

WHEN YOUR SOUL IS TEMPTED TO BE DESPONDENT..., PT. 2
PSALM 103:6-22

Over the past couple of months I've thought several times of a popular and catchy, but ridiculous song from the late 1980s:

*In every life we have some trouble
But when you worry you make it double
Don't worry, be happy
Don't worry, be happy now*

That's much easier said than done, isn't it? And, of course, the song offers no real reason to be happy and no good reason to stop worrying. Just "be happy."

Another song writer wrote a better song about being happy. It might be that King David penned this song, though we don't know for sure. Regardless, the song is filled with a clear admonition for us to express our happiness by praising God. Throughout the song, rather than lamenting his suffering, he reminds himself — and us — of the many reasons to praise the Lord for His goodness to us. I speak of **Psalm 103**.

When we struggle to praise God or be content in whatever circumstances we are, it is because we are focused on wrong objectives. We want wrong things for wrong reasons and in wrong ways. In order to praise God and be grateful and content, we need a new way to think. Our minds need to be renewed. And that is exactly what this song does for us — it renews our minds and transforms our thoughts so that we can move from ingratitude to gratitude, and from despair and despondency to joy and praise.

Last week we noted that in this psalm, the writer addresses himself and he compels himself to praise God. His problem is not his circumstances; his problem is that he is thinking wrongly about his circumstances and about the sovereign God who is over the circumstances. This song corrects his — and our — faulty thinking.

We can summarize the message of **Psalm 103** this way:

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

From the second part of this hymn, we are exhorted with four more reasons to praise Yahweh.

1. Let Your Praise be Stimulated by Who GOD IS (vv. 6-14)

- ✓ God is (and always is) RIGHTEOUS (vv. 6-7)
- ✓ God is (and always is) GRACIOUS (vv. 8-9)
- ✓ God is (and always is) FORGIVING (vv. 10-13)
- ✓ God is (and always is) MINDFUL (v. 14)

2. Let Your Praise be Stimulated by Who MAN IS (vv. 15-16)

3. Let Your Praise be Stimulated by What GOD DOES (vv. 17-19)

- ✓ He is LOYAL to His people (vv. 17-18)
- ✓ He RULES WISELY from Heaven (v. 19)

4. Let Your Praise be Part of a UNIVERSAL Chorus of Praise (vv. 20-22)

- ✓ ALL creation and created beings praise Yahweh (vv. 20-21)
- ✓ WE (corporately and individually) praise Yahweh (v. 22)

1. Let Your Praise be Stimulated by Who GOD IS (vv. 6-14)

- In verses 1-5, the psalmist is clearly addressing himself — his heart and inner man — giving himself reasons to praise God for the things God has done for him personally. Starting in v. 6, the psalmist thinks more broadly about the character of God (notice the change from the second person “your” (vv. 1-5) to the descriptive, “He” in vv. 6ff).
- These are truths about God — realities about who He was, is, and always will be. They were true for David and for Israel. And they are true of all God’s people, everywhere, and in every circumstance.
- And all these realities are further reason for the Psalmist — and for us — to praise the Lord.

• God is (and always is) RIGHTEOUS (vv. 6-7)

- ✓ He states that God is righteous in two ways in these verses:
 - ***Yahweh performs righteous deeds*** — that is, everything God does is right and is in accord with what is right and holy and good. He cannot do anything unholy.
 - ***And (performs) judgments for all who are oppressed*** — that is, He is just and judges wisely and in holiness for those who are oppressed (exploited) by others. God is their holy defender. He makes right decisions for those who are afflicted and suffering from others.
- ✓ He reiterates that God is righteous in v. 7 when he says that ***He made known His ways to Moses***. The God who is infinite and transcendent (and unknowable) made Himself known to Moses (and through Moses to all Israel and all men) as God who is perfectly just and right (**Dt 32:4; Ps 18:30; 77:13; 145:17**). It seems also that when He speaks about ***His acts***, he is thinking not just about His general acts, but His acts of salvation (**Ps. 66:5; 67:2**).
- ✓ All this is to say that what God does for men and in men’s lives is always right and in accord with what is true. The psalmist and Israel and we do not need to despair when suffering that something beyond the control of God has gone wrong or that God has gone wrong. We are safe. “He is good and He does good” (**Ps. 119:68**)— even when we are afflicted. When circumstances are hard and you are afflicted and suffering, nothing has gone wrong and God has not become unfair or unjust. He is doing just as He desires, and it is right and good — for Him and for us.

• God is (and always is) GRACIOUS (vv. 8-9)

- ✓ You might have a category for God that says, “He does what is right, but in doing right He is harsh, mean, and perhaps even vindictive.” The psalmist corrects that thought in these verses.
- ✓ Here he paraphrases one of the most common OT descriptions of God (**Ex. 34:6**); first given after the sin of the golden calf, when God cut out two new tablets of the Law — when the nation needed it most!

- ✓ Notice that this statement is made of YHWH — the covenant making and keeping God of Israel.
- ✓ *That* God is **compassionate and gracious**. These two words are used together 11x in the OT. God loves like a mother tenderly loves her children. He is benevolent and protective. And He is merciful towards His people, giving gifts and privilege that are undeserved. They deserve something else...
- ✓ He is **slow to anger** — He has a “long nose” — that is, it takes a long time for His nose to flare in anger. He is patient with His people (and we will see in a moment why He is patient). He is not reluctant to discipline His people, but He is slow to do it. He will wait a long time before carrying out justice and correction against sinners and against His people (cf. **Rom. 2:4**).
- ✓ He is **abounding in lovingkindness** — He has loyal love to His people; and He is not miserly with His life, but His love is overflowing towards His people. This is a theme of the psalm (**vv. 4, 11, 17**).
- ✓ These attributes of grace are seen in that **He will not always strive with us** — He will not eternally condemn and discipline the one who belongs to Him. The term “strive” refers to a legal dispute — when YHWH has a legitimate cause (legal right) to contest and condemn Israel, He won’t carry it out to the bitter end (eternally). We are prone to persist in anger and bitterness. Not YHWH.
- ✓ And **He will not keep His anger forever** — it’s the same idea as the previous line. His anger has a limit against His people. He won’t maintain His anger without any possibility of relief. His anger always works in concert with His grace.
- ✓ Someone has said that “Great as his wrath may be, his mercy is greater.” Is that right? Can God’s infinite wrath be inferior to God’s infinite grace? No. One is not superior to the other. Both must work together in harmony and unity and neither can be superior to the other, for that would suggest some deficiency in God. Rather, it is better to say that God’s grace is greater than *sin* (**Rom. 5:20-21**). God’s wrath is so great, it could never be satisfied when poured out against unrighteous sinners. God’s wrath is so great it took the infinitely gracious provision of the incarnate God’s death and resurrection to be satisfied. An infinite wrath needs an infinite grace to be satisfied and that is exactly what happened in Christ’s death. It is that reality that David anticipates in the provision of the sacrificial system, and it is that which we remember in the death of Christ. God’s mercy is not greater than God’s wrath; but God’s mercy is greater than our sin, so that His mercy satisfies wrath.
- ✓ Because of Christ, God is not angry with you and cannot be angry with you. Whatever circumstances you have received from Him, they are not a result of His anger with you. They are expressions of grace and kindness to you (however difficult they might be).

• God is (and always is) **FORGIVING** (**vv. 10-13**) — the psalmist expresses this truth several ways in vv.10ff

- ✓ *God doesn’t give His people what their sin deserves* (**v. 10**). Both lines in this verse mean that God has not acted against us according to Israel’s guilt. It was permissible in His righteousness to act against that guilt, but He didn’t. He has not **rewarded** their sin with what it deserved (**Rom. 6:23**). That was true of Israel and it is true of us, as well.

- ✓ *God has limitless love for His people (v. 11).* He is forgiving of His people because He has an immeasurable love for His children. Were you to go to the ends of the heavens (the universe), God's love would exist further than that distance.
 - This phrase might serve as the basis for the children's book we used to read to the girls: "Our love is always with us and it never, ever ends. So snuggle safely in my arms...I love you to the moon and stars, my precious little one." However far our human love might go, God's will go infinitely further. There is no end to His love.
 - But notice also that this love is only for **those who fear Him** — God does not have loyalty and love towards those who reject and rebel against Him. This verse re-affirms **Rom. 8:28** — God is gracious (in an ultimate and entire way), only to those who belong to Him.
- ✓ *God infinitely takes our sin away from His people (v. 12).* No matter what we do, God's faithful love will forgive and restore us. He completely removes our sin; God will never bring up those sins again. They are gone. They are removed from us; there is no judgment against us (**Col. 2:13-14**).
- ✓ *God has compassion (in forgiveness) toward His people (v. 13).* We expect mothers to be compassionate, but here the psalmist tells us that the heavenly Father has a forgiving love that is akin to the compassion of an earthly father (except we know God's compassion is infinitely greater). The sense is that God has *always* pitied and been compassionate for those who are His (**Lk. 11:11ff**; notice again the qualification that this is only for those who **fear** — worship and love — God).
- ✓ All four of these verses are a reminder that we can praise God because we can always be certain that our greatest problem (sin) is always ready to be forgiven by Him (**1 Jn. 1:9**).

- **God is (and always is) MINDFUL (v. 14)**

- ✓ Perhaps no verse has been as moving to me in this psalm as this one. God is often caricatured as a dispassionate, uncaring, relentlessly wrathful God. He is mean. But this verse corrects that with an overwhelming truth of God's nature that is not often considered.
- ✓ ***He Himself knows our frame*** — That is *He* (the pronoun is empathic) is well aware of how we are made. He knows how we have been put together — because He is the designer and manufacturer! It is in His mind (He's **mindful**) that we are just dust — He is well aware that we are composed of finite, dusty material; He not only remembers **Genesis 2:7; 3:19**, but He was there and that was Him that was acting! We are not infinite; we are not Him; He will never forget our constitution.
- ✓ And that means that He will not demand of us something that we cannot do. He will not overwhelm us, but everything He sends to us is within the scope of His provision and care for us.
- ✓ God deals with us (with grace and patience and kindness) because of our mortality and frailness.

- Friends, let us be moved to worship by all these realities of God's nature. He is overwhelmingly kind (beyond our comprehension) to us. Let's thank Him for that — TODAY!

2. Let Your Praise be Stimulated by Who MAN Is (vv. 15-16)

- In contrast to all that God is, is what we are. **As for man** serves as a shift in argument; it's a contrast. God is this way..., but now let's consider man's condition.
- **His days are like grass...** Mankind is temporal...people grow up and flourish and then fade away and die off quickly — like **grass** and like **flowers**. As quickly as a **wind** might develop and blow the petals off the flower, so our lives come and then are gone. A little blowing of the wind, and POOF — life is over.
- This is akin to what **James 4:14** says. Life is a disappearing vapor and we cannot hold onto it. This was the psalmist's lament in **102:4, 11**. Life is over too quickly and man cannot extend it.
- Notice also that not only is life over, but even the memory of the person is gone — **its place acknowledges it no more**; wherever that one has had a place in life, that place is gone and forgotten. He is forgotten, his work is forgotten, and his influence is forgotten. I just listened to the book, *Destiny of the Republic* — the story of the assassination of President Garfield — the shortest-termed President in US history. This is one of the very points the author made at the end; his presidency was short, his influence was short, and it would all soon be forgotten. And it was.

Even as they mourned the death of their president, Americans understood that, as time passed, Garfield would begin to fade from memory. "His ultimate place in history will be far less exalted than that which he now holds in popular estimation," the New York Times warned its readers. More painful even than the realization that his brief presidency would be forgotten was the thought that future generations would never know the man he had been. [Millard, *Destiny of the Republic*, 248.]

- This is a reminder to be humble in our praise — to recognize the supremacy of God (vv. 6-14) and also to remember our limitations and frailty. Let us not worship and praise things that will soon go away and be forgotten. Let us not pursue things that will not last. Let us pursue worship of the lasting God.

3. Let Your Praise be Stimulated by What GOD DOES (vv. 17-19)

• He is LOYAL to His people (vv. 17-18)

- ✓ In contrast to man's brevity and man's place on the earth, there is something that endures: **the lovingkindness of the Lord**. This is the fourth time David refers to God's loyal love (**vv. 4, 8, 11**).
- ✓ Here is one "strong ground of comfort...an everlasting power..." The strength is the loyalty of God to keep His promise to love and preserve His people Israel.
- ✓ The psalmist again emphasizes that this is only for those who **fear Him...keep His covenant and remember His precepts** (**v. 18**). Here we see that fearing the Lord means obedience to God's commandment and Word. Is He saying that God's love is earned by obedience?

- We remember that it is impossible for a person to fully obey the Mosaic Law (Rom. 7:1ff) and that a primary function of the Law is to reveal man's sinfulness. The only way to "keep" the covenant is to believe in the One who would fulfill the Law, Jesus Christ (Mt. 5:18).
- Yet, there is also a kind of obedience that is appropriate for God's people — to express their belief in Him and their desire to submit to Him and His leadership and authority.
- The ones who **remember** God by obeying Him, reveal that they have been saved by Him.
- ✓ We are reminded that we are weak, frail, and fading. But God is strong, omnipotent, and constant. He who is unfading will always keep and preserve His people. When they are suffering, they are tempted to despair and question His goodness. But He is keeping them. He is loyal. He *must* keep them.

- He **RULES WISELY** from Heaven (v. 19)

- ✓ Yahweh in the heavens has **established His throne**. The One who is **in Heaven**, above all things everywhere, has set up His rulership; no one can compete with Him because no one can climb to the eternal, infinite heights in which He lives and acts. So He reigns far above everyone else.
 - ✓ And **His sovereignty rules over all** — His "kingdom" rules over all. God has sovereign authority in all things and over all things. There are no limits to His authority (in contrast to man).
 - ✓ This means that everything that happens on earth (or anywhere) happens because of His decree and control. There are no renegade nations, people, weather, or molecules that escape His authority. No one's actions can overwhelm His sovereignty, and no sin can derail His sovereignty.
 - ✓ He is sovereign over all things and all people. And in His sovereignty He is infinitely wise. All that He does He does in wisdom and goodness for us. It may feel severe, but it is wisdom and grace.
- Because He is in Heaven, above all things and because He is acting in sovereign wisdom over all things, He deserves praise, gratitude, and worship. We do not need to understand His actions in order to praise Him (Abraham at Isaac's sacrifice and Job in his suffering did not understand what God was doing, but they still worshipped). It is enough to know the nature of God. We can trust His actions, and we can praise and thank Him for who He is and what He does. Always. (1 Thess. 5:18).

4. Let Your Praise be Part of a **UNIVERSAL** Chorus of Praise (vv. 20-22)

- **ALL** creation and created beings praise Yahweh (vv. 20-21)

- ✓ At the beginning of the psalm, the psalmist called himself to praise God with a three-fold command to **bless the Lord**. That is repeated at the end of this psalm, except now he calls all created beings to bless and praise the Lord (vv. 20, 21, 22a).

- ✓ He calls the **angels** to praise the Lord — and notice the three-fold way he describes them (v. 20). They have **strength** and ability, they serve Him (**perform His word**), doing what He says, and they **obey the voice of His word** — they are unique in their obedience to God. And the angels *do* praise and serve Him (e.g., **Rev. 4:8; 7:1ff...**)
- ✓ He also calls the **hosts** to praise YHWH — that could be another form of angelic being, or the created stars of the heavens (Scripture refers to both with that word). Because they **do His will** (v. 21), I'm slightly inclined to think it is a reference to higher-ranking angels (but not dogmatically).
- ✓ And he calls **all the works** to bless the Lord — all creation (and it does, **Ps. 148:1ff**).
- ✓ While creation cannot literally speak, all creation does manifest (reveal) God's nature and glory.
- ✓ So in vv. 20-22 the psalmist compels all creation, even the angels in Heaven, to worship God. God's attributes and actions make Him worthy to be worshipped by every created being and thing.
- ✓ And that leads him to his ultimate point — if all created beings are to worship and glorify God, then certainly *he* also must praise God — no matter how tempted he is to lament and despair.

• **WE (corporately and individually) praise Yahweh (v. 22)**

- ✓ He started the psalm with an admonition to himself to praise the Lord. He reminded himself of all God's gracious works to him personally (vv. 1-5). Then he reminded himself of God's nature (vv. 6-14) and God's activities to all His people (vv. 17-19), as well as man's lowly nature (vv. 15-16). Because of all those things, every part of creation has reason to praise God. And so does he.
- ✓ So the final line ends where he began — **bless the Lord, O my soul**. He speaks to himself and orders himself to bless and praise YHWH.
- ✓ And in finishing in this way he has reminded himself and us that he is not singing a solo — he is praising the Lord along with every other one of God's people. All God's people always have reason to praise and give thanks to God. None of God's people has legitimate reason to despair in a way that doubts and rejects and complains against God.

Do you ever have trouble praising God? Do you ever not "feel" like extolling his name? Do you ever get so discouraged that you have lost your joy? And find it hard to praise God? Do you ever get so low that you don't even want to go to church? Do you ever get so downcast that you cannot even sing the hymns and choruses? Maybe that is where you find yourself. Yet the more we know of God, the more we will praise him. To know him is to love him. The key to having a constant devotion to God is to be always growing in the knowledge of God. [Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*.]

- ✓ Oh, brothers and sisters, this day — today, May 17, 2020 — this day when we are still separated from one another, when we have no clear guess about the future, when we are more aware of our frailties, when we have had fear and selfishness and other ungodly motives in our hearts exposed more fully than in a long time, let us find our joy and hope in our eternal God who is good to us.

CONCLUSION:

Where are your thoughts today? As you fight for gratitude and praise and joy and contentment, are your thoughts on your circumstances — on financial struggles, on questions about the future (what school and worship and sports and medical care will be like 6 months or 6 years from now), your employability, your marriage, or your relationships with your children? Or are your thoughts on your God and the Lord Jesus Christ? Where are your meditations? What are you thinking? As long as you focus your thoughts on the things of this earth as ultimate, you will always struggle with praise and gratitude. But when you focus your mind on the nature and the character of God, you will find praise to be compelling and joyful.

Can I rewrite the main line of that silly song I mentioned earlier? Don't worry. Be happy in God and in His abundant spiritual provision for you and you will never be disappointed. That may not rhyme, but it's great theology that will help your soul when you are tempted to despondency.

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.*