

Bless The LORD!  
Text: Psalm 103:1-22  
Series: The Psalms [#17]  
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## Introduction

Psalm 103 is about *blessing*. It opens and closes with “Bless the LORD, O my soul.”<sup>1</sup> Blessing appears frequently throughout the Bible. The first time is in Genesis 1 where God blessed the animals saying they were to be “fruitful and multiply.”<sup>2</sup> That was followed quickly by God creating and *blessing* Adam and Eve, telling them

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”<sup>3</sup>

After His creation work was completed “God *blessed* the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”<sup>4</sup>

As the Old Testament record continues, God blessed Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Job, and all those who feared or revered Him, those who trusted in Him, who obeyed and longed for Him.<sup>5</sup> We read of religious and political leaders blessing the people, as well as fathers blessing their children.<sup>6</sup> This record continues in the New Testament as

Jesus, in what we call the beatitudes, pronounced His blessing on people who have God-honoring qualities, beginning with being “poor in spirit.”<sup>7</sup> When Jesus ascended back to heaven He blessed His disciples.<sup>8</sup> Believers, the apostle Paul wrote, are “blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”<sup>9</sup> And God blesses those who those who hear and obey His word<sup>10</sup> and those who persevere under trial.<sup>11</sup>

But this Psalm, and many other parts of Scripture, are about *us* blessing *God*. “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” Noah was the first person recorded to have blessed God.<sup>12</sup> And after him there are many references to others blessing God. If you wonder how it is possible for us to bless God, or how you are to bless God, you are not alone. Psalm 103 deals with some of what it means to bless God and why we should bless Him.

## Bless The LORD!

Let’s begin with the question of what it means to *bless the LORD*. One place to start is the meaning of the word *bless*. An English dictionary tells us that *to bless* is to make holy or call on God for favour; that *to be blessed* is to be holy or favoured by God, or to bring welcome pleasure or relief; and that *a blessing* is God’s favour and protection, or a prayer for it, or something for which we are very grateful or, a person’s approval or support.<sup>13</sup> This dictionary doesn’t see *blessing God* as a common or familiar part of English usage.

In the language of the New Testament the word for bless literally means *to speak well of*.<sup>14</sup> When God speaks well of or to us, He *blesses* us. And what God then does to fulfill those good words are His *blessings*. When we speak well of God by stating some of His qualities and actions, we are blessing Him.

Since we are in the Old Testament, we need to look at its word for bless. The picture at the base of this word is *to kneel*. It seems that since a common position for receiving a blessing was kneeling, that the word came to refer to the blessing itself. The most important element to understand is how the word was used. One Old Testament language dictionary sums up the use of this word with respect to blessing God as meaning to “adore with bended knees.”<sup>15</sup> It points us to an attitude of acknowledging God’s exalted position, His sovereignty over us as we worship Him for who He is and what He does. We see some of that in the opening lines of the next Psalm, 104, “Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty.”

While some English Bibles translated *bless* here in Psalm 103 and elsewhere as *praise*, it is best to keep the distinction between *bless* and *praise*. To *praise* God is to joyfully declare, to boast about God and His goodness. Turn back a page or two to Psalm 100. Look at verse 4. “Enter His gates with *thanksgiving* and His courts with *praise*. Give thanks to Him, *bless* His name.” There are three key words about worship here:

- Thanksgiving, or giving thanks to God.
- Praise—joyfully declaring and boasting about God’s goodness and greatness.
- And bless (which is rendered *praise* in some versions)—to adore God with bended knee, with bended hearts for who He is and what He does.

Another important question is who is to bless the LORD? King David wrote this Psalm. In the first 5 verses he is directing himself as a believer to bless God. As the Psalm closes, in verse 20, the king calls on God’s angels to bless Him. Then, summing up in verse 22, he calls all of God’s creation in all places to bless God. In other Psalms all the peoples or nations are included, as in Psalm 66:8, “Bless our God, O peoples, and sound His praise abroad.” The emphasis here, and elsewhere in the Bible, is on God’s people to truly, continually bless Him truly, continually, humbly bow before Him declaring His greatness and goodness.

## Why Should We Bless The LORD?

From understanding something of what it means to bless God, let’s now turn to the major subject of the Psalm which is *why* we should bless God. One writer’s description of this Psalm and the next one was, “In the galaxy of the Psalter these are twin stars of the first magnitude.”<sup>16</sup> It is a favorite Psalm of many because of the grand examples of God’s grace to us, which also are reasons for us to bless Him. As you will see in the outline, I have organized them in a way which can help us walk through them, albeit a rather brisk walk today.

Why should we bless God? First, because He is the sovereign God. Drop down to verse 19. “The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.” In the first part of the verse King David paints a picture of God’s sovereign rule, established in the heavens above us. Then he fills that out in the second part of the verse with a clear and emphatic statement of God’s sovereignty — “His sovereignty *rules over all.*” Everything everywhere is under His rule or, as verse 22 describes it, “His dominion.”

This foundational reason for blessing God is found in other Psalms as well. Turn back to Psalm 96, beginning at verse 4.

“For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.”

Then look at the companion Psalm, Psalm 104 again, which opens, “... O LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty.” And Psalm 145:3, “Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.”

I realize that God’s sovereignty can sound rather dry and theoretical rather than exciting and practical. Let me assure you that it is vital, exciting and practical. Because God is sovereign what He says is really and always true. We can count on it! Because God is sovereign, what He has promised He will perform. We can count on it! Because God is sovereign, there is order and certainty. We can count on it!

Every day we should bow before God and bless Him that He is sovereign, that even if our lives and world seem to be out of control and without rhyme or reason, they are not; that though people and Satan’s forces shake their fists at God, they never can come close to defeating Him; that though many people think nothing is really, always true, God’s truth is constant and is our constant hope.

Then we should bless God because He is righteous. Go back up to verse 6. “The LORD performs righteous deeds and judgments for all who are oppressed.” God is righteous, and all that He does is righteous. This tells us God is just and that He upholds justice. He never crosses the line to break any of His moral nature, standards or laws. King David described this clearly and beautifully in Psalm 11:7, “... the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness.” God is righteous in everything He does, including His judgments.<sup>17</sup>

You may recall the ad, which goes way back to 1881, that says Ivory soap is 99 and 44/100% pure.<sup>18</sup> What would you think, how would you feel if God were 99 and 44/100% righteous? 56/100 of a percent is a small number, but anything short of 100% would leave us in doubt about when God would be true to what He says He is and when He would not be; about when and whom God would judge righteously or not righteously. Every day we should bow before God and bless Him that He is righteous.

Next, we should bless God because He reveals His nature and actions to us. Go on to verse 7. “He [God] made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.” The king starts with Moses. God revealed His ways to the leader of His people. Then David expands that by including “the sons of Israel,” or all the people. God reveals Himself and what He is doing to all, not to just a select few. We see some things about God and what He is doing all around us as we look out, up and down each day.

And then God speaks to us clearly, giving us the truth we need to know about Him in His Word. The writer of Psalm 119 blessed God as He told Him “You Yourself have taught me” (verse 102). In the church age every believer has the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to help us, to teach and remind us of all the things we need to know.<sup>19</sup> How can we *not* bless God?

Moving forward, we should bless God because He is compassionate, gracious and abounds in lovingkindness. This wonderful reality fills this Psalm as it fills the rest of Scripture. Let’s start with David describing God in the last part of verse 4, “Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion.” Skip down to verse 8. “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.” On to verse 11. “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.”

There’s more. Verse 13, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.” The next verse, “For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.” Now to verse 17,

“...the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep His covenant and remember His precepts to do them.” (17-18)

Sometimes it is best just to step back and let God’s Word speak for itself and soak into our hearts and minds. When we turn ahead to Psalm 145, David repeats the theme,

“The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works.” (8-9)

The king’s conclusion, his response is found in Psalm 63:3-4,

“Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You. So I will *bless* You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.”

This should be our response. Where would we be, where would I be, where would you be if God were not compassionate, gracious and overflowing with love to us? So we should join King David in blessing God as long as we live.

While all of the things we have looked at so far are God's blessings to us, I have grouped the last four together as they state more specific blessings. God blesses us in and as He pardons our sins. David begins with the amazingly broad statement in verse 3, that God "pardons all your iniquities." Yes, Horatio Spafford nailed it in his hymn, "My sin—not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more."<sup>20</sup>

Look at verse 10. "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Aren't you relieved, and more than that glad that this is true for you? I know I am! And then verse 12 pictures the completeness of our pardon. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Bless God for pardoning all your sins.

Then, God blesses us as He heals our diseases. Go back to verse 3, "Who [God] pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases." This last statement has raised questions and errors, but need not. If we look back to David's own experience, to his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, we see that God forgave, God pardoned him from the sin when he confessed it. But God struck the newborn child from that sin and, despite David's fasting and prayer, the child died.<sup>21</sup>

There is no disease God cannot heal. He can heal all diseases. While there may be a hint or foreshadowing of the final healing of all diseases when we are with God in heaven, that is not the main point here. The point is, as God told the people of Israel in the wilderness, "...I the LORD, am your healer."<sup>22</sup> Bless God for being your healer.

Next there is the blessing of God redeeming our life from "the pit," or from death. Verse 4 tells us just that, that God "redeems your life from the pit." This builds on verse 3. God not only heals us, he saves or redeems us from death, with the main focus here on physical death.

God saved David from death a number of times. The king gave a dramatic description in Psalm 18:4-6,

"The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears."

While we may know of some times when God has saved us from dying, we don't know others. Bless God for saving you from death.

God blesses us as He pardons our sins, heals our diseases, redeems our life from death and as He satisfies us with good things and renews our youth. Go on to verse 5 which tells us that God "satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle."

At times it can be difficult to remember that every good and perfect gift, every good thing that truly satisfies and energizes us is a gift from God.<sup>23</sup> You and I need to remember that God satisfies us with things that aren't material as well as material things. He satisfies us with spiritual things and, most importantly, with Himself. In Psalm 65:4 David testified, "How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple."

And through this God also renews our youth so we are like eagles, so we have the power to soar. Our minds might be going to the words of Isaiah 40:31,

"... those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."

Do you sometimes wish God would give you that physical strength all the time, or wonder why He doesn't give it to you when you really want it? God gives us the strength He knows we need. That strength is not always physical. Notice how David filled out the meaning, purpose and results of God's strength to him in Psalm 18:32, "... God who girds me with strength and makes my way *blameless* ..." No, not easy, but blameless. You see, God is more concerned about my integrity than about how many things I can accomplish in a day. God is more concerned about me being like Christ than being like the Energizer bunny.

## Conclusion.

In light of all that God is, all that He does, join King David, bless the LORD with all your being. As you reflect on this Psalm, ask yourself "Do I really bless God?" And also, perhaps a more difficult question, "Am I more focused on blessing God or on God blessing me?" Yes, "Am I more focused on blessing God or on God blessing me?" If a quick review of the last week reveals I was more focused on God blessing me, then the next question is, "Am I willing to, and will I make the commitment to turn that around starting right now?"

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 103:1a, 22c.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:22.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:3.

<sup>5</sup> e.g., Psalm 119:12; 128:1-6; Isaiah 30:18; Jeremiah 17:7.

<sup>6</sup> e.g., Genesis 27:1-40; 48:15; Exodus 39:43; Leviticus 9:22, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:1-16.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 24:50.

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 1:3.

<sup>10</sup> e.g., John 14:23; 15:10; James 1:25; Revelation 1:3; 22:7.

<sup>11</sup> e.g., James 1:12; 5:11.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 9:26.

<sup>13</sup> “Bless,” “Blessed,” “Blessing.” *Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001, page 86.

<sup>14</sup> εὐλογέω. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, pages 322-323.

<sup>15</sup> בָּרַךְ. F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs. *The Brown-Dirver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007 (11<sup>th</sup> printing), pages 138-139.

<sup>16</sup> Derek Kidner. *Psalms 73-150*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973, page 364.

<sup>17</sup> e.g., Psalm 145:17; 19:9.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, Cecil. “Ivory soap is 99 and 44/100% pure what?”. *The Straight Dope*. Accessed August 12, 2010. <<http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/870/ivory-soap-is-99-and-44-100-pure-what>>.

<sup>19</sup> John 14:16-17, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Horatio G. Spafford. *It Is Well With My Soul*. Public Domain.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Samuel 12 & 13.

<sup>22</sup> Exodus 15:26.

<sup>23</sup> James 1:17.

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