

Who are We?

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[0 : 01] But 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, the book of Psalms, the book of Psalms in Psalm 103.

Psalm 103, as I said, we're going to look at the second half of this psalm this evening. But if we read again just at verse 14, Psalm 103 at verse 14.

For he that is the Lord, he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. He knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust.

As you know, we just sang the opening words of Psalm 92. And Psalm 92, it's a beautiful psalm which has the title, as I mentioned, A Psalm or a Song for the Sabbath Day.

A Psalm or a Song for the Sabbath Day. And it was given that title because Psalm 92 is all about how we should appreciate the Sabbath as a day of rest, and also how we should approach the Sabbath as a day of worship.

[1 : 17] Because the psalmist says, as we sang there, to render thanks unto the Lord. It is a comely thing. And to thy name, O Thou Most High, due praise allow to sing.

Therefore, we should appreciate and approach the Sabbath with an attitude of gratitude as we worship together on the Lord's Day. But our worship isn't just to be confined to the morning service.

Because worship on the Lord's Day, as the psalmist says, it's intended to be both morning and evening. Therefore, we're missing out if we're only in church one end on the Lord's Day.

Because throughout the history of the Old and the New Testament church, God's people gather together to worship both morning and evening. Which is why the psalmist, in his song for the Sabbath day, he said in Psalm 92, Thy lovingkindness to show forth when shines the morning light, and to declare thy faithfulness with pleasure every night.

Both morning and evening. The psalmist emphasizes that we are to appreciate and approach the Sabbath with this attitude of worship. We're to gather together to worship on the Lord's Day, both morning and evening.

[2 : 31] Because we're to show his lovingkindness in the morning, and declare his faithfulness in the evening. And in many ways, that's what we're seeking and striving to do here today with Psalm 103.

Because as we saw this morning, Psalm 103, it's a song of thanksgiving. It's a song of thanksgiving in which David, the psalmist, the singer, he's the songwriter of the psalm, and he praises the Lord and blesses the name of the Lord for all his good and all his gracious benefits.

And as we said, David does this by asking and answering two questions. Two questions. The first question is, Who is God? And then, Who are we?

Who is God? And who are we? And David, he helpfully split this song of thanksgiving into two sections in order to answer those questions. Who is God?

And who are we? And he says, as we mentioned, he says, God is gracious, and David is dust. God is gracious, and David is dust.

[3 : 33] And so this morning, we considered verses 1 to 11 of Psalm 103, and we were asking and answering the question, Who is God? And from those verses 1 to 11, David set before us a declaration about God, a description of God, and a demonstration from God.

The declaration that David says, Bless the Lord, O my soul. The description, he has given us so many benefits and blessings that reveal who he is, and then that demonstration of his love.

But now as we come to the second half of the psalm, verses 12 to 22, David is asking and answering the second question. Who are we? Who are we?

And David wants us to consider this question by setting before us three C's. The comparison, the consideration, and the call.

The comparison, the consideration, and the call. So first of all, the comparison. The comparison. Look at verse 11. David writes, For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him.

[4 : 40] As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

Now, when I was in school, my least favorite subject was English. I hated English.

I loved maths, I loved physics, I loved chemistry, I loved tech, but I really didn't like English. So, children, you have to like English, okay? English is a good subject. But I could never get my head around the proper use for paragraphs, and even the proper use for punctuation.

So if you ever read anything I write, the punctuation is terrible. And it wasn't actually until I went to the Free Church College, and had to learn Greek, that I finally understood the difference between a verb and an adverb, a pronoun and a noun, and even an adjective, and what a participle actually is.

And John Angus, who was with us last weekend, he had a terrible time with us. But one of the things I do remember from school, and my English, what I learned in English class, was when a comparison is being made using a simile.

[5 : 53] And I always remember the word because it looks like the word smile. So it's a simile. A simile, as you know, it uses the words like or as to make a comparison. And in the middle of Psalm 103, boys and girls, in the middle of verses 11 to 13, David uses three similes using the word as.

He says there in verse 11, 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 distant from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

And as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. Now as you can see, this is the middle of Psalm 103, the psalm of thanksgiving, which in many ways, it's the turning point of this psalm.

Because David, he's moving away from focusing upon who God is to now focusing upon who we are. And David makes this transition from who God is to who we are using these three similes, these three comparisons that emphasize and explain who God is.

We touched on the first simile this morning when we consider the first half of the psalm. Where David, he's reading his Bible, he's reflecting upon who God is and his response, as we said, it's a response of praise and thanksgiving where he blesses the Lord.

[7 : 16] He blesses the Lord. He says, Bless the Lord, O my soul. And David does this because he knows that the God of the Bible has made himself known. He's a God who has made himself known and wants to be known and wants us to know him.

And he's not only revealed himself in a sovereign way through creation and in a special way through his word, but he's also revealed, as we saw this morning, he's revealed himself in a specific way through the person of Jesus Christ.

Which is why David worships the Lord with his whole being. His whole being. He sings, 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. David blesses God in acknowledgement and appreciation and even adoration as to who God is because he knows that far too often we forget all these benefits.

We forget all these blessings. Far too often we don't count our blessings that God has graciously, lovingly, and mercifully given to us from the hand of King Jesus.

[8 : 27] which is why David, he calls us in this psalm to count your blessings. Name them one by one. And then you'll see what the Lord has done.

Because our God, as David shows us and says to us, our God blesses us in abundance. Because, verse 3 onwards, he forgives us, he heals us, he redeems us, he crowns us, he satisfies us, and he does it not because of who we are, he does it all because of who he is.

Because, as David says, verse 8, he's merciful and gracious, he's patient, and he's loving. And he's so loving that he does not deal with us as our sins deserve. Why?

Because his love is as high as the heavens are above the earth. His love is as high as the heavens are above the earth. And there's the simile.

There's the first comparison. Because just like the distance between heaven and earth is immeasurable and inexhaustible and incomprehensible, David says, so too is God's love that has been demonstrated towards us.

[9 : 38] It is immeasurable. It is inexhaustible. It is absolutely even incomprehensible. But, you know, the thing is, even though you can't evaluate God's love, even though we can't evaluate it, we can all experience it.

And we can all enjoy it. And I think we need to enjoy it a lot more than we do. That's why Paul prayed for the Ephesians. In Ephesians chapter 3, prayed that they would know, that they would know the length and the breadth and the depth and the height of God's love in Christ for them.

and that they would know it because he is able to do in us, said Paul, he's able to do in us and for us exceedingly, abundantly, above all, more than we can ask or even think.

You know, what a prayer to pray for one another. That we would know the length and breadth and depth and height of God's love in Christ for us. That's what David is singing about here in these similes.

Because he not only sings that we would know the height and depth of God's love. He also sings in his second simile, verse 12, that we would know the length and even the breadth of his love.

[10 : 55] It says, verse 12, as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Now, did you know that the distance all the way around the earth or the earth's circumference of the equator, it has a length, I don't know how they ever work this out, it has a length of 24,901 miles.

Which means, boys and girls, that the distance, wait for it, the distance between east and west, not all the way around, the distance between east and west is half that.

12,450.5 miles. But of course, when David sings this song with this simile in verse 12, that the Lord's love for us is such that he's not willing that any should perish, but that he's willing to remove our sins from us as far as east is distant from the west.

Literally, what David says there in verse 12, when you read it in its original language, David sings that the Lord, he's able to remove our sins from us as far as the sunrise is from the sunset.

[12 : 18] That's how far. As far as the sunrise is from the sunset. And of course, for David, it's not actually a distance that he's referring to, but the fact that east and west they will never, ever meet.

And David is singing about this wonderful fact that God is so loving that when we confess our sin, he is not only faithful and just to forgive us our sin, but he also flings our sin.

He flings it as far as the east is from the west. And what does he do with that sin? He remembers it no more. He remembers it no more.

It's not that he forgets it. He chooses not to remember it out of love for us. But you know, David doesn't stop there. He gives us another simile.

A third simile in verse 13, he says, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

[13 : 19] And with this third simile, David, he shows us that God's love is not only a limitless love for its height and depth and breadth, he also says that his love is a fatherly love.

It's a personal love. It's a paternal love. Because David is telling us about the God of the Bible and he says that the God of the Bible, he's not a cold and callous and cruel God.

No, he's caring. He's compassionate. And he's a concerned father. He's a good, good father. Because the Bible says he's the father of lights.

And he's the father of lights in our darkness. He's the father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He's a father to the fatherless. And he's a husband to the widow.

He's a good, good father because he's the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, it's no wonder the hymn writer ever said how deep the father's love for us.

[14 : 20] How vast beyond all measure that we should give, that he should give his only son to make a wretch his treasure. This is the wonder of who God is and God's love towards us.

And this is what David is singing about. He's singing with all these similes of comparison. And David is reminding us with each and every simile of how great our God really is.

But as David moves his focus from who God is then to who we are, as he's making this transition in the psalm, we see the comparison moving to the consideration.

The comparison becomes the consideration, which is what we see secondly, the consideration. So the comparison and then the consideration. Verse 14.

For, conjunction. He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. As for man, another simile, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field.

[15 : 26] For the wind passes over it and it is gone and its place knows it no more. You know, having read his Bible and having reflected upon who God is, David has considered the greatness and the vastness of God that he is, as our catechism teaches us, he is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

And it's all in his being, his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. The amazing thing about who this God is is that he's from everlasting to everlasting. He has no beginning and he has no end because he is the beginning and he is the end.

He is the alpha and the omega. He's not bound by the barriers of space or time or matter. He's not governed by all the changes and challenges that face all our circumstances and all our situations in our lives because with each and every one of them he remains the same.

Yesterday, today, and forever. As we said this morning from Psalm 139, he is omnipotent. He's omniscient. He's omnipresent.

He's omnibenevolent. He's all-powerful. He's all-knowing. He's in all places at all times and he's all of grace because he blesses us in abundance. He forgives us as David says there in verse 3.

[16 : 47] He heals us. He redeems us. He crowns us. He satisfies us. And it's all because he's loving and gracious and merciful and patient. And you know, the more David sings in worship about how big and how beautiful and how brilliant our God is, the more David then realizes that we are the complete opposite.

When he considers how big and how brilliant and how beautiful God is, he sees how small and how insignificant he is.

And you know, my friend, I don't know about you, but the more I study the Psalms, and we've looked at a number of Psalms over the years, but the more I study them, part of me thinks, and maybe this is just in my head, part of me thinks that moments in David's life are like a musical.

I'm sure you've watched different musicals before, but like moments in David's life were like a musical where all of a sudden he just bursts and breaks into song. And in my mind, one musical moment would have been that time when David, he was probably maybe stepping out onto the balcony of his palace in Psalm 8, and as he stands outside and looks up on a starry night and sees the moon and the stars, of course David, he wouldn't have maybe been as privileged as us to see the northern lights, but David, he had this musical moment as he stood in awe and adoration of God and he said, well, when I look up into the heavens which thine own fingers framed and to the moon and to the stars which were by thee ordained, then say I, what is man that he remembered is by thee or what the son of man that thou so kind to him shouldst be?

And my friend, when David considered how big and how beautiful and how brilliant our God is, he then saw how small and how insignificant we are.

[18 : 56] That's what David is singing about here because, well, he sings about the fact that you can't get much smaller than dust. You can't get much smaller than dust.

Now, as you know, in our cleaning and our cleanliness and our clean homes, we hate dust. We hate dust. And yet, David says, he remembers we are dust.

He remembers we are dust. And of course, with this, David's not bringing us into his dusty home. No, no. David is bringing us all the way back to the very beginning, to the Garden of Eden.

David is bringing us back to that moment when our Creator, he created us in his image and likeness by forming us and fashioning us from what?

From the dust of the ground. And as he formed us and fashioned us like clay on the potter's wheel, he then breathed life into us. But you know, when David mentions dust here in Psalm 103, when he considers who we are, he doesn't mention dust in relation to God's many blessings in life and God's beautiful moment of creation where he brought us into being.

[20 : 15] No, no. When David mentions dust here, he does so in relation not to blessing, but in relation to the curse, God's curse of death.

You remember when Adam and Eve, when they were deceived by the serpent in Genesis 3, and they disregarded God's commands and they then disobeyed God, they fell into any state of sin and misery whereby God not only cursed the very ground that they walked on, but God also cursed them.

Cursed us, solemnly saying to us, you shall return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust and to dust you shall return.

You are dust and to dust you shall return. And yet, verse 14, he knows our frame because he made us.

He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. Do you know what the sad and solemn reality is? We don't. We don't remember that we are dust.

[21 : 32] We don't remember that we are dust because we live our lives as if tomorrow is all planned and as if tomorrow is all promised. We live our lives thinking that we are strong and we are safe and we're all secure.

Everything's in place. We live our lives convincing ourselves that we're not really getting older and our lives are actually getting longer. We live our lives as if we are still a flower in the full bloom of summer.

And we try to forget by blocking it out or filling our lives with everything else we try to forget that the cold dark night of winter is actually coming.

But God doesn't forget. No, no. He knows our frame. He knows that we are frail. He knows that we're fragile. He knows that we're finite. We have a beginning.

We have an end. He knows that we're not a flower in full bloom because our days, as David says, they are like grass. Just like grass. David sings, we flourish like a flower in the field and it's only for a season.

[22 : 39] And you know, the longer you go on in life, the older you get in life, you think that this season is actually very short. And it's passing all too quickly. But we're only this flower in the field for a season and in no time at all, says David.

Verse 16, the wind just passes over it and it's gone. Gone. Gone. And its place knows it no more.

one of the hardest things of being a minister is standing over an open grave and being asked or being expected to say something.

And you know, to stand over an open grave and speak as we lay to rest the remains of a loved one, I'm always reminded that it's the most solemn thing that we do in life. There are many things that we do in life that are serious, that are sincere.

But standing over an open grave has to be the most solemn because we're actually fulfilling God's commandment and God's curse upon us.

[23 : 56] That from the dust we came and to the dust we shall return. The dust we came and to the dust we shall return. And yet those standing over the open grave laying to rest the remains of a loved one.

You know, the devil deceives us. I'm sure he does it with you because he does it with me. Because we foolishly think it'll never happen to you.

It'll never happen to you. You won't be next. But you know, this is why sharing the gospel is so important. This is why speaking to people about their soul is actually so urgent.

In fact, when God wanted to comfort his people and even confront them with the good news of the gospel, he commissioned his prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 40 to proclaim a message to them.

And what was the message he told them? What a message for the people to hear.

[25 : 13] And it's the same message that Peter proclaimed in the New Testament. The same thing. He said, this is the gospel we preach to you. All flesh is grass. All its beauty like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of our God stands forever. And you know, my friend, far too often, far too often we forget and fail to remember all the blessings and benefits that we receive from God.

But even more so, far too often we forget and fail to remember that we are dust. We are just dust. But you know, the amazing thing is God doesn't forget.

He remembers that we are dust. He knows our frame. He knows that from dust we came and to dust we shall return. But this word remember, I always love in the Bible how there are key words to note.

The word remember is a significant word in Scripture. In the Bible we're often told to remember things because we're, as you know, prone to forgetting. So we're told, as you know, the commandment, the fourth commandment, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

[26 : 31] Ecclesiastes chapter 11, remember, or I think it's chapter 12, chapter 12, remember your creator in the days of your youth. Jesus said to those in his day, remember Lot's wife.

The thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him. Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. We're repeatedly reminded in Scripture to remember things because we're prone to forgetting.

But when God remembers, when God remembers, it means that God is going to act according to his covenant of grace. When God remembers, it means that he's going to act in salvation.

When God remembered Noah, Genesis 8, verse 1, when God remembered Noah, the rain stopped and the ark rested. When Jesus remembered the thief on the cross, he woke up in paradise.

My friend, when God remembers, he works salvation. He acts according to his covenant of grace. And you know, the greatest act according to God's covenant of grace, the greatest act of salvation in this world was when God remembered that we are dust.

[27 : 36] because he so remembered us as dust. He so loved us as dust that he became dust in order to redeem and rescue dust.

He became dust in order to redeem and rescue dust. And my friend, this is the glory of the gospel here in the book of Psalms, that in the humiliation of Christ, God became man.

And by taking to himself our nature, our dusty nature, the Son of Man, he humbled himself from his crown of glory down to his cradle in Bethlehem and he kept going down, down, down, down to the cruel cross of Calvary.

He humbled himself from glory to Golgotha all the way down into the grave. But on the third day, on the Lord's day, on the day of worship, he rose triumphant over the grave and God has highly exalted him and given to him a name that is above every other name that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But tonight, Rabbi Duncan reminds us, as he once said, tonight, the dust of the earth is on the throne of the majesty on high.

[28 : 59] Think about that. The dust of the earth is on the throne of the majesty on high. My friend, God remembers who we are. He remembers that we are dust and as David sings, that's the message we must convey to our children and our children's children and the generations that are to come because he says there in verse 16, the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

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.

My friend, the message we are to convey and to present to those around us, to our children, our covenant children, is that God remembers we are dust and that he became dust in order to redeem us as dust.

He became dust in order to redeem and rescue dust and tonight we must direct our covenant children to the dust of the earth who is on the throne of the majesty on high.

We need to direct our children and our children's children and those in our families to Jesus. We need to direct them to the dust of the earth who is on the majesty on high.

[30 : 26] This leads us thirdly, finally, and briefly to the call. The comparison, the consideration, and the call. The call.

Look at 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. You know, as David comes to the conclusion of his song of thanksgiving, he concludes, actually, with a call to worship.

He concludes with a call to worship. Now, as you know, many ministers, they begin their worship service by reading a verse of scripture as a call to worship.

I've never been in the habit of doing it because, well, we sing psalms, which in many ways, they themselves call us to worship. And by singing Psalm 103, David has given us a call to worship both at the beginning and at the end of this song of thanksgiving.

[31 : 34] Because as we said before, this song is neatly split into two sections and it's beautifully bookended in verse 1 and in verse 22 with this call to worship.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. And then in verse 22, Bless the Lord, O my soul. You know, as David reads and reflects upon who God is and who we are, how does he conclude?

He calls to worship the whole of creation. He calls the whole of creation to worship and bless the Lord. He calls the whole of creation to acknowledge God and to appreciate Him and to adore the Lord for who He is and what He has done for us.

David calls, verse 20, all the angels, all the angels in heaven who veil their faces before the throne of God, crying, holy, holy, holy.

He calls them to worship the Lord. Bless the Lord, O you as angels, you mighty ones who do His word, obeying the voice of His word. Then David calls all of God's hosts, His armies, the hosts of heaven and all of God's servants throughout the world.

[32 : 47] He calls them to worship the Lord. Verse 21, Bless the Lord, all His hosts and His ministers who do His will. And then finally, David calls all people everywhere, the world over, everyone who is in God's kingdom.

What are we to do? Worship the Lord. Bless the Lord, He says, all His works in all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. You know, what a psalm. What a song. What a day of worship.

It's been a good day to worship the Lord. My friend, we've been called to worship Him because having read our Bible today, having reflected upon who God is and who we are.

What should be our response? Our response, as David has told us throughout this psalm, is to bless the Lord, to come on bended knee before this wonderful God and respond in praise and adoration for who He is and what He has done for us in and through Jesus Christ.

[34 : 17] Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless His holy name. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks this evening for reminding us who we are, who we are in the sight of a great God and a great King.

It is a marvel to us that in our smallness and the fact that we are so insignificant, that there were the God who would remember that we are dust, that He would know our frame, and that He would even provide for us a Savior through His Son, the Lord Jesus, and how He bids us and compels us to come to Him and to kneel before Him in praise and in worship and in adoration.

Lord, help us to respond to what the Lord is saying, to what the Lord is speaking to us. Help us never to leave church the way we came in, but always to leave knowing that it was good for us to be here and that the Lord is in this place.

So, Lord, bless us, we pray, even in the week that lies ahead. As we often say, it's a week that is unknown to us. But, Lord, we give thanks that it's known to Thee, to the God who knows everything about us.

[35 : 39] And, Lord, we ask that Thou wouldest go with us then into this week, that whatever is before us help us to know that the Lord is there. He is behind, before, and beside us. Do us good, and we pray.

Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to conclude our service this evening.

We're going to sing from that psalm, Psalm 103. in the Sing Psalms version, page 135. Psalm 103.

We're singing the second half of the psalm. We sang the first half of the psalm this morning. And so, we're singing the second half. Page 135, Psalm 103, from verse 12.

But before we sing, we have questions. Are you all awake? Ready and waiting? Good. Question one.

[36 : 41] There are three similes in Psalm 103. Where are they? Verses 11 to 13. Right? You'll have to shout your answers, right?

Shout your answers. So, verses 11 to 13. Question two. What is the distance from east to west? Glad you got the point five.

Well done. 12,450.5 miles. Question three. What does God remember about us? We are dust. And it's good for us to remember that too.

Question four. Having read and reflected upon Psalm 103, how should we respond? Praise the Lord. Well, that's what we're going to do. Praise the Lord.

So, we're going to sing. Well done, boys and girls. We're doing the questions. You did very well. We're going to sing that Psalm. Psalm 103. Psalm 103 from verse 12 down to the end of the Psalm.

[37 : 41] As far as east is from the west, so far his love has borne away. Are many sins and trespasses and all the guilt that on us lay. Just as a father loves his child, so God loves those who fear his name.

For he remembers we are dust and well he knows our feeble frame. So, we'll sing from verse 12 down to the end of the Psalm. We'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise.

Psalm 109. Thank you. Amen. As far as east is from the west so far his love has borne away, our many saints and trespasses and all the guilt that all must live.

Just as a father loves his child, so call us those who fear his name, for he remembers we are just, and well he knows our feeble claim.

And well he knows our feeble claim. Each human life is like the grass, and like a meadow flower it grows, this place will never be recalled.

[39 : 25] Once over it the tempest blows, but everlasting is God's love, for those who fear him and their sin, for those who keep his covenant, uncarefully is preceptive.

And carefully his peace emptied. God's kingly rule is over all, in heaven he has set his throne.

O you his angels, praise the Lord, strong ones by whom his will is done.

O praise the Lord, you heavenly host, his servants who perform his word, praise God his word, throughout his well.

And you my soul, oh praise the Lord. And you my soul, oh praise the Lord.

[41 : 06] 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.