

Praise the Lord for Forgiveness!

Psalm 103 (NIV)

Of David. ¹ Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ² Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— ³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. ¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children— ¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. ¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. ²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. ²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. ²² Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, my soul.

If you were praying that God would show you something, anything, good after last week's message, we have it today. "Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits." (verses 1-2) Why does David say that our souls should praise the Lord? Because it is he "who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." (verses 3-5) He takes care of all of our needs. Every time you get better from being sick, that's God – even when he uses medicine and doctors. Every time you feel rejuvenated, that's God giving that to you. What's more is that he forgives all your sins. Praise the Lord, my soul!

For some of you, hopefully all of you, you perked up and welled up with praises when you heard that God "forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases." (verse 3) You came here with your sins hanging around your neck, weighing you down, chafing you, accusing you. You have relief knowing that God "does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (verses 10-12) The burden is lifted. Your spirit rises high with praise. You are forgiven. You are made clean and perfect and holy in God's sight. Praise the Lord!

If that's you, I want you to hold on to that thought because I see another mindset at work when hearing those words, one that I see in myself that I have to fight. Sometimes I hear that God forgives all my sins and I think: "Yeah, I know. That's nice." My soul is not lifting up in praise because I have come to expect my sins to be forgiven. I feel a bit entitled to it. In fact, sometimes I think that maybe I don't need so much forgiveness this week because I've been living pretty good, doing good works, not really sinning badly.

When I catch myself in this mindset, I quickly realize that I've been downplaying my sin. Thinking about David who wrote this psalm, I know I haven't committed as many gross and heinous sins as he did. I didn't have an affair, commit adultery, have someone murdered. But have my sins really been less horrible?

When I categorize and rate my sins by my standards, it doesn't seem so bad. Lose my patience with my kids or just not give them time and attention as their father? Yeah, but I had a stressful week of work, and they were provoking me. Gaze too long at another woman or entertain fantasies while watching a show? That's not so bad; I didn't act on them. Worry about things I can't control or think that I have more ability and power than I have to control things? Everyone does those things. I sometimes worry. So what? Criticize in a way to tear someone down and harbor hate in my heart against them? I mean, do you know what they said to me? Do you know how they treated me?

It's easy to fall into the trap of the mindset that our sins are not that bad, that I'm a pretty good guy who does good things and don't need that many things forgiven. This is when we need the mirror of God's law, to see the standard of what is demanded of us – which is perfection – and compare that to what we are. God doesn't take, "I tried really hard." Or "I'm haven't sinned as bad as others." Or "I've done more good than bad." God is not Santa who has a list of who's naughty and who's nice and yet most people get presents anyway. For even just one sin, one neglectful thought about the kids, one lustful thought that we tried to hide, one

moment where we did not trust God, one mean thought against another, God should turn his face away from us and be filled with disgust. He should cast us aside, damn us to hell, because we do what's wrong and don't even think it's that bad, that he'll just let it slide. We try to convince ourselves that because we don't think it's a big deal, God shouldn't either. He should just forgive us and love us anyway. It's as if we think that forgiveness from God is my right, something owed, nothing special.

When I take a step back and see again how I am falling short even single day, even this morning, of God's standard, the guilt comes rushing in. It tries to stick to me like tar, tethered to me like a ball and chain. We don't need to reach back for those big sins in our past, sins like the ones David committed, to realize that I am not as good as I want to think that I am. We know the thoughts we've had, the words that we've said, actions that we haven't taken, and they haunt us. We try not to think about them. We try to dismiss them, want them gone, think that we are better. Then we get to a new day, and I see the same old sins. Satan wants you and me to remember those sins, and he tries to convince each of us that our sins are strapped to us permanently.

Now hear again that "the LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (verses 8-12)

God has cut the cord of all the sins that seem tethered to you, all your failures, all the ways that you have fallen short. Out of his great love and compassion for us, he treated us not as we deserved. He didn't turn his face away from us in disgust for all our sinful thoughts, words, and actions. Instead of cutting us off, he cut off our sins from us. He put them on Jesus. Much like the Old Testament scapegoat, Jesus carries those sins away from us, never to be seen again, never to be brought up again in God's judgment. He removed all our sins as far as the east is from the west. How far is that? Start going east and tell me if you ever go west. They never connect. They never meet. Because God has forgiven your sins, they are as far away from you as possible. He does not keep a list of all our sins nor will he read them back to us at the end of our lives. No, they are removed from you. Expunged from your record. Because of what God has done through Jesus, it's as if they never happened. Praise the Lord, my soul! Praise him for his forgiveness of all my sins!

David encourages us to "forget not all his benefits," (verse 2) all the things the Lord does for us. We're good at recounting our sins and bringing them back on us even though God has removed them from us as far as the east is from the west. So, as you face your sins again today and every day, who will help you not forget that God has forgiven all your sins? Who will help you remember that your sins are removed from you as far as the east is from the west?

Another pastor commented to me recently that there is no Bible passage that says, "Forgive yourself." Yet, how many times have we said that to ourselves or others? What does God's Word say about forgiveness? God tells us to confess our sins to him and to confess our sins to others. Why? Because God wants to tell you through his Word, through people, that our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. God did not make this forgiveness thing a solo act that you do on your own. He called us to be the ones who remind people of his forgiveness, that God will never return our sins to us.

We are called to model and live this. When our kids tell us that they've done something wrong, we don't say that it's okay. We tell them that God has forgiven all their sins through Jesus, that he has removed even this sin from them as far as the east is from the west. When someone confesses that they've sinned, that they've lost patience with the kids, entertained lustful thoughts, thought and spread unkind words against others, not trusted God to take care of us by worrying, then we get to tell them that God has removed this sin from them as far as the east is from the west. It's only okay because God has forgiven all their sins. Praise the Lord, my soul!

Brothers and sisters, no matter what sins you carried with you here this morning, no matter the sins you committed years ago or the sins you committed this morning, during this sermon, sins you will commit in the future, God has removed your sins from you as far as the east is the west. They are completely gone, remembered by God no more. Forget not that the Lord forgives all your sins. "Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name!" (verse 1) Praise the Lord because we are forgiven! Amen.