done for us long before we were ever born? After David reminds us of what the Lord has done, David then reminds us of who he is.

Because it's possible to be around somebody who just does a lot of good things, but their heart isn't in it. Their heart just isn't in it. They're doing it because out of a sense of duty, mere duty and obligation, they're supposed to.

But what is the Lord like in his heart? What is his character? What is his personality? What's his disposition towards us? When he does good for us, is he just checking it off the list?

Is he deep down severe and demanding? Is he deep down distant and unconcerned? Think about other people. You know people who are harsh, who are withdrawn when others sin against them.

Maybe that's even what you're like. What does the Lord do with his people when they sin against him time and time again?

[38 : 04] When they disobey him, when they dishonor him? What is his heart towards us when we live like that? Verses 8-12. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Our God is not like us. His ways are not our ways. Our one God is a gracious God. He is a God who shows favor towards people who have never earned it and can never repay him.

And he's not doing it so that he can be repaid. It's just his heart. It's just who he is. He is so gracious, in fact, that he sent his only son into the world to be one of us.

[39 : 24] He does not deal with us according to our sins because his son took our sins on himself. God does not repay us according to our iniquities because his own son made the payment and took the punishment that we deserve.

And so the apostle Paul, he reminds us in Romans chapter 8, He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give you all things?

When you confess your sin, when you are honest with God about who you really are, no longer faking it, no longer putting up a false front of righteousness, but when you confess your sin, he gladly forgives you.

His heart is to forgive. When you are there wallowing in shame, he washes you clean. He puts royal clothes on you.

He welcomes you home. When you cry out for mercy, this God is there. He is always there to show you kindness that you did nothing to earn.

[40 : 40] That is his heart. The Lord is gracious toward guilty sinners. Now maybe you do trust the Lord's forgiveness, but in the end, yes, my sins are forgiven.

Yes, my shame is covered, but I still feel small and powerless. I feel the weight of expectations on me to do more, to be better, to try harder.

Maybe you've come well to know that you're just not going to make it as a hot air balloon God. Maybe you know that you are very, very human.

Maybe you know that you are small and you are frail and you are weak and you don't have what it takes. Maybe you are a small person in a big, overwhelming world.

Even there, the Lord is gracious. Verse 13. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

[41 : 49] 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, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

So what he is saying is, look, if you want this Lord to remember you, you don't have to be a big, lofty, hot air balloon floating high in the sky. Even when you forget him, he has not forgotten you.

He remembers you. He remembers that you are his child. With the Father's heart, he remembers that. And he remembers that you are decaying into dust.

Those of you in the later stages of life know this very well. You are decaying into dust. If you're young right now, that might not seem very true, but oh boy, believe me it is.

[43 : 09] You are decaying into dust. We are just not going to be able to make it as gods. And God doesn't need you to be that.

He doesn't need you to be any more than human, any more than mortal. He knows that you are very small. He knows that you are like that desert grass, that the rain falls and then it springs up.

The hills turn green, and then within a few days, it dies again. It's like it was never there. You're here today, gone tomorrow, but God doesn't need you to be great.

He doesn't want you to be a God. He didn't make you to be a God. He calls you to repent of that. To repent of that hot air balloon mindset and that polytheism that we live in.

The Lord wants you to be a human-sized human. He wants your family and your friends, your colleagues and your customers, to be human-sized humans. And the Lord is compassionate towards small creatures.

[44 : 16] He is compassionate towards people when they are humble and low. Because he always will be, from everlasting to everlasting, gracious.

And has the heart of a father towards his children. That is just who he is. If you believe in Jesus Christ, if you truly believe in him with an affectionate trust, there is going to be a lot coming at you this year.

So that's something I can tell you guys, every one of you in this room, there is going to be a lot coming at you this year. I know that's kind of scary news, but you know it's true.

But if you believe in Jesus Christ with an affectionate trust, then whatever comes at you this year will never threaten your soul. You will not be a hot air balloon desperately trying to stay aloft as winds and storm batter you and knock you out of the sky.

Because your Lord Jesus Christ will never forget you. In Romans chapter 8, here's how Paul reassures us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[45 : 29] Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Will you suffer this year? Will you suffer tribulation, or distress, or persecution from the government, or from family, or from friends? You will not be forgotten by the one gracious God.

This year, will you suffer famine, or nakedness, from inflation, a broken supply chain? You will not be abandoned by the one gracious God.

Will you suffer danger from COVID, or any other disease? You will not be forgotten by the one gracious God who restores us to health in this age or the next.

[46 : 50] Maybe a polytheist, an old school kind, might fear the angels and rulers in the heavens. That's what Paul mentions in verse 38. There could be angels and rulers, there could be powers.

Maybe a new school polytheist might fear, what about other people? What could they do to us? But none of it, not a bit of it, none of them will ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Because we are little people. But there is one gracious God for little people. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Verse 19, the Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, oh you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, oh my soul.

[48 : 03] Our God, our Father, that is your heart towards us and you are the one true God. You are a God who is great, a God who is good, a God who is with us.

We confess that for many of us we have forgotten this. Perhaps we've even grown bored by it. Our hearts have run after many other gods from whom we are seeking help and none of these gods are as good as you are.

All of them will abandon us in the end. None of them will be able to live up to what we demand of them. And we have outtried to elevate ourselves. Lord, let us let go of all of that.

Return our hearts to you to be undivided that all that is within us may bless your holy name. Make us people who are faithful to you and devoted to you and who are speaking of how good you are to us.

I pray that today each one of us may find some opportunity somewhere, somehow, to say, look what the Lord has done for me. The Lord has done great things and I'm glad.

[49 : 13] Lord, I pray for those here who have not yet entrust themselves to the Lord who are still trying to live as polytheists, live to keep all the people around them happy, living to elevate themselves.

Lord, deliver them. May they confess that sin, repent, and say, the Lord alone, he is God, his son Jesus Christ. I'm entrusting myself to him. Lord God, win us back again.

Remind us again who you are, a God who is gracious and merciful. Remind us that we are a little people but we have one gracious God. Amen.