

Autumn 2025 Communion Preparatory Service

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Date: 19 September 2025

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Please turn with me now to Psalm 103 in the book of Psalms. Tonight I'd like to look with you at verses 13 to 14.!

And God willing, over these next few services between now and Lord's Day evening, we want to focus on the concept of remembering.

We're obviously aware that when we come to the Lord's Supper, we remember the Lord in His death. We remember Jesus and the death that He died at Calvary.

And in advance of that, I want to, this evening, begin looking at this reference to remembering, where the Lord remembers that we are dust.

But around that, He gives us so many precious things that we too have to remember as we see these wonderful verses surrounded by these other elements to do with God's mercy and graciousness and forgiveness and His longsuffering toward us.

[1 : 27] He remembers us. But He remembers us in our dustiness, in our fallenness, in our frailties, in our weaknesses, in our sinfulness.

And everything, you might say, is packed into the frame that's mentioned in verse 14. He knows our frame, not just our composition physically and mentally.

He knows our frame, including our thoughts and the actions of our souls. He remembers that we are dust. And if you look at these two verses together, you might ask, well, what's the relationship between them?

How should we study them? Well, one way of doing it, as we'll do tonight, is to see that verse 13 actually flows from what's mentioned in verse 14.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. And that emphasis flows from the fact that He's mentioned as one who knows our frame, who remembers that we are dust.

[2 : 38] In other words, it's the Lord's knowledge of us. It's the Lord taking account of what we are, who we are, and what we're like, that lies behind the compassion that He shows, as a father shows to His children.

The knowledge God has of us. The knowledge God has of us as sinners in our fallenness. The knowledge God has of us in our need of His forgiveness and of His salvation.

That is really from, it's from that that the other emphases there flow, the compassion He shows to His children, to those who fear Him.

First of all, then, we'll look at how God's knowledge is set out here as a knowledge of our condition in verse 14. He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.

Now, it's interesting when he says the psalmist here uses the word frame. He's using a word that goes back to Genesis chapter 2 and verse 7.

[3 : 38] In other words, he's really taking us back to the instance of our creation by God in the beginning as human beings, human life. Our form is something that was set by God in the wonder and in the precision of His creation of us as human beings.

We didn't come about by accident. We didn't develop from a primitive form into what we are nowadays by some sort of evolutionary process. We came about because God formed us.

God created us. God brought us into being. We didn't exist until He actually called us powerfully into existence, into being.

And He made us from the dust. If you go back to the first man and woman, the first man was called Adam, which is really the same pretty much as the Hebrew word for dust.

That dust from which God created us, He took of the dust of the ground, and from the dust of the ground, He formed a man. He formed human life.

[4 : 53] He formed a life distinct from and set above every other form of life out with God Himself. And we mustn't lose sight of that, despite the fact that we live in an age when so much is made of scientific discovery, and some of these are wonderful discoveries.

discoveries of our own circumstances, of our own condition, physically at least, as human beings. But nevertheless, all too often, the fact of our creation is left out of the picture.

And we're not at all taught that this is who we are because God created us this way. We are made from the dust. And all the way through the Bible, that is a reminder to us of how humble we should be in the presence of God.

Not only that He created us from the dust, but that He said in relation to our fall and our sin against Him, as He said to Adam, following Adam's sin against God, dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

Every time you attend a funeral, every time there's a death that reminds you of who you are and who I am, it takes us back to the teaching of the Bible, dust we are, and to dust we shall return.

[6 : 17] It doesn't matter what abilities God has given us. It doesn't matter what achievements we've reached in this life. It doesn't matter how high we're set in society.

It doesn't matter what a name we've been given by our society or by our peers or by the world. We are dust. The most important man or woman in human terms in the world tonight is dust.

And to dust they shall return. And we're reminded of that here in the psalm, that God knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.

But when He says that He knows our frame, the word frame, as we said, reminds us of God's careful crafting of us into being as human beings.

And how He put all the component parts of our being together so magnificently when He called us into being in the person of Adam, first of all.

[7 : 22] He created man from the dust. Not accidentally, not carelessly, not haphazardly, not in a way that left things to be done afterwards that God hadn't completed.

He formed us perfectly. All our faculties were carefully put together by the God who brought us into being.

Every single part as it fitted together when Adam was formed was exactly as it should have been. Exactly as God designed it to be.

Because He is the great designer. The designer of our being. I remember as a boy, I don't know where he got all the parts, but my father was not trained as such, but he was quite skilled in putting things like engines together and dabbling about with engines.

And he had a large marine engine, I remember it, in his barn. And he got different pieces for it from wherever he got them, I'm not sure.

[8 : 31] But eventually he put them all together, and actually it came one of these days to work. I remember he had a fuel tank stuck on the wall, a copper pipe going down to it, a huge flywheel on this thing, which was terrifying, when the engine started up.

And there it was, as it started up, thundering away on the floor of the barn, just shaking the place. He was a powerful engine. And I always stood in awe at the fact that my father got all these parts and he put them together, and this is the result.

It formed this wonderful, amazing, frightening engine. Well, God formed us from the dust.

He knew how to put all the components together, your mind, your conscience, your will, your feelings or affections, all the things that make you a human being.

God fitted together, and there was no sin until we fell. Remember that, you have to remember that a perfect humanity, as God created it, does not involve sin.

[9 : 51] Jesus was completely human. Body, soul, mind, everything, without sin. That's how we are ourselves when God created us.

He knows our frame. And there's a deliberate purpose. This is one of the wonderful things as well, that when we come to stand before God and stand in awe of His skill in putting us as human beings together, I know we're sinful now, and our human frame is affected by and corrupted by sin, our mind, our conscience, every part of us, but nevertheless, when you read what God did in forming human beings from the dust of the ground and putting it together so that a man was formed and He breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul.

The indescribable skill and purpose of God. I think purpose is one of the great words you have to remember when you think about human beings and what human beings ought to be and what they

were created for.

What was God's purpose in creating us? He made us in His image. He made us as His representatives in the creation.

He set human life above all other life in the creation so that we would bear that image for God and about God to the world around us. And that purpose is one of the most wonderful facts of our being created.

[11 : 31] We sang Psalm 139 and when we're thinking now about God knowing our frame, remembering that we are dust, you remember the psalmist there from the beginning of the psalm, is really looking at the perfect knowledge, the sifting knowledge that God has of Him and how He is brought to be confronted with that knowledge of God, that knowledge that reaches into His very soul.

But you remember how He said, I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made for you formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me when as yet there was none of them.

God had it in His mind. The plan was there. The purpose was there. Before we ever existed, God knew what we would be like. God knew why He was making us.

[12 : 55] Now we're told He remembers our frame. He knows our frame. And He made us with that deliberate purpose. He remembers that that's what we're like.

He formed us. He put us together with that deliberate design. Now you won't find that in a lot of textbooks or in a lot of what nowadays is passed off as human knowledge of themselves, human knowledge of the human condition or whatever it's called.

You won't find anything to do unless there's Christians writing specifically from a Christian point of view of the purpose of God or even the fact that God created us at all. Here is the Bible's teaching. We were created, formed, purposefully by God with His own design, with His own purpose, everything just as it should be to reflect Him, to live for Him, to commend Him to the world around us.

That deliberate purpose. And He remembers, He says, that we are dust. In other words, God bears in mind our weakness.

[14 : 06] He bears in mind what we are as sinful human beings and the flimsiness of our fallenness as well, of us and our fallenness.

And you know, the He in this short verse is emphatic, as David wrote this psalm. He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.

And as David contemplates here and elsewhere, everything else in the creation, every other form of life, everything else that God sees, everything else that God has brought into being, and as David comes to confess his own weakness and his sinfulness elsewhere, as well as alluding to it here, it's so comforting, it's so wonderfully uplifting, and so assuring, and so reassuring, that he emphasizes here, He knows our frame.

He remembers that we are dust. He remembers in such a way as makes provision for us. No one else would have done that. You look over a world of human beings, and in its fallenness, it's characterized by hatred, by lack of compassion so often, by being unmindful of other people out with ourselves.

God is never like that. He is mindful that we are dust. That's why the psalm speaks about his being slow to anger, merciful, gracious.

[15 : 43] He will not keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins. Why? Because he remembers what we're like. He remembers our frame. He knows our frame.

He remembers we are dust. He remembers and he knows with a flick of his little finger to put it respectfully, we would be gone out into the darkness of a lost eternity.

But he remembers that we are dust. And he remembers to the extent of what we are going to remember, God willing, on the Lord's day.

He remembers to the very extremity, to the very last detail of providing salvation for us. I think it was B.B. Warfield, that great American theologian, who was thinking of the Son of God in eternity before the incarnation, before he became one of us by taking our nature to himself, before being born of

the Virgin Mary in this world.

And Warfield's thought was, well, he said himself, this was a thought that he powerfully had come to mind. That the Son of God said within himself or even to the Father, I will go and I will die for these sinners.

[17 : 12] I will go and I will die for these sinners. What is it you remember on the Lord's day of a communion? You remember that.

You remember that the Son of God remembered us that we were dust, remembered us in our need, remembered us in our frailty and fallenness and sinfulness, remembered us in the way that we merited a lost eternity, that we merited the wrath of God forevermore.

And yet you come to realize that God remembered us. It was not to destroy us and give us what we deserve. We come to the Lord's table every time we come to the Lord's table and we don't just say, Lord, remember me.

We also say, Lord, thank you that you remembered me previously. That you remembered me by giving your Son to die for me.

Isn't that precious to yourselves? Isn't that precious to all the young folks here tonight as well? It's great to see them. Good to see them at pre-communion services and any other services.

[18 : 25] But this is really what the gospel says to us all, young or old. God remembers you and remembers you by giving you a Savior to embrace in the gospel.

God remembers that we are dust. He knows our frame. God remembers mercy, forgiveness, long-suffering. All of these packed into the remembering of God.

And secondly, God's exercise of His compassion. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him for He knows our frame.

As we said, verse 14 is really in a way what leads on to or gives birth to verse 13. And here is a father, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him.

Those of you who help with church camps or have done so over the past number of years will sometimes come across, sadly, children that don't really know what a loving father is like.

[19 : 38] And it's very difficult in running a camp or being a leader at camp to take a verse like this and try and impress upon these children what a loving father is like.

They've never known one. Maybe there's no father left in the home or the father may be a cruel tyrant who beats them. But for us who know the gospel, for us who live a stable family life, few things are more precious than loving parents.

Father, mother, one or both. And here is as a father, an ideal father, a father who's a proper father, shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him.

wonderful words here as well because for one thing, the pity of the Lord, the Lord's pity, the Lord's compassion, it's really a warm affection such as the warm affection a mother has for an infant child that she's just recently brought into the world.

That's the word in Hebrew and that's what it means. It's very, very close, in fact, to the Hebrew word in the Old Testament for womb, for a woman's womb where a child is formed before it's born into the world.

[21 : 06] Well, this word, pity or compassion, is very, very close to the Hebrew word for womb and it's for good reason because that's the greatest illustration in many ways of the compassion of God in a mother's or a father's compassion for their child.

There's a wonderful text in Isaiah. You'll be very familiar with it anyway, I'm sure. It's often quoted even in prayer. Isaiah 49 and verse 15 where the two matters are brought together, the woman's womb and the child that she has brought into the world.

It's to actually highlight the compassion of the Lord himself. You recall what it says, Isaiah 49 and verse 15. Can a woman forget her nursing child?

That she should have no compassion on the son of her womb. The word womb, the word compassion, closely together, that's making such an emphasis.

Can a woman forget her nursing child? It's most unnatural for a woman to forget or forsake the child, the infant she's brought into the world. It's very often or should be the opposite, isn't it?

[22 : 22] Lavishing such great love and concern and care for that child. Yes, he says, even these may forget, but I will not forget you.

I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me. Now you have all the way through Scripture that same wonderful emphasis on God's exercise of compassion, illustrated marvelously as a father shows compassion to his children, as a mother lavishes love and attentiveness on the child she has brought into the world, that infant that she suckles and nurses.

God is saying in spiritual terms and in even more perfect terms, that's what I'm like. That's what you must understand about me.

And it goes further than that. Another of the prophets in the Old Testament, Hosea, who spoke very much about the Lord's relationship to his people in terms of the Lord's love for his people, though Israel sadly spurned that love, and that's really the emphasis right through the book of Hosea.

But in Hosea 11, you have another illustration of this grand and wonderful love and compassion of God for his own people. Why do they make Bibles with pages that stick together so much?

[23 : 59] So Hosea chapter 11, still another one, and verses 1 to 4. When Israel was a child, God is speaking here through Hosea, when Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

The more they were called, the more they went away, they kept sacrificing to the Baals, they burnt offerings to idols. And in order to highlight the horribleness of Israel's departure from God, as he's putting it in those words, he goes on to say, Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk.

I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love. What's that a picture of?

It's a picture of a child coming to the point just where they're about to start walking. And you find a parent encouraging, father or mother, encouraging them to take their first steps.

What do they do? They actually place them, and they just move back a bit, but their hands, their arms are still stretched out towards the child, because the child is inevitably going to fall.

[25 : 13] And the parent is ready to catch that child. I, he says, God taught them how to walk. My hands were out towards them, teaching them the basics of relationship with me.

I was a father to them. I brought them into being as a people. In their infancy, they loved me. I took them out of Egypt. I taught them how to walk.

I set them on their way, but they have now spurned me. And it shows the horrible nature of sin.

It's not just sin against God. It's sin against this God, this loving God, this fatherly God, this God who has gone to such lengths as to remember that we, and is remembering that we are dust, to provide for us, to teach us, to be long-suffering toward us, to forgive our sin, to cleanse us, to set us on our way in righteousness.

How often God, if he's thought about it all in our society, and how often you'll find people coming to see, to say things in relation to some event that's happened that's difficult to take on board something like poverty, or some disaster, or other, where lots of people lose their lives, and sadly, so many people will say, well, surely you don't believe in God when you see something like that happen, children suffering, children starving.

[26 : 50] Surely you don't believe in the God of the Bible. If you do believe in God, it's not that God, surely, because the God of the Bible, we're told, is something of a tyrant. He's very stiff. He's very distant.

He's very removed from the ordinary things of human life anyway. Surely you don't believe in that God. I believe, as I know you believe, and I hope you believe, in the God who remembers that we are dust.

Who doesn't stand at a distance shouting instructions to us and expecting us just to get on with life? We believe in a God who came into this world and came into this world in the form of humble servants in the person of Jesus Christ, His Son.

That's His remembrance of us. That's the length He has gone to remember us in our need and to set us on the way of righteousness and holiness of life.

He remembers we are dust. He shows compassion to His children. That caricature you see of God in the world, you know it's false. And yet it's so difficult to try and draw people's minds to the biblical God, the biblical God of love, of compassion, of long-suffering, of forgiveness.

[28 : 10] The God who remembers that we are dust. And as for those who fear Him, He shows compassion to His children. The compassion, the passionate compassion of a mother for their child.

The Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. To fear the Lord is not to run away from Him and be afraid. Somebody once said, Lord, I thank You that I can't run away from You because You're everywhere anyway.

but I can run into You. I can find You as my refuge. I can come to You and appeal to You to be my Father.

He shows compassion to those who fear Him. The fear of the Lord, as the book of Proverbs say, the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of knowledge. The first principle of knowledge is the fear of the Lord.

What is the fear of the Lord? Well, in a word, it's the respect that we owe to Him. It's standing in awe of His majesty, of His greatness, of His love, of His remembrance.

[29 : 24] That's not something, none of this in these verses is something you stand and look at without being deeply affected by it in your inward parts. It's something that moves us and moves us to shame at times for how little we love Him when He remembers that we are dust.

To those who fear Him, we want an example of what a good parent is like. Well, this is where you go. You don't start with human parenthood because even the best parents in this world have some flaw or other, some inconsistency or other.

When you want ideal parenthood, the apex of parenthood, perfect parenthood, you find it in God as the Father of His people because every aspect of their need He meets exactly.

It shows in our obedience to Him, verse 18, that fear of the Lord, where it speaks there of those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments.

You know, some people think that Christianity is about keeping a set of commandments and rules and that all Christians are doing really is just out of fear or out of a slavish observance of what they see in the Bible.

[30 : 53] They just do their best to keep these commands and it just stifles life. Why do we keep the commands? Because we love the Lord.

We love the Lord because they're His commands. And when we love the Lord, we love everything that's like Him. And whatever the world thinks of the commands of God, even as they're summarized in the Ten Commandments, the commands are a reflection of God's being, of God's will, of what God is like.

That He remembers we are dust, He has given us commands to keep as a loving response to His remembering. We don't earn the favor of God.

We don't keep His commandments so that He'll turn around and then say, now that you've done this, I can begin loving you. That's not how it works. If it were, it would never happen.

Because we would never earn the love of God. God so loved the world. That's the beginning of things. That He gave His only begotten Son.

[32 : 09] And as God so loved the world, as God remembers that we are dust, as God provided a Savior for us in Jesus Christ, so tonight the gospel, as the message of the gospel, throughout the gospel message, throughout the Bible, says to you, what is your response to the graciousness of God?

To God in His greatness, remembering such as we are. this great God. Think of how the Psalms express the greatness of God above the whole creation that He has brought into being.

Think of all the polemic passages of the Old Testament. That is, passages that really set out in favor of God being God against all the idols in the world.

And you go to Genesis chapter 1, and perhaps you don't think of Genesis chapter 1 as a polemic, but as you go through Genesis chapter 1, what you find is, all the pagan so-called gods are set out there.

The sun, the moon, the stars, whatever else. God made them. They're not gods. They are the work of His hands.

[33 : 22] And all the way through the prophets of the Old Testament, you find the prophets ridiculing, idolatry for what it is. an affront to God, a neglect of the truths of God having created His people.

And Jesus is the perfect example to us of what it is to fear the Lord in obedience and in a loving regard for the ways of God that He expressed in terms of His relationship to His Father.

You remember Luke chapter 2 where His parents, mother and father, had gone to look for Him and had gone to, on that journey, they thought He was lost in the crowd, so they traveled on without

Him.

And then they realized He wasn't there. And they couldn't find Him. Where did they find Him? They found Him in the temple. What was He doing in the temple? He was teaching the doctors of theology.

And He was teaching them about this place, this temple, this Father's house, this Father's business. And when He was scolded, in a sense, by Mary, Joseph, as to why He had not carried on with them, why He had gotten lost, as it were, you remember His famous response, do you not realize that I must be about my Father's business?

[34 : 58] Now, there's the grandeur of Jesus. Yes, He's there as the servant of the Father. He's about the Father's business. He's still the Son of God. He's still the Creator. Don't lose sight of that.

But then within a couple of verses, what does it say? He went home with them and was subject to them. He was subject to them.

He was an obedient Son, even though He was the Son of God. There is perfect humanity, perfect relationship to God, a perfect example of the fear of God, to live in respect to the requirements of God, even for the Son of God in our nature.

And that is the Father we meet with as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The same God is mentioned here 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. And that care of God will go on not only through this life for God's people, but on through eternity itself.

[36 : 24] Because when you come to the book of Revelation and you come to the descriptions of heaven in Revelation 21 and 22, one of the references there is very much of a parent showing compassion to a child.

What does it say? It says, that God Himself shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

You know what it's like for a child who's fallen and scraped their knee or injured themselves, having been out playing or whatever. They come home, tears.

What does a mother or father do? They just take their finger and wipe away the tears and reassure them and clasp them and assure them that everything's okay. I see that's an image of God.

An image of God saying to His people, as it were, all the way throughout eternity, assuring them, it's all right. I'm here and you're mine.

[37 : 28] Nothing will ever hurt you again. He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. Imagine it. The finger that brought the world into being, metaphorically speaking.

This immense God, we think of it metaphorically, whose hands fashioned and formed the universe earned your own place in it. And yet, for all that greatness, these immense, giant hands of God are so delicate, so precise, so careful in wiping your tears and assuring you all is well.

And nowhere, nowhere is that better confirmed for us than in the Lord's Supper. Because that's where you remember the Father's loving provision through His Son of life for us and of assuring us as He does tonight and through the supper itself.

I have done all this for you. Now you must do this for me in remembrance of me.

May God bless these thoughts to us. Lord, our God, we give thanks for Your Word and we give thanks for the assurance Your Word gives us of the compassion You show to Your children and of the way that that compassion never fails.

[39 : 04] And we thank You tonight, O Lord, that we can come to You knowing that all of these things are true and that they will never be changed, that You are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So bless us then, we pray now, as we continue to wait upon You and help us to sing Your praise in conclusion with thankfulness and with a loving heart for Jesus' sake.

Amen. We're going to conclude now by singing in Psalm 103, the psalm we've been looking at in our study this evening. We're going to sing verses 13 to 18.

Such pity as a father hath unto his children. Dear, this is in the Scottish Psalter. Such pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear. For he remembers we are dust and he our frame well knows. Frail man, his days are like the grass as flower in field he grows. 13 to 18 on page 370. Such pity as a father hath. such pity as a father hath hath not to his children dear.

[40 : 20] Like pity shows The Lord to such as worship Him in fear For He remembers we are dust And He our frame well knows Thrill on His days are like the grass As far in fields He grows For over

it the wind doth pass And it away is gone

And of the place where once it was It shall no more be known But unto them not do Him fear God's
mercy never ends And to their children still His righteousness extends To such as keep His
covenant

And mindful are all way Of His most just commandment That they may them obey Now may the
grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be
with you now and evermore Amen Amen