

Psalm 103

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[0 : 0 0] in this psalm praise the lord oh my soul all my inmost being praise his holy name praise the lord oh my soul and forgetting 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 eagles the lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed he made known his ways to mooses his deeds to the people of israel 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 as a father has compassion on his children so the lord has compassion on those who fear him for he knows how we are formed he remembers that we are dust as for man his days are like grass he flourishes like a flower of the field the wind blows over it and it is gone and its place remembers it no more but from everlasting to everlasting the lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts the lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all praise the lord you his angels you mighty ones who do his bidding who obey his word praise the lord all his heavenly hosts you his servants who do his will praise the lord all his works everywhere in his dominion praise the lord oh my soul well please turn back to psalm 103 if you're following me in the scriptures a number of years ago i i read um a piece in a magazine written by an experienced pastor and he was maintaining that from his pastoral experience from the things he'd seen in his ministry over the years that the older you get the essence of your personality and character gets kind of concentrated it gets concentrated over the years so you become more of what you really are if you're prone to negativity and complaining then you're likely to become a very bitter old person i was once chaplain of a small home for the elderly in the village of penn in buckinghamshire and i remember one lady in particular i can't remember her name but uh her default position was moaning and groaning about this and about that every day was she was demanding she was critical nothing was ever good enough no one was ever kind enough the home was never caring enough no matter what it was there was something wrong with it and uh the time came when her very long-suffering daughter and her husband needed to go away on holiday for a fortnight and they said to the old lady that they were going away

on holiday for two weeks and they wouldn't be able to visit well i don't know the old granny was even more bitter and angry at that that that this family could be so selfish as to take a holiday true to form right out of the blue in the first week of the holiday she died and they had to come back now the matron of that home a very experienced nurse very lady long long service as a nurse she she was sure that she had done it deliberately now i i can't prove that i can't prove it i can't disprove it either but it happened another old lady i i knew she she was before i ever went to the church in chessington 1984 this this old lady who was born and bred in in brixham in devon she had had a catastrophic stroke she she could only could only say two words one was thank you the other was bless you that's three words isn't it or bless i remember my first visit to her she couldn't speak her face was alight she was beaming she's paralyzed down various parts of her right side and as as i was leaving she gripped my hand beamed a great big smile at me and said thank you as if it was as if the older she got the more thank yous she spoke you see i think there's an element of truth in that that the older you get the more like yourself you become it's a bit scary isn't it i'm 70 this year is it possible that the essence is being distilled and concentrated am i going to be a grumpy old man sitting in the corner and shouting vile things at people as they pass i don't know well the reason for beginning that way is that a lot of the scholars think that psalm 103 was written by an older guy says

psalm of david that perhaps a bit older and there are various reasons for that that i might be able to mention as i go through but he does talk about children's children he talks about looking at the past that the god who's forgiven his sins and and healed his diseases and redeemed his life from the pits and so on it seems as though he's looking back over a long life and the thing that is distinctive about this psalm written by an older man is that it's full of praise i want to start by talking about the bookends of life if you look at verse 1 and at verse 22 of this psalm at the bookends of this psalm maybe the bookends of this man's life you see that they're full of praise praise the lord oh my soul he says in verse 1 and at the very end of this psalm praise the lord oh my soul now it struck me as i was reading this afresh that this psalm is a little bit like a river it originates up in the mountain somewhere it's a very tiny little stream six inches across and if you're walking across the moorland you might just step over it with hardly noticing it but by the time it reaches the coast it's become a mighty river capable of supporting the weight of a great ship so this this poem this poet poet begins bless the lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name it's a man a single man looking at his own experience at his own relationship to god and from a single heart from a pair of solitary lips that there trickles this flow of praise it's just one man speaking forth the praises of god bless the lord oh my soul and notice that it's a it's a praise to god for two things essentially it's a praise for what he has done he speaks of all his benefits the benefits that god has given to him but it's also a praise for

who god is it's very easy to praise someone and to thank someone for what they've done if they do something really incredibly blessing blessed to you it's easy to to thank people then but to thank someone for who they are that's more difficult we don't get around to that very often do we in our daily lives but this man he says bless the lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name it's praise not only for what god has done but for who god is he's the god who made the heavens he's holy he's perfect he's glorious he's he's without any moral ugliness in his nature he's beautiful in his perfections and one of the one of the characteristics of a of a grown-up believer of a believer who is getting mature is that we know what it is to to praise god just for who he is in his beautiful character to adore him for his magnificent perfections that's why the wonder lord jesus christ taught us how to pray he began in this way our father who art in heaven hallowed be your name it's exactly the same kind of note that is sounded here do you begin your prayers is your prayer life characterized by an adoring appreciation of the holy beautiful character of god we live in a world as i mentioned in in my prayer earlier we've been in a we live in a world where we we get so easily caught up in the cult of celebrity here we are with the the whole program of the whole program of uh premiership soccer before us yesterday what was the preoccupation of the of the newspapers and the and the tv news it was whether two celebrities were going to shake hands with each other what pathetic stuff that is celebrity what was ferdinand going to shake hands with terry well it's nonsense people are applauded for all kinds of things regardless of their character if you can gyrate seductively on a stage and sing perverted lyrics and do so from a life of immoral acts you can still be praised and clapped you can be a footballer one of my heroes in the world of football it appears slept with his brother's wife for over seven years still applauded still appreciated still treated as a celebrity when you come to know the true god you come to one who is to be praised and applauded for his holy name and this man applauds the name of god also not only for who he is for his nature but he applauds him because of what he's done over the course of a long life he mentions a number of these great benefits in verses two to five we're going to look at those in a minute but that's just the personal stream first few verses of this um this psalm are the personal flow of praise from this particular man's heart as he begins to reflect upon the mighty god but by the end of the psalm it's become a mighty river and he's inviting everything to join him in praise of god angels and mighty ones all the hosts of god all who serve god all all the places where god is at work all the places over which god has dominion let everything that has breath as it were praise the name of god praises he wants every atom in the universe to to utter praise to this mighty being oh we've been praising we've been praising andy andy murray this week i guess they've been praising him in dunblane this week andy murray looks ever so happy these days that he's now won the the um

the american open championship well they've been praising him in dunblane he deserves i think significant praise for his single-minded achievements but he doesn't deserve the nobel peace prize does he um he's brought pride and pleasure to many so he deserves some applause at least for that but i have a friend who has developed a care system for disabled people in burma looks after the needs of hundreds of people who've been disabled severely disadvantaged in a culture where

there's no national health service they've been disadvantaged by losing limbs to leprosy or by having landmines blow up under their feet and they lose a leg or two and he's been influential at the highest level of of of government in in in inspiring policies for the disabled in burma he's he's doing it all for a pittance he's a gifted trained doctor trained in birmingham now he's out in burma he's doing it all for a pittance what does that deserve what kind of applause should ring out for that kind of service if we applaud brian gigs for scoring a goal or or one of the boycotts for scoring a century for yorkshire if we if we applaud that what how do we how do we measure the applause that this deserves well says this psalmist god is so glorious and so great that he deserves to be praised eternally completely fully by everything that's capable of worship he prays a sportsman for winning a tennis championship how much more should we praise a man who's giving his life in service for the disadvantaged in burma how much more should we rejoice and praise in in the great god of heaven and these are the bookends of this psalm praise bless the lord oh my soul these are the realities that frame his life instead of thinking about bookends for a moment let's think of the frame these are the things that frame his life what's the frame in a picture well it's the thing that gives everything else its shape and perspective and this is as true of this man everything in his life is framed by the adoration and praise of god now what about you what frames your life what frames your life as you're getting older particularly if you're getting older and your years pass and the real you becomes more and more obvious is it true that the instinct of your heart is to adore and appreciate and applaud the true nature of the living god has revealed in his son jesus christ to what extent are you gripped by the qualities of his nature and the generosity of his works see god's not looking primarily for you to give a bit of money here and there to this and that he's not primarily looking for you to give him a bit of obedience here and there what god is looking for primarily is that you adore him and glorify him and appreciate him praise the lord oh my soul and well that's the bookends of this man's experience i want to just talk and secondly about the benefits of to individual experience we're going to concentrate for a moment on this man's individual experience verses two to five and as this older man looks back on his life he begins to do so in the first place with a pretty narrow focus he talks about my soul he talks about and he's speaking to his own soul forget not all his benefits you notice in the first five six verses of this psalm he's actually speaking to himself praise the lord oh my soul he's speaking to his own soul and then he says to his own soul praise the lord and forget not all his benefits who forgives all your sins and redeems your life from the bit he's talking to himself it's in the singular i'm told that one of the most important spiritual lessons to learn in life is how to talk to yourself even in non-spiritual life the the sports psychologists are telling us now discovering this increasingly important thing that what what's the most important thing to athletes is their self-talk the the difference between success and failure how to talk to yourself i i saw a sports psychologist being interviewed the day after andy murray's famous victory and the the man was talking about about andy murray had learned to talk to himself when he when he'd lost the the fourth set and he was heading for the fifth set at one time he would have got down with himself he would have got pessimistic but now no he's learned to talk to himself in a different way well this man he's talking to himself it's one of the main purposes of christian self-talk to tell ourselves not to forget what god has done for us we're very we're to do this particularly as we look back over all the changing scenes of life through trouble and joy and this is one of the main purposes of christian self-talk this man remembers the time the times and many many many times when he did not do the things he ought to have done and he left undone the things he ought to have done he remembers the times when he broke god's commandments and lived disgracefully and unfaithfully maybe you're here this morning and you are very aware that your life is not what it should be i i once went on a young people's weekend just like some of these youngsters i went to a boys brigade weekend over in lancashire i was 17 years of age and and and i heard an anglican vicar speaking and my whole heart told me that i was a sinner not that i'd done a few things wrong but that my whole life was characterized by sin and that weekend i didn't know what to do with myself i was so aware for the first time in my life of my sinfulness maybe you're here this morning and you you've become aware of of the great failure of your life as far as the living god is concerned you've you've been you've been unfaithful to him you've broken his commandments you've lived disgracefully and unfaithfully but the god who is rich in mercy gave him forgiveness and in the jewish context of course this would mean the death of a lamb he'd bring a lamb to the temple he'd lay his hand upon its head the lamb's throat would be cut the blood would be caught in the basin and sprinkled on the altar as a sign of the man's forgiveness something else died instead of him he remembers the times when he's failed god and he remembers the times when he was sick

really sick in a society where there were no antibiotics in a culture where there was no national health service no surgery worth speaking of he'd come through some really dangerous times when his life was threatened by disease and he looks back and he speaks of the god who healed all my diseases remembers the times he was in desperate trouble in the pit he calls it in verse for a reference to those times when he was the troubles were so great that he was in over his head he was in a place of such trouble that they didn't seem any way out it's a the the the picture is is of a man walking along and he falls into a pit that's been dug for for dangerous animals and he's in the bottom of this pit maybe there are sharp stakes there he can't get out he's he's completely helpless unless somebody comes and rescues him self-rescue is not an option but just when he thought there was no hope god saved him and rescued him

[20 : 21] and brought him out of the pit this man looks back and thinks of all these tremendous things that god has done for him i remember the preacher john blanchard the evangelist john blanchard telling the story of a romanian pastor friend of his during the times of persecution under communism this pastor was in prison for the sake of the gospel and he was in solitary confinement and his faith began to fail him he began to feel alone he felt that god was a long way off and so he prayed he prayed this he said god if you were there send me some way of communicating with other people the guard came in with his meal and as he walked out of the cell the the pastor noticed on the floor a shining pin one single pin he's he picked up this pin and he began to scratch on the rim of his dinner plate the following words commit your way to the lord trust also in him and he will do it but he only got halfway through the verse before the guard came in and took the plate away guess what he prayed lord if you're there send that plate back now there are hundreds of people in this jail and thousands of plates probably the next day that plate came back and he finished the verse and he sent it off a few weeks later i think it was another man was put in his cell and they began to speak to one another this man said you know i was in desperate state and i i prayed to god if you're a god if god is there would you please send me a message and the plate came commit your way to the lord trust also in him and he will do it and these two men now firm believers in jesus christ were together in the cell god had rescued them you see from the pit of despair from the pit of doubt and he brought them together in this prison he he rescued them it's this is this is the kind of thing that that god so often does what benefits are these forgiveness healing rescue and to top it all the lord pours into our experience a sense he says here of his steadfast love and mercy that keeps on giving us enough energy and enough strength for each day as it comes so that our strength is renewed like the eagles you know inside this body this 70 year old body there is actually a 22 year old athlete desperate to get out and run along the beach in whitby but although my body is getting older i tried to play football on the church camp a few weeks ago it was nearly the end of me but inside in my inner man i'm being renewed feel as young today as ever i did because god gives fresh grace fresh mercy so that your youth is renewed like the eagles your body might be getting older but your youthful spirit and we've all known haven't we those those older christian saints who've had such fresh youthful spirits even into their 80s and 90s i once asked in my first ministry i once asked an old christian geordie lady what was her favorite verse in the bible and she said in her best king james version voice hitherto hath the lord helped us hitherto hath the lord well that's that was her testimony she'd look back over a long life and she could look back over a life when god had forgiven her when god had healed her and god had rescued her over and over again and from her lips that's the lips of a woman living somewhere in northumberland

there was a flow of praise blessings to an individual and then let me just close with this this psalm is so full of praise the last thing i want to talk about it says quite brief the blessings of the people of god you notice in verses 8 to 19 that the focus changes from my soul to us and the people of god you see because god never intended us to be solitary christians separated from the gatherings of his people who are always intended to enjoy the benefits of god's love in the context of the christian church he made known his ways to mooses his acts to the people of israel the lord jesus christ came into the world primarily to to get a bride for himself which is the church as a man loves his wife so the lord jesus christ loves his church the whole of her never intended to be solitary christians the lord jesus according to ephesians came to build a living temple the foundation is the doctrine of the apostles and the prophets he himself is the chief cornerstone and every born again christian every true christian is a living stone placed on top of that foundation lined up to that cornerstone and in close proximity to all the other stones around it and it's it's in that temple that god is pleased to dwell by his spirit it's a picture of community of corporate engagement now i know the church is always

letting people down and there's always something to moan about in the life of the local church but it's the only church there is jesus christ only has one church it's the church where people love the word of god observe the sacraments of baptism and the lord's supper and are in fellowship with him and with each other that's a true church and that's where we should be found on the lord's day and day by day so the incredible blessings that are described in these verses are the common experience not only of the individual but of the people of god now i haven't time to take you through this whole passage so i'm going to just look at one core and fundamental benefit for which praise is due from god's people verses 10 to 12 he does not treat us as our sins deserve nor repay us according to our iniquities for as high as the heavens are above the earth how high is that for as high as the heavens are above the earth so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us when paulian and i lived in timemouth in the northeast one of our best experiences was in the winter especially to walk around the headland in timemouth early in the morning early in the morning when the sun was rising out of the north sea and that there would be invariably a sea mist and you would just be able to see the the sun just struggling to shine through the mist and a kind of golden series of ripples all the way from the sunrise uh to to the the the lighthouse on the north pier can you see it your mind's eye what an amazing picture one of our favorite places the magic was always fresh but i never saw the sun set in the east all the time i was in timemouth i never saw the sun set in the east for some reason it always set in the west it's an absolute rule of nature east and west are never to be confused with one another the sun always rises in the east and it sets in the west now this psalm has a dark side it talks about um he will not always he will not always accuse nor will he harbor his anger forever it talks quite frankly about god's anger against our sins it uses three words three hebrew words for our sins sins and iniquities and transgressions three different hebrew words describing human behavior that is displeasing to god the one whose name is holy the one who is perfect in every way looks upon us and we are sinful in every way in the way we think in the way we feel in the choices we make in the things we do and in the things we don't do every day of every hour of every day of every week of every year there is not a day when we have not been touched by sins and iniquities and transgressions but because he has a heart of love a love that is higher than the heavens because he has a heart of love he does not wish to see his anger destroy us god has found a way to remove our sins he's found a way to remove our sins as far from us as the east is from the west he's found a way whereby our sins will never ever be held to account against us he's found a way by which we can be thoroughly and completely and everlastingly forgiven it's a way undreamt of in all the religions in the history of the world it was so different to the mind of the ancient world that the jews thought it was a stumbling block and the greeks the gentiles thought it was stupidity because this way says that god has removed our sins from us by bearing the guilt and the punishment of those sins himself the penalty of his broken law was laid not upon a bleeding lamb but upon a bleeding savior the son of god the judgment that i deserve instead of being visited on me and the anger of god being experienced by my soul through all the everlasting ages of eternity has been placed upon jesus christ when the son of god died for my sins on the cross christ died for our sins according to the scriptures it says so the guilt and the shame of our sin is removed from us when we trust christ so completely that it will never touch our relationship with god ever again just as it is impossible for the sun to rise in the west or set in the east it is impossible for the sins of a man or woman or boy or girl who's trusted jesus ever to have their sin come between them and god again this is why the christian life should be a life of praise bless the lord oh my soul and forget none of his benefits this is why christianity is a singing religion god is our father and our friend jesus christ is our brother and our savior our sins are gone we still struggle with them but they can never again be held against us as long as we trust in and depend upon the lord jesus christ our sins as far as god is concerned are gone buried in the deepest sea and forgotten forevermore christ died for our sins according to the scriptures well are you here this morning as a man or woman who's praising god for sins forgiven have your sins been removed as far as the east is from the west because christ died for you and you're putting your trust completely in christ to make you right with god as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us and if you've not yet come to christ maybe this is the morning 19 i think it was 1959 or 1960 i went into the little chapel at cape and ray hall i didn't know how to pray but i had my sins weighing heavily upon my heart and i prayed my first real prayer and it was this god i'll give you a chance if you'll give me a chance it wasn't much of a prayer it probably wasn't theologically accurate but that day a new life

began in me a life forgiven life a life in which the love of god was being shed abroad in my heart by the holy spirit well you can begin this morning before we sing our next hymn before we finish our last hymn you can become a believer in jesus christ by surrendering to him by telling him you're sorry for your sins and asking him to accept you into his family a new life will begin and your sins will be removed from you as far as the east is from the west it can begin this morning let's pray heavenly father we thank you this morning that you've not treated us as our sins deserve we deserve to be cast out from your presence we deserve to be spending eternity in the outer darkness in the painful realities of that place called hell that's what we deserve but we thank you for sending jesus your son we thank you that on the cross he accepted into himself the judgment and penalty and anger that our sins deserve we thank you that in that he removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west we pray that every one of us would leave this church this morning trusting in christ rejoicing in his beautiful perfections and rejoicing in his finished work hear our prayer forgive our sins for jesus sake amen amen now may the grace of our lord jesus christ and the love of god and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all this day and forever more amen and