

A Name Like No Other

Session 3

December 17, 2023

The Love Expressed in God's Name

The Point: We can call upon the name of God because He loves us deeply.

Session Passage: Psalm 103:1-5,8-13,17-19

The Setting for Psalm 103. This is a psalm of descriptive praise, delineating reasons that the writer had for gratitude and praise. Though it is “of David,” the compiler of the psalms listed no specific occasion for its writing. David could have associated this psalm with the thanksgiving offering which was given by worshipers (Lev. 7:11-15). In addition, Psalm 103 could have served as a song used in general settings of worship to praise the Lord for all the benefits He had given to His people.

Psalm 103:1-5

Connection to The Point: We can call upon God confident that He lovingly provides for us.

Soul (v. 1). The Hebrew word for *soul* (*nephesh*) comes from the verbal form meaning “to take breath.” The *soul* represents the breath of life in an individual. Here it is used of the psalmist’s inner being, all that is within him.

Bless (v. 1). Three times in this passage, David reminds himself to *bless* the Lord (vv. 1-2). Like the three-fold repetition of “holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8), David saw the importance of recalling God’s work in his life and responding in praise. The Hebrew word for *bless* (*barak*) could mean “to kneel down,” “to praise God with bended knee,” or “to salute or greet.” To *bless* the Lord is to bow the knee before Him and surrender to Him in joyous praise. Worship is the response of a reverent heart to the magnitude of God, and David reminded himself that this was a good thing for him to do.

Lord (v. 1). This is a substitution for God’s personal, covenant name, *Yahweh*. The substitution follows the practice of the Jews, who substituted the word *Adonai* (meaning “lord” or “master”) for *Yahweh* because they feared saying God’s name lest they mispronounce it. When “Lord” occurs (in small caps) it is an indicator that the word being referenced is *Yahweh*. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists.

All that is within me (v. 1). True worship involves the whole person, not merely a part. David summoned his whole being to worship the Lord, reminiscent of loving God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:30). David desired to engage his whole being in worship by recognizing and remembering the activity of God in his life.

Holy name (v. 1). God had revealed His personal name, *Yahweh*, to Moses in Exodus 3:14-16. *Yahweh* is the God who transcends time, being active in creation, at the present time, and in the future. Throughout the psalm, David used this name for God (indicated by “Lord”) because it encompassed not only who He is but all His activity—what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. *Holy* (*qodesh*) means to be set apart, sacred. God is completely apart from and above His creation. Yet, at the same time He is immanent. He chooses to interact with humanity for our good (John 3:16).

Forget (v. 2). Forgetting the Lord’s work in one’s life spells disaster (Deut. 6:12; 8:11; 28). The Lord had told Israel not to forget Him, what He had done for them, and not to make an idol of anything in the heavens above, on the earth, or the waters under the earth (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 4:16-19,23). However, the nation did this repeatedly, starting when they built

the golden calf and substituted it for their worship of God while Moses was still on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments (Ex. 32).

Benefits (v. 2). The Hebrew word for *benefits* (*gemul*) occurs about twenty times in the Old Testament, and it usually means the recompense for what is deserved. Sometimes it is used to implore God to recompense the wicked for their evil deeds (Pss. 28:4; 94:2). In this case, the *benefits* of God are not those that a person earned; they are benefits of His grace.

Forgives (v. 3). The remembrance of God's forgiveness in our lives is a powerful motivator to worship. The subject of the verb *forgives* (*salach*) in the Hebrew text is always God. The character of God is such that He is always ready to forgive if people turn to Him in repentance (Neh. 9:17). The expression "He forgives all your iniquity" is not directed at everyone but rather only those who have received forgiveness through the shedding of blood. For the Israelites, this forgiveness was accomplished through the yearly atoning sacrifice in the holy of holies in the tabernacle and later the temple. But now, complete forgiveness has been accomplished through the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:22-28). Those who put their faith in Him are forgiven their sins, reconciled to God, and receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:14-18; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 2:13-14).

Iniquity (v. 3). The Hebrew term for *iniquity* (*avon*) is derived from a word meaning "to bend, twist, or distort." *Iniquity* is that which is bent or crooked, a distortion and violation of the original intentions and will of God.

Heals (v. 3). The term (*rapha*) means "to mend by stitching." Figuratively it means "to cure" or "cause to heal." It also can have the meaning of "to make whole." Forgiveness of sin and healing go hand in hand, as Jesus demonstrated in Mark 2:1-12.

Diseases (v. 3). The word used for *diseases* (*tachalu*) refers to both physical and psychological distress. It is the result of living in a fallen world. God will one day end all *diseases* (Rev. 21:4).

Redeems (v. 4). To *redeem* (*gaal*) someone is to set him free from slavery by the paying of a price.

The Pit (v. 4). The word for *Pit* (*shachath*) literally means "destruction." "The Lord had redeemed the psalmist out of destruction and into delight. The image of the pit refers to the most desperate situations in life from which the Lord has extricated him (cf. Pss 28:1; 40:2[3]); and it may here refer to the underworld [Sheol]." ¹ Sheol was the place where the unrighteous went after death.² Another psalmist understood that God had redeemed him from death itself (Ps. 49:7-9,13-15), and this may be the meaning of David's statement in this verse.

Crowns (v. 4). *Crowns* (*atar*) refers to the act of bestowing a wreath or crown upon a person's head. To be crowned suggests both receiving honor and being of high status. God crowns His people with the attributes that flow out of His own nature in the sense that they experience His faithful love and compassion (Ex. 34:6). People do not earn or deserve these things, but rather receive them through grace as they trust in God. That God crowns (blesses) His people with faithful love and compassion should inspire worship in the hearts of those who know Him.

Faithful love (v. 4). Faithful love and compassion are two characteristics that God used to describe Himself to Moses (Ex. 34:6). *Faithful love* (*chesed*) refers to God's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises and obligations. It describes the mercy, lovingkindness, and steadfast love that God demonstrates toward His children because of the covenant He has entered into with them and because it is in His very nature to do so.

Compassion (v. 4). *Compassion* (*racham*) describes God's willingness to show favor upon His people. It is associated with the ideas of grace and hope.

Satisfies (v. 5). The usual meaning of *satisfies* (*saba*) is to provide proper nourishment. However, here it means more than physical nourishment. It has the idea of fullness or sufficiency. God provides for (satisfies) the deepest needs of those who follow Him.

Good things (v. 5). In expressing His grace God gives far more to His followers than we deserve, because death and hell are really the only things we deserve (Rom. 6:23).

Eagle (v. 5). The use of the eagle here has a double meaning. The Lord moves swiftly like an eagle to renew and heal His people, and these people receive renewed youth and power (like that of an eagle) from God (Isa. 40:31).

Psalm 103:8-13

Connection to The Point: We can call upon God, trusting in His compassion, grace, and forgiveness.

Compassionate (v. 8). Echoing the words of Exodus 34:6-7, David highlighted the compassion of God. This is the adjective form (*rachum*) of the noun for “compassion” in verse 4. *Rachum* is used only of God and it emphasizes His attribute of compassion. A related term refers to a woman’s womb. The care God has for His people is akin to the love a woman has for her child.

Gracious (v. 8). The word *gracious* (*channun*) is used only of God in Scripture describes His readiness to aid those in need, such as the Israelite debtor who was in distress (Ex. 22:26-27). God’s grace flows from His great love for His children.

Slow to anger (v. 8). The Hebrew term for *anger* (*aph*) literally refers to the nose or nostrils. It pictures someone who demonstrates his anger by flaring his nostrils. Even in situations where God has reason to be angry, He exhibits restraint and mercy.

Abounding (v. 8). The term (*rab*) refers to having an abundance in quantity, size, age, number, or quality. God’s desire is to bless and satisfy people by lavishing good things upon them (v. 5).

Accuse (v. 9). The word for *accuse* (*riv*) literally means “to strive with, to grapple.” Figuratively it refers to a person who has a complaint against or is engaged in a controversy with another.

Be angry (v. 9). The term (*natar*) literally means “to guard” or “to keep.” Figuratively, it means “to cherish anger” and “to bear a grudge.” When a person approaches God in repentance and faith, the Lord does not hold onto His anger but is willing to forgive (Ps. 51; Jer. 3:12).

Sins (v. 10). Because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), all deserve death (6:23). The term for *sins* (*chet*) means “to miss the mark.” All have missed the mark of God expectations, failing to achieve His holy and perfect standard for how we are to live. Yet, God does not give us what we deserve; rather, He offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Repaid (v. 10). In Hebrew, the word *repaid* (*gamal*) is related to the term used for “benefits” (*gemul*) in verse 2. It is a play on words. David called on his own soul to remember God’s “benefits” (*gemul*), and one of those is that He had not repaid (*gamal*) David for his sins. Some of God’s greatest gifts are the things He does not give to us which we truly deserve because of our sins.

As high as the heavens are above the earth (v. 11). In the ancient world, a world without airplanes and rocket ships, the heights of the heavens seemed unassailable, and even now in our day the universe is still too massive to comprehend fully. When David thought of the faithful love of God, it was higher than the heavens.

Great (v. 11). God's faithful love is so *great* (*gabar*) that it can prevail over all obstacles, in this case our sins.

Fear (v. 11). The term (*yare*) can refer to fright, dread, or terror; but, it also has the meaning of reverence. Those who *fear* God approach Him with reverence and humility. This fear also motivates them to live in obedience to God's holy standards.

As far as the east is from the west (v. 12). The east and west will never meet because they are going in opposite directions.

Removed (v. 12). The term (*rachaq*) means "to send far away."

Transgressions (v. 12). *Transgressions* (*pasha*) denotes rebellion and revolt against God's authority.

Father . . . children (v. 13). To understand how God loves His children, one need only look to how a father loves and has compassion on his children. Sadly, some fathers today fail to truly love their children. This is not so with our heavenly Father. He always displays His love and compassion toward His children.

Psalm 103:17-19

Connection to The Point: We can call upon God knowing He is always there for us.

Eternity (v. 17). The psalmist reemphasized the point he had made in verses 11-13. The Hebrew term (*olam*) indicates a long time. It is used of the past and the future. Regarding the future, it can have the meanings of "always," a "continuing (perpetual) existence," or an "indefinite unending existence" (eternity). The double use of *eternity* in this verse indicates God's faithful love for His children encompasses everything—eternity past, time, and eternity future. God's love is boundless.

Those who fear him (v. 17). For a third time, the psalmist wrote of the Lord's actions toward *those who fear Him* (vv. 11,13). God lavishes His faithful love (*chesed*) on those who fear Him (v. 11). God has compassion (*racham*) on those who fear Him as a human father has compassion on his children (v. 13). Finally, God's faithful love is endless (*olam*) toward those who fear Him (v. 17). Again, those who *fear* (*yare*) God approach Him with reverence and humility, and live in obedience to His Word.

Righteousness (v. 17). *Righteousness* (*tzedaqah*) describes one who is just and morally virtuous. The term's root word (*tsadeq*) means to be just or righteous in one's character and conduct, to conform to a moral standard.

Grandchildren (v. 17). The term (*ben*) can refer to a male or female child or generally to a youth. In the broader sense, it can refer to a descendant of any generation in a family. It also describes people of a guild, order, or class. Because God is righteous, always conforming to His own perfect standard, He will pour out His faithful love not only on the present generation, but also on future generations who fear His name.

Keep (v. 18). The term for *keep* (*shamar*) means "to exercise great care," "keeping watch over or preserving something." God requires the same thing from every generation, that they "keep his covenant." In the Old Testament, it was the Israelites who entered into a covenant with God. In the New Testament and today, it is those who enter into the covenant God has made through the blood of His Messiah, Jesus (1 Cor. 11:25). The Lord desires to pour out His love

upon human beings, but they must approach God on His terms by way of the covenant He has made through Jesus (John 14:6).

Covenant (v. 18). “In basic terms, a covenant involves some kind of agreement or promise made between two parties by which they swear allegiance to one another. More specifically, biblical covenants are agreements or promises made between two parties [normally God and His people], which establish a relationship between them.”³

Remember (v. 18). To keep God’s covenant, one must *remember* (*zakar*) God’s commandments. To remember God’s commandments is to live a life that is founded upon and grounded in those commandments. The fear of God (v. 13) produces obedience to God.

Observe (v. 18). To keep God’s covenant, one must obey His precepts.

Precepts (v. 18). *Precepts* (*piqqud*) are the commands of God which instruct a person how to live in a covenant relationship with Him. The term appears exclusively in the Psalms, with most usages in Psalm 119, a psalm dedicated to the Word of God. To observe God’s precepts is to obey His Word. The term is also translated “instructions” (Ps. 111:7).

Established (v. 19). While God is a compassionate Father (v. 13), He is also the sovereign King of the universe. “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool” (Isa. 66:1). That God’s throne is established emphasizes that His reign and rule are permanently fixed. His omnipotent power and sovereignty guarantee His eternal rule over all of His creation. He is sovereign over all threats and opposition to His rule. Nothing in the universe can shake or diminish either His kingdom or His rule over it.

Rules (v. 19). The term for *rules* (*mashal*) means to have dominion over. Nothing in all of creation is outside the rule of God.

1. Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73–150*, vol. 13, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 264.

2. Chad Brand, “Sheol,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [HIBD], gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 1451–1452.

3. Stephen J. Wellam, “Covenants,” in HIBD, 356.