

# From Dust to Glory

*Psalm 103*

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*Psalm 103*

<sup>1</sup>Bless the LORD, O my soul;  
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!

<sup>2</sup>Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
And forget not all His benefits:

<sup>3</sup>Who forgives all your iniquities,  
Who heals all your diseases,

<sup>4</sup>Who redeems your life from destruction,  
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,

<sup>5</sup>Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*,  
So *that* your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD executes righteousness  
And justice for all who are oppressed.

<sup>7</sup>He made known His ways to Moses,  
His acts to the children of Israel.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD *is* merciful and gracious,  
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

<sup>9</sup>He will not always strive *with us*,  
Nor will He keep *His anger* forever.

<sup>10</sup>He has not dealt with us according to our sins,  
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

<sup>11</sup>For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;

<sup>12</sup>As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

<sup>13</sup>As a father pities *his* children,  
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.

<sup>14</sup>For He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust.

<sup>15</sup>As *for* man, his days *are* like grass;  
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

<sup>16</sup>For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,

And its place remembers it no more.

<sup>17</sup> But the mercy of the LORD *is* from everlasting to everlasting  
On those who fear Him,

And His righteousness to children's children,

<sup>18</sup> To such as keep His covenant,

And to those who remember His commandments to do them.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD has established His throne in heaven,  
And His kingdom rules over all.

<sup>20</sup> Bless the LORD, you His angels,  
Who excel in strength, who do His word,  
Heeding the voice of His word.

<sup>21</sup> Bless the LORD, all *you* His hosts,  
*You* ministers of His, who do His pleasure.

<sup>22</sup> Bless the LORD, all His works,  
In all places of His dominion.

**Bless the LORD, O my soul! (Psalm 103)**

## **Introduction – A Keener Sense of Sin**

Charles Spurgeon writes of this Psalm:

Doubtless by David; it is in his own style when at its best, and we should attribute it to his later years when he had a higher sense of the preciousness of pardon, because a keener sense of sin, than in his younger days. His clear sense of frailty of life indicates his weaker years, as also does the very fullness of his praiseful gratitude.

How long had it been since David had killed a lion or a bear or a giant with his own hands. The more recent notable events in David's life included adultery and murder. God is often presented as the gracious forgiver of sins to unbelievers but, for some reason, not quite so gracious to those who already know Him as sons and daughters.

My own testimony is that my greatest failures have been since my conversion rather than prior to my conversion. I was saved, as far as I know, at the age of seventeen. This means that I have had some thirty-five years as an adult Christian to know and experience the frailty of my own constitution.

We must never underestimate our capacity for evil, nor must we ever underestimate God's capacity for grace. Westminster Confession Chapter 5, article 5, states

In the fullness of His wisdom, righteousness, and grace God often allows His own children to be tempted in various ways and for a time to pursue the corruption of their own hearts. God does this to chastise them for their previous sins and to reveal to them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness in their hearts, so that they may be humbled. In addition to various other just and holy results, believers are thereby raised to a closer and more constant dependence on God for their support and are also made more alert in detecting and resisting opportunities to sin.

I believe it was in the spirit of this Psalm, and David's behavior that lead to this Psalm, that this portion of the Confession was inspired.

**Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, *bless* His holy name! <sup>2</sup>Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits (Psalm 103:1, 2)**

## **Blessing the Lord**

How do we go about blessing the Lord? The Hebrew word (*barak*) when used of God generally means to invoke divine favor. When used of man it generally means to praise or kneel before. The Lord 'blesses' us by knowing our needs and providing according to His riches and mercy – what David calls "His benefits". We 'bless' the Lord by responding in praise and worship; as David says "all that is within me" or from our inward parts – from the depth of my being.

What are these benefits?

## Benefits

**...who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup>who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, <sup>5</sup>who satisfies your mouth with good *things*, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

**<sup>6</sup>The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.<sup>7</sup> He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.<sup>8</sup> The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.<sup>9</sup> He will not always strive *with us*, nor will He keep *His anger* forever.<sup>10</sup> He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.**

**<sup>11</sup>For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.<sup>13</sup> As a father pities *his* children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him (Psalm 103:3-13).**

Was it the great strength that God had given David that causes David to sing? No! Even though God had given David the strength to grab lions and bears by their beards and strike them dead (1 Samuel 1:34-37).

Was it because of what God was doing through David that David sings? No! Even though God had used David to bring His kingdom to the apex of its earthly glory. Perhaps the younger, stronger, purer, but not so wise David would sing of these things.

But the mature David sings because of different 'benefits' in verses three through thirteen. He sings of a God who forgives, heals, redeems, and crowns with loving-kindness and tender mercies. David sings of a God who delivers from the oppression of our sin as Moses delivered the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt.

David sings of a merciful, gracious, patient God – abounding in mercy! David sings of a God who because of His grace does not punish His children according to their iniquities, but exercises great mercy – a mercy which is higher than the heavens are above the earth, as far as the

east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. It's been pointed out that the north and the south eventually meet but not the east and the west. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.

David is not glorying in what God has done in him or through him. He is glorying in what God has done for him. David is glorying in what God has given him as His heavenly Father.

I have known many people here in the South Bay area. I have been a senior pastor, a youth pastor, a teacher, coach, community center leader and recreation leader among other things. I have made an effort to impart things like knowledge, ability, character and integrity. I would hope that those under my care will have benefitted by what I might have to offer.

But if, heaven forbid, anything were to happen to me and my wife, there are only people who would own all that we own. We have only four beneficiaries, our children. They are the only people on this planet to whom Jen and I bequeath everything. And that makes them different from everyone else. It is not merely what they will, hopefully, learn from us but what they will actually receive from us. This illustration falls short because God can and does impart to His children things that a human father couldn't possibly impart, but I pray we can all understand that in which David glories.

David takes a turn in verse fourteen. He begins his explanation as to why we are to glory, not in anything found in us, but found in God and His promises. He tells us what God knows about us and what we should know of ourselves.

**For He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust.**

**<sup>15</sup>As for man, his days *are* like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes.<sup>16</sup> For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.<sup>17</sup> But the mercy of the LORD *is* from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children,<sup>18</sup> to such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them.**

**<sup>19</sup>The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.**

<sup>20</sup> Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word.<sup>21</sup> Bless the LORD, all *you* His hosts, *you* ministers of His, who do His pleasure.<sup>22</sup> Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul! (Psalm 103:14-20)

He Knows our Frame

Dust

The scriptures teach us how man was created.

**And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).**

After the fall of man they also teach us of man's destiny.

**In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:19).**

They also teach us how godly men view themselves in light of God. Abraham, bargaining for Sodom, was very aware of his condition as he spoke to the angel of the Lord.

**So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."<sup>27</sup> Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:<sup>28</sup> "Suppose there were five less..." (Genesis 18:26-28a).**

I saw a film about a certain movie star who was promoting a certain religion. She stood upon the shore of the ocean crying out "I am God, I am God." I guess if you're seeking to invent a religion, you're not going to get many takers if you stand on the shore and cry out "I am dust, I am dust." But my friends, we are one and not the other. And the

very lips that cry out “I am God” will one day, in fact, be dust; and we all know it. Jerome made the statement,

Hubris is an arrogance that exalts itself above God and takes credit for its own greatness—e.g., the case with the great nations like Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Tyre. This arrogance will be brought to dust to the consternation of those who put their trust in it.

A person who exercises this hubris cannot rejoice because of the benefits of God because they think they’re God. And although most of us would not be as blatant as to walk out onto the edge of the shoreline and cry out that we’re God, I wonder sometimes just what it is that separates me from someone who would do that.

How easily we are tempted to consider our own thoughts as coordinate to God’s thoughts, or view our possessions and talents as a result of our own greatness or fortitude. How subtle the sin when we begin to praise God for what we see in us—like the Pharisee who prayed, **“God, I thank you that I am not like other men” (Luke 18:11b)**. How very humbling it is to remember that we are dust.

One great advantage of admitting that we are not God but dust is the realization that God doesn’t expect us to be God, He remembers that we are dust, He expects us to be dust. Regarding these verses Matthew Henry states,

*Dust thou art.* He considers the frailty of our bodies and the folly of our souls, how little we can do, and expects accordingly from us, how little we can bear, and lays accordingly upon us, in all which appears the tenderness of his compassion.

Some of us think, “The Christian life! The call of God to ‘be ye perfect!’ I cannot bear it!” My friends, how right you are and how well God knows it.

One proud mother shared with me how well her son scored in the SAT examination. What if I asked her, “Did he score 1600?” Her answer would have been “No.” What if I said, “How could you be so happy when your boy missed questions?” He scored well for dust. Does God

understand us any less than this mother understands her son: God knows us better!

Alex Rodriguez signs a \$250 million contract. Is he expected to bat a thousand? No! If he can succeed four out of every ten at bats he would be the best hitter in the history of the game. Dust isn't expected to do any better than that.

I remember when my babies learned how to sit up on their own. They would begin to fall and I let them, just a little, but not enough for them to hurt themselves, just enough for them to know they had lost their balance so they can learn to succeed the next time. It would thrill me when the cute little balls of dust learned to sit up on their own. I knew of their weakness. And not only do I rejoice in her little triumphs I also will do what I can to keep her from harming herself. This passage instructs us that God knows our weakness as well. Psalm 37 comforts us:

**The steps of a man are established by the LORD; and He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.**

**(Psalm 37:23-24, NASB)**

God knows we are dust. He knows our little triumphs will never be enough. He knows we ever stand in need of His benefits: His mercy, His grace, His forgiveness found only in the cross of Christ.

God remembers we are dust; I should remember that I am dust, and we should remember this about each other. Paul writes:

**The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. <sup>48</sup> *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.* <sup>49</sup> *And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (1 Corinthians 15:47-49).***

As I was preparing this sermon I was considering how well the world, with its emphasis on self-esteem, might embrace the concept that we are but dust. I was considering how someone might chide me and

say, "Maybe you're dust, buddy, but I consider myself a heck of a lot more than dust."

Then I was considering how the same person might respond to this passage. It teaches us that in Adam, our natural physical ancestor who was made from dust, we are dust. Then it teaches us that in Christ we will bear a new image, the image of Christ Himself. I thought how someone might accuse the Christian of now having a delusion of grandeur.

But this is the nature of the Christian paradox. We must lose all to have all, we must die to live, we must become nothing to become everything, we must become poor to become rich, we must take the seat of dishonor to receive the seat of honor, we must be last to be first. And before the living God, when we by His grace understand that we are dust, it is then that He grants us to have new bodies, everlasting and glorious like Christ Himself.

God takes the dust and breathes life into it and calls it His child. God will then give the dust a new body in eternity that will never become dust again. We are now corruptible but we will be incorruptible, having glorified bodies fitted to the celestial world, where we are ever afterwards to have an eternal inheritance. By God's grace He brings us from dust to glory. We have no less reason than David to sing "**Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! And forget not all His benefits.**"