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**“Praise the LORD, My Soul”**

**Psalm 103**

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**August 30, 2020**

**(Psalm 103)**

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
  - <sup>2</sup> Praise the Lord, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits—
  - <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,
  - <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,
  - <sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
  - <sup>6</sup> The Lord works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.
  - <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:
  - <sup>8</sup> The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.
  - <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
  - <sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.
  - <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;
  - <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
  - <sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
  - <sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.
  - <sup>15</sup> The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;
  - <sup>16</sup> the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.
  - <sup>17</sup> But from everlasting to everlasting  
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children—
  - <sup>18</sup> with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.
  - <sup>19</sup> The Lord has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.
  - <sup>20</sup> Praise the Lord, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.
  - <sup>21</sup> Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.
  - <sup>22</sup> Praise the Lord, all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.
- Praise the Lord, my soul.

**Core Idea:** Our souls are battlefields for praise, which is why we have to learn to preach the gospel to our souls daily. Praise will naturally flow out from us when we meditate on who God is.

**Opposing Value:** We want the praise for ourselves.

## INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. If you have your Bibles, please turn to Psalm 103.

*1 Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. 2 Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all His benefits—3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, 5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. 7 He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel: 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; 10 He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him; 14 for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust. 15 The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; 16 the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. 17 But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children—18 with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts. 19 The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all. 20 Praise the LORD, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word. 21 Praise the LORD, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants who do His will. 22 Praise the LORD, all His works everywhere in His dominion. Praise the LORD, my soul.*

For those of you who may not be familiar with this book, Psalms is a collection of many songs and poems written for the Israelites. It's written over a period of more than 800 years. And there are many authors including King David, who wrote more than half of the psalms including the one that we just read. Now, why is this book valuable to us? I love what C.S. Lewis said, "The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance." **Psalms are written to awaken our emotions.** It's absolutely true that Christianity is a religion that requires you to think. We should never leave our brains at the door. We must work our minds because our God reveals Himself to us *through* His Word. But at the same time, emotions are massively important as well. We must remember that God has given us not only **minds** to understand and apply His Word, but He has also given us **hearts** to feel and experience the power of His Word.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Peter sent out an email discussing his reflection on what this pandemic has caused in our lives. He recounted how we had to learn how to do school, work, community, and even worship online at home; how many of us struggled with loneliness; how a lot of our plans were indefinitely on hold; and as he reflected on these things, this one part really stood out to me. He said, "It's really hard to describe. I can't place my finger on it, but something doesn't feel right within me – emotionally, mentally, spiritually.

I feel off. I don't feel terrible, but at the same time I don't feel great. I'm not doing terribly in my spiritual life, but I'm not doing great in my spiritual life either. There's a lack of motivation. Spiritual life has become dull." I don't know about you, but I felt like Pastor Peter put to words what I have been feeling recently. But I'm afraid that I may not be the only one going through this; sadly, this may describe a lot more of us than we think.

When Pastor Peter asked me to preach, Psalm 103 stood out to me because I think David, the author of this psalm was going through something similar. I think David was in a season where he knew the truths, but he wasn't experiencing the power of truths. We don't exactly know what was going on, but whatever the case may be, the result was that he found himself unable to praise God with all of his heart. How do I know this? I'll explain more in my first point. But until then, I want to start by inviting you to open your minds and hearts to hear the truth. If you resonate with what David is going through, my prayer is that the truth we find in this psalm will inspire and move you to dance like David – all because you rediscover and reexperience this incredible joy, hope, and life in God. Of course, I don't want to assume that all of you are feeling off. Maybe you're vibrantly growing with God during this season. Maybe you're already overflowing with praises for the LORD. My prayer for you is that you'll be even more undignified for the LORD – that this truth will fuel your passion for God to burn even more brightly. Let me point out three truths from this psalm:

- **THE COMMAND TO PRAISE**
- **THE REASONS FOR PRAISE**
- **THE ETERNITY OF PRAISE**

### **1) THE COMMAND TO PRAISE**

Let's read verse 1, "*Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name.*" This psalm begins with a command to praise the LORD – but this command is unique in that David is commanding himself to praise the LORD. Why is he addressing his own soul? Why is he talking to himself? As I hinted in the beginning, if we think through it for a bit, it's very likely that he's speaking to himself because he is not praising the LORD for whatever reason. It might be that he's feeling distant from God; he may be overwhelmed by the circumstances of life – feeling anxious or fearful; or he may be feeling lazy, simply apathetic. Whatever it may be, David recognizes that he's not praising the LORD as he should; so, he begins to speak to his own soul.

Brothers and sisters, does this describe you today? At one point, God was so beautiful in our lives; we adored Him; praises flowed out naturally, so passionately; we worshipped Him with everything we had, but then life happened. COVID happened. We got busy. Work has been extremely draining. For parents, there's no boundary between work and family anymore. It feels like never-ending chores – cooking, homeschooling, and cleaning. Everyday is a battle. It's chaotic. In contrast, some of us just got lazy. We lost that motivation. The first thing we do when we wake up and the last thing we do before we sleep is check our phones, spending hours on social media, YouTube, or Netflix. We get easily distracted. We find ourselves slowly adjusting to this new lifestyle. It was uncomfortable to be alone before but now we enjoy it more because it's easy, convenient. It was difficult to worship online but now we prefer it – and worship has become just an activity that we do on Sunday. It's no longer a lifestyle but an added activity that interrupts our daily schedule. Then suddenly we realize that we're no longer in awe of God; we're no longer moved by the beauty of God; we're no longer overwhelmed by the wonder of His presence in our lives.

Why does this happen? Why do we lose sight of His beauty that dries up our praises to God? Of course, there are many reasons, but one reason is **because our souls and hearts are battlefields for praise**. There is constantly an intense battle to earn the praise of our hearts. In every moment of our lives, no matter where we are, no matter what we're doing, there are forces that are continually seeking to win the ultimate allegiance of our hearts. The thing that we have to remember is that our hearts are so weak and fickle that we *will* willingly give ourselves to the thing that we believe will ultimately save us. We *will* quickly praise the thing that we believe will give us meaning and significance.

Many of you may have heard that all humans are created to be worshippers. Everyone worships something. Then the most important question we need to ask is, **“What are we worshipping today?”** I believe that it's this simple truth that we forget which leads us to feel so dead and distanced from God – that dries up our worship to God, simply because we're unaware of what we're worshipping; because we're unaware of what is competing with our worship to God. Friends, what is competing with God to achieve that ultimate allegiance of your soul? Career, children, school, entertainment, money, convenience, your hunger for acceptance, respect, or reputation? We need to slow down to reflect our hearts frequently.

**What's amazing is that what David doesn't do is remain there – in that deadness of his soul; rather, he chooses to battle within himself to praise the LORD.** Look at verses 2-5. *“Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all His benefits—who **forgives** all your sins and **heals** all your diseases, who **redeems** your life from the pit and **crowns** you with love and compassion, who **satisfies** your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.”* He is reminding himself, reasoning with himself, reflecting and remembering that it is God alone who forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, and satisfies. He is fighting not to forget, not to be deceived that somehow, he can find these benefits from other things of this world. He remembers that his status and reputation can't take away the guilt of his sins – only God forgives. He remembers that no matter how much he trains his body, it is only God who heals; his health is in His hands. He remembers that no wealth or education will rescue and protect him from his troubles – only God redeems. He remembers that no one will crown him, love and embrace him like God does. He remembers that nothing of this world, no pleasure, will satisfy him like God does. **David literally talks and reasons with himself until it makes sense, until he feels and experiences it.** And he won't stop until this truth comes alive in his heart and changes him completely.

**Brothers and sisters, we must learn to command our souls when we feel dry, dead, apathetic, and unmotivated.** We need to learn to reason with our souls. Then how do we do this practically? One pastor said this: “David is warming himself at the fire of the truths of God.” In other words, by meditating on the Scripture. Meditation in Christianity is not emptying your mind; it's the filling of your mind with truths – truths that will shape your reality today. Without meditation, the truths of the Word can flow through our minds like water in a pipe and make no impact. But by means of meditation, we give the truth a chance to settle in our minds and do its work. This is really important to note especially because praise is always a response – one cannot generate praise out of nowhere, it must come from something; namely, through the Word of God. Let me say it more boldly: praise will not come out of us unless we're in the Word of God. Brothers and sisters, I pray that you'll turn to the Word today. Read it; write it out; memorize it; talk about it; reason with it; learn to warm your soul at the fire of God's truth for this is how it will fuel our worship to God.

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## 2) THE REASONS FOR PRAISE

If we look at verses 6-19, David shares so many reasons for praise that it might be hard to get through all of them in one sermon. So, let me point out just three reasons that inspired David to praise God.

**First reason: God's faithfulness.** Let's read verse 8. "*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.*" This verse is important to think through because it's a direct quote from Exodus 34. In Exodus 34, you see Moses climbing up Mount Sinai, where the presence of God was. And as he walks into the pillar of cloud which represented God's glory, majesty, and magnificence, this is what Moses says: "*Show me Your glory*" (Ex. 33:18). "I want more of You. I want to know the fullness of who You are. I want to see You in all of Your unveiled beauty. I want to see all of Your holiness, all of Your goodness; I want to see all of You!" And God responds by saying, "You cannot see all of me because no one may see me and live. But I will do this for you: I will hide you behind the cleft of a rock so that you may see my back as my glory passes by you." And as God passes by, He proclaims His name which David records for us in verse 8.

Why does David quote that in this psalm? Because David is reminding himself to the faithfulness and goodness of God who worked in the lives of the Israelites through His servant Moses. **And by doing so, David preaches to himself that the God who was faithful then will continue to be faithful now and even in the days to come.** This is made more evident when we read verses 8, 11, and 17, where God is described as the God of *hesed*, which is a Hebrew word that's translated as "love" or "steadfast love" in ESV. It's the love that's unchanging; the love that is faithful; the love that is never failing. What this means is that God is good in your life right now as He always has been and always will be. He is good even in your sickness, loneliness – even in your season of waiting, anxiety, confusion, and darkness; even in this pandemic, God is good in your life because no matter what you see right now, no matter what you experience and feel, God will always be faithful all the way to the end forever. We must remember that past grace is evidence of future grace.

**Second reason: God's love and compassion.** Let's read verse 13. "*As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.*" The verb "*has compassion*" in Hebrew means "overwhelmingly in love with something" or "surging emotional love." It's the love of the heart – the love that's deeply moved. When you do a word search on this, in other parts of the Scripture, it's often used to describe mother's love for her children. For example, Isaiah 49:15 says, "*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and **have no compassion** on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!*" Or it's the love of a mother described in 1 Kings 3. In this story, we read of a woman whose infant boy dies at night; and in her despair and anger, she goes and finds another woman with an infant and steals her child while the mother is sleeping. The next day, the mother of the living infant realizes what has happened; drags the woman who stole the baby to King Solomon who hears their dispute. After listening to them, he says in verses 24-25, "*Bring me a sword... Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.*" Then this is what verse 26 says, "*The woman whose son was alive was **deeply moved out of love** for her son and said to the king, 'Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!'*" This is where you see the love of the mother – she would rather have the child given to the liar in order to save the child. And David tells us that this is the kind of love that God has for you.

Then it begs the question, “Why does God love us like this?” Let’s go back to Psalm 103:13. If you read this superficially, you could conclude that God loves this way because we fear Him. But if you understand the parallelism of Hebrew language, you’ll realize that David is implying that fearing Him and being His children are same thing. “*As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.*” In other words, to live in fear, to live in awe and wonder, is the same thing as being His children. **God loves us because we’re His children; and we know that we’re His children because we live in fear, awe, and wonder of Him.** Then it all makes sense why God loves us this way. All parents know; the moment your child is born, your heart locks on your child. You experience this incredibly deep and unshakable love for this child. In the same way, God’s heart is locked on us. He loves you absolutely and completely. You are treasured and sought after by the King not because of what you have or accomplished but simply because He delights in you. The world tells us that we are valuable, significant, and desired only if we possess this product, afford to wear that brand, drive this car, have that kind of look, or live in this kind of neighborhood. They’re constantly measuring our worth according to what we can offer. And sadly we ourselves measure our worth by the same standard of this world, which is why we often find ourselves proud (because we achieved it to some degree) or crushed (because we’re so far from it). But the Bible tells us that we are given that worth by the King. Brothers and sisters, we’re loved simply because the King delights in us.

**Last reason: God’s anger and forgiveness.** Let’s read verses 8-12. “*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*” **David tells us that God gets angry but it’s compassion-driven anger.** What does this mean? It means that it’s slow to anger. It’s not impulsive or irrational, but it’s under control. It’s deliberate and purposeful.

Some may argue, “How is this a reason to praise God? How can we praise a God who gets angry?” To help us understand, I want to share a little lengthy quote from Rebecca Pippert who said this: “We tend to be taken aback by the thought that God could be angry. How can a deity who is perfect and loving ever be angry? But we must remember that love detests what destroys the beloved. Real love stands against the deception, the lie, the sin that destroys. Nearly a century ago the theologian E.H. Glifford wrote: ‘Human love here offers a true analogy: the more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the drunkard, the liar, the traitor.’ If God were not angry over how we’re destroying ourselves, He wouldn’t be good. And He certainly wouldn’t be loving. For anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference. How can a good God forgive bad people without compromising Himself? Does He just play fast and loose with the facts? ‘Oh, never mind... boys will be boys.’ Try telling that to a survivor of the Cambodian ‘killing fields’ or to someone who lost an entire family in the Holocaust. No. To be truly good one has to be outraged by evil and relentlessly hostile to injustice.” David tells us that our God hates evil because He’s good. And the Bible clearly states that our God gets angry; but it’s the righteous anger of a lover against anything that threatens or damages the beloved. **It’s really an anger that arises from this intense love.** God doesn’t get angry to see us suffer; no, it’s to transform us; it’s to guide us back to what is good, which is why forgiveness also comes easily. He doesn’t want to harbor His anger forever; He doesn’t want to treat us as our sins deserve. He’s not there to repay us in anger for what we have done. He will gladly and quickly and forever remove our transgressions from us.

Friends, do you know this God who was, is, and will always be forever faithful and good? Do you know this God who is deeply moved in His love for you? Do you know this God who gets angry when you're threatened yet who is so quick to forgive? These are the reasons that David gives us for praise.

### 3) THE ETERNITY OF PRAISE

We saw how David began this psalm by talking to himself. He was trying to wake his soul up – to stir the emotion of his soul to love and praise God by remembering and recounting all His benefits. When we look at verses 20-22, we see that David ends by calling all of creation to praise. He calls onto the angels, the heavenly hosts, and all of God's works – calling essentially the entire creation to praise the LORD.

What's David doing here? **He's pressing the point that praises to God never really ends because the praise that started in the heart of David will continue to be echoed forever.** Praise never ends. I love how one commentary describes the last sentence in this psalm: "The fact that the psalm's last line is a reiteration of the psalmist's opening self-exhortation to praise suggests that the psalmist imagines his own voice to have a part in that ongoing choir." Brothers and sisters, when we praise the LORD at home alone or with our family, in our Life Group meetings, or at church singing (or humming), we're truly experiencing heaven on earth – we get to have a glimpse of what we will be doing for eternity. Mountains are singing with joy, trees are waving their hands with praise, oceans are clapping their hands, the angels are shouting, "Holy, holy, holy" – and we get to be part of that in praising our faithful, loving, and forgiving God. I pray that this picture humbles us yet excites us knowing that it's a privilege to be part of something like this. Everything will pass away; but praise will continue forever. Don't you want to be part of this?

### GOSPEL

Then how do we become part of this choir? How do we praise with all of our inmost beings? If we're honest, if we're left to ourselves, when we look deep into our souls, we'll realize that we don't really want to praise God because we want ourselves to be praised. If there is a God, we just want Him to support and affirm us in everything we do; we just want Him to make us feel important, significant. We don't want a God who will compete with us for the throne of our hearts. How then can we be awakened to praise the LORD?

Like I said in the first point, is it just by fighting and wrestling harder? Preaching to ourselves more intensely, passionately? Well, there's something that must happen even before that. Speaking to yourself is important but it will be meaningless unless something else happens. How can the heart beat no matter how much blood is pumped in if that heart is dead? **In other words, we need a new heart because our hearts are dead in our sin and transgression.** Then in order to give us this new heart, do you know what God did? **God sent His one and only Son Jesus Christ to make that possible.** As Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for our sins, as He received the penalty that should've been on us, a *faithful* God turned His face away from Jesus and forsook Him so that He may remember us; a *loving* God gave up His own Son so that we may be called children of God; a *holy, righteous* God poured out His just anger on Jesus so that we may be forgiven. Brothers and sisters, we have a new heart, a new life through Jesus Christ. Our souls are now awakened, made possible to praise God.

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It's true that we're still sinful and we live in this broken world that causes us to be distracted at times; but we're freed to praise the LORD – which is why it's important for us to continually warm our souls at the fire of His truth to fuel that passion for praise.

## **CONCLUSION**

When I put Eli to sleep, one of the routines is for me to say, “I love you,” as I give him a kiss on his forehead. I still remember the moment when he responded for the first time, “I love you too daddy.” Of course, I knew he loved me but at that moment, I experienced his love for me through his words. Brothers and sisters, I pray that today you'll experience God's love for you through Jesus Christ – that it won't just remain an abstract thought, something that you just know it in your head but that you'll experience it – because if you do, praise will naturally rush out of you. Then as you warm your soul at the truth of God, as you think about the benefits you received, as you remember who God is and all that He has done, and as you delight in the fact that we get to be part of something that is eternal, I invite you to command your soul to praise the LORD today – that you'll worship God through your lips, but also with your thoughts, attitudes, and actions all the days of your life.

Let's pray.