

Bless the Lord, Psalm 103

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Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. We're currently in the midst of an emphasis on one of our five identities as a church: worshipers. Along with that, we just finished with Men's Worshiper Training, and this Tuesday kicks off Women's Worshiper Training.

In light of this emphasis on being worshipers, it would probably be timely to ask the question, what is a worshiper? A worshiper is someone who sees all of life through the lens of the gospel. Jesus defined it this way:

²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. John 4:23

So, worship is not about a particular place or a particular form, but about worshiping the true God through his indwelling Spirit on the basis of the truth of the Son. But we can easily miss the mark of a true worshiper. And when that happens, Psalm 103 can help us get back on the right track.

So I invite you to open your Bibles there with me. You can find it on page 502 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of today's sermon is simply "Bless the Lord," and the main idea is this: We truly worship when we remember we are truly loved. Here's how we'll work our way through the passage:

- 1) True Worship Calls to the Soul - vv. 1-5
- 2) True Worship Puts Things in Perspective - vv. 6-18
- 3) True Worship Calls to the Universe - vv. 19-22

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Psalm 103. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

Of David.

¹ *Bless the Lord, O my soul,*

*and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!*

*² Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,*

*³ who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,*

*⁴ who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*

*⁵ who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*⁶ The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.*

*⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.*

*⁸ The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.*

*¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

*¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;*

*¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

*¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.*

*¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.*

*¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;*

*¹⁶ for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.*

*¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,*

*¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.*

*¹⁹ The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.*

²⁰ Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his word,
obeying the voice of his word!

²¹ Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers, who do his will!

²² Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Psalm 103

[Leader:] *The Lord has spoken to us.* [Congregation:] *Thanks be to God!* [You may be seated.]

Exposition

Anybody here familiar with a “hate-like”? A hate-like is when you click “like” on someone’s Facebook or Instagram post, when in your heart you actually hate that post (or that person). The most common occurrence of this takes place when we are jealous of what that person is doing.

Probably all of us have experienced this. When you think of the cultural lens behind this, the way in which our culture leads us to interpret the world, here’s the symbol that comes to mind: (like symbol). Clicking this means you are extending friendship, approval, even love—at least outwardly, right? You’re blessing someone. But on the inside, where it really counts, even while we click “like,” we can actually be masking animosity, disapproval, even hatred. Our lips don’t line up with our hearts. And what can easily happen in that moment, especially if this takes place with multiple posts, is we find ourselves bitter and ungrateful. In other words, we forget the good things in our own lives. And we bless nothing and no one.

When Jesus saw this sort of thing among a group of religious people called the scribes and Pharisees, he called it out. In the Gospel of Mark we read,

⁶ *And [Jesus] said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,*

*“ ‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;*

*⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ Mark 7:6-7*

So, what Psalm 103 does is help us to avoid what Jesus is talking about here—to avoid being hypocrites whose lips don't match up with our hearts; whose remembrance of God's grace has been forgotten; whose ability to bless has been lost.¹

Now, like many of the psalms, we don't know the exact circumstances, other than that it's attributed to David. And yet, this psalm is written in such a way that—even though it's personal—it applies to all of us in all circumstances—but especially when we are bitter and ungrateful.² In fact, part of why I chose to preach this psalm was because of so many difficult things coming at me from so many different parts of life recently, I found my heart ungrateful and blind to the good. I needed Psalm 103 to help me preach to myself, and I would imagine, often you do too.

1) True Worship Calls to the Soul - vv. 1-5

This brings us to our first section of the passage this morning: true worship calls to the soul. We read in verses 1 and 2:

*¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!*

*² Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits, Psalm 103:1-2*

Think with me for a moment about what this teaches us about worship. It's not a thing that just happens, like you turn on a worship playlist and out it flows. Maybe when you're a brand new Christian, but not as life goes on. Worship is a battle, like Crigler's friend who had to climb under his old Volkswagen van and beat it with a hammer just to get it started.

David is hammering his soul here—'Come on soul, wake up! If I start to bless the Lord with my lips, but you're asleep, soul, then I'm going to be a hypocrite!' And then it's like the teenager that won't get out of bed—'Oh you won't wake up, ok...[ice water].' What's the water that David throws on his soul? Verse 2—"forget not all his benefits". It's a call to stop forgetting. One scholar writes,

¹ John Piper, "Bless the Lord, O My Soul,"

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/bless-the-lord-o-my-soul>

² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 397; W. S. Plumer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series Commentaries (Chelsea: Sheridan, 2016), 913

*One of the saddest proofs of our fallen nature is our [tendency] to forget God's benefits, especially his unspeakable gift, Jesus Christ...Our memories are too often like leaky vessels in retaining things that are good.*³

And so, in order for us to be worshipers, we regularly need the spiritual discipline of remembrance (or gratitude). We need not be surprised or paralyzed when we find our souls ungrateful, apathetic, or gloomy—we need instead to *remember* all God's benefits.⁴ Here are some that David douses himself with (starting in verse 3):

³ *who forgives all your iniquity*, [Here is the first and greatest benefit, the one with the most power to awaken our gratitude and worship.]

who heals all your diseases, [Here we might be tempted to scoff because in this life he doesn't heal all our diseases. But as one author puts it, "What is pride, but lunacy; what is anger, but a fever; what is [greed], but [swollenness]; what is lust, but a [deformity]; what is sloth, but a [paralysis]?"⁵ As embodied souls, you can't always easily separate our spiritual condition from our physical. So as a God who has promised to resurrect us with heavenly bodies, he indeed heals all our diseases!]

⁴ *who redeems your life from the pit*, [Here we remember the terrifying fate from which we've been rescued.]

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, [So not only rescued from the worst fate of endless separation from God, but then crowned like kings with the best fate of endless affection from God. This one, David and we will return to.]

⁵ *who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's*. [Here we have the impossible—being satisfied and hopeful even in old age or illness. When everything is being taken from you, but the Lord is not taken—and so you have everything.⁶ I see this in so many of our senior members here at Antioch, and I need it.] **Psalm 103:3-5**

Imagine the *awakening* that can happen with this kind of remembrance. Not the kind that makes you want to kill the person who threw ice water on you, but the kind that kills *you*, the ungrateful, embittered beast⁷, and brings to life in its place one who genuinely blesses the Lord with both lips *and* soul, who, as Ephesians commands, "sings and makes melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to

³ Plumer, 917

⁴ Kidner, 397

⁵ Plumer, 914

⁶ Plumer, 914-915; Kidner, 398

⁷ Psalm 73:21-22

God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ⁸. Let it be you, call your soul to remember.

2) True Worship Puts Things in Perspective - vv. 6-18

This brings us to our second section of today's passage: true worship also puts things in perspective. Read with me in verses 6 and 7:

⁶ *The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.*

⁷ *He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel. Psalm 103:6-7*

When you call your soul to remember, there's a natural contrast that becomes clear, a contrast between us and God. The first contrast takes place in verses 6-14, between God's ways and our ways.

To remember the Lord is to remember his ways. And for David, God's ways were most clearly on display in how he rescued his Old Testament people from slavery. In the exodus from Egypt, God made known his ways to Moses and the people of Israel. (In fact, much of Psalm 103 seems to be influenced by Psalm 90, the prayer of Moses.) What did those ways look like? They looked like working righteousness and justice for the oppressed. But these ways aren't just summed up by one act, but the bajillion *ongoing* acts as God's people wandered in the wilderness.⁹ Our ways are being a stubborn, ungrateful people. God's ways are in being

⁸ *The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.* [Which is almost an exact quote from the Lord when he passed by Moses on Mount Sinai—right after the people had made a golden calf and worshiped it.¹⁰]

⁹ *He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.* [Unlike us, who prefer to keep our quarrels going and nurse our grievances.¹¹]

¹⁰ *He does not deal with us according to our sins,*

⁸ Ephesians 5:19-20

⁹ Kidner, 398-399

¹⁰ Exodus 34:6; Kidner, 399

¹¹ Kidner, 399

nor repay us according to our iniquities. [What grace! He certainly contends with us until we're humbled, but he doesn't give us what we deserve.¹² "If you kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared."¹³]

¹¹ *For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;*

¹² *as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

¹³ *As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.* [With these three verses the contrast between God's ways and our ways is truly put in perspective: "as high as the heavens are above the earth...as far as the east is from the west...as a father shows compassion to his children"—the distances described here are *infinite*. Our love—flaky, conditional. God's love—infinite toward those who fear him. Our forgiveness—hesitant, grudgy. God's forgiveness—infinite toward those who fear him. Our compassion—moody, preferential. God's compassion—infinite toward those who fear him.¹⁴ And even more amazing because,]

¹⁴ *For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.* [He always sees us as we are. Though we might forget his virtue, he never forgets our vice—that because of our sin we are, even at our best, often confused, fearful, nervous, tempted, weary.¹⁵ And so when we bring all that mess to him in reverent fear instead of hiding it like hypocrites, what wells up in him is this compassion that says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child [?] Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."¹⁶] **Psalm 103:8-14**

And this kicks off a different angle of contrast in verses 15-18: not just God's ways and our ways, but God's days and our days.

¹⁵ *As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;*

¹⁶ *for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.* [This is one of the Bible's favorite ways of describing how temporary we are. We are a blip,]

¹² Plumer, 915

¹³ Psalm 103:3-4

¹⁴ Kidner, 399

¹⁵ Plumer, 916

¹⁶ Isaiah 49:15; Kidner, 399

*¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,*

*¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.* [I mean, feel the weight of an eternal God whose days have no end! But that's not the ice water that David douses on himself. It's not the eternity of God that's awakening him here. Example: "The most important thing in life is for the soul to get to a place where it can know it is loved." How can true worship happen, how can we genuinely bless the Lord, without knowing we are loved? And so David's Spirit-inspired remembrance is this: 'Yes, Lord, from eternity past to eternity future, you exist; but along with you, the whole way, has been and will be your steadfast love toward me. Not because I'm awesome, but because I look to the covenant you have made; I bow to the commandment you have given.' What is that covenant and commandment? Well, for us, we remember it each week when we come to the table. Jesus said, "This cup marks the new [what?] *covenant*, in the shedding of my blood."¹⁷ When we look to God's covenant Son and obey his command to repent and believe in him, the love that chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, the love that will abide forever, that love rests on us.¹⁸ And *that*, awakens the soul to bless the Lord.] **Psalm 103:15-18**

And that puts everything in perspective.

3) True Worship Calls to the Universe - vv. 19-22

And here we arrive at our third and final section of the passage: that true worship calls to the universe. This is what happens when the individual soul is awakened to bless the Lord—it never just stays individual. You realize you've joined a universal chorus, and you want everyone and everything to join in. Read with me in verses 19-22:

*¹⁹ The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.*

*²⁰ Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his word,
obeying the voice of his word!*

*²¹ Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers, who do his will!* [This reminds me of situation from college. Each year a wealthy donor would be given stage time to sing the same song, even though the

¹⁷ Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20

¹⁸ Kidner, 400

sound of it made you want to howl at the moon. The song was “We Are Standing On Holy Ground”—you know the next line, right—”and I know that there are angels all around”. Well, all the students were pretty sure there weren’t any angels anywhere nearby. Fast forward, when I was part of church who obtained and restored a Catholic cathedral, during the renovations there came the decision of what to do with two statues of angels above the stage. Ultimately, we decided to keep the angels as reminders that what we gather to bless the Lord, we are joining in the worship of heaven. That redeemed my college experience for me! And it delights me especially when we sing the song “Come And Sing” here at Antioch. Truly, we are joining in the chorus of angels.]

²² *Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion.* [This is all God’s created order. In Luke 19:40, after Jesus had entered into Jerusalem for the last time and people cried “Hosanna!” the Pharisees told him to rebuke the people. Jesus responded, “If these were silent, the very rocks would cry out.” This is seeing all of life through the lens of the gospel. Worshiping not just on a Sunday or at Family Group or in your quiet time, but constantly; joining in with every detail of God’s creation in praise to him.] **Psalm 103:19-22a**

But the final line is as personal as the first:

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Psalm 103:22b

Even though true worship will lead you to call to the whole universe, it is always a single voice, with its own part to add, its own benefits to celebrate, and its own access to the delighted ear of God.¹⁹ My voice may be small, but may it bless the Lord!

Conclusion

And the only reason we have any hope for being able to do that, is because we have a Savior who did it first. In Jesus Christ, there was never a conflict between his soul and his lips. He was never the hypocrite who blessed outwardly, while cursing inwardly. He never appeared to extend friendship and approval and love, while actually harboring animosity and disapproval and hatred. He was the most genuine Person who ever lived, and that meant he was full of both grace and truth.²⁰

¹⁹ Kidner, 400

²⁰ John 1:14

Where I lived overseas, one of the unique components of their art was how they identified the “bad guy”. You could always tell who the bad guy was because half his face would be obscured, which carried the idea that he was masked, hiding, inauthentic, untrustworthy.

When it comes to Jesus’ face, what is his face like toward you today, friend? Is it masked? Scowling? Lowered in disappointment and shame? Shaking back and forth in disapproval? Perhaps it isn’t the face of Jesus you’re seeing, but your own reflection.

He has made it absolutely clear what his posture is toward you. It’s also clear throughout the heavens and the earth. That’s why angels showed up at:

- his birth
- his temptations before he died
- his crucifixion, awaiting in mass at the word to rescue him from the cross if he called
- at the empty tomb of his resurrection
- at the moment of his ascension

And you know what they did in those moments? They blessed the Lord.

And that’s why Romans 8 tells us that “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now,” longing to be “set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”²¹ What is creation longing for? To be free to bless the Lord.

And if that’s not clear enough, then know this. That Jesus Christ walked headlong into crucifixion and paid the penalty for your ungrateful, apathetic, gloomy soul, so that you could know, to the depths of your soul, that you are loved; so that a hundred times a day you could *stop forgetting* the One 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 eagle’s
- who does not chide or keep his anger forever

²¹ Romans 8:20-22

- who doesn't deal with you according to your sins
- whose love toward you is as high as the heavens are above the earth
- who removes your transgressions as far as the east is from the west
- who shows you compassion like a father to a child

For those of you who are turning from your sins and counting everything on him, he loves you! And all so that you might bless the Lord.

On the night that he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns." **Today we are announcing, "Blessed be the Lord our God, Jesus Christ!"**²²

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

²² 1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 41:13, 72:18, 89:52, 106:48; Luke 1:68

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