

Reading: Psalm 103

Theme: Praise the Lord.

Two writers in their book "Firm Foundations" (Peter Jeffrey and Owen Milton) use the idea of the book of Psalms being like a mountain range with 150 peaks and they call this Psalm *"the Everest of the Psalms"*. Charles Spurgeon compares the book of Psalms to the Alps and says that this *"has ever seemed to us to be the Monte Rosa of the divine chain of mountains of praise, glowing with a ruddier light than any of the rest."* It is a great and glorious Psalm and there's so much we could learn from it, but its theme is "Praise or bless the Lord". I want us to note 3 main things from this Psalm:

1. Heart Reasons. (v1 & 2)

David wrote this Psalm of praise, blessing and gratitude. He does so from a full to bursting heart. There are many things we could learn from it, but if we learn nothing else, it is that we personally as individuals are to bring our praise and worship to the Lord. Within the Christian scene in UK there are differences as to what is to be sung and how it is to be sung in our worship - psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with different styles of music and accompaniment, or no accompaniment. We are to learn as Charles Spurgeon says *"Soul music is the very soul of music"* - however we worship, it is to be from our very heart and soul.

David stirs up himself to sing God's praise. Matthew Henry says *"David is here communing with his own heart, and he is no fool that thus talks to himself and excites his own soul to that which is good."* David actively stirs himself up to praise the Lord in these verses and he does so wholeheartedly - from his very soul. His praise springs from this source as he praises God's holy name - His character and being. David does so for all of God's benefits to him *"God's all cannot be praised with less than our all"* CHS.

For us it is right to count our many blessings, to name them one by one, but our resulting surprise should be turned into praise, worship and adoration from our own hearts. As we consider what the Lord has done for us, we will find heart reasons to praise and bless the Lord. David did and we can learn from him and see:

2. Personal Reasons. (v3-5)

CHS says *"Here David begins his list of blessings received, which he rehearses as themes and arguments for praise. He selects a few of the choicest pearls from the casket of divine love, threads them on the string of memory, and hangs them about the neck of gratitude."*

Pardon for his sin is the **first thing** he mentions; such was so precious to him and what a reason to bless and praise the Lord for! If we are Christians this evening, haven't we got the same reason to praise and bless the Lord? It is easy to forget this as a glorious blessing and benefit from God, but it is our legal condition and situation from the moment we trust the Lord Jesus until the end of eternity!

David then speaks of God healing all his diseases. This is a difficult matter, but it seems that David knew this in his own personal experience; perhaps he wrote this Psalm after a period of illness and restoration to health. This is **not a universal guarantee** for all who are Christians, nor for all become Christians. Some would claim that the moment you become a Christian you will never again have problems in your life, and that would include no illnesses. Personally in my reading of God's word I do not see this and many great, godly believers throughout history have suffered ill health in various ways. At the moment of his writing, David was personally enjoying those two blessings together, yet he puts

first that his sin had been forgiven and would have done so whether or not he had known and experienced the blessing of restoration to health.

What we are to recognise that all restoration to health is of the Lord, whether He blesses us directly, or through our body's immune system being able to cope, or by the use of means - medicine, surgery and the like. Ultimately all healing is to be traced back to the Lord, but even times of bodily infirmity can be used to glorify Him and magnify His grace even as we go through such sufferings.

In v4 & 5 we see glimpses of the perilous positions David had been in throughout his life and how he was spared. Spiritually we have been spared from destruction/the pit and we have already, in our ongoing lives, been crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercies (AV), love and compassion (NIV). Our God doesn't do things by halves, for He cleans and heals us spiritually, redeems us from deserving hell and as His sons and daughters He crowns us on our way to our heavenly home with love and compassion. Regrettably we can so easily forget these blessings and live our lives as if our salvation was just a little passing incident, but we are to think big and glorious thoughts of what our God and Saviour has done for us, is doing for us and certainly will do for us.

David knew his mouth (AV), desires (NIV) satisfied with good things - did he just mean by this food to eat, peace and rest? He also acknowledged that his youth was renewed like the eagle's. We don't know his situation, but we know that he realised the situations he had been in and that all these blessings were from God. It does us good to take stock of our lives and what our God has done for us. Coming to the end of a year and the start of a New Year are obvious times to do it; as are anniversaries and birthdays,

but it is good to do so at any time, especially after recovery from a time of illness or difficulty.

As David reflected, he knew that personal reasons abounded, but he was not self-centred and introverted, not absorbed by "*I, me, myself*" in his song, but he also magnifies the Lord for His goodness to others of the Lord's people and so we see:

3. Collective Reasons. (v6-22)

David now gives the Lord's people reasons why they should join in to praise and bless the Lord. He is not just concerned about himself and his own worshipping, but he wants others to join with him. So in v6 he draws everyone's attention to the Lord's righteousness and justice. He realised God's people may themselves be having a rough time and questioning why life doesn't seem fair. So he points all to the character of God that He works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He knew that in life things didn't always seem fair, but he owned that the Lord would readdress this situation and justly repay those who were the oppressors. Sometimes it is hard for believers to see the wicked, godless prosper and triumph and we, as we saw last week, can question if it's worth going on as a Christian. Yet ultimately we must have our eyes on the Day of Judgement when all wrongs will be righted and all injustices corrected.

David directed all to Moses and that through him the ways of God were most clearly made known. In fact, he says the people of Israel in Moses' days were eyewitnesses to God's ways and working. Moses saw much and taught much of God and he wanted to see God's glory directly, but saw it indirectly as he saw much of his glorious compassion, patience and forgiveness to His people. The people were eyewitnesses to God's care, love, provision, patience and pardon. Personal experience in our lives and the lives of others

are to be encouragements and warm our minds and hearts. The themes and matters revealed to Moses and the people of Israel are opened up and developed in the following verses, for David can see them to be so obviously true and relevant. So v6 needs to be seen in this light, that when God's people suffered oppression at the hands of the Egyptians, the Lord righted the wrongs and justly punished the Egyptians. We can see this in the life of Moses - how God saw the oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians and how He answered their prayers in amazing ways when they were in trouble.

In v8 we have a glorious description of the Lord and we can be so glad that He is like that, because if not we would be done for! He could be angry and deal out righteous indignation to those who are abusive or ignorant of His compassion and grace, but He gives much time, much opportunity for repentance and grace to be sought. If He deals with sinners like that, we can be so glad that He is even more gentle and kind to us as His children!

He is plenteous in mercy (AV), abounding in love (NIV) and this is shown in His dealings with us as His people – v9 & 10. Our God is not a hard God, but tender and He does not always accuse/chide/strife and He certainly does not harbour grudges. Thankfully He doesn't deal with any one of us as we and our sin deserves and we have every reason to praise and bless the Lord for that alone! We learn that we have His love/mercy (hesed) and David in v11-12 tries to quantify that for us as we have these great measurements concerning His love and we learn how far He has removed our sins from us. CHS wrote *"Come, my soul, awaken thyself thoroughly and glorify the Lord for this richest of blessings. Hallelujah. The Lord alone could remove sin at all, and he has done it in a godlike fashion, making a final sweep of all our transgressions."*

It will do us good to remember that ALL our sins have been eternally removed from us as far as the East is from the West - totally gone and never to be remembered again and as God's people we can rejoice in that as individuals and as a church. Yet the Lord does more than that – for He then goes on to care for us and be gentle with us, as we see in v13-16. Here we see the tenderness and gentleness of the Lord, the sovereign Almighty Lord of heaven and earth and He is seen as being mindful, gentle and careful for people like us as a church and as individuals. It is lovely to see a parent caring for their children, and also a child caring for their parents, yet nothing is so amazing and thrilling as to realise that the God of heaven cares for people like you and me and He has compassion on us and He knows exactly how we are - even though we are so weak and temporary and are compared to grass in the heat of the middle eastern day (v15 &16).

David is again awed by the amazing love/mercy (hesed) of the Lord. He realises that it is an everlasting love, and will never end. God's love and mercy is better than life itself and will certainly outlive our lives on earth and its beneficial effects can be known, experienced by those descendants who follow on after God's people, even if they themselves may not directly know the Lord and miss out on the greatest blessings (v17-18). The descendants of believers benefit in ways they cannot understand; do not always appreciate and yet they themselves may not have the direct chief blessings of sins forgiven and peace with God. The effects of God's love and mercy can be known, experienced directly and indirectly by their descendants and are not confined to any age or generation as all can enter into a rich personal relationship and covenant with this God for themselves.

David also recognised that God is on an established throne there in heaven and His kingdom is ruling over all (v19). Here is another reason why we should praise God because He has all power, authority and rule. He rules and reigns over all - His providential dealings are awesome as well as His sovereign control and command of all things. He is working all things together for good to those who love Him who are called according to His purpose. This should be a great comfort and encouragement to us when we can't make sense of things in the world around us or even in our own individual lives or the lives of our loved ones.

Then David appears to act as a choirmaster and starts to call in the parts of an enormous, glorious choir to praise the Lord. He calls them in - angels who have done His bidding since the moment of their creation - they would be marvellous to hear singing the praise of their great God and Creator; then all the heavenly hosts join them - commentators aren't sure what is meant by this, perhaps those which are termed principalities and powers. Then all His works, everywhere in his dominion are called on to join in this glorious anthem of praise to the Lord.

Can we imagine what that would sound like? We have a glimpse of it in the book of Revelation 5:9-14 – started off by the four living creatures and elders around the throne, for as they see the Lamb take the scroll and open it - *“they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who*

was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen", and the elders fell down and worshipped."

It would be great to hear all this, but so frustrating if we cannot join in praising Him from our own heart and soul - that is why, I feel, David ends where he began with **him** praising the Lord for himself. No matter what we achieve, who we become in our life, even if we know the greatest success in God's work, we still have to praise Him personally from our own heart and life. Whatever we have done in His service, we must stir ourselves up to do more and praise God. In heaven praise is going to be a completely delightful, enjoyable work and so we must never think we've done enough on earth to praise Him, but keep on practising from a true and grateful heart all for that He has done for us and be getting in tune and heart for heaven.

If David could be so taken up with God when all he had was the OT experience and means of grace, I think we should be more willing and ready to praise our lovely Saviour for all that He's done for us in that so great salvation which has been given to us as His child. If David had reason enough to praise God, I suspect that we have many more reasons to join in with him and praise the Lord – v1-5.