

The practice of remembering

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[0 : 00] Psalm 103. As you're turning there to Psalm 103, you might want to ponder this.

Why does Daniel, that's me, obviously, yeah, mind mishap there, let you know what he's preaching on before he preaches on it?

Why do I do that? Why do you think I might do that? I don't want a discussion now, it's a rhetorical question, but why do you think I might do that? Well, I've not done that this morning, clearly, but we are following a theme as we have been.

But I have done that in the evenings. Three weeks before, or at least two weeks before, I mentioned that I would be doing a series on the gospel in the evenings. What do you think might come to your mind?

If you don't know the answer, don't worry, I'll give you the answer this evening. Psalm 103. Now hear God's word.

[1 : 27] Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. 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 owe his child, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

[2 : 27] For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so 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. For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.

As for a 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.

[3 : 31] Obey the voice of his word. Bless the Lord, O his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, O his works, in the places of his dominion.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. Well, we would ask for God to bless his word to us this morning. We're going to come back to that. We'll do that. There's a few things here to remember.

One of those things is that the Old Testament has a particular way of pointing us to Jesus. It's often been said that if you read the Old Testament and don't see Jesus, you've not read the Old Testament correctly.

And that can be applied to Psalm 103. If you read Psalm 103 and don't see Jesus, then you've not read 103 correctly. The Old Testament is leading us and taking us all the way to Jesus, and it does it very, very clearly.

Another thing you might notice is that Psalm 103 is actually quoted in the New Testament by Mary, who recognizes that she is going to be the mother of God the Son on earth.

[4 : 38] And she says that my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. So here we have Mary quoting Psalm 103 in clear reference that she understands that this is about Jesus.

This is about God, but this is about Jesus. That that Savior that she speaks of is Jesus Christ, and she acknowledges that God is a merciful God.

That God is a God who loves to forgive, and God is a God who is merciful to those who fear him from generation to generation. The point there is the same point here in Psalm 103, that you have been saved in your generation, and the generation that was saved before you were saved in their generation, and the generations that are going to be saved will be saved in their own generation. The church fluctuates. There's no doubt about that, and it fluctuates because different amounts of people are saved in different generations. Mary acknowledges this as she is carrying God the Son. Peter then says in Acts that he understands the gospel, and he understands the gospel as a promise, and the promise is this, that God saves us through his Son.

[6 : 02] How does God save us? Through Jesus. Only through Jesus. And then he has this to say, that this promise that God saves you through Jesus is for you, for your children, and for your children's children, and for all who are afar off.

So Psalm 103 has a lot to say about Jesus. Psalm 103 has a big arrow pointing us straight to the Son of God who saves, straight to the promise of salvation.

But Psalm 103 also has a number of other things to say, and this is important. The first thing is this, that we are to remember that God has done this, that we are to remember that God forgives, that we are to remember that God saves through his Son, and don't leave that bit out, that God does all these things, that we are to remember that God is merciful.

We are to remember that God is loving. We are to remember that God is gracious. But generally speaking, how many of us actually remember it? Now, as I bring it to your attention this morning, you're going, yeah, I remember that.

Okay. But how many of you remembered it yesterday when I didn't bring it to your attention? And how many of you remembered it the day before when I didn't bring it to your attention?

Remembering is not just being able to call to mind, or have somebody else call it to your mind, but remembering, biblical remembering, is actually being able to call it to your mind, yourself, any day of the week.

[7 : 40] And how important that is. Okay. We tend to think that forgetfulness, and we will get to this, is not a sin. But you, there are some kinds of forgetfulness which isn't.

But when it comes to God, it's a serious problem. Okay. We use forgetfulness as an excuse for not having done something. Oh, I forgot. I forgot.

Well, if you didn't forget, it would have got done. So forgetfulness is a problem, whichever way you look at it. It's even a bigger problem if you forget God forgets. It's a big problem if you forget God loves you.

It's a big problem if you forget that God is a very present help and strength in times of need. That is a big issue for people who would suffer having forgotten that, or at least not remembering it that often.

So the psalmist here calls us to remember, but he calls us to remember specific things about God, and he calls us to remember them all the time. Now, it's not just for remembering's sake.

[8 : 47] Okay. We're not here to pass the test. Okay. Remembering is important because it's what gives faith its strength. Remembering is important because it's what gives trust its strength.

As you remember God, and as you remember the things of God, your faith is strengthened. Your trust in God is strengthened. So remembering is not for passing a test.

It's for living life. It's for living life securely, faithfully. It's living life knowing that God has got your back all the time.

So we're going to break the psalm down, and here we go. In the first five verses, you'll notice that it's full of praise. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and look at all the things that we're to bless the Lord about.

Then he says, verse 2, oh, and by the way, as you bless the Lord, as you praise the Lord, as you recognize all these things, don't forget. Okay?

[9 : 44] Remember, and also remember to not forget. Okay? So think about that. Remember, and remember not to forget. That's important.

Then he says that God is a God who loves you. That God is a God who forgives your iniquity. That God is a God who heals your diseases.

That God is a God who redeems your life. Verse 3. Verse 4. He redeems your life. That he is a God who crowns you with steadfast love. And he does this by sending his son to the cross.

The only way God can demonstrate his love to you, and it get through to you, is by giving his son to the cross. Verse 5. God will satisfy you.

God will renew you. In other words, these first five verses are verses of absolute praise. But notice who he's speaking to. Well, we'll move on, and we'll answer that in a moment.

[10:47] Verses 6 through the 14 now explains what God loves to do. So this is what, verses 1 to 5, verses of praise. This is what belonging to God is like.

It's like belonging to someone who loves you, forgives you, who will never let you go, ever. That's what belonging to God is like. But this is the, verses 6 through to 14, here are a whole number of things that God also loves to do.

He loves to work righteousness into your life. And again, he does that by his son dying on the cross. You go read 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21, and you work out, well, how does Psalm 103 take us to Jesus?

How does Psalm 103, verse 6, take us to Jesus? Well, God loves to work righteousness in our life. Well, how does he get it in our life? 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21, that as Christ dies on the cross, our sin is exchanged for his righteousness.

What is true about us leaves us, all that sin, and what is true about Christ is now true about us. God has worked the righteousness of Christ into us.

[11:57] The technical term is imputed. It has been given to us. It then goes on to say, verse 8, that God is a God who loves to be merciful and who loves to be gracious.

But more importantly, or rather as importantly, he doesn't react impulsively. Okay? God is not impulsive towards us.

Everything is thought through. Everything is thought through. Okay? He's not like us.

We react impulsively. We say things and then wish we never said them. We do things and then at a later date, wish we never said them. But God's not like that.

God does not react impulsively towards anyone. Then it says also in verse 8, that God loves us with this kind of steadfast love, this covenantal love.

[12:56] In the Hebrew, the word is hesed. Hesed is a love that cannot be broken. It's a covenantal love. It's not like, I love the way you look, or I love your hair, or any of that.

This is a deep set covenantal love. This means that whatever you do, okay, it isn't going to be able to change my love towards you. That's the type of love that has been spoken of here when it speaks of covenantal and steadfast love.

When you get married and you make that love commitment, you're making a hesed commitment.

And the commitment is, whatever you do, I'm still going to love you. The trouble is, because we are not perfect like God, it's very, very difficult for us to fulfill those kind of vows because the standard of love is just so incredibly high.

That doesn't mean that we can, well, it's too tough for me. I can just have a day off. No, not at all.

Rather, this is getting you to understand that God does not walk away from a relationship with you.

You might walk away from your relationship with him and you frequently do, but God doesn't. God never walks away from your relationship with him and his relationship, never.

[14:12] So if there's a weak link in this chain, if it is a chain, the weakness is on our side. So God loves us with a hesed love, a covenant love that says, I will not let go of you.

Even when you let go of me, I've still got hold of you. That's something to get your head around. But that is also something not to be forgotten, ever to be forgotten.

Then it says, verse 10, that God does not deal with us as he should. This means that when it comes to God, whatever else we might think we go through in our Christian life, we get off lightly.

Okay? We get off lightly all the time. God does not deal with us as he should. He does not deal with us according to what our sins deserve.

You know, God has a tally sheet and then he's able to do arithmetic really, really well and he gets to the bottom and thinks, whoa, that's a big total, but I'm not going to repay you with that total.

[15:16] I'm not going to demand that from you. I will not repay you with the total that you have rung up. God is a God who what? Forgives our debts.

God is a God who clears our debts. We run up totals and there are totals that are deep, deep debts and God wipes them clean. Okay? God does not repay us according to the debts that we run up. Remember, he loves to forgive. He loves to lead us to himself and he loves to be good to us in every way. Then he says, verse 12, that our sins, most importantly, are removed as far from us as the east is from the west.

This is one of my favorite lines in the whole of the Psalms for this reason. I've never gone to the North Pole or the South Pole, but I'd quite like to and for no other reason than to say, you know, I've been there.

But the point is this, that I can get to the North Pole and many other people have got to the North Pole and I can also get to the South Pole and many other people have got to the South Pole, but I cannot get to the East Pole and I cannot get to the West Pole.

[16:31] You see, if God said that our sins were separated from us as the North Pole is from the South Pole, that's a limited distance. That means that there is a fixed distance in which your sins are separated from you by God.

But God doesn't say that. He says they're separated from you as the East is separated from the West. You know, you can travel East forever in a day and still travel East. And you can travel West forever in a day and still travel West.

The point here that God is making to you is that when I separate your sins from you, it is at an ever-increasing distance. Okay? They never return. They're never to be brought up ever again. Not only do they go, but they go at an ever-increasing distance. Now, you might sin again and you might even commit the same sin again and again and again.

But God is a God who removes that sin at an ever-increasing distance. Okay? That means if they are being removed from you, you are not going to be able to catch them up. For as long as they travel East, however you try and chase out, you're not going to get them.

[17:39] For they are ever moving away from you at an ever-increasing distance. The point here is that when God forgives, he does it properly.

Think about that. When God forgives you, he does it properly. He does it in his son. But in terms of memory, in terms of, well, what do you do with all these things that have been forgiven but can be remembered?

Because that's the problem, right? That even when you have forgiven someone, what do you do with the memories? The problem is the memories as well as the initial sin. And God says, they are removed.

They are removed from you as far as the East is from the West. See, God can't forget, and that's a good thing because it means that he doesn't forget us. But what does he do with all those sins that he can remember?

Well, they are separated from us at an ever-increasing distance. He is constantly pushing them away. Now, there's a complication there because you're talking about God, but you get the picture.

[18:42] Okay? When God forgives, he does it properly. Properly. That's the type of God that you belong to. Verses 15 then through to 17 is a wonderful contrast between us and God, and the contrast is this.

your time is short, and you're going to live a very short life. Okay? Even if you grow to be over 100, and many of you might want that, and others might not want that, you know, because we all have different understandings of what being old is like.

So, some of us might enjoy that, and others might not, depending on the type of life that we live now, whether it's easy or difficult. Okay? That changes everything. But the point here is that however long it could be, it's still short.

But God, verse 17, his love is from everlasting to everlasting. Now, that's encouraging, but it's also discouraging if you don't understand the important part of that verse.

That what good is it if God's love is everlasting to everlasting, but I'm not around forever? You know, what good is it if God is able to love me from everlasting to everlasting, but I'm not around from everlasting to everlasting?

[20:02] You know, fine, I get to enjoy it in my lifetime, and it may be wonderful, and it's going to be wonderful, but what good is that if it doesn't last? Well, the point here is that as we're led to Jesus, we are to recognize that the everlasting God loves us in everlasting ways because we belong to the eternal Son.

That as we come to Jesus, who gives eternal life, that is how we get to experience everlasting love everlastingly. There's only one way we can get to experience everlasting love everlastingly, and that is if we are everlasting.

And the only way to be everlasting in the kind of relationship with God like this is if you belong to His Son. There is no other way. So forget not His benefits means forget not that you get to enjoy all these benefits by belonging to Jesus.

Okay? You don't get to enjoy them anywhere else. You don't get to have them anywhere else. You may get to have them temporarily on earth, you know, being in a Christian environment, you know, and being with Christian people, and though yourself not being a Christian, you can still, you know, eat the fruit of Christians, you know, the good things.

But it's temporary. The only way you can get to have it forever is if you get to have eternal life. And the only way you can get to have that is in the Son, Jesus Christ.

[21 : 26] So, we get to experience the everlasting love in a life that is short because we belong to the Son who is eternal and gives us eternal life.

That's the God we belong to. Now the psalmist having realized this closes in verse 22 by saying the same as what he said in verse 1.

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, last part of verse 22, and bless the Lord, oh my soul, the first part of verse 1. What you're to recognize here is that this psalm has not only been written down for you to hear, to know, and to understand, but you're also to understand that this man is speaking to himself. Bless the Lord, oh my soul. He's not just telling you these things, he's telling himself these things.

Okay? How do I not forget?

Will I remind myself? Bless the Lord, oh my soul, is speaking of a man who is speaking to himself the things that he cannot afford to forget.

[22 : 35] Bless the Lord, oh my soul, is speaking of a person who is speaking to himself all the things that God is, and he speaks them to himself so that he does not forget God.

The importance here is for you to go home and speak to yourself and I will not think it strange. In fact, I'm even encouraging it. But what you speak to yourself is going to be the important issue here. Okay? I want you to speak these words to yourself. Okay? I want you to speak to yourself, but I want you to speak these words to yourself. I want you to be like him.

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Just don't forget. Here's a man who tells himself what to remember and then he tells himself to remember.

Here's what you are to remember and remember it, he says. Here's what to remember and don't forget it. And the reason we have the psalm is so that we can read it and so that we can do the same.

[23 : 47] There's a couple other things then to notice which are going to encourage you to do that because you could be sat here thinking, well, that's a great idea but I don't know if I can go through with it. Here's a couple reasons why you should.

The first is in words that have been repeated. Now, of course, you know, the psalmist doesn't have a sharpie so he cannot draw your attention to a specific word by underlining it with a highlighter.

So the way that he does it is by repeating that same word more than once and whenever you get a word repeated more than once, he's trying to get your attention on how important that word is and the first word in verses 1 through to 6 that you'll see which is repeated is the word all.

Okay, verse 2, all his benefits. Verse 3, all your iniquity heals all your diseases. Verse 3. Verse 4, he redeems your life from the pit who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

Verse 5, so that your mouth is renewed like eagle's wings. Verse 6, the Lord works righteousness, justice for all who are oppressed. In other words, you're supposed to understand that God is the God of all.

[24 : 56] Okay, there is nothing lacking in God. There is no, God doesn't shortchange anyone. You don't go to God and God turn around and say to you, well, I'll see what I can do.

Okay? I've had a few things broken, especially when I worked on a building site and I would take it to the guys who could mend it and I would take it and I'd say, look, I need this two days from now and he'd look at me and go, well, I'll see what I can do.

Well, I don't want you to see what you can do. I need it in two days from now. I need it to be fixed.

Well, when you go to God and when you remember all these things and you go to a God who does it all, he does it completely, you're not going to someone who says, well, I'll see what I can do.

God doesn't see what he can do. God does it. God completes it. God fills you. Oh, when he removes your sin, it's not, I can see what I can do. They're all gone.

When he heals you, he heals you spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally. It may take a great deal of time, but it is done completely. So, God is a God of completeness and therefore, if you are outside of God, then it is no wonder why you experience incompleteness and struggle with it on a daily basis.

[26 : 15] In fact, even if you do belong to God, you can still struggle with it because you're not doing what the psalmist is doing here. This is a conscious effort. It's hard work in many cases, but the benefits of putting in this hard work produces a fruit that cannot be produced in your life any other way.

You cannot get the benefits of experiencing the all, the completeness, without speaking to yourself these words like the psalmist does. Okay? We, you know, we all want what's at the top of the hill without climbing the hill.

You know, I often say to Barry, and it's a reminder to myself as well, the temptation to design your book cover before you've written the book is great. Okay?

We all love to see the finished product, but none of us seem to love to put the work in. Okay? Put the work in. Then you'll get to the finished product.

Don't, don't imagine the end. Okay? Rather, imagine each step and move forward with that. So God is the God of all. The second word here, which is also an important one, is the word fear.

[27 : 30] This occurs quite a lot, that God's steadfast love is on those who fear him, verse 11. That God's compassion is experienced by those who fear him.

Well, what does that mean? Well, it means that his compassion is not experienced by those who don't fear him. and that his love is not experienced by those who don't love him, who don't fear him. His steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting to those who fear him, verse 17. What does that mean? Well, it means that his everlasting love to everlasting love is not upon those who don't fear him.

It's actually upon those who do. It's upon those who keep his covenant, verse 18. And remember to keep his commandments, verse 18. The important thing here is really, really important and it's so important that if you don't get it right, it means that you're missing Jesus.

That you're actually leaving Jesus out of your conversation when you speak to others about God's love because of this reason. That if God's steadfast love is set upon us just as we are, then we get to experience it just as we are.

[28 : 50] There would be no need for forgiveness because God would accept us just as we are. There would be no need for Jesus to die on the cross because God would accept us just as we are.

There would be no need to take away our sins because God would accept us just as we are. There would be no need for any of these things.

There was no need for us to be any different than what we are, because God would accept us just as we are. The thing is, is that God accepts everyone, but he accepts them in a very particular place, and that place is in Jesus.

We get to experience all these things in Jesus. I don't want to go on too much about doctrine and theology, but I hope you understand that the reason I study these things is because I need to get it right.

If I'm going to stand here and speak on behalf of God, I live with a constant fear that God is going to judge me heavily for the things that I've taught if I don't get it right.

[29 : 57] One of the key doctrines here is a doctrine called union with Christ. What that means, I'll put it really, really simply, is this. That you get to enjoy all the benefits of God by belonging to his son.

And when it says here that his compassion is experienced by those who fear him, another psalmist says that there is forgiveness with the Lord that he might be feared.

Well, we get to experience all these things not because we have to do something to get them. We have to do nothing to get them. We don't have to change, but rather we have to be changed by the son.

Okay? So this doesn't mean that all of a sudden if you want this, you have to go ahead and do something. That's not what it's saying. What it's saying is, is that you do have to change, but you can't change.

So God gives you his son. God forgives you in his son. God removes all the sin from you in his son. Everything that God does for you, he does through his son, Jesus.

[30 : 59] So if you want to get to experience all these things, God's love, even prayer, answered prayer, then it can only happen in and through his son.

The psalmist here wants to make clear, as does the New Testament, that all these things are true for anybody, but they're true for anybody who belongs to the son. In other words, don't miss out Jesus.

Don't leave him behind. The issue is not that you have to be different and you have to go out and be something else before you can come to God. You have to be no different.

What you do have to be, though, is trusting in the one who will change you. What you do have to do is exercise faith in Jesus who will bring you to God, who then loves you and sets all this stuff upon you.

So you can sit there and do nothing. Jesus will do it all. But you must believe that Jesus will do it all. And he will. Okay? God forgives you completely in his son.

[32 : 06] So come to him. Here's the exhortation, then, as we close. Remember that this promise is not just for you. It's not just for you.

But God's love extends, as it says here, from generation to generation. It extends to our children's children. What does that mean in a church like this?

Well, what it means is this, is that when Sunday school is up and running properly, I mean, it is running properly now with summer Sunday school. But what I mean is, is when we have all the classes fully functioning and all the children are here because there's something being offered for them.

The danger is this, that they enjoy that but never get to come into here. It's great encouragement to see you children not in crew this morning and not in Sunday school. And I'll tell you why.

Because you are avoiding the danger of muscle memory. I'm going to explain that if I can. This church has about 50 to 55 children going out to Sunday school. This promise is for our children's children.

[33 : 14] Okay? We take this seriously because we have a responsibility that God has given us. So these truths that I've said must be guarded against muscle memory.

Now muscle memory is good for some things. Okay? Playing the piano. I'm sure that Ian's fingers can move across those piano keys without having to think about them all that much.

And the reason that is the case is because he has spent years and years and years playing and therefore he can just do it. Okay? Same with people who play the guitar. Same with people who play other instruments.

Same with people who perhaps are good at typing. This muscle memory kicks in. Do you remember learning how to hold a knife and fork? No.

Do you hold a knife and fork? Yes. Do you think about holding a knife and fork when you're holding it? No. Rather your muscle memory kicks in and you just go ahead and do it and you hopefully eat with a knife and fork or if it's chips or whatever with your fingers.

[34 : 16] But there ahead you can go and do it. Some people say that riding a bike falls into muscle memory. In other words, once you learn how to ride a bike, you'll never forget.

Well, that's been tested by me a few times. But I think, generally speaking, I think it's true that once you do learn to ride a bike, you will never forget. That kind of muscle memory should not be taught to our children when it comes to church.

The danger is that the only reason for coming is out of muscle memory. That each Sunday we get dressed at this particular time, have a bath or a shower the night before, or if we're in a rush the following day, there we have it.

Oh, we haven't had time to brush your hair, but it's okay. Well, we're half dressed and we'll complete it as we get to church, which is totally fine. And then you come in, but everything's muscle memory.

No conscious engagement about we're going to worship God. We're going to hear the gospel. We're going to know that God forgives us and loves us. That we're going to grow up in Christ happens.

[35 : 17] This same kind of muscle memory, I love visiting people on a Monday and a Saturday night for a very good reason. Now, I used to do this a lot.

I don't do it anymore because I've repented of my sins. But I used to love visiting the same person on a Monday as I did on a Saturday to see whether or not muscle memory was true.

And so you have people that leave church on a Sunday evening and they go into their house and they place their Bible down in a particular place. Monday, it's still there. And then the following Saturday, as they come out of church, it's still there.

Sunday, they pick it up and they come to church again. The Bible and its position and even its reading has no conscious effort other than muscle memory.

But God doesn't accept that kind of stuff. When we come to God, we are to be engaged fully.

[36 : 18] People who place their Bible down in one place and pick it up from the same place the following week are doing nothing more than following their muscle memory. They are not remembering.

Remembering is a conscious engagement. The psalmist here spends a lot of time remembering. The psalmist here understands that remembering is a conscious effort that does not come easily. That remembering is something that will not happen through muscle memory. Rather, you have to engage your heart. In Romans 12, it says that after a person is saved, they are engaged in reasonable worship.

In other words, that they are engaged consciously in the things that they are doing. It's not a better religious practice. I've done this a hundred times before. Now we can do it without thinking.

That's the danger. God doesn't want you to do it without thinking. He wants you to remember. And he wants you to remember because the things that you are to remember are that he loves you.

[37 : 31] That he forgives. That he is always there for you to pray to. So, as we bring ourselves before God and we bring our children before God and we hope that our children's children will come before God, the danger to be avoided is muscle memory.

The practice to be remembered is the practice of remembering. So, go home and speak these words to yourself and speak them to your children.

And here, see Jesus and come. Come to Jesus to trust in him. Amen.