

## Psalm 103

## Praise the Lord

(t/h - m:18 Mar 18)

Years ago there was a popular song called Big Yellow Taxi by Joni Mitchell. In the chorus was this memorable line: *Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got til it's gone.* You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone! There's so much in our lives that we take for granted. We go home and flick a switch and our room lights up. Our cupboards have food in them, we turn on a tap and hot water comes rushing out of it. I jump in my car and switch on the ignition and drive off. I take these things for granted and I think most of us do. We rarely stop to think how blessed we are with our modern conveniences and standard of living.

A few years ago in 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit New York and knocked out power lines and tore up roads, and for the first time in generations people learned what it was like to live without electricity, with food and petrol for their cars. And they learned something else; they didn't know what they had until it was gone! Sometimes we don't know what we have until it's taken away from us. Psalm 103 helps us to remember just what we've got and just how blessed we are. David, the writer of the psalm starts out praising God and he says: *Praise the LORD, my soul and do not forget all his benefits (v2)*. If we forget any of God's benefits, if we forget the many ways we are blessed then we run the risk of taking God and His provision for granted.

We can become like the woman who walked into a supermarket just before Christmas and after searching the cold cabinets, decided that she was unhappy with the size of the turkeys that were left. She turned to a shop assistant and asked rather snappishly: *Don't these turkeys get any bigger?* The assistant calmly replied: *No madam, their dead!* The complaining woman probably had more food in front of her than most third world countries but she just couldn't see it. And she grew so angry because what she saw wasn't good enough, what was left wasn't big enough for her. I suspect we've all done this at some time.

If we don't get into the habit of thanking God for what we *do have*, we'll soon become ungrateful because of what we don't have. The message in Psalm 103 is this: Get into the habit of being thankful now! Get into the habit of not forgetting what God has given us! So just what has God given us?

The Bible says we should give thanks for all things. There's a story about a minister called Alexander Whyte. He was known as a man who always found something to be thankful for. One Sunday morning, the weather was so awful that one church member thought to himself: *Well, the minister won't think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this.* Much to his surprise however, Whyte began by praying: *We thank you Lord that is it not always like this!* The Bible says we should be thankful for *all* things. So what has God given us? Spend a couple of moments and think of at least five things you can be thankful for. Somebody tell me one of the things they are thankful for (*move around the congregation asking for example of thankfulness*).

For the most part you have answered as I would have; you expressed thanks for tangible things like your family or friends, your home or possessions. But then I read Psalm 103 I noticed that David wasn't thanking God for these things. Not once in the entire Psalm does David ever speak of something tangible. David didn't give thanks for his family or home, or possessions. Instead, he praises God because his God has forgiven all his sins, healed all his diseases, redeemed his life from sin and crowned him with love and compassion. Why would David focus on these things rather than the kind of stuff that you and I might take for granted for. The things that David was thankful for are the things we largely take for granted: Our forgiveness, our health, our faith and God's love. And we can't buy or do anything to get these things. God gives and blesses us with these qualities and they can't be earned or bought. I can lose my loved ones, my home and possessions, but I can't lose the things David wrote about in Psalm 103.

Jesus said exactly the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount. *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Matt 6) David is telling us in Psalm 103 that his treasures are in heaven.

What kind of treasures was David talking about? He says his greatest treasure is that God loves him and has compassion on him. That foundational truth makes all the difference to him. David acknowledged that he's not worthy of God's love and that our lives are fleeting. *Our days are like grass, we flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.* David knows that we're not all that impressive because we are fragile and easily forgotten. And what's more; God knows that too! God knows how we're formed because He is our creator, and He formed us from dust into His image.

The Bible tells us that we are special creations by God. Yes, we are fragile and we are easily forgotten by the world; but God won't forget us! David says God loves us so much that He redeems our lives from the pit and He crowns us with love and compassion (v4). In the Bible there are stories of people who spent time in pits. Jeremiah was thrown into a literal pit. Daniel was thrown into a pit we know of as the lion's den. Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit with the intention of killing him but then changed their minds and sold him into slavery in Egypt. Those were the literal pits that God rescued them from.

But there were an are other pits that aren't so literal but are equally depressing. David spent several years running from King Saul. Moses spent forty years in the wilderness, and Ruth spent many years in poverty in a foreign land.

Each of these stories tells of how God reached down and pulled people up and out of the put and placed them on solid ground. And David teaches us that what God did for those people; He will do for you and I. David knew that God loved that much, and God loves us in the same way.

We serve a loving God. We serve a God who not only takes care of our physical needs but offers us forgiveness and everlasting life. Psalm 103 assures that God love and cares for us so much that He delights to forgive us and remove our sins. He restores the relationship between Him and us. Not only does He remove our sins but He forgets about them. This is the God that we serve. A God who loves us so much that *He gave His only begotten son that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.*

But sadly there are people in this world who do not want Jesus to be their saviour. There are people in this world who believe that their goal in life is to be health, wealth and wise, and to die at a ripe old age peacefully. Jesus doesn't fit into that equation for them, and these people tend to look at others who don't reach that goal as poor and underprivileged.

In closing, some years ago there was a team from a church in Edinburgh who went on a short term missional trip to Haiti. When they arrived they were shocked at the abject poverty in which people there lived. Most of the people in Haiti have little in the way of personal property and Haitian people considered the mission team extremely wealthy. They thought that it was a luxury to have a suitcase because if you own a suitcase then this must mean that you have things to put in that suitcase! The average home was really a shanty, a ramshackle affair that was simply one small room. The people had little food and there was little work available that people could do to earn money.

Those who's goal it is to have all the health, wealth and wisdom they can acquire, would look down on those in Haiti with pity for all they lack. Then one of the Haitian pastors said something to a member of the mission team that was inspirational. The pastor said, *There are some people in this world who say we are a poor people here, but no one is poor who has Jesus.* I know that sounds like a platitude but what the Haitian was saying is that there is more to life than wealth. We can be spiritually rich while being physically poor, think about that for a moment and think about the truth of Psalm 103.

Do we consider ourselves rich by the standards of this world, but living without acknowledging all that God has blessed us with? Are we so busy looking for more in this world that we miss what's really important? *Doesn't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone.* It's never too late to examine our lives and consider where we place our priorities; with God or with the world? Don't leave it too late to consider where God is in your lives! **Amen**

(1706 words)