

Our Gracious God

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help, and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, in the book of Psalms, Psalm 103.

Psalm 103, we're going to walk through this Psalm, this favorite Psalm. But if we read again in verse one and two, Psalm 103 in verse one, where David says, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name, bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Now, I want to begin this evening by asking the question, who is the God of the Bible? Who is the God of the Bible?

And I ask that question because in our modern world, many people say that, well, if there is a God at all, the God of the Bible, they say, is a cold, harsh God who predestines people to heaven and hell.

And many say that the God of the Bible is an oppressive, he's an overbearing, he's a dictator God because he takes away all our fun and he just tells us that we have to live in submission to him.

[1 : 2 3] But you know, when we actually read the Bible, that's not the description we're given of the God of the Bible. And that's certainly not the description David gives to us here in Psalm 103.

Because David describes to us that the God of the Bible, he says, is a gracious God. And he's a God who does not deal with us as we deserve. But he deals with us in his mercy, in his grace, and in his covenant love.

And you know, when we think about it, the way God actually deals with us, we often struggle with that. Because as Christians, when we see our sin, when we see our failings, when we see the times that we let the Lord down and the things we've done, maybe even in a day or the things we've said, we think to ourselves, well, I'm not worthy of his grace.

And I'm not good enough for God to be so gracious to me. But you know, the wonder of God's grace is that his grace is extended to us, not because of who we are, but because of who he is.

And you know, that's why David opens Psalm 103 by exhorting his soul. In fact, he exhorts his soul to bless the Lord. He says, bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me.

[2 : 4 3] Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits. And this word bless that David opens the Psalm with, it's a significant word because the word bless literally means to kneel.

And the word bless, it's used in the sense of kneeling before a king in humble submission and reverence. It's the image of a king standing up from his throne.

And we are kneeling before the king. We have our head bowed and our hand outstretched. And we are receiving from the hand of the king something that we don't deserve.

And yet the king is graciously and freely giving to us what we don't deserve. That's what it means. He's blessing us. He's giving to us what we don't deserve.

Because blessing, it only comes from the gracious and merciful hand of the king. And so to be blessed is to receive something you don't deserve.

[3 : 47] To be blessed is to be shown undeserved favor. To be blessed is to be graciously given a free gift. Therefore, God blesses us when he gives to us something that we don't deserve.

But this is the thing what we see with David. We bless God when we humbly acknowledge that what we're receiving, what we are receiving from the gracious hand of the king is what we don't deserve.

God blesses us and we bless God. And that's what David is doing here in the opening words of the Psalm, as he acknowledges the God of the Bible to be a gracious God.

David is humbly acknowledging God's gracious acts towards him. And these acts, he says, are personal. They're personal acts. David, you can almost imagine him.

He's on his knees praying before the Lord. He's in humble submission and reverence before the Lord. And from the depths of his soul, he's thanking and praising the Lord for being so gracious to him.

[4 : 53] And you know, that's how we ought to be. We ought to bless the Lord because he's so gracious with us. In fact, in this Psalm that we'll see, David says that there are five ways in which the God of the Bible graciously deals with us.

And first of all, David says that our gracious God redeems. He redeems us. That's what he says in verse two, verses two to four.

He says, bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

And then he says, you know, you're not going to be a gracious God. You're not going to be a gracious God, you're not going to be a gracious God. And then he goes on, who satisfies you with good.

And so as David kneels, you could say, as David kneels before his covenant king, kneeling before Jesus Christ, and he's got his head bowed and his hand out stretched, and David is praising and thanking the Lord that the Lord has dealt with him not according to his own personal sins, but according to his grace.

[6 : 04] And the Lord is graciously giving to David what he doesn't deserve. He is the benefactor. And we are the beneficiaries. We are the beneficiaries of his grace.

We are the recipients of what the Lord has graciously and freely given to us. And you know, in these verses, verses two to four, David describes all the benefits.

He describes all the benefits that the benefactor bestows upon his beneficiaries. In fact, David says in verse two, he says, bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

David urges his own heart, his own thankful heart. He urges his soul not to forget what the Lord has done in him and for him.

Because it's so easy to forget and it's so easy not to be thankful. But David is urging himself not to forget and always to be thankful for what the Lord has done in him and for him.

[7 : 10] Because what the Lord has done in him and for him is exceedingly, abundantly above all more than he could ask or even think. And David is saying to us and he's even saying to himself, don't forget the Lord's benefits and blessings which he has bestowed upon you.

And you know, what's so wonderful about these verses is that what the Lord graciously gives to everyone who comes before King Jesus with their knee bowed and their hand outstretched, what they receive from the hand of King Jesus, these benefits which the benefactor bestows upon his beneficiaries.

These benefits they are given to us personally, personally given to us. And what David says about them, I love the language that he uses.

He says that they're not a one off event. These benefits that you see here, they're not a one off event. They're not just for the moment. No, he says these blessings and benefits, they continually flow to us every day of our lives.

My friend, these benefits from our gracious God, they carry with them the promise of continual blessing. So David is saying that the Lord continually forgives all your iniquity.

[8 : 33] He continually heals all your diseases. He continually redeems you from the pit. He continually crowns you with his covenant love and mercy. He continually satisfies you with good every single day of your life.

And you know, this continual blessing which the Lord graciously pours upon us. You know, that's why David could confess in the shepherd's Psalm of Psalm 23.

He not only confessed the Lord is my shepherd, but he also said, I shall not want. He said, I will not lack nothing because of the shepherd's provision.

And you know, that's why he concluded Psalm 23, isn't it? He said, surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

And when David says surely, he doesn't say it out of uncertainty or doubt. David is saying with absolute certainty and surety.

[9 : 35] It is with surety. Goodness and mercy will continually follow me all the days of my life.

And in God's house forevermore, my dwelling place shall be. My friend, our God is a gracious God. And he's a gracious God because as we see here, he first of all redeems.

But then secondly, he renews. He redeems and then he renews. We see in verse five. It says, he satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

So David, he praises and he thanks the Lord because our gracious, merciful patient and loving God, he forgives all our iniquity. He heals all our diseases.

[10 : 40] He redeems our life from the pit. He crowns us with his covenant love and mercy. He satisfies us with good things. But then David says more than that, more than that, our gracious God renews us like the eagle.

He renews us like the eagle. And I love the illustration that David uses of being renewed like the eagle. Because it said that there's no bird that lives as long as the eagle.

Eagles can live for up to a hundred years, which is not only longer than any bird, but it's longer than most people, apart from Murdoch, who's 105 today.

But you know, what's interesting about the life of an eagle is that the life of an eagle is not one of continuous vitality and strength, because there are seasons.

There are seasons when the eagle can look old and tired and almost dead. And during those seasons, those difficult seasons in the eagle's life, the eagle pines in pain and its beak becomes twisted and sensitive.

[11 : 51] And the eagle can even find itself in places that are isolated and lonely and lacking nourishment. There are dark seasons, you could say, in the life of an eagle.

But when an eagle molts and renews its feathers so that it looks young again and full of life and strength and vitality. It's often said that the eagle has its youth renewed.

And the eagle is given this new lease of life, this new renewal, this revitalization in which the eagle is able to stretch out its wings again and soar high as the mountains.

And you know, applying it to the Christian life, we can often feel like the eagle. There are seasons when we feel spiritually young.

We feel close to the Lord. When we have the assurance of God's word, we have the joy of the Lord being our strength and our cup is just, it's running over. And during those seasons where everything seems great, prayer is easy.

[12 : 54] Reading the Bible is enjoyable. Going to church is a delight. Being with the Lord's people is a blessing. There are seasons in the Christian life when we're just soaring high like the eagle.

But as you all know, there are times like the eagle when we feel weak and tired and just worn out.

And we're even pining like the eagle. We're sensitive in our faith. We feel isolated from the church. We feel lonely maybe as a Christian. We feel we're lacking strength and that vitality that we once enjoyed.

There are seasons in the Christian life when we get tired of fighting with sin and the devil. We get tired of maybe the divisions within the church. We get tired of all the opposition from the world.

And it's just tired with the weakness of our own flesh. There are seasons when we become worn out and we just want to wind down and ease off and let others take over.

[13 : 57] And yet David reminds us that that's not what the Christian life is about. Because we're told here in verse 6 that the Lord works righteousness and justice.

He gives guidance and direction just like he gave guidance and direction to Moses and the people of Israel. And the Lord, he comes alongside us and he reminds us that he is still merciful and gracious.

He's slow to anger. He's abounding instead fast covenant love. In those times where we feel weak, the wonderful thing is that our gracious God reminds us of what we are in Christ and what we have in Christ.

And that he continually, he reminds us that he continually forgives all our inequities. He continually heals all our diseases. He redeems us from the pit. He crowns us with covenant love and mercy.

He satisfies us with his good things. The Lord continually pours all his blessings upon us so that we will be renewed and revitalized and re-energized just like the eagle.

[15 : 03] You know my friend, the Lord gives to us seasons in our life so that we will rise up again just like the eagle.

That we will rise up with, you could say, fresh wings and renewed feathers and soar like the eagle so that we will serve the Lord with more passion and more purpose.

And you know, I love those closing words of Isaiah chapter 40 where Isaiah reminds us what our gracious God is really like.

He says that he gives power to the weak. To those who have no might, he increases strength. And then Isaiah says, even the youths, they shall grow faint and weary and the young men they shall utterly fall, but those who wait upon the Lord, they shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. My friend, our God is a gracious God.

[16 : 06] And he's a gracious God because he redeems, he renews, and then thirdly we see that he removes. He removes.

I look at verse nine. It says, he will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As well as David continues to praise and to thank the Lord for being a gracious, merciful, patient and loving God, a God who, as David says, he forgives all your iniquity.

He heals all your diseases. He redeems you from the pit. He crowns you with covenant love. He satisfies you with good things. He renews you like the eagle. But then more than that, David says, more than that, our gracious God, he says, does not deal with us as we deserve.

[17 : 12] He deals with us according to his grace. And you know, with this, David emphasizes just how merciful, gracious, loving and patient the Lord really is.

Because he says in verse 10 that the Lord doesn't deal with us according to our sin and he doesn't repay us according to our iniquities. So my friend, with the Lord, it's not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

With the Lord, it's grace upon grace upon grace. When we bow our knee before the Lord and live our life in submission to the Lord, he doesn't deal with us as we deserve.

He deals with us according to his grace. And you know, that's what Paul emphasized in Ephesians chapter two. And after highlighting how sinful and rebellious we really are, Paul said, but God, but God who is rich in mercy for his great love for with he loved us, even, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, he has quickened us together with Christ by grace.

Are you saved? You know, this is the wonder of our salvation that the Lord doesn't deal with us according to our sins. He doesn't repay us according to our iniquities.

[18 : 37] No, he deals with us as the Bible teaches. He deals with us in Christ according to his covenant, steadfast love.

And listen to what David says about God's gracious love towards us. He says that it's immeasurable, inexhaustible and incomprehensible.

He says in verse 11, for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. David says no one can measure the distance between heaven and earth.

It's immeasurable. It's inexhaustible. It's incomprehensible. And David says that's what God's love is like. That's what the love of our gracious God is like.

This steadfast covenant love is immeasurable. It's inexhaustible and it's even incomprehensible. I'm sure you all remember the children's hymn, Jesus' love is very wonderful.

[19 : 43] Maybe the teachers know it. We talk about the wonderful love of Jesus, that it's so high, you can't get over it. So low that you can't get under it. So wide that you can't get round it.

Why? because it's wonderful love. And that's what David is reminding us tonight, that the love of our gracious God is immeasurable, inexhaustible and incomprehensible.

But you know, David, he doesn't leave it there because having described the love of our gracious God as a love that's as high as the heavens are above the earth. David then says that the love of God is such that our gracious God removes our sins from us as far as east is distant from the west.

And what can be said about the east and the west? Is that never the twain shall meet. You know, my friend, the forgiveness of our gracious God is that when we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But the Lord not only forgives us and cleanses us from all our sins, he removes all our sins. He removes our sins so that they're never seen again.

[21 : 01] And the imagery that David is using here is the imagery of what took place on the day of atonement with the scapegoat. We're all familiar with the term scapegoat for the person who takes the blame for something that they didn't do.

But the scapegoat is a biblical concept, as you know, because on the day of atonement, the priest would lay his hands upon the goat and confess the sins of the people onto the head of this goat.

And that would be the scapegoat. And the scapegoat would be led out into the wilderness, bearing the sins of the people, never to be seen again. And that's what our gracious God has done for us.

Because Jesus, he is our scapegoat, and he came to bear our griefs. He came to carry our sorrows. Jesus came to take away all our sins and cast them into the depths of the sea to be remembered no more.

My friend, our gracious God, he removes our sins from us as far as east is distant from the west. He casts our sins into the depths of the sea, and he remembers them no more.

[22 : 16] Our God is a gracious God. And he's a gracious God because he redeems, he renews, he removes, and then, fourthly, he remembers.

He remembers. Look at verse 13. He says, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. 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. As was David, as he continues to praise and thank the Lord. He talks about his gracious, merciful, patient and loving God.

This God who forgives all our iniquity, he heals all our diseases, he redeems us from the pit, he crowns us with covenant love, he satisfies us with good things, he renews us like the eagle.

[23 : 22] He loves us as high as the heavens, and he removes our sin as far as east is distant from the west. And then David says that the love which our gracious God has towards us is so personal, so caring and so compassionate, because its paternal love.

Its the love that a parent has for their own children. Its unconditional, its unchanging and its unrestricted love. He says as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

But like a father who loves his children so personally and is caring and compassionate towards them. David says in verse 14 that the Lord knows our frame.

Like little children the Lord knows that we are weak. He knows that we are frail. He knows that we need to depend upon him for absolutely everything. Like a father who loves his own children, he knows us so personally, so intimately, so deeply.

Why? Because he's the one who made us. He remembers that we are dust. Our Heavenly Father remembers that like Adam we were made from the dust of the ground.

[24 : 43] He knows that we were formed and fashioned in his own image and likeness. We're made in the image and likeness of our gracious God. And you know I love the words of Isaiah's prayer.

I have it written on my plaque on my study wall. The prayer of Isaiah where he says, O Lord, Thou art our Father, we are the clay, Thou our potter, we are the work of Thy hands.

And you know the beautiful words that remind us that our Heavenly Father, he has molded us, he has shaped us, he's formed us and fashioned us for his own purposes and glory.

But what's remarkable is that because our gracious God has redeemed us and renewed us and removed our sins from us, because of all that, we are His.

We are His. And our confession tonight is just like Isaiah. O Lord, Thou art our Father, we are the clay, Thou our potter, we are the work of Thy hand.

[25 : 52] And you know he's working in us, working in us and for us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. And he's begun that good work in us and he promises to bring it on to completion.

But you know the wonder of it all is that our gracious God, he always remembers that we are dust. He remembers that from the dust we came and to the dust we must return.

We were made in the image and likeness of our first parents Adam and Eve, but we also possess the curse of their first transgression. And you know, we all know it and we all see it all too often in our communities, that the wages of sin is death.

And you know that's what David says here, as for man his days are like the 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. You know what David says here is quite startling, because in comparison to the immeasurable and inexhaustible and infinite greatness and love of our gracious God, he says we are the complete opposite.

[27 : 09] Our time he says is measured, our frame is exhaustible, our life is finite. As for man he says his days are just like the grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field, then the wind passes over it and it is gone.

But you know, despite our frailties and our weakness, our confession, the confession of the Christian, it is as Asaph put it in Psalm 73.

You know, despite knowing how weak and frail he was, Asaph knew how gracious his God is. That's why he said, my flesh and heart, doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never.

My friend, our God is a gracious God. And he's a gracious God because he redeems, he renews, he removes, he remembers, and lastly, and very briefly, he reigns.

He reigns. It says in verse 17, the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

[28 : 31] The Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

You know, Sam 103 is a Sam which reveals to us the God of the Bible. And in it, we're being reminded here tonight that the God of the Bible is a gracious, merciful, patient and loving God.

And you know, it doesn't matter how often I read this, I'm amazed by it, that he forgives, continually forgives all your iniquity. He continually heals all your diseases. He continually redeems your life from the pit.

He continually crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. He continually satisfies you with good things. He renews you like the eagle. His love for you is as high as the heavens.

[29 : 33] He removes your sin from you as far as east is distant from the west. He cares for you just like a father cares for his children. And he also remembers that you are dust.

And David says that our gracious God does all of it because he reigns. His throne, he says, is as high as heaven.

His kingdom, he says, rules over all. His reign is from everlasting to everlasting. And his righteousness is to every generation.

It's to our children, he says, and to our children's children. My friend, our gracious God reigns. And because of this, David concludes his Sam of praise and thanksgiving.

By inviting everyone to come and bless the Lord. He has this, you could say, this fourfold invitation to bless the Lord.

[30 : 32] For David, he's in fact calling all of creation. He's calling the angels, the heavenly hosts, the servants of God. He's calling his people and all of humanity.

He's calling them to come and bless the Lord. He says in verse 20, bless the Lord, O you as angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

David calls all of creation to come and kneel before King Jesus, to come with their head bowed and their hand outstretched and receive from his hand the hand of the King what they don't deserve.

Why? Because our God is a gracious God. And he's a gracious God because he redeems, he renews, he removes, he remembers and he reigns.

[31 : 40] A friend of our God is a gracious God. Well, may the Lord bless these few thoughts to us. Let us pray.

Lord, we give thanks to thee for all the reminder this evening, the reminder, Lord, of who thou art. The word of God who is gracious and merciful, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, and that we would never forget who thou art.

And we would always realize that each and every day of our lives that we are dealing with such a gracious God who loves us with an everlasting love, whose faithfulness towards us is as high as the heavens, whose grace is always sufficient.

Help us, Lord, then we pray, to come on bended knee with our head bowed and our hand outstretched to receive from thee all what we do not deserve.

But yet, Lord, what thou art willing to give. Bless us, we pray. Bless us abundantly, we ask. Bless us as homes and as families, as loved ones, as congregations and as communities.

[32 : 50] That thou, Lord, were as poured down by blessing upon us. That if it were that the place would not be able to contain it, all, Lord, we ask, knowing that thou art the God who will give, not because we deserve, but solely, Lord, because the word of gracious God.

Hear us, then we ask. Continue with us, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. First one already.

We're going to conclude by singing Psalm 103. Psalm 103 in the Sing Psalms version. We're going to sing from verse 8 down to the end of the Psalm.

Psalm 103 of verse 8, the Lord is merciful and kind. To anger slow and full of grace, he will not constantly reprove, or in his anger hide his face.

He does not punish our misdeeds or give our sins their just reward, how great his love as high as heaven towards all those who fear the Lord. So Psalm 103 from verse 8 to the end of the Psalm.

[34 : 02] That's great. The Lord is merciful and kind.

To anger slow and full of grace, he will not constantly reprove, or in his anger hide his face.

He does not punish our misdeeds or give our sins their just reward, how great his love as high as heaven towards all those who fear the Lord.

Towards all those who fear the Lord. As far as he sits from the West, so far his love has borne away, our many sins and trespasses, and all the guilt that dawned us late, just as a father loves his child, so God loves those who fear his name, for he remembers we are dust.

And well he knows our feeble frame, each human life is like the grass, and like a meadow, flower it grows, its place will never be recalled, once over at the tempest blows.

[36 : 15] But everlasting is God's love for those who fill him and their seed, for those who keep his covenant, and carefully his precepts eat, and carefully his precepts eat.

God's gangly rule is over all, in heaven he has set his throne, O you his angels praise the Lord, strong ones by whom his will is done.

O Christ the Lord, you heavenly hosts, his servants who perform his word, praise God his words throughout his realm, and you my soul, O praise the Lord, and you my soul, O praise the Lord.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.