



Week 9: Psalm 103 (A meditation)

Why should we praise God? The psalmist gives us many reasons here. As we look in some detail at what he says, it should encourage our own thanksgiving. Each study looks at just a few verses, but you should try to see where they fit into the whole psalm. Where cross references to other passages on a similar theme are given, don't feel obliged to look up all of them — concentrate on the psalm first, and use the other passages to help further reflection. You could also follow up other passages you know on a similar theme.

Day 1. 'Count your blessings'

Psalm 103:1-5

The psalmist starts by encouraging himself to praise the Lord — with his whole being (verse 1), not merely an outward show. Like him we probably need the command in verse 2 not to forget how much God has done for us — when we do remember, it should encourage us to praise God, just as it did him.

1. Look through the whole psalm and write a list of all the things the psalmist says the Lord has done for him.
2. How many of these are things you can identify with? — mark them on the list.
3. Now look back on your own experience as a Christian and write your own list of things (both spiritual and physical — see verse 3) for which you can praise the Lord.

Now spend some time in praise and thanksgiving for yourself — use these lists to encourage you, as the psalmist did.

Consider: Can you honestly say with the psalmist 'He fills my life with good things' (verse 5)? — or are there things you do not yet have, and wish the Lord would give you? Now would be a good time to talk these over with God. It may be that these are blessings which God wants to give you at some time in the future, or it may be that God knows these things are not best for you (cf. Luke 11:9-13).

Day 2. Looking back

Psalm 103: 6-8

Not only can the psalmist look to his own experience of God's blessing to

encourage his praise, but also that of the whole people of God down the ages and in his own time (notice the word 'our' and 'we' in verses 10,12,14). These verses recall the Lord's rescue of his people when they were oppressed in Egypt, and particularly his covenant with them at Sinai, when he revealed himself and promised to guide them. Verse 7 recalls such verses as Exodus 33:12-17, and verse 8, Exodus 34:5-6.

1 What does the psalmist say here about God's character?

Try to express it in different words from the psalm!

2 Consider: Can you think of examples of God's faithfulness to believers, either in past times, or in other parts of the world? Stop and thank God for his faithfulness, both to you and to others.

Reading Christian biographies can be a great encouragement to your own faith in God, such as Dr Helen Roseveare's story, *Give Me This Mountain* (IVP, 1966), or Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place* (Hodder, 1976).

As Christians we look back to Jesus' death and resurrection as the supreme revelation of God's love to us, just as the Jews looked back to the Exodus. Read Romans 8:31-39, where Paul uses this theme to encourage his readers to face their current problems. Why is it such a stimulus to confidence in God?

Day 3. God's forgiveness

Psalm 103: 8-14

The psalmist turns to one particular example of God's compassion — his forgiveness.

- 1 How do we deserve to be treated (verse 10)?
- 2 Why doesn't God treat us like that?

Not an easy question! — the psalmist's only answer lies in his understanding of God's character — he uses poetic imagery to show how sure forgiveness is (verses 11-12). We have the privilege of seeing this much more clearly demonstrated in Jesus.

Read: 1 Peter 2:21-25. (Peter is making clear allusions to Isaiah 53 — you might like to read that as well.)

3 What extra grounds do Christians have for being certain of God's forgiveness?

Stop and thank God for his forgiveness — it may help to remember specific sins from the last day or so, or even from further back, confess them, and thank God that they are so decisively put away (verse 12).

4 It is easy to take God's forgiveness too lightly! What attitude towards God does the psalmist expect in those who are forgiven? How will this affect our attitude towards sin?

Day 4. 'We are dust'

Psalm 103:13-18

1. What does the psalmist mean when he says we are dust (verse 14) and our life is like grass (verse 15)? (Do you ever think of yourself like this?)
2. What does he say gives meaning to life?
3. Think about your non-Christian friends. What is important to them? What do they use to give meaning to life?

Consider: Do you ever let such things become more important to you than the Lord? Read Jesus' warning about such things in Matthew 6:19-24.

Read the whole psalm again, and look out for all that it says about the way the Lord loves us. Praise him for that love!

Day 5. 'Our God reigns'

Psalm 103:17-22

As he contemplates all that God has done for him and for his people, the psalmist sums it up by saying that God rules over everything (verse 19).

1. What response does the psalmist expect people to make to God's sovereignty?
2. Why do you think he calls not only men, but angels and all other creatures to join him in praise?
3. Read through the whole psalm again, and make a list of all that it teaches about God's character.

Consider: What does the Lord's rule mean for you personally? Do you have any problems which seem to be insoluble? Are there areas of your life where what you want and what God wants don't coincide? As you think and pray about these, it may help to look back at what this psalm says about God's love and faithfulness.

Weekend

Pray: Since God is king over *all* (verse 19), it follows that we can bring the needs of the whole world to him. Think of the major stories which have been in the news in the past week, and take time to pray for the needs which these represent. Try to understand something of the background to this week's crises, by careful reading of news reports and editorial comments. Do you know of Christian missions working in such areas, who could do with prayer now?