

Psalms: The Songs of the People of God
Psalm 103: To the Praise of His Mercy and Grace
Sunday, September 1, 2019

Introduction

The story of the nation of Israel is a story that is often marked by unfaithfulness. While God had chosen Israel to be His people, saved them from slavery in Egypt and promised to make them a great nation, from very early on they struggled to remain faithful. One of their earliest and most significant rebellions came very shortly after they had received the Law of God and affirmed their covenant with Him. As they waited for Moses to return from Mount Sinai with the Law written on stone tablets they became impatient. Soon they had built a golden calf to serve as their god (Exodus 24, 32-34).

After their rebellion God's anger was kindled against Israel. Moses was also angry, but he pleaded with God on behalf of the people. In time God chose to not respond in judgment and instead extended mercy. It is during this time that God identifies Himself and His character in a way that becomes a common confession for the people (Exodus 34:6-7). The confession describes God's merciful and gracious nature toward His people and it's this confession and these characteristics of God that serve as the foundation for Psalm 103.

Overview: A Psalm of Praise for the Mercy and Grace of God

Psalm 103 is written by David and begins as a seemingly personal psalm of praise and thanks for the mercy and grace of God (vv. 1-5), but starting in verse 6 David begins to recount the character of God and how He has dealt graciously with His people throughout their history. Building on the confession of Exodus 34:6-7 the psalm becomes an extended recounting of God's mercy and grace and a hymn of praise that has been treasured by the people of God for generations. In it we are reminded of the forgiveness of our sins and God's immeasurable love, mercy and grace.

David's Personal Praise to God (103:1-5)

- **A deep, wholehearted, all-consuming praise (vv. 1-2)** The psalm begins with David speaking to himself, calling himself to praise God fully.
- **Praise for the incredible works of God on behalf of His people (vv. 2-5)** David's full-hearted praise isn't empty; it is based on his recognition of who God is and what God has done. God forgives (Psalm 32:1-5), heals (Psalm 32:3, 38:3-8), redeems (Psalm 16:9-11), crowns and satisfies His people.

The Source of Praise: David's Reflections on the Grace and Mercy of God (103:6-19)

- **A historic example of God's grace (vs. 6-7)** As David moves to a more general psalm of praise for God's mercy and grace much of it is rooted in the way God has revealed Himself to and interacted with the people of Israel. In spite of their unfaithfulness, He is always faithful.
- **God's declaration of His character (vs. 8)** In Exodus 34 God revealed Himself to Moses and now David quotes God's self-revelation.
- **David's commentary on God's grace (vs. 9-10)** After quoting God's description of His character David begins to unpack what God has revealed about Himself. While God has every reason and right to be angry and full of wrath toward us, He shows great patience and kindness (vs. 9). While we deserve His judgment, God does not deal with us as we deserve (vs. 10, Psalm 30:4-5).
- **Three pictures of God's grace (vv. 11-13)** In three verses David provides three pictures that help us consider the magnitude of God's goodness and grace.
 - **The Greatness of God's Love (vs. 11)** The steadfast love of God refers to his faithful, covenantal love toward His people. This love is immeasurable in the same way that the distance between the heavens and the earth is seemingly immeasurable (Romans 5:8).
 - **The Extent of God's Forgiveness (vs. 12)** The distance between east and west is immeasurable and this illustrates the extent or the completeness of God's forgiveness – our sins are removed from us (Micah 7:18-19; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
 - **The Depth of God's Compassion (vs. 13)** While God's love is vast, He also comes close and interacts with His children as a loving Father – He is tender, kind and nourishing.
- **The contrast between the giver of grace and the recipients (vv. 14-19)** While our lives are short and fleeting God's grace and love are everlasting. As we consider the eternal nature of the sovereign king (vs. 19) we should be in awe that He extends mercy and love to us.

David's Call for Universal Praise (103:20-22)

While the psalm begins with David encouraging himself to praise, it ends with a crescendo: David calls for the praise of God from everyone and everything, in heaven and on earth.