

PSALM 103

This psalm calls more for devotion than exposition; it is a most excellent psalm of praise, and of general use. The psalmist,

I. Stirs up himself and his own soul to praise God (v. 1, 2) for his favour to him in particular (v. 3-5), to the church in general, and to all good men, to whom he is, and will be, just, and kind, and constant (v. 6-18), and for his government of the world (v. 19).

II. He desires the assistance of the holy angels, and all the works of God, in praising him (v. 20-22). In singing this psalm we must in a special manner get our hearts affected with the goodness of God and enlarged in love and thankfulness.

~~Psalm~~ PSALM 103:1-5

CHEERFUL PRAISE

A psalm of David.

David is here communing with his own heart, and he is no fool that thus talks to himself and excites his own soul to that which is good. Observe,

I. How he stirs up himself to the duty of praise, v. 1, 2.

1. It is the Lord that is to be blessed and spoken well of; for he is the fountain of all good, whatever are the channels or cisterns; it is to his name, his holy name, that we are to consecrate our praise, *giving thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.*

2. It is the soul that is to be employed in blessing God, *and all that is within* us. We make nothing of our religious performances if we do not make heart-work of them, if that which is within us, nay, if *all that is within* us, be not engaged in them. The work requires the inward man, the whole man, and all little enough.

3. In order to our return of praises to God, there must be a grateful remembrance of the mercies we have received from him: *Forget not all*

his benefits. If we do not give thanks for them, we do forget them; and that is unjust as well as unkind, since in all God's favours there is so much that is memorable. "O my soul! to thy shame be it spoken, thou hast forgotten many of his benefits; but surely thou wilt not forget them all, for thou shouldst not have forgotten any."

II. How he furnishes himself with abundant matter for praise, and that which is very affecting: "Come, my soul, consider what God has done for thee."

1. "He has pardoned thy sins (v. 3); he has forgiven, and *does forgive, all thy iniquities.*" This is mentioned first because by the pardon of sin that is taken away which kept good things from us, and we are restored to the favour of God, which bestows good things on us. Think what the provocation was; it was iniquity, and yet pardoned; how many the provocations were, and yet all pardoned. *He has forgiven all our trespasses.* It is a continued act; he is still forgiving, as we are still sinning and repenting.

2. "He has cured thy sickness." The corruption of nature is the sickness of the soul; it is its disorder, and threatens its death. This is cured in sanctification; when sin is mortified, the disease is healed; though complicated, it is all healed. Our crimes were capital, but God saves our lives by pardoning them; our diseases were mortal, but God saves our lives by healing them. These two go together; for, as for God, his work is perfect and not done by halves; if God take away the guilt of sin by pardoning mercy, he will break the power of it by renewing grace. Where Christ is made righteousness to any soul he is made sanctification, ~~1~~1 Corinthians 1:30.

3. "He has rescued thee from danger." A man may be in peril of life, not only by his crimes, or his diseases, but by the power of his enemies; and therefore here also we experience the divine goodness: *Who redeemed thy life from destruction* (v. 4), from the destroyer, *from hell* (so the Chaldee), from the second death. *The redemption of the soul is precious;* we cannot compass it, and therefore are the more indebted to divine grace that has wrought it out, to him who has *obtained eternal redemption for us.* See ~~1~~Job 33:24, 28.

4. "He has not only saved thee from death and ruin, but has made thee truly and completely happy, with honour, pleasure, and long life."

(1.) “He has given thee true honour and great honour, no less than a crown: *He crowns thee with his lovingkindness and tender mercies;*” and what greater dignity is a poor soul capable of than to be advanced into the love and favour of God? *This honour have all his saints.* What is the crown of glory but God's favour?

(2.) “He has given thee true pleasure: *He satisfies thy mouth with good things*” (v. 5); it is only the favour and grace of God that can give satisfaction to a soul, can suit its capacities, supply its needs, and answer to its desires. Nothing but divine wisdom can undertake to *fill its treasures* (~~103:21~~ Proverbs 8:21); other things will surfeit, but not *satiate*, ~~103:27~~ Ecclesiastes 6:7; ~~103:28~~ Isaiah 55:2.

(3.) “He has given thee a prospect and pledge of long life: *Thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*” The eagle is long-lived, and, as naturalists say, when she is nearly 100 years old, casts all her feathers (as indeed she changes them in a great measure every year at moulting time), and fresh ones come, so that she becomes young again. When God, by the graces and comforts of his Spirit, recovers his people from their decays, and fills them with new life and joy, which is to them an earnest of eternal life and joy, then they may be said to *return to the days of their youth*, ~~103:25~~ Job 33:25.

~~103:6~~ PSALM 103:6-18

GOODNESS AND COMPASSION OF GOD

Hitherto the psalmist had only looked back upon his own experiences and thence fetched matter for praise; here he looks abroad and takes notice of his favour to others also; for in them we should rejoice and give thanks for them, all the saints being fed at a common table and sharing in the same blessings.

I. Truly God is good to all (v. 6): He *executes righteousness and judgment*, not only for his own people, but *for all that are oppressed*; for even in common providence he is the patron of wronged innocency, and, one way or other, will plead the cause of those that are injured against their oppressors. It is his honour to humble the proud and help the helpless.

II. He is in a special manner good to Israel, to every Israelite indeed, that is of a clean and upright heart.

1. He has revealed himself and his grace to us (v. 7): *He made known his ways unto Moses*, and by him *his acts to the children of Israel*, not only by his rod to those who then lived, but by his pen to succeeding ages. Note, Divine revelation is one of the first and greatest of divine favours with which the church is blessed; for God restores us to himself by revealing himself to us, and gives us all good by giving us knowledge. He has *made known his acts and his ways* (that is, his nature, and the methods of his dealing with the children of men), that they may know both what to conceive of him and what to expect from him; so Dr. Hammond. Or by his *ways* we may understand his precepts, the way which he requires us to walk in; and by his *acts*, or *designs* (as the word signifies), his promises and purposes as to what he will do with us. Thus fairly does God deal with us.

2. He has never been rigorous and severe with us, but always tender, full of compassion, and ready to forgive.

(1.) It is in his nature to be so (v. 8): *The Lord is merciful and gracious*; this was his way which he made known unto Moses at Mount Horeb, when he thus proclaimed his name (⁽⁴²⁴⁶⁾Exodus 34:6, 7), in answer to Moses's request (⁽⁴²³³⁾Exodus 33:13), *I beseech thee, show me thy way, that I may know thee*. It is my way, says God, to pardon sin.

[1.] He is not soon angry, v. 8. He is *slow to anger*, not extreme to mark what we do amiss nor ready to take advantage against us. He bears long with those that are very provoking, defers punishing, that he may give space to repent, and does not speedily execute the sentence of his law; and he could not be thus *slow to anger* if he were not *plenteous in mercy*, the very *Father of mercies*.

[2.] He is not long angry; for (v. 9) *he will not always chide*, though we always offend and deserve chiding. Though he signify his displeasure against us for our sins by the rebukes of Providence, and the reproaches of our own consciences, and thus cause grief, yet he will have compassion, and will not always keep us in pain and terror, no, not for our sins, but, after the spirit of bondage, will give the spirit of adoption. How unlike are those to God who always chide, who take every occasion to chide, and never know when to cease! What would become of us if God should deal

so with us? *He will not keep his anger for ever* against his own people, but will gather them with *everlasting mercies*, ^{<548>}Isaiah 54:8; 57:16.

(2.) We have found him so; we, for our parts, must own that *he has not dealt with us after our sins*, v. 10. The scripture says a great deal of the mercy of God, and we may all set to our seal that it is true, that we have experienced it. If he had not been a God of patience, we should have been in hell long ago; but *he has not rewarded us after our iniquities*; so those will say who know what sin deserves. He has not inflicted the judgments which we have merited, nor deprived us of the comforts which we have forfeited, which should make us think the worse, and not the better, of sin; for *God's patience should lead us to repentance*, ^{<411>}Romans 2:4.

3. He has pardoned our sins, not only my *iniquity* (v. 3), but *our transgressions*, v. 12. Though it is of our own benefit, by the pardoning mercy of God, that we are to take the comfort, yet of the benefit others have by it we must give him the glory. Observe,

(1.) The transcendent riches of God's mercy (v. 11): *As the heaven is high above the earth* (so high that the earth is but a point to the vast expanse), so God's mercy is above the merits of those that fear him most, so much above and beyond them that there is no proportion at all between them; the greatest performances of man's duty cannot demand the least tokens of God's favour as a debt, and therefore all the seed of Jacob will join with him in owning themselves *less than the least of all God's mercies*, ^{<430>}Genesis 32:10. Observe, God's mercy is thus great *towards those that fear him*, not towards those that trifle with him. We must fear the Lord and his goodness.

(2.) The fulness of his pardons, an evidence of the riches of his mercy (v. 12): *As far as the east is from the west* (which two quarters of the world are of greatest extent, because all known and inhabited, and therefore geographers that way reckon their longitudes) *so far has he removed our transgressions from us*, so that they shall never be laid to our charge, nor rise up in judgment against us. The sins of believers shall be remembered no more, shall not be mentioned unto them; they shall be sought for, and not found. If we thoroughly forsake them, God will thoroughly forgive them.

4. He has pitied our sorrows, v. 13, 14. Observe,

(1.) Whom he pities — *those that fear him*, that is, all good people, who in this world may become objects of pity on account of the grievances to which they are not only born, but born again. Or it may be understood of those who have not yet received *the spirit of adoption*, but are yet *trembling at his word*; those he pities, ²⁴¹⁸Jeremiah 31:18, 20.

(2.) How he pities — *as a father pities his children*, and does them good as there is occasion. God is a Father to those that fear him and owns them for his children, and he is tender of them as a father. The father pities his children that are weak in knowledge and instructs them, pities them when they are froward and bears with them, pities them when they are sick and comforts them (²⁴¹³Isaiah 66:13), pities them when they have fallen and helps them up again, pities them when they have offended, and, upon their submission, forgives them, pities them when they are wronged and gives them redress; thus *the Lord pities those that fear him*.

(3.) Why he pities — *for he knows our frame*. He has reason to know our frame, for he framed us; and, having himself made man of the dust, *he remembers that he is dust*, not only by constitution, but by sentence. *Dust thou art*. He considers the frailty of our bodies and the folly of our souls, how little we can do, and expects accordingly from us, how little we can bear, and lays accordingly upon us, in all which appears the tenderness of his compassion.

5. He has perpetuated his covenant-mercy and thereby provided relief for our frailty, v. 15-18. See here,

(1.) How short man's life is and of what uncertain continuance. The lives even of great men and good men are so, and neither their greatness nor their goodness can alter the property of them: *As for man, his days are as grass*, which grows out of the earth, rises but a little way above it, and soon withers and returns to it again. See ²³⁰⁶Isaiah 40:6, 7. Man, in his best estate, seems somewhat more than grass; he flourishes and looks gay; yet then he is but *like a flower of the field*, which, though distinguished a little from the grass, will wither with it. The flower of the garden is commonly more choice and valuable, and, though in its own nature withering, will last the longer for its being sheltered by the garden wall and the gardener's care; but the flower of the field (to which life is here compared) is not only withering in itself, but exposed to the cold blasts, and liable to be cropped and trodden on by the beasts of the field. Man's life is not only wasting of itself, but its period may be anticipated by a thousand accidents. When the

flower is in its perfection a blasting wind, unseen, unlooked for, *passes over it, and it is gone*; it hangs the head, drops the leaves, dwindles into the ground again, *and the place thereof*, which was proud of it, now *knows it no more*. Such a thing is man: God considers this, and pities him; let him consider it himself, and be humble, dead to this world and thoughtful of another.

(2.) How long and lasting God's mercy is to his people (v. 17, 18): it will continue longer than their lives, and will survive their present state. Observe,

[1.] The description of those to whom this mercy belongs. They are such as fear God, such as are truly religious, from principle. *First*, They live a life of faith; for they *keep God's covenant*; having taken hold of it, they keep hold of it, fast hold, and will not let it go. They keep it as a treasure, keep it as their portion, and would not for all the world part with it, for it is their life. *Secondly*, They live a life of obedience; they *remember his commandments to do them*, else they do not *keep his covenant*. Those only shall have the benefit of God's promises that make conscience of his precepts. See who those are that have a good memory, as well as a *good understanding* (^{<BIB>}Psalm 111:10), those that *remember God's commandments*, not to talk of them, but *to do them*, and to be ruled by them.

[2.] The continuance of the mercy which belongs to such as these; it will last them longer than their lives on earth, and therefore they need not be troubled though their lives be short, since death itself will be no abridgment, no infringement, of their bliss. God's mercy is better than life, for it will out-live it. *First*, To their souls, which are immortal; to them the mercy of the Lord is *from everlasting to everlasting*; from everlasting in the councils of it to everlasting in the consequences of it, in their election before the world was and their glorification when this world shall be no more; for they are predestinated to the *inheritance* (^{<BIB>}Ephesians 1:11) and *look for the mercy of the Lord*, the Lord Jesus, unto eternal life. *Secondly*, To their seed, which shall be kept up to the end of time (^{<BIB>}Psalm 102:28): *His righteousness*, the truth of his promise, shall be *unto children's children*; provided they tread in the steps of their predecessors' piety, and *keep his covenant*, as they did, then shall mercy be preserved to them, even to *a thousand generations*.

PSALM 103:19-22

CHEERFUL PRAISE

Here is,

I. The doctrine of universal providence laid down, v. 19. He has secured the happiness of his peculiar people by promise and covenant, but the order of mankind, and the world in general, he secures by common providence. *The Lord has a throne* of his own, a throne of glory, a throne of government. He that made all rules all, and both by a word of power: *He has prepared his throne*, has fixed and established it that it cannot be shaken; he has afore-ordained all the measures of his government and does all according to the counsel of his own will. *He has prepared it in the heavens*, above us, and out of sight; for he *holds back the face of his throne, and spreads a cloud upon it* (¹⁸¹⁹Job 26:9); yet he can himself *judge through the dark cloud*, ¹⁸²³Job 22:13. Hence *the heavens are said to rule* (²⁰⁴⁵Daniel 4:26), and we are led to consider this by the influence which even the visible heavens have upon this earth, their *dominion*, ¹⁸³³Job 38:33; ⁰⁰¹⁶Genesis 1:16. But though God's throne is in heaven, and there he keeps his court, and thither we are to direct to him (*Our Father who art in heaven*), yet *his kingdom rules over all*. He takes cognizance of all the inhabitants, and all the affairs, of this lower world, and disposes all persons and things according to the counsel of his will, to his own glory (²⁰⁴⁵Daniel 4:35): *His kingdom rules over all kings and all kingdoms*, and from it there is no exempt jurisdiction.

II. The duty of universal praise inferred from it: if all are under God's dominion, all must do him homage.

1. Let the holy angels praise him (v. 20, 21): *Bless the Lord, you his angels*; and again, *Bless the Lord, all you his hosts, you ministers of his*. David had been stirring up himself and others to praise God, and here, in the close, he calls upon the angels to do it; not as if they needed any excitement of ours to praise God, they do it continually; but thus he expresses his high thoughts of God as worthy of the adorations of the holy angels, thus he quickens himself and others to the duty with this consideration, That it is the work of angels, and comforts himself in reference to his own weakness and defect in the performance of this duty

with this consideration, That there is a world of holy angels who dwell in God's house and are still praising him. In short, the blessed angels are glorious attendants upon the blessed God. Observe,

(1.) How well qualified they are for the post they are in. They are able; for they *excel in strength*; they are *mighty in strength* (so the word is); they are able to bring great things to pass, and to abide in their work without weariness. And they are as willing as they are able; they are willing to know their work; for they *hearken to the voice of his word*; they stand expecting commission and instructions from their great Lord, and *always behold his face* (^{<483>}Matthew 18:10), that they may take the first intimation of his mind. They are willing to do their work: They *do his commandments* (v. 20); they *do his pleasure* (v. 21); they dispute not any divine commands, but readily address themselves to the execution of them. Nor do they delay, but fly swiftly: They *do his commandments at hearing, or as soon as they hear the voice of his word*; so Dr. Hammond. *To obey is better than sacrifice*; for angels obey, but do not sacrifice.

(2.) What their service is. They are *his angels*, and *ministers of his* — his, for he made them, and made them for himself — his, for he employs them, though he does not need them — his, for he is their owner and Lord; they belong to him and he has them at his beck. All the creatures are his servants, but not as the angels that attend the presence of his glory. Soldiers, and seamen, and all good subjects, serve the king, but not as the courtiers do, the ministers of state and those of the household.

[1.] The angels occasionally serve God in this lower world; they *do his commandments*, go on his errands (^{<292>}Daniel 9:21), fight his battles (^{<167>}2 Kings 6:17), and minister for the good of his people, ^{<311>}Hebrews 1:14.

[2.] They *continually praise him* in the upper world; they began betimes to do it (^{<88>}Job 38:7), and it is still their business, from which they rest not *day nor night*, ^{<64>}Revelation 4:8. It is God's glory that he has such attendants, but more his glory that he neither needs them nor is benefited by them.

2. Let *all his works* praise him (v. 22), all *in all places of his dominion*; for, because they are his works, they are under his dominion, and they were made and are ruled that they may be unto him *for a name and a praise*. All his works, that is, all the children of men, in all parts of the world, let them all praise God; yea, and the inferior creatures too, which

are God's works also; let them praise him objectively, though they cannot praise him actually, ^{<H50>}Psalm 145:10. Yet all this shall not excuse David from praising God, but rather excite him to do it the more cheerfully, that he may bear a part in this concert; for he concludes, *Bless the Lord, O my soul!* as he began, v. 1. Blessing God and giving him glory must be the alpha and the omega of all our services. He began with *Bless the Lord, O my soul!* and, when he had penned and sung this excellent hymn to his honour, he does not say, Now, O my soul! thou hast blessed the Lord, sit down, and rest thee, but, *Bless the Lord, O my soul!* yet more and more. When we have done ever so much in the service of God, yet still we must stir up ourselves to do more. God's praise is a subject that will never be exhausted, and therefore we must never think this work done till we come to heaven, where it will be for ever in the doing.