

## **“Bless the Lord, O My Soul”**

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

Psalm 103

### **Of David.**

- <sup>1</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!
- <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,
- <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,
- <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- <sup>6</sup> The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- <sup>9</sup> He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- <sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
- <sup>13</sup> As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
- <sup>14</sup> For he knows our frame;  
he remembers that we are dust.
- <sup>15</sup> As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
- <sup>16</sup> for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.
- <sup>17</sup> But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who

fear him,  
 and his righteousness to children's children,  
 18 to those who keep his covenant  
 and remember to do his commandments.  
 19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,  
 and his kingdom rules over all.  
 20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels,  
 you mighty ones who do his word,  
 obeying the voice of his word!  
 21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts,  
 his ministers, who do his will!  
 22 Bless the LORD, all his works,  
 in all places of his dominion.  
 Bless the LORD, O my soul!

- Psalm 103, ESV

### ***How can we bless the LORD?***

Have you ever wondered how it could be possible for us to bless the LORD? We know God blesses us, and we are greatly blessed by God. But how can we – as mere creatures who receive everything from God and who cannot give anything to God – bless the LORD? How can we possibly make God better off?

Well, the Hebrew word translated as “bless” is Barak, and it is used in the Bible both for God blessing people and for people blessing the Lord. In Genesis 1 when God blesses Adam and Eve and says to them “Be fruitful and multiply,” it’s the word Barak. When God calls Abraham and tells him He’s going to bless him and multiply him, it’s this same word, Barak. In the Aaronic blessing in Numbers – The LORD bless you and keep you – the same word is used. This very common Hebrew word is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament, both of God blessing His people and people blessing the LORD.

But how is that possible? How can we bless the LORD and the LORD bless us in the same way? Well, just because the same word is used doesn’t mean that word has the same sense. The root of “Barak” is to kneel. When God blesses us, He stoops to condescend to do us good. When we bless God, we bow the knee and acknowledge Him for who He is.

If you think of the English word “bless,” it has a double sense, too. To bless someone is to speak well of them. We speak well of God because God is worthy of being

spoken well of. But when God speaks well of us, His word is powerful and effective and causes the good things He speaks to come to be in our lives. So, we praise God for being holy, wise, and just because He is. God declares that we are forgiven, cleansed, and adopted and those things happen because God speaks them, not because we already have those qualities in and of ourselves.

So, to bless the LORD is really both to bow the knee and to speak well of Him. In other words, to bless Him is to bow before Him and praise Him – to humbly adore Him and speak well of Him.

G Campbell Morgan, famous British evangelist and Bible scholar, said of Psalm 103: *“It is perhaps the most perfect song of pure praise to be found in the Bible.... Through centuries it has been sung by glad hearts, and today is as fresh and full of beauty as ever.”*

What did he mean by *“the most perfect song of pure praise to be found in the Bible”*? Well, two things stand out –

1. Psalm 103 systematically and comprehensively unpacks in beautiful poetic song the reasons we have for praising the LORD, for blessing His Holy Name.
2. Psalm 103 doesn't have any petitions to God. David isn't here asking God for anything – which is unusual in the Psalms. He is solely focused on praising God himself first and foremost, and then on calling others to praise Him.

#### **i. Speak Well of All of God's Benefits (vv. 1-5)**

*<sup>1</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!*

*<sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,*

*<sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,*

*<sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*

*<sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

The first person we need to call on to bless the LORD, to bow in humble adoration and to speak well of the LORD, is ourselves. This is a pattern in Scripture. Psalms 42-43 (originally one Psalm in Hebrew) have this beautiful three-times-repeated refrain –

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you in turmoil within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my salvation and my God.*

As believers, we need to learn the art of listening to ourselves less and preaching to ourselves more. Instead of paying so much attention to the grumblings and groanings and desires of our sinful, selfish hearts, we need to tell our souls the truth about who God is and what He has done for us, and we need to call ourselves to bless His holy name and to put our hope in Him alone!

And when we call on our souls to praise and hope in the LORD, it helps to have specific reasons at hand. David here says –

*forget not all his benefits,*

<sup>3</sup> *who forgives all your iniquity,* - Forgiveness for sin is the most needed most undeserved, and most abundantly provided benefit we receive from God.

*who heals all your diseases,* - Any healing we receive in this life and the full and permanent healing we are promised in the resurrection and the life to come all comes from God through Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> *who redeems your life from the pit,* - “The pit” here refers to death. Our bodies will be raised; death will be finally and eternally defeated; even before that day, as soon as we die, we are immediately in the presence of the LORD in glory. The death we deserve from the sin we have done has been overthrown; He redeems our lives from the pit!

*who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,* - God crowns us - bestows on us as an honor – His steadfast love, His hesed, and His mercy, His tender and compassionate heart despite our sinful unworthiness.

<sup>5</sup> *who satisfies you with good* – Everything good we enjoy in this life – every good moment of our lives: every laugh, every hug, every bite of delicious food, every note of beautiful music, every beautiful walk in the woods, every sunset and rainbow and full moon and starry night, every moment of wonder and pleasure, every good and perfect gift – God gives us all of them personally and intentionally as an expression of His Fatherly love for us.

*so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.* – God renews us when we are downcast and come to the end of ourselves. He refreshes us repeatedly in this life, and one day, He will eternally and perfectly renew us in resurrection bodies that will never tire or grow sick or die.

We need to remember these benefits of God – that He freely gives them and that we don't deserve them – and we need to bless His holy name – to bow in honor and adoration and speak well of Him to our souls for these good and gracious benefits!

## II. **Speak Well of God for His Righteousness (vv. 6-7)**

*<sup>6</sup> The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all who are oppressed.*

*<sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.*

Verses 6-7 expands our vision from God's benefits to us personally to His rule over His people as King. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne," – Psalm 89:14 tells us. God is right and just in Himself, and He rules over His people in absolutely right and just ways.

We need to understand this properly: When we say "The LORD works righteousness and justice," we don't mean that God tries His best to measure up to an external standard of righteousness and justice to which He can then be compared. The LORD is Himself perfectly righteous and just, and His perfect character is itself the standard by which other acts or attempts at righteousness and justice are measured.

Now, God has been gracious enough to reveal His ways of righteousness and justice through the Word of God, beginning with the Torah, the first five books of the Bible which He gave to Israel through Moses. God is righteous and just, and He reveals Himself and His ways through His word.

Here's the challenge for us: We don't always see God's righteousness and justice or understand His ways. He does invite us to call out to Him in our distress for relief, but He also invites us to see how He has revealed Himself in His word and to trust His character, even when we do not understand – especially when we can't see or understand. We can bow the knee and speak well of God's righteousness and justice always.

### III. **Speak Well of God for His Character: Mercy and Grace & Forgiveness, Compassion & Faithfulness (vv. 8-18)**

Part of what helps us see God's good rule over us clearly is understanding how incredibly gracious and forgiving God has been and continues to be toward us.

*<sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

Verse 8 is really the heart of this wonderful Psalm of Praise. The Psalm of Praise itself begins in verse 1 and ends in verse 19. Verse 8 is the heart of it, and verse 19 is the conclusion. Then, verses 20-22 is the response, the call to all creation to join in the anthem of praise.

Verse 8 is God's self-disclosure, found first in Exodus 34:6-7, when God revealed His name - His holy name – to Moses:

*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." - Exodus 34:6-7, ESV*

God reveals Himself again this way here in Psalm 103, also in Psalms 86 & 145, then through the prophet Joel, and in the prayers of Jonah and Nehemiah. This is who God is, how He is to be understood. When we read of the name of the LORD, which is a way of referring to His holy character, this is it in verse 8 – He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

If we want to know what this self-disclosure of the character of God means, verses 9-18 really unpack this for us.

*<sup>9</sup> He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.  
<sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;*

- 12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*
- 13 As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.*
- 14 For he knows our frame;  
he remembers that we are dust.*
- 15 As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;*
- 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.*
- 17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who  
fear him,  
and his righteousness to children's children,*
- 18 to those who keep his covenant  
and remember to do his commandments.*

I cannot describe this wonderfully merciful and incredibly gracious God any better than Psalm 103 does right here in these verses. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, but instead He is incredibly forgiving and gracious and faithful to us. We are weak and so fragile and temporary. We can't really do anything for God to put Him in our debt; He is so much stronger, better, more glorious, and eternal than we could ever be. So, we have a God who needs nothing from us and who deserves everything we are and have to be for His glory, and yet we rebel and repeatedly disobey Him. How does He respond? By removing all of our sin far from us and treating us with tender compassion. And then, having redeemed us and made us His own, He is absolutely faithful to us in every way with a steadfast love that is eternal and unfailing.

This God – this merciful, gracious, forgiving, compassionate, faithful, eternally loving God is surely worthy of all of our adoration and praise. We should willingly and readily bow before Him and speak His praises with all that we have. While we spend our few short days here on earth before the Lord brings us home through His steadfast love, we have nothing better to do with our lives than to live them blessing His holy name.

#### **iv. Speak Well of God for His Sovereign Rule (v. 19)**

And the final verse of this stirring song of praise praises God for His sovereign rule over all –

*The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,  
and his kingdom rules over all.*

And so, when we say “The Lord is King of Creation,” we mean that this one true God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He rules from a foundation of righteousness and justice over ALL that He has made. He made it ALL – from mountains and oceans to people and angels to stars and galaxies – God is the Creator and Ruler of Everything!

It's going to be our joy this summer to meditate on and grow in understanding and responding to the Lord who is the King of Creation.

#### v. **Calling All to Speak Well of God (vv. 20-22)**

And one of the first things we see, from the conclusion of Psalm 103, the response to the Song of Praise of verses 1-19, is that we should be not only calling ourselves to bless the Lord at all times for who He is and what He has done, but we should be extending this call to all creation. If He is indeed the King of Creation, we should be calling all of creation to join us in blessing His name –

*20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his word,  
obeying the voice of his word!*

*21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts,  
his ministers, who do his will!*

*22 Bless the LORD, all his works,  
in all places of his dominion.*

*Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

But then, we end back where we began, by calling our own souls to Bless the LORD.

#### **What does a life shaped by praise look like?**

As we close, just a few words of application: What does a life that flows from a soul committed to blessing the LORD look like? I'd like to suggest a few things, and we'll revisit these and pick up more as the summer progresses:

A life shaped like praise is a life lived in joyful wonder. A flower isn't just a flower, and the moon isn't just the moon. A sunset isn't just pretty, and being forgiven of our sins isn't just nice. These things are wonderful gifts from the God of the Universe who is our Father in Jesus Christ and who loves us and has compassion on us. He intentionally, willingly, and personally gives us all of these good things and



everything else good in our lives, and that should fill us with joyful wonder that God would care that much for us.

This joyful wonder should overflow into gratitude. We should be continually grateful for how much better God is treating us than our sins deserve. We should say Thank You from our hearts continually.

And, finally, we should be looking for ways to invite others to share in this joyful wonder and gratitude by coming to know God for themselves. Joyful wonder, gratitude in God, and an eager desire to share this with others are all the contours of a life shaped by praise, from a soul that blesses the Lord.