



The God We Worship, Part 5: He is The God of Goodness and Grace

Series: The Wonder of Worship

Psalm 103

March 1, 2015

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Some have called this “David’s Hallelujah Chorus.” This psalm is a psalm of worship and adoration that arises out of David’s experience of God’s grace. As David fixes his mind on specific instances of God’s amazing grace -- as choice, select expressions of God’s rich and glorious grace parade before the soul of David -- and as he considers all of these evidences of God’s grace, His thoughts and his heart are immediately filled with blessing and gratitude to God. He calls to His own soul, preaches to himself, to bless God. This truly is one of the greatest psalms ever written. Charles Spurgeon said: “There is too much in this psalm for a thousand pens to write. It is one of those all-comprehending Scriptures which is a Bible in itself and might alone suffice for the hymn book of the church.” He’s right. This is truly a rich and beautiful psalm, one upon which we could meditate for days and weeks and still never plumb its depths fully.

As we look at this text this morning, there are a few things that I want for us to keep in mind, a few thoughts that will help us to grasp the wonderful nature of these blessings and benefits of God’s grace, things that will make the message of this psalm just explode off these pages.

First, we need to keep in mind the freeness and undeservedness of these blessings from God. Truthfully, I don’t think we should have much trouble realizing how unworthy we are to receive these good things from the Lord if we remember all that we have looked at over the last few weeks – God’s incomparable holiness and purity as opposed to our sinfulness and corruption; God’s sovereign rule as opposed to our inherent weakness and creatureliness; God’s justice and wrath against sin and the wrath that our sins deserve; and God’s loyal and steadfast love in spite of our rebellion and wickedness that His love overcame. That we would receive anything good from God’s hands, that He would choose to bless us and make us the recipients of gracious love and fatherly mercy, should continually astonish us. When we think about the fallen angels for whom there was no sacrifice, no redemption, no grace...when we think about

the lost unbelieving world that will face judgment for continuing rebellion and sin, we ought to be amazed at the fact of God's unrelenting pursuit of us, His redemption and mercy lavished on us. We have no rightful claim to God's blessing – it is all of grace.

Second, we need to keep before us the comprehensive richness and variety of God's expressions of grace to us. God's grace, in this psalm, is expressed in variety of ways: forgiveness, healing of our souls, redemption of our lives, being encompassed by His love, soul satisfaction, strength and more. The answer for each of our needs, and more, as an immortal soul, are abundantly found in Him. God delights to shower His people with every possible expression of His favor and love. His grace is full and complete and richly given.

Third, we need to see the unchanging and continuing nature of God's grace to us. The grace of God is showered upon those whom He loves with a steadfast, unchanging, eternal love – that's constancy, unchangableness -- and He binds Himself by promise to our children and our children's children who keep covenant with Him – that's continuation. God delights to shower with grace those who are His children by faith and their children and their children's children after them. God is the fountain of never-ending grace.

In fact, grace is such a beautiful and varied outflow of the character and nature of God that it defies a concise definition. When we speak of God's grace to His children, we are speaking of God's sovereign, free, undeserved and unmerited favor given to those to whom He desires to give it, to those who deserve the very opposite. It is divine favor and blessing given to those who rightly deserve His wrath but whom He has instead delivered from condemnation and whom He has made the object of His richest blessings because of His eternal and steadfast love for them. We are speaking of His kindness and compassion, His generosity and goodness of God to His people. And the root of this grace to His children is His sovereign and steadfast love. Grace is nothing less than God expressing the fullness of love's blessing to those upon whom He has set His eternal and special affection.

So let's look at this text this morning and get a sense of the greatness of the goodness and grace of God. And let me tell you how we are going to do this. I want us to first look at the blessings of God's grace that make up the bulk of this passage, and then we will circle back around to the opening couple of verses of the psalm. So let's look at it together.

David preaches to himself in this text and calls upon his soul, upon his inner man, upon that which defines all that he is – his mind, will, emotions, senses and faculties, to bless the Lord for all of His benefits. And what are the benefits, these choice blessings of God’s grace, upon which David fixes his focus?

The Gracious Blessing of Forgiveness (3a, 8-12) The first blessing of God’s grace that grips David is this: He is the God “who forgives all your iniquity...” (Psalm 103:3, ESV) Forgiveness is the first thing upon which David places his focus for a reason – because until sin is forgiven -- healing, redemption, satisfaction and all the rest -- remain unknown and unattainable blessings. The pathway into the full enjoyment of all of God’s grace is first the experience of the gracious forgiveness of God. It is first in importance and primary in our experience. It is what we desperately need most. Think about this. Sin is what separated us from the enjoyment of God’s goodness to begin with. Sin is what drove our parents, Adam and Eve, from the Garden of Eden and from the blessedness of free and full communion with God. And it is the pardon of our sin – the grandest act of God’s grace – that opens the way of full communion with and blessing from God.

In His grace, God forgives all of our iniquity. That word “iniquity” is a strong one. Iniquity is not simply a mistake or a shortcoming; it’s not simply a bad attitude toward God. Iniquity is ingrained perversity and wickedness, the bentness of our being toward sin, unrighteous character and conduct, acts of rebellion and moral evil, acts of commission and omission. Iniquity encompasses our character and action. This, our very nature, God forgives.

He forgives it all. Every transgression, every evil thought, every wicked deed, every worthless act – God forgives and keeps on forgiving – that is the idea here. The word for forgiveness is a word that is used only of God’s offer of pardon and forgiveness to the sinner. Never does this word in any of its forms refer to people forgiving each other. This forgiveness is something only God can offer, only God can accomplish. And David rejoices that God has forgiven, not just the acts of sin that he has committed, but all of his iniquity, his fallen nature. Forgiveness of iniquity is only in the power and grace of God to truly accomplish.

This forgiving grace is in the very nature of God. It is what he delights to do. We have all seen someone who is forced to act contrary to his nature – Annapolis, little boy who acts as a ring bearer... God's grace is not contrary to his nature. In fact, David elaborates on this later in Psalm starting in verse 6: "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (Psalm 103:6–8, ESV) The grace of God, his lavish love and blessing to His people is at the very heart of His character. David harkens back to God's dealings with the nation of Israel, how He took them out of bondage and oppression to Egypt and delivered them by His mighty hand. He graciously rescued them because of His steadfast love for them as His people, because of His promise to Abraham, and ultimately because of His eternal promise to bring forth from them the Messiah, Jesus Christ, through whom all nations would be blessed. God made His gracious character known to Moses and to the people of Israel in all of His dealings with them. In fact, David quotes God's own self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 34 when he writes: The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. It is because of God's unchanging nature that He forgives iniquity. He patiently bears with us in our sinfulness, deferring punishment rather than immediately judging us, but instead acting in mercy and grace because of His steadfast love.

God is so unlike us. If He was One like us, He would long since have broken out in anger against us and against the whole world and consumed it all in holy displeasure. But God bears with vessels of wrath, with those who are continually fashioning and fitting and preparing themselves for destruction by their acts of unrighteousness, so that He might show grace to some and forgive them and reclaim them from the pit of destruction.

David says: "He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever." (Psalm 103:9, ESV) That word, "chide," means "to conduct a suit." God will and does rebuke our sin, but He does so, not to conduct a case against us and to find us guilty before His eternal court, but He does it to lead us to repentance and to enjoyment of His fellowship. Toward us, His rebuke always has a redemptive purpose. He does not refuse to be reconciled to us, keeping "His anger forever," does not hold a grudge but, in grace, as soon as His son or daughter cries out to Him in sincere repentance, He receives him or her immediately, as a father.

"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities." (Psalm 103:10, ESV) Were ever more beautiful words written than these? Out of His grace, He does not give us what our sins deserve, does not repay us as our sins deserve. In truth, none of

us has ever suffered, as our sins deserve, even when we have been greatly chastened. Our lot has never been given according to the rule of what we merit, or demerit, but rather according to grace.

God has not dealt with us according to what our sins deserve, if he did, none of us could stand. "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." (Psalm 130:3–4, ESV) God does not deal with us according to our sins, because He has dealt with Jesus according to our sins. God, in His infinite grace, laid our iniquities upon His own dear and holy Son. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6, ESV) He did not cast aside our sins as if they were of no consequence. God exacted from Christ everything that we owe. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people...Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief." (Isaiah 53:7–8, 10a ESV) He did it that He might exercise forgiveness toward us that is in keeping with His truth and justice. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:23–26, ESV) God does not deal with us according to our sins because He has dealt with Jesus accordance with what our sins deserve and what His holiness demands and Jesus willingly endured it all out of steadfast love. This, and this alone, is why we can sing and celebrate that God does not and never will "deal with us according to our sins" or "repay us according to our iniquities". The measure of God's steadfast love is the depth of the sacrifice he endured in giving up his only Son to suffer in our stead.

And having done all this, having provided this remedy for our sins, he delights in granting this grace of forgiveness to all who fear Him as David says in verses 11 and 12, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:11–12, ESV) In His grace, God has pardoned not only our iniquity but every individual transgression. He has so removed our transgressions (as far as the east is from the west) that they will never be laid to our charge; never rise up against us in judgment. The sins of believers have been

remembered no more, shall not be held against us, could be sought for but never found. Their record has been and continues to be blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ. This cleansing is so deep and so pervasive; that there is not even a memory left of our past sins. What incredible grace. If this were all for which David or we had to bless God that would be enough. But there is more. God gives

The Gracious Blessing of Healing (3b) David calls Him the God “who heals all your diseases,” (Psalm 103:3, ESV). This verse is not about physical healing primarily. He is the God who heals our physical diseases according to His gracious will, but that is not the focus here. The grammatical construction of this sentence shows that the focus here is not on the body but on the soul. Sin is a sickness of the soul. It permeates the whole of our person and it is not enough that God pardons our sins, but by His grace, he brings healing to our sin sick souls. God does not do His work half-way. Our sins are capital offenses and God deals with their penalty by pardoning grace. The corruption of sin is thorough and death-dealing, and God deals with them by renewing grace. He brings healing to us through the sanctifying work of His Spirit and His word as sin which once reigned in our mortal bodies is progressively put to death by His grace at work in us. “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6:12–18, ESV) This is the power of God’s grace in us. As Thomas Brooks said: “Saving grace makes a man as willing to leave his lusts as a slave is willing to leave his galley, or a prisoner his dungeon, or a thief his bolts, or a beggar his rags.”

God does not merely forgive us, He regenerates us. He makes us alive from death and sin to life and holiness. He heals our souls. The soul has its diseases – guilt, fear, doubt, depression, anger, lust, hate, jealousy, spite, greed and all the rest – and God deals with them and heals our souls from their power by His grace. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the

glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11–14, ESV) “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25–27, ESV) In healing our souls of its disease of sin, He gives

The Blessing of a Life Redeemed from the Pit (4) David says He is the God “who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,” (Psalm 103:4, ESV). What David is getting at here is that God has redeemed our lives from the pit of despond, from worthless living, and from aimless existence. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean. Just recently there has been in the news the story of a former professional football player who is now penniless and whose life is destitute of hope. The story recorded the way that he had pawned his Super Bowl ring. Up until that point, he had liquidated about everything else that he had but he held onto that ring as a symbol of a better time, of a time when he felt like his life was worth something, when people respected him and his life seemed to have a purpose. He didn’t want to, but he was forced by his circumstances to pawn that ring for a pittance. He did it with confidence that when things turned around he could buy the ring back at the pawn price plus interest. You can imagine what happened. When the time came for him to buy the ring back, according to the terms of his loan, he didn’t have the money. He pled and begged for leniency and for more time, but the pawn shop owner, looking at the mess this man had made of his life, refused. Not long after, the ring appeared in the pawn shop window on a black velvet pad and the price on the ring, several times what he had received, showed just what a pittance he had received when he pawned it. He realized that he had thrown away this ring of great value, to him the symbol of his life, with no way to redeem it.

This is a picture of all of us. We have done the same thing with our lives by our sins. Like Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of pottage, like this man traded his Super Bowl ring for a trifle, we have traded our lives for a pittance with no way to get it back. We could never redeem our lives, but Christ has done just that. He redeemed our lives from destruction, from waste, from eternal loss with His priceless blood. He has rescued us from our enemies – from Satan, from this world of sin, and from our own fleshly sins and desires, and made of them something of eternal worth. And God, by His grace, has crowned us with steadfast love and mercy – He has “encompassed” or “surrounded” our lives with His steadfast love and mercy and made our lives

valuable in His sight. He has made us eternally secure in Him and in His steadfast love, His “hesed,” that we spoke about last week.

We have been saved by God’s grace and by His grace in Christ, He has “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:6–7, ESV) He has raised our lives from the pit so that He might show us the fullness of the riches of grace for all of eternity. We cannot escape His gracious love, we are covered by its evidences. “But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as with a shield.” (Psalm 5:11–12, ESV) He is the God who forgives, the God who heals, the God who redeems our lives and preserves them, and He gives

The Gracious Blessing of Satisfaction And Strength (5) David says that He is the God “who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:5, ESV) Only the believer knows the joy of satisfaction in God and the strength that such joy brings to the heart and soul. No man is ever filled to satisfaction but a believer and only God Himself can satisfy even him. Many a worldling seeks to satisfy himself with food, drink, sex, personal ambition, personal accomplishments, and he may be temporarily satiated by these things, but not one is satisfied. Only God can satisfy the soul that has been made for Him and by Him. That is why God says through Isaiah: ““Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” (Isaiah 55:1–3, ESV) By God’s grace, He has forgiven us, is healing us, has recovered and rescued us from our decay unto real life, has laid hold of us to satisfy us for time and eternity. He has done it. He must be the One to do it all and He knows He must because He knows what we are.

The Must of God’s Grace (13-19) “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:13–14, ESV) God must act in compassion and grace, must seek us out, must overcome our spiritual deadness, must overcome our antagonism to the truth, must act to

forgive and save and bring us to Himself, must create in our hearts reverence and fear, faith and hope, trust and love or we would never come to Him. He knows our frame. He knows that we are but dust and that is why He does what He does. The redemption of our souls by Christ was a marvelous work of God's grace. We are justified freely by God's grace. We are forgiven by grace. Our regeneration and calling is by the grace and power of God the Holy Spirit. Our adoption into the family of God was by grace. Our sanctification is by the grace of God. Our preservation in grace is by grace. And our resurrection shall be the work of God's grace. We are but a moment, but God's grace to us is from everlasting to everlasting, because His love is from everlasting to everlasting. Look how David describes it...

"As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." (Psalm 103:15–19, ESV) We are, on his earth, like the flower quickly fading, here today and gone tomorrow, but God's love for us is everlasting and eternal, and our place with Him forever – as certain as His rule over all the heavens and earth, as sure as His kingdom and His reign. The grace of God, just like His throne, never fails and never falls.

And it in light of this view of God's goodness and grace that David calls upon all of the creation to worship and bless the Lord. "Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul!" (Psalm 103:20–22, ESV) And yet in all of his exhortation, he returns again to preaching to himself first. David never wants to forget this truth of God's grace showered upon him and upon us and that is why he preaches to himself and to us as he does. Now go back with me to the first two verses of this Psalm to see how intensely personal this is for David and how it is that we must respond.

The Response of a Soul Awakened by God's Grace (1-2) David writes: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits," (Psalm 103:1–2, ESV) David preaches to his soul to bless and worship and praise the Lord. He preaches to himself because he knows that he must. We are all so prone to forget God, so prone to take his grace for granted, so prone to wander and to leave the God we love.

Think about how easily we are distracted from what really matters – black/blue or white/gold dress... But, even more, what gets in the way of a holy obsession with God is our own obsession with ourselves. Sociologists have called this the “Narcissistic Age” -- like the Stone Age, Iron Age, Agricultural Age, Industrial Age. And they are right. Some much of our lives are consumed with ourselves, with trying to make ourselves praiseworthy, trying to get people to bless us, to exalt us, to extol us. We broadcast our lives so people will be impressed with us. That one of the best selling products in America is a “selfie stick” ought to tell us something. But it is not only self-obsession, we are expected to pretend to be as obsessed with our friends lives. Honestly, there is only so much obsession to go around. We have a massive fixation upon ourselves and here is the truth – you worship what you are fixated upon.

Do you see how David preaches to himself? That all that is within him, everything that is in him –with intensity, with vigor, with fervency, with passionate energy -- would bless the Lord of goodness and grace. His desire is “Let every thought and every word bless the Lord by their truthfulness. Let every action bless the Lord by its integrity. Let my conscience bless the Lord by its faithfulness. Let my judgment bless the Lord by making decisions according to His word. Let my desires bless the Lord by seeking only His glory. Let my affections bless the Lord by loving Him and loving what He loves. Let my thoughts bless the Lord by meditation upon His excellence. Let my imaginations bless the Lord by pure and holy contemplations. Let my hope bless the Lord by looking to the glories yet to be revealed. Let my memory bless the Lord by forgetting none of His benefits and blessings.” It is a wholehearted response.

Ours must be the same. We must bless God individually -- it is the calling for all of us who have tasted the graces and blessings of God, who have known what David so eloquently describes in this psalm. We must bless him fervently --- not with lip service or by attending church, but with our whole soul. To bless someone, to praise them, in Biblical terms, is the expression of the warmest affections of the soul. Just as we are to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, so must we bless Him with all of our faculties and powers – with our whole man. And we must bless God incessantly – we should make ourselves always prepared, always in the posture of praise, preaching to ourselves, as it were, so that we do not fail to stir our own souls up to bless the name of the Lord.

My heart resonates with the words of Charles Spurgeon when he says: “Brothers and Sisters, either do not pretend to praise God at all, or praise Him with all your might! If you are Christians, be out-and-out Christians, or let Christianity alone; none hinder the glorious Kingdom of Christ so much as these half-and-half men and women who blow hot and cold with the same breath! My Brethren, be thorough! Plunge into this stream of life as bathers do who dive to the very bottom, and swim in the broad stream with intense delight. Do this, or else make no profession... If we are always blessing the Lord, this will save us from murmuring—the spirit of discontent will be ejected by the spirit of thankfulness, and this will also deliver us from laziness, for if all our powers magnify the Most High, we shall scorn the soft couch of ease, and seek the place of service, that we may bring more honor to our Master. Nothing beautifies a man like praising God!” Beloved, here is the truth: a heart full of thoughts about the glory of who God is and of His magnificent grace to us who are unworthy can no more conceive of an end to that praise than it can conceive of an end of God. May we all preach to ourselves these words: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,” (Psalm 103:1–2, ESV)

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