

## **The Heart of Worship – Psalm 103**

*Five Points Community Church (7/26/15) Brett Toney*

### **We're All Forgetful**

Around the office, I'm kind of notorious for forgetting things ... names, small decisions we've made, little things. This is heightened because Pastor JJ and Katie can recall inconsequential details from a conversation weeks ago. For me, if it isn't on my to-do list or in Evernote or something, then I function as though I don't need to remember it. But really, I'm just not in the practice of remembering things. I just assume I'll remember it or that I wrote it down. And that's the problem, I just let things slide and don't really *try* to remember.

The psalmist had this problem too—and I think if we're honest, so do all of us. The psalmist was prone to forgetting all that God had accomplished for him. And O how quickly we also forget all that Christ has accomplished for us. Have you ever held a grudge? Have you ever been slow to forgive? Have you ever considered yourself more important than someone else? Have you ever been anxious or worrisome? Have you ever lied by saying “No” to a preacher's string of rhetorical questions? Those are all symptomatic of gospel amnesia. And this malady kills worship and fosters sin. Just think about it. If the depth and beauty of the person and work of Christ were always before you, always at the forefront of your thinking, you'd never sin. If you were in a perpetual state of responding to Jesus in worship, sin would have no place in your life. But we slip into forgetfulness. We fall into gospel amnesia and worship becomes an impossible chore.

Worshiping the Lord in spirit and truth does not always happen spontaneously. Sometimes you have to get yourself there by preaching truth until your spirit responds. I must recall who the LORD is and what he has done in order to move myself to worship. Allen Ross talks about the dialogue nature of worship, this back-and-forth. And it always starts—the

dialogue of worship always starts with God. We will not worship the Triune God in his holiness if the conversation starts with us. He is the Initiator. Worship always begins with the Lord saying, “Here is who I am for you.”

But despite the full sufficiency of God’s self-revelation, I forget. I let things slide, and I don’t really *try* to remember. I grow complacent in my gospel amnesia, and my heart gets sluggish. And so I need to follow David’s example here. Paul Tripp puts it humorously, “No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do.” David is talking to himself here, and that’s the cure to the gospel amnesia that leads to the death of worship and the birth of sin. “Brett, listen up. Bless the LORD! No. Really. Stop and listen. Praise God with all that you are. Do it. Right now. Stop forgetting and remember who he is.”

I am rather encouraged though that I’m not alone in this. It’s actually kind of helpful to know that the king of Israel, the man after God’s own heart, the forerunner of the Messiah, the Spirit-inspired psalmist had worship-quenching gospel amnesia also. There’s grace for people like me. And that grace comes through this psalm.

### **What He Has Done (v.2-7)**

So, Brett, don’t forget all of the LORD’s benefits. Be vigilant in recalling all that the Triune God has done. Has not all of your iniquity been forgiven? If David can make such an assertion, how much more can we who testify to the death and resurrection of the propitiating Savior and regenerating indwelling of the Spirit of God! Wake up! *God. Forgave. You.* The sickness of your soul has been eternally healed. What would only secure your death has been eradicated.

But guess what? That’s not what God has done. He didn’t just do that. He has not merely healed you of some disease. No, you were dead. You were in the grave. There was no hope for

you. They were shoveling dirt on your cold corpse. It was in that state that God looked down on you six feet under, Christian, and said, “Rise.” He “redeemed your life from the pit.”

Did you forget that last night? Did you forget that in the car on the way here this morning? Have you never known that to be true for you? It was probably hard to sing these songs this morning having forgotten that.

But the benefits of the Triune God of glory are still better yet. He has not merely brought the negative balance of guilty, dead sinners back to zero. He has not just cleared our record so that we are morally neutral. If his benefits were limited to that, they would be incredible. But they’re better; they’re unimaginable. For the eternal God has not just made us morally neutral, he has bestowed upon us “steadfast love and mercy.” He has surrounded us with his benevolent character. He has set his covenantal love upon us—that’s what the phrase “steadfast love” gets at. God himself has entered into covenant with his people; he has bound himself to once dead, sickly, wretchedly guilty sinners. Like the prophet Hosea took an unfaithful wife and covenanted to lay down his life for her, so has the LORD united himself to his people.

He then satisfies your soul. Christian, you were clamoring in the dark with the rest of mankind looking to sex or substances or work or wealth or children or some world-changing cause to satisfy you. All of those things fail; they fail to satisfy. An unimaginable benefit of your Savior is that he satisfies you *with himself*. He alone is good. He alone will not leave you hungry in a few hours, looking for another meal, another fix. He provides that which you are yearning for—namely, *himself*—so that you exude strength and vitality.

This is what the oppression-ending, self-revealing Three-And-One has *done*. Just pause for a second and look back over those verses, v.3-7. Don’t forget.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—  
My sin, not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Be vigilant in recalling all that the LORD has done. Christian, do not just assume you'll remember and live in light of these realities. When you do, you're just a beat away from forgetting them all together. When you're curt and snippy with your wife or kids, you've forgotten how greatly the Lord has forgiven you. When you gossip with your girlfriends, you have forgotten how he has redeemed your life from death.

When you wake up tomorrow morning and extending yourself in love towards others is the absolutely last thing you want to do, *remember*. In that moment, what are you saying to yourself? What's the narrative you are listening to? Is it the storyline of the Serpent? "Surely he didn't say there would be grace for *this* day. Surely there isn't forgiveness for what you did last night." Friend, you need to quit listening to yourself and start talking to yourself. Do not forget all of the Lord's benefits. Consider all that he *has* done as what you need him to do looms large. Set your heart afresh on the goodness of God in Christ to satisfy your soul.

### **Who He Is (v.8-14)**

Recalling what God has done is one weapon the psalmist wields in the fight of faith, in the war of worship. All his benefits are wondrous, but more stirring is our God *himself*. The psalmist moves from what the LORD has *done* to recalling who the LORD *is*. After all, the Christian life is not about salvation but a Savior. We shouldn't be as concerned about the benefits as we are with the Benefactor. And the Glorious One is captured in the description of v.8, remember that your God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." That is how he made his glory known to Moses; that is the enduring nature of his character.

And our God is not one created in *our* image. He is *not* like *us*. We are bent to hold grudges and continue to hold wrongdoings against others. But our God will not always chide nor keep his anger forever. Consider that. We have sinned against an infinitely holy God and are due eternal, conscious punishment. But the character of God is confounding. For all who are in Christ, he will *not* hold your sin against you. If he were to deal with us according to our sin or repay us according to our iniquity, *who could stand?* For those who he has set his covenant love upon, the LORD is merciful and gracious. His entire demeanor towards us is the opposite of what we ought to expect. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life. That's justice. That's right.

But O for the steadfast love of God toward those who fear him! He has drawn near to his own in covenant love. He came and sought his Bride, laying down his life to redeem her. Yes,

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:23-26).

So Christian, know that even though it is great that your sin has been removed from you as far as the east is from the west, greater still yet is your God who would show such unimaginable love and mercy. In his glorious work of salvation, we see the perfect revelation of the character of God. We are shown for our eternal remembrance *who he is*, not just what he has *done*. Do not listen to the narrative that would cast aspersion on the character of your God. In the dark night of your soul, look to the light of his glory. Know that he will show compassion on you to greater measure than any earthly father would. He will care tenderly for you. He will not smother the faintly burning wick or break the bruised reed (cf. Isaiah 42:3). He knows your frame; he knows how much you can bear up under.

Day in and day out, you are fighting a worship war. Will you worship comfort, worldly pleasure, or self? Or will you worship the LORD who is merciful and gracious? Something will always take preeminence in your life; you will always have a god on the throne of your life. And what Psalm 103 is holding out to us is the example of fighting that war by combating forgetfulness, gospel amnesia. “Forget not all his benefits”; recall the gracious character of our God. And know the kind of king he is.

### **How He Reigns (v.15-19)**

He is a king *not* like the kings of men. We are like a daffodil that comes up, lasts for a while, readily withers, and blows away. You would be horribly mistaken if you thought the LORD is like that. Neither he nor his steadfast love is fleeting or fading. No, his covenant love lasts “from everlasting to everlasting.” His righteousness lasts for generations of generations. His throne is not some dinky chair in an elaborately decorated room. No, his throne has been established “in the heavens.” Get a flavor for the supremacy of his kingship by going out into the country on a clear night and look at the stars. *That* is his throne room. Let the smallness you feel in that moment sink in a little. You’ll probably start feeling like that daffodil. Our God reigns forever and over all things.

We don’t know the context or setting that David penned this psalm. But from what we do know of the struggles of his life and what is expressed in this psalm, we can envision David getting anxious or worrisome. “Go slay that mighty warrior. Be the king of this people. Fight off these nations. Be the reason for the peril that your people face.” Put yourself in those situations. Feel the pressure and the loneliness. You can see why David needed to preach to himself. You can imagine how he probably started wondering what God was doing and if he really was in

control. And then the Lord initiates, “David, I am a king like you will never be. I reign forever over all things. Your greatest trouble, your greatest sorrow, your darkest sin—I’ve got this.”

Listening to the words of worry and anxiety is a symptom of forgetting. It’s a symptom of seeking to worship something—insurance, comfort, your own abilities, financial security—worshiping something besides God. It’s gospel amnesia. Our God has been given the Name that is above every name, and at that name every knee will bow in heaven and earth and under the earth (cf. Philippians 2:9-11). Friends, Jesus Christ did not just die and rise again, but he ascended on high to sovereignly reign over all things. Worry and anxiety is functionally believing that that is not true. So when the basement floods, when the car breaks down, when the job is taken away, what will you worship? Will you remember or will you go head long into forgetfulness?

**Now Respond! (v.20-22a)**

How will you respond? Look at how David does. He started the psalm stirring his own soul to worship, calling his own soul to bless the LORD. He concludes by calling *others* to join him in worship. One commentator puts it this way: “The psalm implies that we do not understand the significance of our personal experiences of God’s grace unless we see them in light of [the LORD’s] acts in relation to the community.”<sup>1</sup> Christian, you are not alone in this worship war. Yes, you preach to yourself. You struggle to bring to remembrance all that the Lord has done and who he is. You endeavor by faith to stir *your* heart to worship. But you don’t do it alone. You employ the partnership of other worshipers. You call on others to praise God with you that they might respond in worship to your self-sermon like you desire to do. *Their* worship helps foster *your* worship.

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<sup>1</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms: Psalms 90-150*, p.176

Another implicit response we see in this psalm is gratitude. In recalling all that God has done, all that he is, and all that his kingship means, he is seeking to cultivate a grateful heart. Gratitude is the heartbeat of the Christian life. All we have is nothing we deserve. So one way fight for worship and push back against forgetfulness is that we practice gratitude, and not just in November. Gratitude undercuts grumbling and murmuring. Gratitude does away with pride. Gratitude demolishes the exaltation of self. Gratitude reminds us of a giver. So if your heart is sluggish, if the things of the Lord are unusually distasteful, consider that one issue you may have is ingratitude for God and his good gifts.

### **The Lord's Table**

These two responses, gospel-centered community and gratitude, are what this Table is all about. That's why it is called "Communion" and the "Eucharist." This is where we come *together* to remind each other of what the Lord has done. This is where we give thanks for who our God is. In fact, you could even say that this Table is an experiential version of Psalm 103. We eat this bread and drink this cup saying, "Soul, praise the Lord. Do not forget that God has forgiven all of your iniquity and redeemed your life from the grave. Soul, praise the Lord. Do not forget that he *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Soul, praise the Lord. Do not forget that your crucified and risen Savior now reigns as the eternal King." O may we not be a forgetful people but get to the heart of worship by remembering the LORD and all his benefits.