

*A Study of Psalm 103*  
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*Monday, March 17, 2003*

How our souls long for intimacy with the Lord! We crave His presence more than an alcoholic does his next drink or a junkie his next fix. Some may find this to be a crass or inappropriate metaphor but as a recovering addict I find it rather fitting. I was so in tune with my spiritual emptiness that I attempted to fill it with anything I could. At the time I did not know the object of my need so as I tried to fill the spiritual vacuum with drink and smoke I actually ended up increasing the void in my soul. I knew that something was missing but without the rest of the information I just made matters worse. How important it is that we know the truth in it's entirety! David was a man who knew the importance of truth. His reliance on it can be strongly seen throughout his Psalms. He lived a life dependant on not only who God is but also how God is. David spent his time on earth seeking after God and building a life on the foundation of His character, this life of experiential truth indeed crescendos in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

All good authors know that you must begin a story strong; you must have a hook! David's first line of "Praise the LORD, O my soul" can often be mistaken as an ordinary statement when in fact it is a directive. He is commanding his soul, in fact his entire inmost being to praise the Lord's holy name. Yet, he does not just leave it there, he understands the importance of not just praising the Lord in spirit but in truth as well. He dialogues with himself regarding all that God has done for him, and by doing this he reminds himself of who God is.

He starts at a very appropriate place; the beginning. The first aspect of God's nature that David decides to remember is that He is the forgiver of our sins. This benefit is quite strategically placed at the beginning of his analysis of God's because with the forgiveness of our sins He has taken away that which kept good things from us, and we

are restored to the favor of the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Once this is established David is able to continue with his exposition on the benefits of God. These three successive couplets reveal God to be the one who heals all your diseases, redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with love and compassion, satisfies your desires with good things, and renews your youth like the eagles. Through these words David delivers beautiful imagery of one who is sinking in the pit of sin and disease and yet God pulls them out, brushes them off, fixes them up, and renews them back to the days of their youth as if they had never wasted one moment in that deep, dark pit so long ago. With the inclusion of these verses David not only discusses specific acts of God but he also shares with us an overall, encompassing character trait of the Lord: He gives in abundance beyond what is necessary. He does not just forgive our sins and leave their repercussions in our lives; he goes the next step and heals our disease. He does not just pull us out of the pit; He places us up on a throne. He satisfies our desires, which in itself is a true blessing, but He does it so that we may be renewed to our youth. He truly is the Lord who repays us for the years the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25)! He truly is a God of excessive love and abundant mercy!

In verse six there is a shift in the style of David's writing. It seems as though he begins to focus more on God's character and less on His benefits towards us. Of course we do benefit from His character but it seems as though his writing becomes much more God focused at this point. We are told of the Lord's righteousness and justice, and how he makes His ways and deeds known to His people. Then in verses eight through ten we are told a beautiful truth of God. In His compassion and grace we will find relief from His anger and accusations for He "does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us

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<sup>1</sup> Henry, Matthew; [Complete Commentary on the Entire Bible](http://www.crosswalk.com): online – [www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com)

according to our iniquities” (v. 10). These three verses show us that God’s benevolence implies no merit.<sup>2</sup> Sinners will be chastened for a time but they will experience His abundance of love for we do not receive that which we deserve.

Verses eleven through thirteen are conditional, parallel lines that introduce a well-known concept in regards to how we relate to God. The first and last of these verses describes the Lord’s immeasurable love and compassion but states that it is only expressed to those who fear Him. Sandwiched between these verses the author uses poetic license in order to tell us that our sins are further from us than we could ever know. Judging by the location of this line one can assume that the same condition applies as noted in the previously stated verses.

David now seems to return his focus back on man beginning in verse fourteen. He relates God’s love and compassion to the fact that He knows how we were formed and remembers that we are dust. In other words, God extends His love and compassion towards us because He knows we are weak, He knows we are but a blade of grass. Small and fragile, here one day and gone the next, never to be remembered by those left behind. He speaks in metaphors of how we flourish like flowers of the field but then the wind blows and we are gone. How quickly we bloom, only to turn to seed and be carried by the wind into a history of long forgotten days. Not even those we leave behind remember us, for more flowers will come and the wind will not cease its relentless pursuit. O, but what a beautiful comparison David puts forth in the seventeenth verse when he juxtaposes the fleeting days of man with the never-ending love and righteousness of the

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<sup>2</sup> Jamieson, Fausset & Brown; Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible: online – [www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com)

Lord! In fact, it is from everlasting to everlasting that the Lord's love and righteousness are with our children and us. From eternity past to eternity future we experience this treasure of God's love but again it is only expressed within His conditions; fear Him, keep His covenant, and obey His precepts. Yet, even within these conditions we find God's enveloping love. For it is by adhering to these statutes that we may live lives of peace, contentment, and true happiness.

David begins his conclusion with a reference to the Lord's throne. He states that it has been established in heaven and His kingdom rules over all. Thrones were generally elevated seats used by leaders to oversee their domain or territories. How appropriate for the Lord's throne to be established in heaven, the highest point that we know. In present day vernacular David would be saying that Jesus is "King of the Hill" or the "Top Dog" and all that is beneath Him is under His rule. Once this is understood the Psalmist can now move into his final four parallel verses.

Praise the LORD, Praise the LORD, Praise the LORD, *Praise the LORD* . . . structured repetition such as this commands attention from the reader and denotes the importance of the text. David has formatted these lines so that he instructs all things known to man, from the highest heavenly hosts to the depths of his own soul, to give praises to the Lord. No one is omitted, not even the least forgotten, all must submit their praise to God. David then employs the technique of Inclusion as he carves out the last six words of his offering - "Praise the LORD, O my soul". How such power can be wielded from such simple words. David started this piece strong, and he finishes strong. The inclusion of this last phrase provides two soul-piercing effects. First, these statements can almost be seen as bookends, bringing order and structure to all that is held between.

At a quick glance the reader knows the intention of the Psalm; it begins with praising the Lord and it ends with praising the Lord – chances are, it's all about praising the Lord. The second effect that this Inclusio provides is a sense of timelessness. It brings a circular structure to the Psalm where the end has become the beginning, and the beginning the end. You could almost see the reader getting lost amongst the lines, for once the end is reached one could simply return to the beginning turning its reading into a never-ending song of praise.

How blessed we are to have the realities of God captured in such a beautiful fashion. It is amazing how talented and intentional David was when writing these works. Poem after poem, song after song, as we enter into this world of yesteryear we experience the timeless truth that there has never been, and never will be, a greater muse than the Holy Spirit of God!