

Psalm 103

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] five verses, but please listen and follow as we read from verse 6 to the end of the psalm, and then a little later we'll be looking specifically at one of the verses in the psalm, but really that gives us the theme of this wonderful hymn of praise to God.

So we're going to continue reading from verse 6 of Psalm 103. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses, 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 as he removed our transgressions from us.

[1 : 08] 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. His 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.

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, O my soul.

[2 : 13] Well, let's turn back then please to Psalm 103. We're going to consider just a small part of it this evening.

This morning we were particularly brought to remembrance of the need for remembrance. The need for remembering. And forgetfulness, as I pointed out to the children, is one of the flaws in human nature, one of those aspects of the fall.

One of the things that has corrupted and tainted human nature is that because of sin we are forgetful, and that we are forgetful of many things, and through forgetfulness we cause all sorts of problems, don't we?

We can cause all sorts of upset. We can be forgetful of people's feelings, and forgetful of people's situations, forgetful of arrangements we've made with people, and promises that we've made, and so on.

And even with our modern technological wizardry of knots in handkerchiefs, and string on our fingers, and mobile phones, and all those things, we still manage to forget important matters.

[3 : 27] Survey was taken some time ago about what were the things we were most likely to forget, and here were the top six. I'm sure we can associate with all of them.

83% of people forgot names. 60% of people forgot where they'd placed something, keys, particularly. Though I think mobile phones is another one, lately would be on that list.

57% of people forgot telephone numbers. 53% of people forgot words. What was the word I was looking for? Trying to remember a word.

49% forgot what had been said in a conversation. I think that was probably all of the male population, because that's a problem, isn't it? What did I just say to you?

I don't know, dear. I wasn't listening. But that's 49%. And then 42% faces. But of course, as we thought this morning, as we're brought here to God's word, we realize, don't we, sadly, to our

sorrow and grief, we are most forgetful of the Lord our God.

[4 : 34] That's the reality, isn't it? Through all the things in life we forget, we are forgetful of him. And even David here, of course, reminds us and says to himself, praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

He's speaking to his own soul, as David does, and he tells himself, don't forget what God has done for you. And so he brings this list of blessings.

And really, the psalm that we have before us sets out the vast difference between us and God. As human beings, we are not like God.

We are made in his image, and we bear some of those resemblances to him, but God is not like us. And though we are forgetful, most assuredly, he is never forgetful.

In fact, even when he speaks about our sin, he never speaks about forgetting our past sin. He only speaks about remembering it no more. Very positive action, rather than a negative action.

[5 : 36] But the verse I want us to think about, particularly, which I hope will be great encouragement to us in this matter of remembering and forgetting, is verse 14. But I'll read from verse 13.

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.

The very straightforward, simple truth that immediately should hit us with encouragement is this, God remembers us. He remembers us.

We forget all of him, but he remembers us. The whole of the psalm is about how God's care and concern and thoughtfulness is towards his people. There in verse 11, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

Verse 13, as a father's compassion is chosen, the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. On the goes for everlasting, verse 17, for everlasting the Lord's love is for those who fear him. He's thoughtful and remembering of us, his people.

[6 : 42] And that's an immediate comfort, I hope, to us. There are times when we feel as if God has forgotten us. There are times when we face situations and circumstances where we think that in some way or in somehow God has forgotten us.

But God's word declares to us and impresses upon us, he never forgets us. He never forgets. He always remembers us.

And if I can put it this way, he remembers you. Yes, he remembers his church. He remembers those for whom Christ has died. He remembers those who fear him.

But there's an individuality about it as well. He remembers you. And he remembers me. And of course, every year the Queen issues, I don't know whether it's a Queen or not, but somebody does, issues a New Year's Honours list.

I don't think she has a lot of say in who goes into it nowadays. But what it is, is a public recognition, isn't it? Of what people have done. They've done a great service for the nation. In the arts or in some other aspect.

[7 : 45] Or they've done a great work for charity and so on. And so they are remembered in the New Year's Honours list. But the truth is that we have done nothing that God should remember us by.

We've done nothing honourable in one sense to deserve his thinking of us or remembering us. In fact, the only reason that God should remember us is for the bad things we've done.

If we've had any impression upon him that should draw his attention to us, it's our sins. It's our wickedness. It's our evil. We're a bit like the pupil who makes that lasting impression on the teacher. It's not the one who's the brainiest, but the naughtiest, isn't it? In one sense, if God should give us any attention, it's to deal with our sin. Not because of any honour.

And yet, he remembers us. We would be honoured, wouldn't we? We would kind of say a great honour if somebody of great importance like the Queen was to remember us.

[8 : 46] We'd think we were highly esteemed if we'd been invited to a garden party or on the New Year's Honours list. Or even somebody like the Prime Minister, maybe. We'd settle for that, wouldn't we? Most of us.

Somebody thought of us. Or even the Mayor of Whitby. We're not too fussy about who remembers us just as long as somebody does. Prime Minister, when he was Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, telephoned several members of the public because they'd written letters to the government about

concerns they had and complaints.

And they were, of course, very surprised to have the phone spoken to by Gordon Brown. But here we're told there's no reason why God should look and remember us.

We haven't written to him. We haven't sought him. We haven't done anything rightfully that deserves his attention. But he remembers us. He has us in mind.

He remembers. Let us keep that in our minds, dear friends, tomorrow and in those difficult days. The Lord remembers me.

[9 : 53] He is thoughtful of me. He is considerate of me. But really, of course, this verse has much more even to say than that. Wonderful though that is. We're told that he remembers that we are dust.

As he puts it in the sentence before, he knows what we are, how we are formed. So the Lord God not only knows who we are, but he knows what we are.

Remember that way. He not only knows who we are, but what we are. He knows our very essence. And what a great antidote to our pride.

If we remembered that we were dust a bit more than we do. Now when it says that he remembers that we are dust, this is not a derogatory statement.

God is not saying in some way you're trifling, you're inferior, you're worthless. Rather, it's a very scientific description of us. Genesis chapter 2 and verse 7 tells us the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground.

[10 : 58] We are only just muck and water, aren't we? That's what we're made of. Our bodies are just things that you find in your garden and a bit of water all mixed together.

We're nothing but a collection physically of minerals and chemicals that can be found commonly upon the earth. He remembers that we are dust. We're nothing precious in that sense.

We're not made of gold or silver. We're not made of something which is really expensive and dear. A rich man often thinks about his money but there's nothing expensive or valuable, if I can put it that way.

He remembers that we are dust. And the wonderful truth is this, that when the Bible speaks about God knowing us and being thoughtful of us, as we see here, it's clear that he's talking about there being some form of relationship with God, being involved.

There is a relationship that's taking place. It's not just that God acknowledges our existence. It's not just that God recognizes that we are individual. But rather than that, he is the God who acknowledges that we are his.

[12 : 13] That he's brought us into a relationship with him. To know God is to know a relationship with him. 2 Timothy 2.19 The Lord knows those who are his.

The Lord knows those who are his. And he knows everything about us, doesn't he? Because he remembers that we are dust, as I've said, is a sense of him knowing our deepest, innermost being. Not just our physical nature in that way, but our very emotional nature, our very mental nature. Everything about you and I is known and remembered by God.

Sometimes we do feel like nobody understands me. God does. He knows you and he knows me. And this wonderful grace and mercy, again, of his towards us is all the more astonishing since we recognize that it is sinful dust, rebellious dust, selfish dust, arrogant dust, dust that has acted against the commands of its maker.

[13 : 22] Yet he remembers us. And we can draw wonderful encouragement. A few wonderful things that this means to us.

It means ultimately that if God remembers us, then there is wonderful grace, isn't there? The writer here speaks about the covenant with those who keep his covenant.

God has entered into a covenant with dust. Covenant is that binding agreement, usually between equals of promises and of care and of love.

That God should cause us to be in covenant with him who are dust. That he should call dust to be his children. Verse 13, as a father, it's compassionate and his children so the Lord is compassionate and those who fear him.

That he should send his only begotten son into the world to save dust and rescue dust from its sin. What wonderful grace, undeserved.

[14 : 27] Again, if we should ever think of ourselves too highly, then bring ourselves back to this verse. We're dust. There's nothing in you or I that can merit the concern, the love, the care of God,

yet it is there.

And if that is the case, then there's nothing that you and I can do to undeserve the merit and love and care of God.

If he has chosen to remember us as dust, sinful dust, then there's nothing in all of the world and the universe that can stop him from remembering us and thinking of us.

But also remember this wonderful truth. He remembers that we are dust. What wonderful condescension then of God that he should choose to make his dwelling in vessels of dust because that's what we are and yet the Bible makes it clear.

1 Corinthians 6.19 Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who's in you. Here is the God who fills the universe, the God who created all things and yet he calls your body and mine which is but dust his temple.

[15 : 42] In 2 Corinthians in chapter 4 verse 7 Paul speaks about we have this treasure in jars of clay or earthen vessels. A modern translator tried to bring that up to date as it were and he said the equivalent was this that we have this treasure in disposable plastic cups.

Worthless things. You wouldn't keep your treasure in a plastic cup just as you wouldn't keep your treasure in an earthen jar because they're both fragile and disposable but we are the Lord's temples.

In the Old Testament the temple was that magnificent craftsmanship the beautifully ornate gold and bronze and silver and jewels. A thing to behold.

Here we are as dust and God has made his dwelling in us. And isn't it amazing as well that he remembers that we are dust and what a wonderful privilege it is that he should call us to bring glory and honour to him in this world.

God can do whatever he likes in this world to show his glory and does show it in creation in many ways but he has chosen to bring glory and honour to himself through us through our bodies through the physical limitations of these vessels of clay and of dust.

[17 : 09] In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 20 Paul writes honour God with your body. Isn't it amazing that our lives are to bear the likeness of Jesus Christ the Son of God though they are dust.

But I want us particularly to think just for a moment now about what this really means for us because I think here not only is there great encouragement but great comfort because here we remember when it says that God remembers we are dust surely it's clear that the psalmist is saying this that God remembers that we are weak.

God remembers that we are frail. That's why he says he knows how we are formed he remembers that we are dust as for man his days are like grass flourishes like a flower of the field the wind blows over and it is gone and its place remembers it no more.

Now none of you ladies will understand this illustration of course but you only have to blow on dust for it to just scatter you don't know anything about it because your houses are all spotless without any dust but if you happen to go to another place perhaps and you've seen some dust you know how light it is and fragile just blow and it's gone it's scattered it's unstable it has no strength it has no substance in itself dear friends in our humanity we are so frail our lives are so unstable there is no certainty we have no certainty of tomorrow or the next day we have no strength in ourselves that's why David goes on to talk about flourishing like a flower of the field wind blows over and it's gone it's place remembers it no more how different to the Lord our God so therefore dear friends this is important in remembering our frailty and our weakness God also realises then our limitations our lack of stamina and he deals with us according to our weaknesses he remembers that we are dust everything that

God does in your life and mine he does bearing in mind our weakness and frailty just like a piece of very fragile bone china he handles us delicately if you're too rough or too harsh with something that is fragile it will break and crumble Isaiah 42 verse 3 likens us to bruised reeds easily broken easily damaged God deals with us in the light of this truth which means this he never overloads us with more than we can bear now we feel like he does don't we there are times and seasons in our lives we feel like the pressure upon us is so great that we will just be crushed by it we feel as if we could be knocked over with a feather we feel as if the circumstances of our lives are so hard that really anything that happened anything more that was laid upon us we would utterly be destroyed but

[20 : 34] God remembers dear friends that you and I are dust and he will not overload us here's what Paul writes to the church at Corinth no temptation has seized you except what is common to man and God is faithful he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear we may feel like

we cannot bear it but he has promised that he will not give us more than we can bear he will not overload us he remembers that we are dust he remembers that we dust and therefore he will not ask us to do what we cannot do he does not command us to go through circumstances and situations which are beyond us or beyond the strength that he provides for us to go through them you see like a craftsman the Lord our God chooses a tool for a particular job with care he judges us according to the purpose he has in mind for us he is a wise and master builder only uses those materials he knows will be able to perform and bear up under the job he has for them and again how we feel that is so rarely the case

Lord I'm not adequate for this situation Lord I haven't the sufficiency to face this or to do this you're calling me to work in this area you're calling me to go through this time but he knows you he remembers that you're dust he remembers that your weaknesses and frailties and he will not call you to go through that which he will not also equip you to deal with has he called you to suffer loss like Joseph in Egypt has he called you to endure physical hardship and suffering like Job has he called you to go through rejection and misunderstanding like Jeremiah or persecution like Stephen all these believers could accept these troubles like Paul of old they were able to say in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds how how could they face these things how could they how could you and I though we are dust and God knows that we're dust how could we because God has given us a wonderful promise which we find all the way through the scriptures but particularly came to Paul and it's a promise for all God's people that according to our weakness strength is given I'm sure you know where I'm turning to 2 Corinthians 12 three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me we don't know what it was that Paul was suffering with but for a man like Paul to plead three times with God to take it away was something you can be pretty sure which was painful serious and hard something he felt inadequate to deal with he felt like he was dust and it was going to crush him but what does the response he gets from the father but he said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness you see the wonderful truth is this when David says the Lord remembers that we are dust it's not simply a mental acceptance of our weakness but rather his remembering is the moving of his arm to act so we find that we go back to Moses and to

Exodus we're told that there the Lord remembered his covenant with Isaac Abraham Isaac and Jacob and he did something and so when David says the Lord remembers that I'm dust it's the motivation by which the flood gates of his grace are poured out upon us when he remembers our weakness he is assured that he gives us his grace and strength so what should we do in the light of this promise in the light of this truth that he remembers that we are dust what should we do dear friends we need to remember three things three things particularly when we feel like dust particularly when we feel our own weaknesses and frailties first of all remember to look to Christ for grace don't look to yourself when we feel weak that's often the time when of course we feel weak so we try to look to ourselves we try to build ourselves up we try to tell ourselves that we should be able to do it and that we should conquer we should make it through and so on that's not the answer remember to look to

Christ for in Christ there is the strength and the grace that we need and in him alone what does Paul write to the Philippians chapter 4 that wonderful thing I can do all things through him who gives me strength Paul was a man who knew weakness like we know weakness but he looked to the Lord Jesus looked to him secondly dear friends when we feel ourselves to be dust remember that here is here is someone who knows better than we do to live as dust because the Lord Jesus Christ himself took on our human frailty and weakness we do not have an ivory tower God we do not have a God who has no understanding or comprehension of frailty and weakness he took on the nature of dust for us so Hebrews 4 15 speaks of Jesus as one who sympathizes with our weakness speaks of one who is tempted in every way just as we are don't say

[26 : 26] God doesn't understand yes he does because in Jesus he took on your frailty and mine remember there is one who knows better than ourselves what it is to live in weakness and thirdly and finally dear friends remember to trust him remember to praise him and thank him that he remembers that you are dust remember to lean upon him and look to him and depend upon him if he remembers that you are dust dear friends and nothing you face will overload you be too great for you nothing that he calls you to do will be beyond you and the strength he gives you to do that work remember him and trust him for just as we are told in Hebrews 4 15 that Jesus is the one who sympathizes with our weaknesses and Jesus is the one who is tempted in every way so we are also

encouraged therefore let us approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need let's pray together your knowledge of us oh lord is astonishing though we acknowledge readily and accept readily that you are the God who knows all things understands all things we can forget this truth that you remember us and know us all the way through you know our limitations our weaknesses our frailties you remember that we are dust and though there are times in our lives when we feel more like dust than ever before maybe for some of us even here this evening that's how we feel we're faced with circumstances and situations where when we look to our own resources we see the tank is empty we see that lord there there is nothing not even vapors left lord by which we can run on and lord we ask you to forgive us that in those times we do not look to you as we should but again look perhaps to others or allow the enemy the devil to tell us how dreadful and awful we are and unfit we are and so on we thank you for this remembrance that you remember that we are dust we ask again oh lord that you would give to us that not only that sense of weakness but also give to us that sense of reliance and dependence upon you help us to be able to hear your promise to paul as words to us my grace is sufficient for you and my strength is made perfect in weakness we bring to you lord our emptiness and our weakness our frailty we bring to you these dusty bodies with all their aches and pains and limitations their forgetfulness their selfishness their sin we ask again oh lord remember us as dust and give us grace according to our need for the day ahead that oh lord we may be able to say with paul and with all the saints before us i can do all things through him who gives me strength strengthen us for the task ahead and make us oh lord to be those that bring honour and glory and praise to you in these bodies while we live for we ask it in the name of jesus christ amen