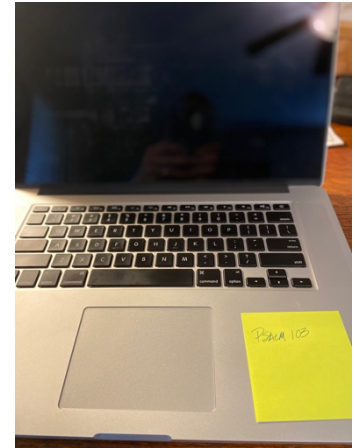


WHEN YOUR SOUL IS TEMPTED TO BE DESPONDENT...
PSALM 103:1-5

Several months ago, while reading my Bible, I was struck by the beauty of a particular psalm and though I didn't have time to study it in detail that day, I knew I didn't want to forget to study that psalm, so I grabbed a sticky note, wrote the psalm number down and put it on my computer. There it stayed for several months.



Then COVID-19 arrived and I knew I wanted to do a series of sermons on the bigness of God — to remind us of His power and authority, and of His kindness and compassion. I wanted these sermons to give us something to hold onto when our souls are tempted to despair. One day while I was in my office, I saw that sticky note again and opened my Bible back to that psalm and thought, “Ok. That one has to be in this series.” And that’s what brings us to Psalm 103 this morning (and next Sunday morning).

The editor’s superscription tells us that it is a psalm of David, and it well might be, but we just don’t know whether it is or not — and while it has some themes similar to Psalms 32 and 51, it is impossible to know if this is David’s reflection at the end of life on God’s grace towards His sin. As I mentioned earlier, it is in a group of praise psalms (103-106) that ends the fourth book (section) of psalms. But it also pairs well with Psalm 102; that psalm is filled with despondency and despair; this psalm is an admonition to a despairing soul and what the one who is tempted to despair must do. One commentator says about Pss. 102-103, “The hope of the preceding Psalm (v. 13) has been realised. Sorrow has been turned into joy....Praise and thanksgiving take the place of complaint and supplication.” [Kirkpatrick, 599.]

This song is one of overwhelming joy. I found myself moved to tears multiple times this week as I studied. What is particularly remarkable about this psalm is that while it is written in the context of temptation to despair, it is *not* a despairing song: “There are no clouds in the horizon, nor notes of sadness in the music, of this psalm. No purer outburst of thankfulness enriches the church.” [MacLaren, quoted by Leupold, 715.]

I summarize the opening verses of **Psalm 103** this way:

WHEN TEMPTED WITH DESPONDENCY, THE BELIEVER ALWAYS HAS REASON TO PRAISE GOD.

Let’s listen to this song and heed the one command it gives and the reasons for that command:

1. One Great Command for the Despondent Soul — PRAISE (vv. 1-2)

- ✓ Temptation to despondency is a REALITY (Ps. 102 – 103:1)
- ✓ When tempted to despondency we must PRAISE the Lord (v. 1)
- ✓ When tempted to despondency we must PREACH to ourselves (v. 1-2a)
- ✓ When tempted to despondency, we must REMEMBER not to forget (v. 2b)

2. Five Compelling Reasons to Praise God ALWAYS (vv. 3-5)

- ✓ He FORGIVES all our sin (v. 3a)
- ✓ He HEALS all our (sinful) diseases (v. 3b)
- ✓ He REDEEMS us from death and Hell (v. 4a)
- ✓ He CROWNS our lives with grace (v. 4b)
- ✓ He SATISFIES us in all things (v. 5)

1. One Great Command for the Despondent Soul — PRAISE (vv. 1-2)

- Temptation to despondency is a REALITY (Ps. 102 – 103:1)

- ✓ We know that there is a temptation to despondency because we read Scripture and live life.
 - Suffering is a common theme in Scripture: Ps. 119:50, 67, 71, 75, 92, 107, 153; Js. 1:2-4.
 - Suffering is commonly observed in our world: doctors and hospitals, car repair shops, bank loan departments, counseling ministries, law offices, arbitrators and judges, and policemen.
 - When we suffer we are tempted to discouragement, despair, and despondency — we are tempted to become fainthearted and empty of courage (1 Thess. 5:14).
- ✓ We know that there is a temptation to despondency because Psalm 102 tells us there is. He was physically ill (v. 3), “skin and bones” (v. 5), lonely (v. 7), ridiculed (v. 8), under God’s wrath (v. 10). All his suffering led him to plead (in seeming despair) with God
- ✓ We know that there is a temptation to despondency because Psalm 103 suggests there is. As we will see in a moment, the opening verse is a command to praise the Lord. And commands in Scripture are not given because it is our natural inclination to do them.
 - The Bible tells husbands to love wives because it’s not natural for them to love.
 - The Bible tells wives to love their husbands and children because love is not a natural response.
 - The Bible tells citizens to honor the king and obey those in authority over them because it is most natural for citizens to be anarchists.
 - The Bible tells sinners to repent because it is natural not to repent.
 - And the Bible tells worshippers to praise God because it is most natural to want to receive praise, not to give praise — even to God — and especially when we are suffering.
 - For this psalm to call the worshippers to praise is to remind them that even when suffering, there is reason to praise (which we will see in vv. 3-5, and then even more next week).
- ✓ Suffering is a reality in a fallen world. Wherever there is suffering, there is a temptation to despair. Even when we are doing well, we are tempted to despair — to act as if our circumstances are beyond God’s ability or God’s compassion.
- ✓ This psalm is a glorious (needed) antidote to that despair. It’s an antibiotic for hearts that are infected with joylessness and unrighteous and ungodly sorrow.

- When tempted to despondency we must PRAISE the Lord (v. 1)

- ✓ Twice in verses 1-2 the psalmist says **bless Yahweh**. And once more he infers that we are to bless Yahweh — **bless His holy name**. What does it mean to “bless God?”
 - To bless God *does not* mean we are adding something to Him that He doesn’t possess.

- To bless God is to acknowledge the power and authority of God. It is to give thanks to Him and praise Him for that power and authority. It is to express joyful gratitude as a means of affirming that God is our confidence, delight, and satisfaction. We want Him and we enjoy Him.
- To bless the Lord is to affirm to the world that whatever we don't have, we always have something that gives us ultimate joy. It is to affirm the character and "Godness" of God.
- And notice that this is *an imperative*. It's a command. It's required. It's not optional. It is for every person in every circumstance in every place. It's for the Israelite worshipper and for me.
- But the fact that God commands it also means that it is possible. In every circumstance it is possible to praise the Lord. It is possible to give thanks to Him. In fact, in this psalm that follows a profoundly sad psalm, this psalm is profoundly joyful. The psalmist does not request anything from God and "admiring gratitude shines through every line of this hymn..." [Kidner]
- It's possible to praise in despondent circumstances because our praise is not "general" — it is specific — it is to **the Lord**. It is to YHWH — to the covenant making God of Israel. This is the name that Israel refused to speak about God, but the name that God most often used of Himself in the OT (6800x) — 11x in this psalm (vv. 1, 2, 6, 8, 13, 17, 19-21, 22 [2x]). He is trustworthy.
- Notice also the second line — **bless His holy name**, which means the blessing is an affirmation that what God is doing is holy, right, and good. God has not acted against His holy nature. He is being consistent with all that He eternally is. His providential actions are right — when He brings a virus or cancer or financial hardship or seclusion or death, He is holy and right.
- Are you and I being intentional in cultivating praise when we are tempted to despair? Here is one personal example — today I am recording our 8th worship service during COVID-19. Every time I've done that I have finished with a profound sense of sadness. A couple of times, I have had to leave quickly to keep from weeping. This is *so* wrong and hard. As I worked on this message, I had to ask myself, "Terry, in your sadness, are you purposefully working to praise God? Are you thanking Him and honoring Him for so many graces in GBC's life?..."
- When tempted to despondency, we *must* praise YHWH, and it is possible to praise Him.

• When tempted to despondency we must PREACH to ourselves (v. 1-2a)

- ✓ Have you noticed to whom the psalmist is talking? He's not talking to God. He is not talking to fellow worshippers. He is not talking to the ungodly. He is talking to himself — "Praise the Lord, **O my soul...**" (similar to Pss. 42-43). When he says that he is looking inwardly. He is giving a command to himself. He is reminding himself that it is possible, and he *must* give praise to YHWH.
- ✓ He will say the same thing again in v. 2. And in the second line of v. 1 he will use a synonymous phrase — **all that is within me...** It's everything inside of him. We call this the inner man. It's what he's thinking, what he's desiring, what he's longing for, what he loves. All of it should bless YHWH.
- ✓ This is not a literary device. It's not a superficial statement. He is battling for his heart.

- ✓ He is a counselor who is diagnosing the condition of his own heart. He sees that his heart is inclined to go the wrong direction and he is pointing himself to the truth and to righteousness.
- ✓ Notice that the psalmist begins this psalm by saying three times, **Bless the Lord** (vv. 1-2a). Notice how he ends the psalm — a three-fold command to bless the Lord (vv. 20-22). Guess what the theme of the psalm is? Praise of the Lord is not only becoming of the believer; it is essential.
- ✓ Do you know what your heart needs today? Your heart needs to be reminded to praise the Lord.
- ✓ Are you like the psalmist, preaching that message to yourself when you are tempted to despair?
- ✓ I've quoted this many times, but Lloyd-Jones is absolutely right:

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?...The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: 'Why art thou cast down' — what business have you to be disquieted?...And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: 'I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God'. [*Spiritual Depression*]

- ✓ When we are tempted to despondency, we need to preach to ourselves. We must remind ourselves of one of our most basic tasks — that we are on earth for God's praise and to give Him praise.

• When tempted to despondency, we must **REMEMBER** not to forget (v. 2b)

- ✓ Our poor brains are fallible. Even when I have appointments in my Google calendar, I will forget them. A few years ago I remembered an appointment late in the day and sent someone a text that said something like, "I forgot to confirm this with you this morning, but we have an appointment in two hours — can you still make it?" He responded, "You forgot you remembered. You texted me a couple of days ago, and yes, I'm planning to be there..."
- ✓ Even when I remember, I am prone to forget. You know what that's like don't you?
- ✓ But friends, there is something we must not — we dare not — forget. We must **forget none of His benefits**. When the psalmist says that, it is an acknowledgment that we are prone to forgetting the benefits of God. Good things happen, blessings come, bad things go away, hardships end, and we are prone to forget God. That was Israel's downfall (**Dt. 8:11-14**), and it is ours too.
- ✓ It gets even worse than that; the idea here is not simply absent-mindedness; it is apathy about God. It is carelessness about remembering Him. It is a deliberate act of ignoring God's good gifts and kind acts for His people. It is acting as if whatever good we have is because of what we have done and the hardship we have is God's fault. It exalts ourselves and diminishes God. Forgetting God is the exact opposite of praise. And we must not allow ourselves to go there. How can we remember?

- In verses 3-5, the psalmist leads us to remember God through five reminders of His benefits — His particular acts of kindness to His people. These were true of Israel as His covenant people, but they are true of all those who belong to Him — even us, as NT believers in Christ.

2. Five Compelling Reasons to Praise God **ALWAYS** (vv. 3-5)

- One of the things I have done during COVID-19 is to build a “thank list” — things for which I’m thankful in these days; and whenever I add something to the list, I read and pray back through the entire list.
- When we build those kinds of lists, it’s tempting to put things like, “Thank you for not getting COVID-19...finding TP and chicken at the grocery, a house that is safe, a wife that is a gracious companion...” While it’s appropriate to give thanks for those graces, those are small graces and they can easily be removed. If we make them our focus, when we don’t have a spouse (or our spouse is combative), and we get deathly sick, and we lose our job, and the grocery stores run out of meat, then we might be tempted to think that we have nothing for which we can give thanks.
- The psalmist is going to remind us that no matter our circumstances, there are *always* reasons for gratitude — it is possible for every follower of God to give thanks and praise God *at all times* (and I mean, *at all times*). Notice where the psalmist points us. The first reason to praise God always is —

• He **FORGIVES** all our sin (v. 3a)

- ✓ He washes our sin. He cleanses us. He removes our sin (v. 12). He takes it away and puts it an infinite distance away from us. He pardons us.
- ✓ And notice that the psalmist says, **all your iniquities**. Not a few. Or some. Or even most. *All*.
- ✓ Like you, my list of sins I have committed is really long. And the list of my unrighteous desires is almost infinitely long. I grieve over the many ways I haven’t glorified Him. Isn’t it that way for all of us? And He forgives it. *All*. Our sin killed us and God wiped it all away (Ps. 32:5; Col. 2:14-15).
- ✓ This doesn’t mean we aren’t sinners. We are. We still have the flesh (Rom. 7; Gal. 5). We will still sin. But it means that He does not treat us as sinners. He has not given us what we deserve (vv. 9-10). He is not angry with us and He does not pour out His wrath against us.
- ✓ The psalmist did not know the fullness of it, but He does not treat us according to the amount of or our kinds of sins because of Christ. And because Christ is our righteousness, He makes us His sons.

• He **HEALS** all our (sinful) diseases (v. 3b)

- ✓ Some (many, actually) have suggested that **heals all your diseases** is the promise of physical healing. And the word **diseases** does sometimes refer to physical diseases. But it also refers to spiritual disease, and that makes the most sense here, because not **all** physical diseases are healed. And the first line is speaking of forgiveness, and often second lines in psalms are parallel thoughts.

- ✓ Also, v. 4 is speaking of spiritual redemption from spiritual death and Hell. So it seems best to understand this as spiritual healing — God heals all our spiritual disease (**Ps. 147:3**). He not only takes the sin away, but He restores the sinner so that the sinner can do righteous acts.
- ✓ This week I read about the lame man who was healed in Acts 3:7-8 so that his feet were strengthened and he was leaping and jumping after a lifetime of inactivity; that's the kind of healing God gives spiritually — the sinner is immediately equipped to do God-honoring things to please Him.
- ✓ There is restoration with God. He rehabilitates the sinner and makes him useful (**Philemon 10-11**).

- He **REDEEMS** us from death and Hell (v. 4a)

- ✓ The word **redeems** has the sense of reclamation. And God's person is reclaimed from **the pit**. That word is often used as a synonym for Sheol (death or Hell, depending on context) — cf. **Ps. 16:10**.
- ✓ The one who is destined for eternal death and eternal judgment in Hell is reclaimed from that.
- ✓ Do you see what's the psalmist is telling us? The one who deserves and is destined for wrath is given life instead. God not only forgives the sin, but He heals and strengthens so that sinners can do good things, and then He gives eternal life to those who deserve eternal death.
- ✓ This is the OT affirmation of eternal life for those who trust God for salvation.
- ✓ I haven't had any life-threatening illnesses, but when I was six years old, I was playing one evening where I shouldn't have been playing and was hit by a car when I went to cross a street when I shouldn't have been crossing the street. In God's grace, the car was going slowly, and I recovered from my injuries within a week or so. But all of us have an eternally life-threatening disease that God says, "No — let me show you what eternally life-infusing grace looks like."
- ✓ Don't ever shrug at the gift of grace — "Oh, are you talking about Jesus? Oh yeah, I've done that." Oh friend, we should never get over that God reached into the coffin and yanked us out and made us breath with life. That was Lazarus' story. It was Israel's story (**Ezk. 37:1-10**). It's our (eternal) story.

- He **CROWNS** our lives with grace (v. 4b)

- ✓ Not only does God pull the believer out of the Pit, but He crowns the believer's life with added blessing. Like crowning a king with his crown, God grants **lovingkindness** and **compassion**.
- ✓ Those are two words that appear together often (51:1; 69:16) — they refer to 1) His loyal love and grace to His people (cf. also **vv. 8, 11, 17**) and 2) His mercy and pity for needy people (cf. **vv. 8, 13**).
- ✓ This is God's faithfulness to eternally care for His people and shower them with kindness.
- ✓ God graciously treats His people like kings. He gives them a new vitality and life.
- ✓ He does this because He is aware how needy we are; He made us, and He knows our need for His kindness to us (**vv. 13-14**). Whatever grace we need for life, He abundantly gives us (Jn. 1:16).
- ✓ My dad has often said this is like the jelly on top of the peanut butter. He saves us and then He grants to us overflowing grace and kindness for all eternity. We are blessed with kingly lives.

- He **SATISFIES** us in all things (v. 5)

- ✓ This verse is difficult to translate; **years** is something like “ornaments.” Different Jewish commentaries and texts have interpreted it in various ways, leading to translations like “years” or “mouth.” Regardless of what the word is, the intent is clear — God is satisfying. He gives Himself and **good** things that enhance and benefit our lives that supersede every other desire of life. Because we have Him, we don’t need anything else.
- ✓ The result of that gift is that the believer is **renewed like the eagle** — the eagle is pictured as a creature that has particular vitality and strength; so the believer in God is given power and vigor and stamina, like the eagle possesses.
- ✓ He will be given such strength, that God will satisfy him completely.
- ✓ What will satisfy you today?
 - A nice grilled steak or salmon for Mother’s Day? A haircut? A visit from the grandkids? A new job? A healthy bank account balance? No more restrictions on activity? Maybe a Lamborghini? ([Five-year-old](#) who borrowed parents SUV to drive to CA).
 - Those things might be enjoyable, but we don’t need them to be satisfied. If you have God and Christ, you have everything you will ever need — eternally need. He is enough. **Colossians 3:11** — **He is all** — He is all sufficient; we don’t need anything else.
 - Could you be satisfied with God as your only inheritance, like the Levites (**Dt. 10:9**)? He is our only (ultimate) inheritance. The gospel gets us to Him and gives us Him. That’s David’s point.
- Have you noticed what the psalmist has done in this psalm? As he has given us reasons for praise, he has moved from the lesser to the greater, building to a crescendo of praise. Each reason builds on and expands the previous. We have increasing reason for praise, if we belong to God and are in Christ.
- We are commanded to always praise, and we always have reason for praise.

CONCLUSION: Today, on Mother’s Day, in COVID-19, in financial recession, without many activities of life, with sickness and death, when our souls are tempted to despair, *we have reason for praise*. We have a command to bless the Lord by praising Him. And we have abundant, infinite reason for praise.

- ✓ We are forgiven
- ✓ We are healed
- ✓ We are given life
- ✓ We are crowned with grace
- ✓ We are satisfied

In every circumstance of your life today, give great praise to God for His grace.

BENEDICTION: **Psalm 103:19-22**

*Remember Zoom Meeting Room for fellowship after the service,
and someone will be at GBC from 1-2 p.m. today if you want to drop off checks.*