

Our Gracious God

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 103.

And we're going to go through the whole Psalm, but if we just read again at verse 1, where David says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

I want to begin this evening by asking the question, who is the God of the Bible? Who is the God of the Bible?

Because in our modern world, many people say that if there is a God at all, the God of the Bible is a cold, harsh God who predestines people to heaven and hell.

And many say that the God of the Bible is oppressive, he's overbearing, he's a bully, he's a dictator. And he's all these things because he takes away our fun and he tells us how to live and he asks us to live in submission to him.

[1 : 19] But you know, when you and I read the Bible, that's not the description we're given of the God of the Bible. And that's not the description David gives to us here in Psalm 103.

Because David describes the God of the Bible as a gracious God. A God who does not deal with us as we deserve, but a God who deals with us in his mercy, his grace, and his covenant love.

But you know, when we read the Bible, we not only struggle to see how people can think that the God of the Bible is cold and harsh. What many of us struggle with is that we believe, what we struggle with is that the God of the Bible is that gracious towards sinners such as we are.

We struggle with how gracious God is. Because more often than not, what we struggle with is the fact that God would love us and that God would care for us and that God would be so patient with us despite our sin and all our shortcomings.

What we often struggle with is the fact that God is so gracious that we realize that we're not worthy of his grace. And that when we see our sin and we see all our feelings and the times that we've let down the Lord and the things that we've done and said against the Lord, we think to ourselves, I'm not worthy of his grace.

[2 : 44] I'm not good enough for God to be so gracious to me. But you know, my friend, what we have to remember about the God of the Bible is that his grace is extended to us not because of who we are, but because of who he is.

And this is what we need to rediscover. This is what we need to learn if you've never learned it before, that the God of the Bible is a gracious God. He's a gracious God who doesn't deal with us as we deserve.

No, despite our sin, he loves us in Christ and he deals with us in his grace. And you know, that's why David opens Psalm 103 and he exhorts to his own soul.

He says, bless the Lord. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. And we've come across this word bless many times before.

It's a significant word and it's repeated throughout the Psalm. But it's a word that literally means to kneel. And it's used in the sense of kneeling before a king and reverence and humility.

[3 : 52] And the image that the word bless should always highlight for us is that it's this image of a king standing up from his throne. And we are kneeling in the king's presence.

And we're kneeling on our knees, head bowed, our hand outstretched. And we are receiving something from the hand of the king that we don't deserve.

And yet the king is graciously giving to us. He's graciously and freely giving to us what we don't deserve. He's blessing us. Because blessing, it only comes from the gracious hand of the king.

Blessing comes from the hand of this gracious and merciful king. Because to be blessed is to receive something you don't deserve. To be blessed is to be shown undeserved favor.

To be blessed is to be graciously given a gift. Therefore God blesses us when he gives to us something we don't deserve. And this is the thing.

[4 : 50] We bless God when we humbly acknowledge that what we are receiving from the gracious hand of the king is what we don't deserve.

God blesses us. And we bless God. And that's what David is doing in this psalm. As he acknowledges the God of the Bible as a gracious God.

He's humbly acknowledging God's gracious acts towards him personally. David is kneeling before the king. You can just imagine him kneeling before the king in submission and reverence.

And from the depths of his soul, he's thanking and praising the Lord for being so gracious to him. And you know, that's how we ought to be. We ought to come before the Lord on bended knee, our head bowed and our hand outstretched.

Receiving from the Lord what we do not deserve. We ought to bless the Lord. Because he's so gracious to us. In fact, in this psalm, David says there are five ways in which the God of the Bible graciously deals with us.

[5 : 53] It's a wonderful psalm. So first of all, David says that our gracious God redeems. He redeems. Look at verse 2. David says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

And so as David kneels before his covenant king, Jesus Christ, with his head bowed and his hand outstretched, David is thanking and praising the Lord, that the Lord has not dealt with him according to his sin, but the Lord has dealt with him according to his grace.

And that the Lord is graciously giving to him, to David, what he doesn't deserve. And what we have to remember is that the Lord is the benefactor, and we are the beneficiaries of his grace.

We are the recipients of what the Lord has graciously and freely given to us. And in these verses, David describes all the benefits, which the benefactor bestows upon his beneficiaries, you and me.

In fact, David says in verse 2, he says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

David urges his own heart and soul to be thankful, and not to forget what the Lord has done in him and for him.

[7 : 25] Because David knew that the Lord has done in him and for him, exceedingly, abundantly, above all, more than he could ask or even think. And David is saying to himself and to us, Don't forget the Lord's benefits and blessings, which he has bestowed upon you.

He is the benefactor who has bestowed all these benefits and blessings upon his beneficiaries.

Don't forget it, he says. Don't forget what the Lord has done for you.

And you know what's so wonderful here, is that this is what the Lord graciously gives to everyone who bows their knee, and submits their life under the authority of King Jesus.

David says, These are the benefits, which the benefactor bestows upon all his beneficiaries. Those who come to the Lord, kneeling in humble submission, with their head bowed and their hand outstretched, this is what they receive.

And he gives this list, and we'll look at that in a second. But what we have to notice is that each and every one of these benefits that David mentions, they're mentioned to us as if they are given to us personally.

[8 : 35] Because when David speaks here, he's speaking in the singular. He's speaking personally, specifically, individually, towards this one person who's bowed before King Jesus.

And David is saying to us, This king is the only king who will give to you what you don't deserve.

And you know, I love the language that David uses here, because these benefits, which the Lord graciously bestows upon us personally, David says, They're not a one-off event.

They're not just for the moment. They're not here today and then gone tomorrow. No, he says, These blessings, these benefits, they continually flow to you every day of your life.

My friend, these benefits from our gracious God, they carry with them the promise of continual blessing. Where he, as it says in verse 3, He continually forgives all your iniquity.

He continually heals all your diseases. He continually redeems you from the pit. He continually crowns you with his covenant love and mercy. And he continually satisfies you with good.

[9 : 43] It's all continuous. It's not here today, gone tomorrow. It's every day of your life. And you know, this continual blessing, which the Lord graciously pours upon us, is that not what David confessed when he came to know the Lord as his shepherd?

David confessed, The Lord's my shepherd. I'll not want. I will lack nothing. Because the shepherd's provision is an abundant provision.

That's why David concluded Psalm 23 by saying, Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And when David says surely, he doesn't say it out of uncertainty or doubt.

David is saying with absolute certainty and surety, he's saying, It is with surety that goodness and mercy will continually follow me all the days of my life.

And in God's house forevermore, my dwelling place shall be. My friend, our God is a gracious God. And he's a gracious God because he redeems.

[10:51] But then secondly, we see that he renews. He renews. Look at verse five. He says, David, He satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

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.

Now, David, he praises the Lord because our gracious, merciful, and loving God, as he has said earlier, he forgives all our iniquity. He heals all our diseases.

He redeems us from the pit. He crowns us with steadfast love and mercy. And he satisfies us with his good things. But then David says, more than that. More than that.

Our gracious God renews us like the eagle. And you know, I love this illustration that David uses of being renewed like the eagle. Because it said that there's no bird that lives as long as the eagle.

[11:57] Eagles can live for up to 100 years, which is not only longer than any other bird, it's also longer than most people. But what's interesting is that the life of an eagle is not one of continuous vitality and strength.

They're not always soaring high. Because there are seasons. Seasons in the life of an eagle when they look old and tired and almost dead.

And during those seasons, it's said that the eagle pines in pain. And the eagle's beak, it becomes twisted and very sensitive. And the eagle can even find itself in places that are isolated and lonely and lacking.

You could say that there are dark seasons in the life of an eagle. But when an eagle molts and renews its feathers so that it looks young again, it's full of life and strength and then there's vitality, it's often said that in that action, the eagle's youth is renewed.

And the eagle is given this new lease of life. It's given a renewal and a revitalization in which the eagle is able to stretch out its mighty wings and rise high again.

[13:14] And you know, my Christian friend, there are times in the Christian life when we feel just like the eagle. There are seasons when we can feel spiritually young and we're walking so close to the Lord that we could almost touch him.

And we have the assurance of his word. We have the joy of the Lord being our strength, our cup is just running over. There are times where we have these seasons where prayer seems easy.

Reading the Bible is enjoyable. Going to church is a delight. Being with the Lord's people is just a blessing. My friend, there are seasons in the Christian life when we're soaring high just like the eagle.

But as you know, there are other times like the eagle when we feel weak and tired and worn out. We're pining like the eagle. We're sensitive without faith.

We feel isolated from the church. We're lonely as a Christian. We feel that we're lacking strength and vitality that we once enjoyed.

[14:20] There are seasons in the life of the Christian where we're tired of fighting against sin and the devil. Tired of the divisions within the church. Tired of all the opposition from the world. Tired of all the weaknesses of our own flesh.

There are seasons where we're worn out and we just want to wind down and ease off and let others take over. And yet David reminds us here that that's not what the Christian life is about.

Because we're told that the Lord works righteousness. That's what he says in verse 6. The Lord works righteousness. He gives guidance and direction like he gave to Moses and the people of Israel.

The Lord reminds us that he's still merciful. He's still gracious. He's still slow to anger and abounding and steadfast covenant love. My friend, the Lord gives to us the dark seasons in our life in order to renew us.

Because we don't bow our knee to King Jesus and receive from him all these blessings and benefits which we don't deserve. We don't bow before the King just to bow out.

[15 : 26] No, we focus our minds upon our gracious God and remind ourselves that in Christ we are blessed. We are to remind ourselves what we are in Christ and what we have received in Christ and that our gracious God he continually forgives all our iniquities.

He heals all our diseases. He redeems us from the pit. He crowns us with his covenant love and mercy. He satisfies us with his good things. The Lord continually pours his blessings upon us not so that we will bow out but so that we will be renewed and revitalized and re-energized like the eagle. My friend, the Lord gives to us seasons like the eagle so that we will rise up again with fresh wings, renewed feathers and soar like the eagle and serve the Lord with more passion and more purpose. And you know, don't you just love those words at the end of Isaiah chapter 40. Isaiah writes, Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, he neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak and to those who have no strength. He increases their strength. Even though youths, he says, shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall.

[16 : 51] But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

My friend, our God is a gracious God. And he's a gracious God because he redeems, he renews, and then thirdly, he removes.

He removes. Look at verse 9. We're told that he will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. As far as east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. And so as David continues to praise and thank the Lord because his God is a gracious, merciful, patient, and loving God.

[17 : 56] And he's a God who forgives all our iniquity, heals all our diseases, redeems our life from the pit, he crowns us with his covenant love and mercy, satisfies us with good things, and he renews us like the eagle.

But more than that, David says, our gracious God, he does not deal with us according to what we deserve, he deals with us according to his grace. And with this David, he emphasizes to us just how merciful, gracious, patient, and loving the Lord really is.

Because he says in verse 10 that the Lord doesn't deal with us according to our sin. And he doesn't repay us according to our iniquities. In other words, my friend, with the Lord, it's not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

With the Lord, it is grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. When we bow our knee before the Lord, when we live in submission to him with Jesus as our king, the Lord doesn't deal with us according to what we deserve.

He deals with us according to his grace. And you know, that's what Paul emphasized to the Ephesians. In Ephesians chapter 2, after telling them how sinful and rebellious we are as sinners, Paul says, but God who is rich in mercy for his great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, he hath quickened us together with Christ.

[19 : 29] Then he says, by grace are you saved through faith. It's not of works. It is the gift of God. My friend, this is the wonder of our salvation that the Lord doesn't deal with us according to our sins.

He doesn't repay us according to our iniquities. He deals with us in Christ according to his covenant steadfast love. And listen to what David says about God's gracious love towards us.

He says that it's immeasurable, inexhaustible, and incomprehensible. He says in verse 11, he says, for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him.

David says, no one can measure the distance between heaven and earth. No one can measure it because it's immeasurable, it's inexhaustible, it's incomprehensible.

And David says, that's what the love of our gracious God is like. His covenant steadfast, unwavering, unchanging, unfailing love is immeasurable, inexhaustible, and even

incomprehensible.

[20 : 40] We can't get our minds around it. I'm sure you all remember the children's hymn, that Jesus' love is very wonderful. Maybe you sang it as a child or maybe to your children, where it says that the wonderful love of Jesus, it's so high, you can't get over it.

It's so low, you can't get under it. It's so wide, you can't get around it. Why? Because it's wonderful love.

It's the wonderful love of Jesus. And that's what David is reminding us tonight. The love of our gracious God is immeasurable. It's inexhaustible.

It's incomprehensible. But you know, David, he doesn't leave it there. Because having described the love of our gracious God as a love that's as high as the heavens are above the earth, David then says that that love of God is such that when we bow our knee in submission to Him, and when we confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, our gracious God removes our sin as far as east is distant from the west.

And what can be said about the east and the west? Never the twain shall meet. They shall never meet.

[22 : 04] My friend, the forgiveness of our gracious God is that when we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But you know, the Lord not only forgives us our sin and cleanses us from our sin, He removes our sin never to see it again. And you know, the imagery that David is using here is what took place on the Day of Atonement with the scapegoat.

We're all familiar with the term scapegoat. It's used nowadays for the person who takes the blame for something that they didn't do. But the scapegoat, it's a biblical concept because on the Day of Atonement, the priest, he would confess all the sins of the people upon the head of the scapegoat and the scapegoat would be led away into the wilderness bearing the sins of the people never to be seen again.

And that's what our gracious God has done for us because Jesus is our scapegoat. He came, as Isaiah 53 says, to bear our griefs, to carry our sorrows.

Jesus came to carry our sorrows away from us, to cast them away, to carry them, even as Isaiah says, into the depths of the sea. My friend, our gracious God removes our sins from us as far as east is distant from the west.

[23 : 36] That's how far he moves. He casts our sins away from us into the depths of the sea and he remembers our sin no more. And you know, I love that illustration.

Maybe you've seen it yourself. That when the Lord casts our sins into the depths of the sea, there's a picture of the sea and there's a sign beside it that says, no fishing.

No fishing. We're not allowed to fish for our old sins and bring them back up. Because if the Lord has forgiven us and if the Lord has cleansed us and if the Lord has removed our sins from us as far as east is distant from the west, if the Lord has cast our sins into the depths of the sea, never to be seen again, never to be remembered again, then we ought to do the same.

If we have given it to the Lord, we leave it with him. We leave it with him. My friend, our God is a gracious God. And he's gracious because he redeems, he renews, he removes.

And then fourthly, he remembers. He remembers. It says in verse 13, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

[24 : 54] For he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. 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.

As David continues to praise and to thank the Lord because he's saying he's a gracious, merciful, patient and loving God who forgives all our iniquities, he heals all our diseases, he redeems us from the pit, he satisfies us with good things, he renews us like the eagle, he loves us as high as the heavens, he removes our sin as far as east as distant from the west.

And then David says that the love of our gracious God is so personal, so caring and so compassionate because it's a paternal love.

It's the love that the parent has for their own children. And well, if you're a parent, you'll know that that love is unconditional, it's unchanging and it's unrestricted love.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. But you know, like a father who loves his children so personally and is caring and

compassionate towards them, David says in verse 14 that the Lord knows our frame.

[26 : 22] like little children, the Lord, even as we saw this morning with little Donnie, like little children, the Lord knows that we're weak, the Lord knows that we have no strength of our own, the Lord knows that we're frail, he knows that we need to depend upon him for everything.

Like a father who loves his children, we're told the Lord knows us and loves us so personally, so intimately and so deeply. Why?

Because he's the one who made us. He's the one who made us. He remembers that we are dust. Our heavenly father remembers that like Adam we were made from the dust of the ground.

We were formed and fashioned in the image and likeness of our gracious God. And you know, I love the words of Isaiah's prayer in Isaiah 64 where Isaiah is praying and he says, O Lord, thou art our father and we are the clay and thou art potter that we are the work of thine hand.

And there are beautiful words that remind us that our heavenly father, he is the one who has molded us and shaped us and formed us and fashioned us for his own purposes and glory. But what's remarkable is that because our gracious God has redeemed us and renewed us and removed our sins from us, we are his.

[27 : 49] we are all his. We belong to him and our confession tonight is, O Lord, thou art our father. We are the clay and thou art potter.

We are the work of thy hand. But you know, the wonder of it all is that our gracious God remembers, he remembers that we are dust. Our gracious God remembers that from the dust we came and to the dust we shall return.

He remembers that we were made in his image and likeness, the image and likeness of our first parents, Adam and Eve. But we also, as we all know and as we've seen in even the past 24 hours, that we all possess the curse of their first transgression.

And you know, we see it all too often in our community. We're reminded of this reality that the wages of sin is death. David says in verse 15, 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. And you know, what David is saying here is quite startling because he's talked about the immeasurable and the inexhaustible and infinite greatness and glory of our gracious God.

[29 : 15] And yet he says here that we are the complete opposite. We're the complete opposite because our time, it's all measured. Our frame is exhaustible.

Our life is finite. As for many, he says, his days are like the grass. And you know, Moses, he used the same imagery in Psalm 90.

when he spoke about the shortness of time and the length of eternity. Moses said that our life, our life is like new grass. New grass that rises with the morning sun.

He says, it springs up in the morning and it's full of youth, full of strength, full of vitality. But it doesn't take long for the evening to come round. And when the evening comes, it all begins to wither, fade, and die.

And Moses says that even our days and years are numbered. We're finite. He says, they're 70 or if by reason of strength, they're 80. But whatever length of time we're given, he says, it's short.

[30 : 23] It's all temporal. It passes all too quickly. You know, it's no wonder Moses prayed, Lord, teach us to number our days that we might apply our hearts to wisdom.

But you know, it's the words of Asaph in Psalm 73. They give to us the confession of the Christian. Because you know, Asaph, despite knowing how weak and how frail he was, Asaph knew how gracious God is.

Do you remember what he said? My flesh and heart doth faint and fail. But God doth fail me never. What a confession to have.

My flesh and heart doth faint and fail. But God doth fail me never. Oh, my friend, our God is a gracious God. He's a gracious God. And he's a gracious God because he redeems, he renews, he removes, he remembers.

And lastly, and very briefly, he reigns. He reigns. Look at verse 17. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

[31 : 41] 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, it reveals to us the God of the Bible. And in it, we're reminded that the God of the Bible is a gracious, merciful, patient, and loving God.

He forgives all our iniquities. He heals all our diseases. He redeems our life from the put. He crowns us with steadfast love and mercy. He satisfies us with good.

He renews us like the eagle. He loves us as high as the heavens. He removes our sin as far as east is distant from the west. He cares for us as a father to his own children and he remembers that we are dust.

And David says that our gracious God, he does it all because he reigns. He does it all because he reigns. His throne is in heaven, he says.

[32 : 43] His kingdom rules over all. His reign is from everlasting to everlasting and his righteousness is extended to every generation.

It's to our children and our children's children. My friend, our gracious God reigns. And because of this, David concludes his psalm, his psalm of praise and thanksgiving, he concludes with this fourfold invitation to bless the Lord.

He calls all of God's creation, the angels, the heavenly hosts, his ministers or his servants, he calls the people and all of humanity to praise the Lord.

He says in verse 20, Bless the Lord, O you as 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. David calls all of creation. David calls you, my unconverted friend.

[33 : 54] David calls you to kneel down before King Jesus and bow your head before him and hold out your hand outstretched because the God of the Bible is a gracious God and he will give to you what you do not deserve.

He will be gracious with you. He's a gracious God and you know it's a wonderful psalm that reminds us that every one of us needs to bow before King Jesus and acknowledge that he is Lord to come before him on bended knee head bowed hand outstretched because he's a gracious God.

He's a gracious God because he redeems, he renews, he removes, he remembers and he reigns. He reigns.

My friend, our God is a gracious God. Our God is a gracious God but do you know him as your gracious God?

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, how we marvel at thy grace. We marvel, Lord, that thou are one who would pour out blessing upon blessing upon sinners such as we are.

[35 : 21] And Lord, help us never to think that we are worthy of it. Help us never to think that we are deserving of the least of thy mercies. But help us, Lord, to see that we are poor, bankrupt sinners that need thee and thee alone, the God of all grace, to give to us what we do not deserve.

Help us to come humbly each and every day, to come, Lord, confessing that we are utterly dependent upon thee. Come, Lord, enable us to come with our knee bowed and our hand outstretched, knowing that thou art the one who will give to us what we do not deserve.

Bless us, Lord, we pray. Bless us in the week that lies ahead, a week that is unknown to any of us, but known only to thee. Help us to commit everything into thy care and keeping.

For thou art our gracious God, who will keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore. Take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake.

Amen. I'm going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the concluding words of this psalm, Psalm 103.

[36 : 40] Psalm 103, page 370. We're singing from verse 19 down to the end of the psalm. The Lord prepared hath his throne in heaven's firm to stand, and everything that being hath his kingdom doth command.

O ye his angels that excel, in strength bless ye the Lord, ye who obey what he commands, and hearken to his word. Down to the end of the psalm, of Psalm 103, to God's praise.

The Lord prepared hath his throne in heaven's firm to stand, and everything that be in us his kingdom doth command.

O ye his angels not excel, in strength bless ye the Lord, ye who obey what he commands, and hearken to his word.

O bless and magnify the Lord, ye glorious hosts of his.

[38 : 32] He ministers not to fulfill what death his pleasure is.

O bless the Lord, told ye his words, wherewith the world is stored, in his dominions everywhere, my soul bless the Lord.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.