

Pillar Passages – Ps 103  
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Welcome to our next Pillar Passage. Today we are looking at Ps 103.

This is one of the sweetest and most beautiful of the psalms. The center piece of the psalm is in verse 11-13, which we will get to. But there are themes within this that bounce off of each another, and echo each other in beautiful ways. We will see these as we walk through it.

There are four stanzas. Stanza number one here is in verses 1-5. Then the largest stanza begins in verse 6 and moves down through verse 14. Then stanza number 3 move down from verse 14 through verse 19. Then the final stanza in verses 20-22. We will see how the final stanza is an echo of the first.

Beginning in the first stanza, David speaks to his own soul, which we ought to recognize as an important discipline. We can learn from David. David is one who takes his own soul in hand and preaches to his own soul. You can see this also in Psalm 42-43, and he does it again here, commanding his own soul to bless the Lord. All that is within my, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Do this instead of forgetting all His benefits. This is something we human beings—we finite and forgetful human beings—are prone to do; to forget all His benefits; all that He has done for us.

At the center and at the beginning of all that He has done for us, is that He forgives us. Without this forgiveness, all His other blessings are but temporary and they will spoil on us, and eventually they 'll kill us actually. This is a God who forgives all of our iniquity. Without if we have nothing. And with it we have *everything*. Because it is out of the heart and the power that forgives us that also heals us. In forgiving us, He redeems us from the pit. Pictured by the times when we have been sick and He heals us in our bodies. But eventually He redeems our lives from the pit of slavery and death that our sin has brought us to in Christ.

It is the first job of every Christian to not forget all of His benefits and to return again and again—this is why we do communion—to return again and again to the forgiveness of all our iniquities. Not because we are sadomasochist and enjoy talking about how bad we are, but because we enjoy talking about how good this God is. Who crowns us with steadfast love (verse 4).

This image of crowing is an image of something immovable—something that is unchanging. The gold crown that is placed on our heads and yet is given by God; it is based on His immovable nature. It is His steadfast love which is immovable; steadfast in His mercy that He pours out on us. In doing so, satisfies our souls with good that is with Himself. So that our youth is renewed like the eagles. We are transformed. We are, in Christ, given new life, and we may walk (Romans 6:4) in newness of life. God does more than just forgive, but out of this glorious forgiveness He gives us new life in the resurrection of Christ.

Now, this is a God whose desire is to do more than just save—though that is glorious. Yet He wants His righteousness and His justice to spread over all the earth—to all who are oppressed. So then, in the past, He did this through His people; through Moses to the acts He performed powerfully to his people in the exodus, and up until this day. He is merciful and gracious. This is a God—and not that we are looking at a passage in the Old Testament—this is a God who is *slow* to anger, and abounding (we might say, splashing over) so full of that on a moment's notice, He overflows with steadfast love.

Which is entirely opposite of how most people think of the God of the Old Testament. This is instead a God who is tightly wound to, on a moment's notice, smite us in anger for what we do wrong and who is begrudgingly and resentfully loving. But that is *not* the God of the Old Testament. That is not the God who is actually there. Nor it is the God of this psalm.

One writer says, the reason why we think this way is, we read the Old Testament wrong. Either we don't actually read it and we just listen to what other people say about it on Instagram or YouTube. Or we read it atmospherically. We don't really take into account all the data of the Old Testament. All the places and the long years where God is patient and longsuffering. The reality is, that this God, He will not deal with us according to our sins. This is not a God who will smite us at the first misstep. If He did that, no one would live. No, He deals with us in mercy. Even though He fathers His people, Israel, like a good father who disciplines, that's not His main stance towards His children. Like any good father, He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever. He does not repay us according to our iniquities. He does not do this. And this is good news.

The reason for this comes up in verse 11—again the heart of this psalm. This is a God whose steadfast love is the thing that is greater. Greater than what? Greater than everything. The steadfast love is the thing that is greater than all our iniquities; greater than His anger; greater than everything else. It is as high as the heavens above the earth. His steadfast love is that—toward those who fear Him; towards those who honor Him; who respect Him; who revere Him.

To those people, what He does is, He removes our transgressions from us. Every place where we have crossed over a line—even if we didn't realize we were doing it—and the ones we knew darn well we were doing it. He removes them from us, as far as the east is from the west. As others have said, this is well chosen. It is different than from the north to the south. If you head north on the earth eventually, you will start going south again, right. But that's not the concept that he uses. If you head west, you can continually head west, *forever*. You never start heading east again. That is the point. He has removed our transgressions for us. We who are in Christ, infinitely so. Why? Because of His steadfast love. That is the primary thing—not our sin. Why? Because He is a father (verse 13) who shows compassion to His children. Why does He do this?

Why does He show compassion to those who fear Him? Well, it is His heart to do so, but He is a perfect father who knows our frame. [Footnote: how we were formed] He knows that we are but dust. He knows that we are finite creatures. He's our creator. He knows us. He knows better

than we do. He knows better than any scientist. He knows, and He responds with compassion. Therefore, it's not a setup. He's not setting us up to fail. This is a God who shows compassion to those who fear Him; who are (in the words of Romans 8) called according to His purpose to the glory of His name.

Because He knows that we are but dust, He knows that we are like grass, like a flower of the field. The hot wind passes over it and it's gone. He knows that our place is here on the earth for just a little while and then were gone.

So is His steadfast love bigger than death? Yes, it is. Because His steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting. It exceeds even time—even the time horizons we finite human beings, who are made of dust, who are born of the dust, and who will one day return to the dust. Those who fear Him (there it is again) those who fear Him; respect Him, revere Him, He will pour out His steadfast love—even to the next generation. Even to the generations beyond us. He is this generous. He is this gracious to those who fear Him; to those who keep His covenant. This is how we demonstrate this fear; this faith. Those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments. Perfectly? No—those who fear Him.

Why? How can God do this? Because He has established His throne. And His throne is not on earth. It's not bounded by time. No. It is in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all; over all things; over every person; over every generation to those who fear Him. This is like—as one commentator said—this is like with any parenting relationship. A parent is much more willing to be merciful and gracious to a child who fails; who errors, and yet who honors his parents; who respects his parents. In the same way, this God is overflowing with steadfast love toward those who simply turn to Him in humble honoring and respect and reverence of Him. This is a compassionate God.

The psalmist, now, has satiated his soul with the knowledge of this God. He's filled himself, he's overflowing, so now he turns from talking to his own soul and now he turns outward. Now he calls on the angels; the mighty ones; those who surround the throne of God. He calls upon them to join him. And to all people in all places of this God's dominion to join this one man in praising Him.

This is the impulse of every one of us who bring ourselves to worship this God. We know that we're doing it right when we want others to experience the same thing.

Seems like we've been talking this whole time about worship, but then strangely it ends in missions. And that's exactly right. The heart of missions is worship. Missions exist so that God's name would be worshipped where it presently is not. Then worship results in missions. This is the virtuous cycle of the Christian life.

We come together on Sundays to command our souls to bless the Lord and to be so filled with Him that our souls are overflowing with Him. Then from that, we move out again commissioned to be soldiers in His mighty army to see the worship of His name along with all of His hosts; all of

His mighty ones who do word; who obey the voice of His word. To be those people. But also to see other brought into the same fold. For this is a God who blesses our souls. Thus we ought to be a people who are constantly coming back and taking our souls in hand, and commanding them "Bless the Lord, O my soul."