

Date: 1.6.08
Text: Psalm 103
Title: How great Thou art!
Place: Kingscliff, Tweed AM, PM
File: Psalm 103

The Pilgrim fathers who started the United States of America were men and women who never took the blessings of God for granted. Their early years were filled with great poverty, disappointment, disaster, death. But they had a custom of putting 5 kernels of corn upon each empty plate before a dinner of “thanksgiving” was served. Each member of the family would then pick up a kernel and tell what they were thankful for. It was to remind them that even when they had nothing to eat, they still had plenty to thank God for.

So touching indeed is the picture of William Brewster, rising from a scanty Plymouth dinner, consisting of a plate of clams and a glass of cold water, to thank God “for the abundance of the sea and the treasures hid in the sand.”

Being thankful. Its easy to forget isn't it? We have so much here in Australia. We have so many material, physical, emotional, spiritual blessings and yet so often when we come to God in prayer rather than saying thanks for what we have got, rather than praising God for who He is, we ask him for more and more and more blessings.

Well Psalm 103 is an antidote to such an attitude. For here is a Psalm that starts off with praise and ends with praise. Here is a prayer that doesn't include one request from God. Here is a Psalm where David tells *himself* to remember what God has done, what God is like and that God is in control.

Now sometimes they say talking to yourself is a sign you're cracking up. Not sure what they say about SINGING TO YOURSELF. But do you notice, here's a song that David sings NOT TO GOD, not to OTHER PEOPLE... But to HIMSELF. Verse 1. Praise the Lord O MY SOUL. All my INMOST BEING, praise his Holy Name. Praise the Lord O MY SOUL - and FORGET NOT all his benefits."

1, So what Has God done for us?

Verse 3, he forgives all our sins. What a place to start. Not that I have a nice house, a loyal family, money in the bank. All good things, yes. But if our relationship with God is the most important thing in our life, then the most important blessing in life is that which forgives my sins, and so helps my relationship with God be reconnected.

So David praises God that he forgives him all his sins. Not just some of his sins. Not just the little ones but the big ones. Not just the public ones but the secret ones. Not just the bad things that he did but the good things he failed to do. Not just the sins of the past but the sins of the present and the future. God forgives them all.

Friends if this was where this Psalm stopped it would still do us an incredible service. For forgiveness of sins, should be something we praise God for, in the words of Fanny Crosby, all the day long. But we are so blasé at times about our sin. That we easily forget *that he forgives all our sins and heals all your diseases.*

There is no disease that God cannot heal. Colds, flu, broken bones, cancer. And there is no disease or pain going to be allowed into heaven. But I know that God doesn't always heal us of all our diseases, here on earth. Jesus didn't come into the world to stop all diseases and suffering, nor to explain it, nor to take it away, but to fill it with his presence. But having said that, we can also take heart that he has given us specific promises in his Word to encourage us to look to him for healing - for indeed he is able. And often God chooses to heal miraculously like what he has done recently with George, Maxine and Tom but sometimes he heals us by taking us to himself like he did with Ian (and June)!

He forgives, heals and *redeems our life from the pit*. He buys our life back for us, when we have given it away so cheaply. Now almost every day a whole stack of brochures appear in my letter box and they display all sorts of things I can buy. From \$1 bargains from the cheap shop to 5 bedroom homes at Terranora. And as I browse through these brochures I get to understand the value of things.

Well the price that God paid to redeem your life from the pit was the death of his son Jesus. The only perfect man, the word of God who helped create the world, the one and only Son of the Heavenly Father, took your place on the cross to buy you back for God. That is one incredibly high price. That is something we can never take for granted. That is something that we should always be praising God for.

But he does more than just forgive us, heal us, and redeem us, he crowns us with his love and compassion. He fills us with His character, he unleashes his Spirit within us. He gives us a dignity, a calling, a position in this world that is totally undeserved. And he satisfies our desires with good things. It is amazing, absolutely amazing, the good things we daily get from our Heavenly Father, especially here in Australia.

Did you know that if you woke up this morning with more health than illness...you are more blessed than the six million who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation...you are ahead of 500 million people in the world. If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death...you are more blessed than three billion people in the world. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead, and a place to sleep...you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace...you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

God does indeed satisfy our desires with good things. And even if you look around you and life is not particularly rosy at the moment you can still do what Alexander Whyte, the Scottish preacher, once did. He was known to always begin his prayers with an expression of gratitude. One cold, miserable day his people wondered what he would say. He prayed, "We thank Thee, O Lord, that it is not always like this."

Do we praise God for all his benefits unto us enough? Do you remember what God has done for you? Do you have a heart of praise, of gratitude, of thankfulness this day for all the blessings that God has given you?

On September 8, 1860, a steamer named *The Lady Elgin* hit a chunk of ice in Lake Michigan and sank. And as people screamed in the icy water, a university student

whose name was Edward Spencer swam out over and over again - and rescued 17 people. He survived. But ended up with hypothermia.. He was bedridden; never really recovered. He couldn't continue his university course And within 2 years he had died.

At his funeral, the person giving the eulogy made a point of saying that NOT ONE of those 17 people that he saved ever visited him in his two years of sickness. NOT ONE of them even turned up to his funeral. NOT ONE of them had ever bothered coming back to say THANKYOU. Lets make sure we don't do that to God. Lets makes sure we are regularly saying to ourselves "Praise the Lord, O my soul, all my inmost being...and FORGET NOT all his benefits". But let us also praise God

2. For what He is like, for David does that in verses 6 to 18,

For He remembers that God is righteous, just, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, full of steadfast love. It is not just what God has done for you that should raise our praise, for ultimately that would be a selfish thing to do - to just praise God for the things that are in it for me. For the truth is that God is worthy of our praise even if he does nothing for us, just because of who He is.

Lets think about that for a moment or two shall we. God has made his ways known to His people. God has revealed Himself to His world. God has left his fingerprints all over the place. And wow what a wonderful, glorious, awesome God He is.

For He is like a Father, full of compassion. We are like the children wilful, disobedient, impulsive. But He doesn't always accuse us, He isn't always angry. No he finds a way where he gently gives us another chance. Remember even despite Israel's unfaithfulness, he still was there, like the Father of the Prodigal Son hoping that they would return. Many a time he could have just wiped us all off the map. I'm sure he has looked down at me and said for the umpteenth time, when on earth is he going to get his act together? But he is full of compassion and that is something that should fill us with praise.

And he is gracious, for he doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. God could have insisted on justice and each one of us would not have a leg to stand on. But he tempers his justice with mercy. He offers us the gift of eternal life graciously. He removes our sins as far as east is from west.

Now I find that verse very interesting. Because if David had said, he removes our sins as far as north is from south, then that would be a finite distance, because in our world we have a northerly point and a southerly point. But east and west is a infinite distance. We can start to travel east and there is no point, so long as we continue in that direction, at which we start to travel west; or we can start to travel west and, no matter how long we continue, there is no point at which we start to travel east. West is always west; east is always east. And so if God takes away our sins as far as east is from west then if we start travelling toward them there is no place where we will ever catch up with them again!

It reminds me of the time that Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, was reminded one day of a vicious deed that someone had done to her many years before. But she acted as if she had never even heard of the incident. "Don't you remember

it?" her friend asked. "No," came Barton's reply, "I distinctly remember forgetting it." Isn't that worthy of praise? That God distinctly remembers forgetting what you and I have done and will never again show off our dirty washing, ever.

Praise God because He is a God full of love. His love just goes on and on and on forever. Our days are just like grass. We are there one day and gone the next. But God's love endures from everlasting to everlasting. God's love comes throughout every season of life. God's love is always there, its remnants can even filter down to our children and our children's children. God's love is incomprehensible, shoreless, boundless, bottomless, and endless, ever unfolding and infinite! We could never, ever begin to measure it.

The famous preacher, C H Spurgeon, one day visited a farm and noticed that the weathervane was made up of the words "God is love". He asked the farmer, "Does this mean that God's love is as fickle as the wind?" "No" replied the farmer, "on the contrary, whichever way the wind is blowing, God is love!"

Hallelujah, praise God for His love, His righteousness, His justice, His compassion, His grace. Friends, ponder His character and let it lift your Spirit. Think over His attributes and let it fill your soul. Meditate on what God is like and let that hymn of praise flow again. So often we are so busy, so often we can only see what is in front of us that we fail to become immersed in how great thou art!

But be aware that when we think about God, what we know about Him is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. I like the story of the inland Indian tribe in the Pacific northwest that commissioned one of their tribe to "visit the ocean" and bring back "the ocean" to them so they could see it. So the Indian rode his pony to the Pacific ocean, and looked at the vast expanse for some time in awe and wonder. Finally, before he left he took a small bottle and filled it with water from the ocean, and took it back to show his tribe "the ocean." Likewise when we dwell on God's love, compassion, justice, grace and anger we are only considering a drop in the ocean. He is even more amazing and powerful and gracious than our minds will ever fathom.

3. So praise Him for who He is, praise Him for what He has done and lastly in verses 19 to 22, **praise Him that He is in control.**

Because the Lord has established his throne in heaven. And His Kingdom rules over all. God is firmly in control. He is not like the military junta of Burma afraid that foreigners would loosen their power over their people. He is not like the prime minister of Australia or the President of the USA, able to be voted out at the next election. God's rule is secure. God's throne is established.

Humans can wave their puny fists at God, but their defiance won't last. Satan can scheme and manipulate, but his days are numbered. Disease, death, pain and poverty can think they will control us for ever, but they are wrong. God is in control of the good, the bad and the ugly.

That is why the angelic beings are praising God. That is why the mighty ones of the world beyond are doing his bidding. That is why the heavenly hosts are full of song and his servants are doing his will. That is why everyone, everywhere needs to praise

Him. And that is why the first words on our lips and the last words on our minds should be *“Praise the Lord, o my soul. All my inmost being, praise his holy name.”*

So how can we learn the lessons of this Psalm and fill our lives with praise? How can we allow this perspective to infiltrate our thinking, and our singing and our actions?

Well I'm not really sure, because I need to learn this lesson as much as the next person. But I think there is a clue in the first and last verse of this Psalm. For there David has to remind himself of the need to praise God. David has to teach Himself to praise God no matter what his outward circumstances. David knows that he will forget & so this Psalm is here to remind him to again get his perspective right in life.

And so it is in reading Psalms like this, that will help us Praise the Lord. It is singing the great hymns that weekly we redirect our gaze. It is having a balance in your prayers of Praise and Confession, of Thankfulness and Requests that trains yourself to start each time with God with praise. It is memorising parts of Scripture that encourage praise that allows your thoughts to continually come back to these neglected truths. And it is when we, God's people, meet together, we should be asking each other, not just how has the week been? But what are you thankful for? What are you praising God for at present? What aspect of God's character is precious to you right now?

And sometimes we should come into God's presence for no other reason than to draw near to him and praise him. Sometimes we should come to Church for no other reason than to say thanks. Sometimes we should talk to God and say nothing but words that would declare how great thou art.

"What can I do for you, Madam?" Abraham Lincoln asked an elderly lady who had been ushered into his private office. Placing a covered basket on the table she said, "Mr. President, I have come here today not to ask any favour for myself or for anyone else. I heard that you were very fond of cookies, and I came here to bring you this basket of cookies!"

Tears trickled down the gaunt face of the great President. He stood speechless for a moment; then he said, "My good woman, your thoughtful and unselfish deed greatly moves me. Thousands have come into this office since I became President, but you are the first person to bring something instead of asking for something." And I'm sure God would be similarly moved if his children came went into his presence with an attitude of praise and thankfulness rather continually asking for more.

Praise is something that should always be on our lips. Because no matter what the outward circumstances, we can always thank him for what he has done, for who He is like and for that fact that He is in control. And praise also helps to put our lives into perspective. It takes us away from the tunnel vision of self and places it on our mighty and powerful God and that is good to do whether our outward circumstances are good or bad!

In 1636, amid the darkness of the Thirty Years' War, a German pastor, Martin Rinkart, is said to have buried five thousand of his parishioners in one year, at an average of fifteen a day. His parish was ravaged by war, death, and economic disaster.

In the heart of that darkness, with the cries of fear outside his window, he sat down and wrote this table grace for his children: *“Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices, Who wondrous things (has) done, In whom His world rejoices; Who, from our mothers’ arms, (Has) blessed us on our way With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.”*

Somehow in the midst of all this pain, this pastor was able to write a beautiful song of praise and thanks to God. He saw God at work around him even when grief and loss ravaged his world.

Can we do that? Can we learn to praise God no matter what our situation in life is? I hope so. And King David here is trying to teach us to praise God no matter what. Are we ready to learn?

