

Boundless Love

Psalms for Uncertain Times

Psalm 103:1-22

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We continue this morning in our series in the Psalms. As you turn to Psalm 103, I want you to know that I've been praying for you. I'm praying that these psalms are working *on* your hearts and working their way *into* your hearts. As we work through these psalms, on Sunday morning and through the exercises posted on our blog, I pray you're learning to pray in the midst of difficulty. I hope you're gaining fluency in your ability to praise God and lament.

Two weeks ago, Jordan Green got us started on praise in Psalm 100. This morning we're going to dig a little deeper into praise in Psalm 103. Last week we learned that it's right to cry out to God in the middle of our pain and sorrow. But we also learned that biblical lament doesn't stop at complaint. It must move on to praise God for who he is and what he's done.

This is what we were created for. We were made to praise God. To praise God with every fiber of our being. But it's not easy, especially during the times we're in. I like what Jordan Krahn said in his opening comments. Sometimes it's easier to focus on what's hard than on the ways God's blessed us. In other words, it's easier to lament than to praise.

And if we're honest, sometimes we just don't feel like praising God. We may do it anyway. We may go through the motions, singing on Sunday morning, but our hearts aren't in it. We praise with our lips, but not with everything that's in us. Have you ever felt that way?

David did! David knew all this quite well. And so, he starts this psalm by giving himself a pep talk. He knows he needs to praise God with his heart. But he also knows his soul needs a little talking to before he can get his praise on! So, he speaks to his soul: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"¹

But he doesn't *just* give himself a pep talk. He also lays out a plan for praise. He's not like a coach simply trying to psych himself up. He's more like a personal trainer who lays out a workout regimen to actually help him achieve his goals. Look at verse 2. He repeats what he said at the beginning, but then he moves on: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." How will every fiber of his being learn to praise God? By not forgetting all God's benefits. How will his soul come to bless the LORD? By remembering all the ways God's blessed him.

You've heard it since you were a child. You need to count your blessings. My wife has created a gratefulness wall in our house during our quarantine so that we can post the blessings in our lives. It helps us focus on what's going well. It's a good exercise.

So, like I said in my weekly email on Friday, here's your first application for this morning. Get out a pen and paper and write down the ways God has blessed you. And I promise, as you do that, you'll train your heart to bless the LORD. Some of you may remember the song from your childhood: "Count your blessings. Name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done."

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

That's what this psalm's training us to do. Here's the basic message: We should praise God with everything we have for everything God's done for us.

But David doesn't leave it up to us to enumerate all God has done for us. He goes on to tell us very specifically all of the benefits God's given to his people. And that's good, because sometimes when we're low, we forget what God's done. In verses 3-5 he summarizes the benefits. Then in verses 6-19 he digs deeper.

The benefits or blessings of God could be summarized in one word—love. God's love. His steadfast love is the dominant theme in Psalm 103. And it teaches us that God's love is comprehensive. Just look at verses 3-5. The LORD forgives all your iniquity, heals all your diseases, redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, and satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. This is a comprehensive view of God's love.

His love is like an ever-flowing spring that gushes forth God's grace and mercy to us. In other words, God's love is boundless. So, the message of this psalm is quite simple. We're called to give boundless praise to the God who shows us boundless love.

But what are the specific benefits of God's love? And in what ways is God's love boundless? Oh, how God loves us; let me count the ways! There is so much that could be said. One commentator said there are seventeen benefits listed in this psalm.

But I believe those benefits can be outlined in two broad categories. One is there in verse 3. He forgives all your iniquities. And that's expanded in verses 6-12. The other is in verse 4. He redeems your life from the pit (the pit of death). And that's expanded in verses 13-19. So, let's start counting our blessings friends.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS (6-12)

Let's begin with the first broad benefit of God's boundless love. God forgives all our sins. This is drawn out in verses 6-12.

To help us to not forget the blessing of forgiveness, David goes to the exodus from Egypt. This is a common strategy in the Psalms, because the exodus is the supreme paradigm for God's love in the Old Testament.

He begins by saying in verse 6, "The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed." Remember when Israel was oppressed in Egypt? They cried out to God, and God rescued them. But as we learned in our study of Exodus, Israel needed rescue from their sin every bit as much as they needed rescue from Egypt.

And that's drawn out in verses 7-8. In verse 8 we read, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." This is a direct quote from Exodus 34. And the context is critical.

What happened right before the LORD revealed himself as merciful and gracious? They sinned against God. They made a golden calf. Right after they received the Ten Commandments, right after they were told to have no other gods before them and to not make for themselves an idol, what did they do? They made an idol! Their sin was grievous. They deserved death. But God spared many of them according to his mercy. He forgave them.

God revealed to them something about his character. He abounds in steadfast love. That truth is a truth all future generations needed to remember. And so David says to us, “Forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity.” It was true in 1400 BC in the wilderness. It was true for David in 1000 BC. And it’s true for us in 2020. God’s character and his commitment to his people doesn’t change. God’s boundless love extends to all generations.

But why do I say God’s love is boundless? This is drawn out in verses 9-12. And there’s something here that we can’t miss if we want to understand God’s love. Here it is: God’s judgment has limits, but his love has no limits. Let me say it again. God’s judgment has limits, but his love has no limits.² “He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever” (v. 9). There are limits to his judgment and wrath. “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (v. 10). There are limits to his judgment. But there are no limits to his love. “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him” (v. 11) “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgression from us” (v. 12). Do you see? Higher than the heavens. Further than the east is from the west. No limits.

God’s love for his people is boundless. It’s not that God doesn’t judge sin. He does. But he doesn’t deal with *his people* according to our sin. Instead, he deals with us according to his mercy. He deals with our sin through sacrifice, so that our sin is removed. There are limits on God’s judgment. Not on his love. It’s boundless!

Friends, we began by saying that the hard things in life sometimes cloud our vision and make it hard to praise God. One of those hard things is our sin. Our sin can be quite discouraging. I know this personally. Over the last few weeks, I’ve recorded discouragement in my journal a number of times because of my sin. Especially the recurring sin in my life: my anger, my critical spirit, a desire for control, a lack of patience. When will I be free!? It can be quite discouraging.

It’s right for me to grieve over my sin. But it’s wrong to not consider the whole picture. There’s so much more. Yes, my sins they are many. But! His mercy is more. If I’m going to praise the Lord, I need to get my head above the clouds. I need “strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:18-19). God’s love knows no bounds. God’s grace “will pardon and cleanse within. Grace, grace, God’s grace, grace that is greater than all our sins.”

You need to know this love too, if you are going to praise God with everything within you. If you want a heart that’s oriented toward praise, that overflows with praise, you need to see yourself the way God sees you.

On the cross, Christ has paid the price for our sins. Yes, they’re grievous. Heinous. Offensive to God. Hurtful to others. And our sins deserve God’s wrath. That’s all true. But his mercy is more. His love is boundless. Our sins have been removed in Christ. If you want to bless God, you cannot forget all these benefits!

Another thing that can cloud our vision of God’s blessings is death and disease—or the effects of the fall. In our series so far, we’ve talked a lot about death and disease. So, I won’t go into detail. But

² Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Praise: A Historical Commentary*

death and disease can cause us to lose sight of all God's benefits. And so, David goes on to talk about the way God deals with death.

EVERLASTING LIFE (13-19)

God's benefits not only include forgiveness from sin. They also involve redeeming our life from the pit (v. 4). I believe he means the pit of death.

But before we get to how God deals with death, I want to talk about who God is. I want you to notice an important change in verse 13. Verses 6-12 are largely describing God as a righteous judge. Sure, a judge who's merciful and acquits those who belong to him and delivers them from the judgment they deserve. It's a gracious picture. But the picture changes in verse 13. David takes things up a notch, so we can really start to grasp the *heart* of God.

He says, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him." So not just a judge. Or as verse 19 highlights, not just a king. But also, a father. A compassionate father.

The word compassion is a pregnant term. It's a good translation, but there's something lost in translation. In Hebrew, the root word for compassion is where we get the word for a mother's womb. Think about that for a moment. A baby in its mother's womb. A baby so vulnerable. A baby who won't make it outside of his mother's womb. But her womb provides intimate and protective care for him.

In the same way, our heavenly Father knows how vulnerable we are. Look at verse 14: "He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." He knows we are mortal. And that we will die. Verses 15-16 go on to say, "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."

God knows our frame. He remembers we are dust. And yet God's posture toward us is not, "You deserve it!" That's true. We do deserve death. But God's posture toward us is like a compassionate father. And so, he desires to protect his children. And his desire to protect his children is tender. It's like the compassion of a mother's womb.

All parents listening this morning understand how precious this metaphor is. None of us are perfect parents. We have many flaws. But even sinful parents can have a heart of compassion for their children. We want to give them good things. And when they are vulnerable, when they're in distress and they cry (especially as little children), we respond with tender, protecting love. And when they call out "mommy" or "daddy," there's something that stirs in us. We want to respond in compassion.

Mike Bullmore says one reason God put this heart in parents is so we would understand God's heart toward us. If sinful people care for their children with compassion, how much more our heavenly Father?³

And how does this heart of compassion work itself out? How does it benefit us? Those who belong to God are ultimately protected from death. God gives everlasting life. This is not explicit, but I think it's implied. God not only forgives our iniquity (v. 3). He also redeems us from the pit of

³ Mike Bullmore, "[He Knows Our Frame](#)"

death. And he gives us a crown (v. 4). The New Testament talks about believers receiving a crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4) or a crown of life (James 1:12) when they die. Clearly a reference to eternal life. Verse 5 says that God also renews our youth like the eagle's. The eagle experiences longer life than any other bird. And even when it gets older it still looks young. This is a metaphor for eternal life.⁴ Not explicit, but it's implied.

What's explicit in verse 17 is that the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting. So those who know his love will surely know his love in an everlasting way. Even though we are dust, even though we all die, if we know God's love, we will have eternal life. As Spurgeon says, "How wonderful that his mercy should link our frailty with his eternity, and make us everlasting too!"⁵

So, we don't have to fear death. It doesn't have to keep us down. Even in the face of death and disease, we can praise the everlasting God who gives everlasting life.

Do you see just how comprehensive God's love for his people is? His benefits stretch from forgiveness of sins to eternal life. And everything in between. Count your blessings friends. And then bless God for all his blessings. Sing of his steadfast love toward you.

A couple of weeks ago, Jordan Green said that he sings the doxology over his kids every night. He wants to form them in praise toward God. My wife does something similar with our kids. Every night, for the last twenty years, she has sung to them:

*O, how he loves you and me,
O, how he loves you and me.
He gave his life, what more could he give?
O, how he loves you; O how he loves me;
O, how he loves you and me!*

*Jesus to Calvary did go,
His love for mankind did show.
What he did there brought hope from despair.
O, how he loves you; O, how he loves me;
O, how he loves you and me!*

Friends, we don't have to be lost in despair. Because of the love of God, seen on the cross at Calvary, we can have hope. The benefits of God's love can lead us to praise God. We can give boundless praise to the God who shows his boundless love.

The Boundaries of God's Love

But with that said, I need to make an important qualification before we close. I've been speaking of God's boundless love. And I don't want to remove one inch from that love. But there are boundaries to God's boundless love. There are no boundaries to the depth of God's love or the height or the length or the breath. But not everyone knows the love of God.

We're told repeatedly in this psalm that God's love is for those who fear God (v. 11, 13, 17). In other words, his love is for those who are in right relationship with God. In fact, God's *steadfast* love

⁴ Waltke

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms*

speaks of his *covenant* love toward his covenant people. His love is only for those in covenant relationship with God (v. 18).

So, although the primary application of this psalm is to remember God's love, before we can remember God's love, we first have to receive God's love.

And how do we do that? In the Psalms the people of God were under the old covenant. But in Christ a new covenant has been established. A new covenant in his blood. So, to come into a right relationship with God, you have to receive Jesus.

You have to turn from your sins and place your trust in Jesus. Receive him as Savior from sin. He died for our sins on the cross. He paid the penalty we deserved, so we can be forgiven. Receive him as Savior. But don't stop there. He's not only Savior. He's also Lord. He's the king over all (v. 19). And so, if we want to come into right relationship with God, we have to repent—to turn from our sins and submit to him.

You are called to praise God. But before that, you are called to trust in Jesus. Fall on his mercy at the cross. And you'll come to know the deep, deep love of Jesus. You'll experience his grace and understand his compassion. And then you'll be ready to do what you were made to do. To bless the LORD with all that is within you.

The first chapter of Ephesians summarizes this so well for us. Jordan referenced that at the beginning of the service. Paul begins where David begins. By blessing God for the blessings we have in Christ: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (v. 3). What are those blessings in Christ? In him we become children of the compassionate heavenly Father. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. In him we have obtained an inheritance. This is eternal life. In him we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

And how should we respond to these blessings? They're all to the praise of his glory. Bless the Lord who has blessed you in Christ. Give boundless praise for his boundless love.

Prayer

Father, we bow our knees before you. We pray that you would strengthen us according to the riches of your glory. That you may grant us to be strengthened with power through your Spirit in our inner being. We want Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith. We want to be rooted and grounded in love. So that we can learn to praise you!

So, I ask Father, that you would give us strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, so that we could come to somehow know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

CLOSING COMMENTS

My main goal this morning has been for you to grasp the vast dimensions of God's love for you in Christ so that you would do what you were made to do. So that you would praise God with every fiber of your being.

But the deep, deep love of Jesus is not just for you. We're also called to spread his praise from shore to shore. Psalm 103 begins with David calling his own soul to bless the LORD. But Psalm 103 ends with David calling all creation to bless the LORD. He calls the angels to bless the LORD (v. 20). All the heavenly hosts (v. 21). All his works, in all places of his dominion (v. 22). The LORD rules over all people and all things (v. 19). And so, he wants all creation to praise him.

And the way he intends for the world to come to praise him involves the church telling the world of all of his benefits in Christ. So, I want to encourage you to not keep his blessings to yourself. As the LORD has blessed you, be a blessing to others.