

PSALM 103

With Resurrection Day coming up I thought this psalm might be appropriate to tune our hearts and minds to all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Prayerfully take your time with this lesson. I doubt we'll get through it in one week! :)

1. Read carefully through the psalm.

2. Who wrote this psalm?

What did he know about sin, its consequences, and God's forgiveness? (Cf. II Sam. 11-12; I Chron. 21:1-22:1; Ps. 32, 38, 51). Pray for the H.S.'s guidance, then take the time to go through these chapters and glean what God has for you. You may need more space.

3. What is David praising God for in verses 1-5 of Psalm 103?

What do these things mean to you?

FOR FUN: See if you can find out how an eagle renews itself. Jot down what you find.

4. How does the LORD work for the oppressed?

Does it always appear like this to us? Why or why not?

5. Verses 7-19. How did God describe Himself to Moses in Ex. 34:5-7?

How does David elaborate on this?

Compare Is. 57:14-21. What do you find here?

How high are the heavens above the earth?
If you're going east will you ever find west?

What does God remember about us? Cf. Ps. 78:38-39.

How does this show His compassion?

How is God's love and righteousness compared to our frailty?

Read Eph. 2 and Heb. 10. What do these chapters tell us about God's love and righteousness?

6. Verses 20-22. How are the angels described and what do they do?

What should be the response of the righteous to all God has done and all He is? (Cf. Ps. 89:5-17a and Rom 12:1-2, as well as what you've discovered in other passages in this lesson.)

Write your own words of praise to God here.

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2. Who wrote this psalm?

David.

What did he know about sin, its consequences, and God's forgiveness? (Cf. II Sam. 11-12; I Chron. 21:1-22:1; Ps. 32, 38, 51). Pray for the H.S.'s guidance, then take the time to go through these chapters and glean what God has for you. You may need more space.

II Sam. 11-12 = Whether or not Bathsheba was "ambitious" or not, David should have known better. Besides, Eliam (her father) and Uriah (her husband) were two of his Mighty Men (II Sam. 23:34, 39), and Eliam's father, Ahithophel, was David's counselor (II Sam. 15:12, 31). There should have been some loyalty on David's part, as on Uriah's, but he let his fleshly desires rule. So he committed adultery, then connived/lied to get Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife to cover up their sin, and when that didn't work, David set up Uriah's murder and took Bathsheba as his own wife. There were too many people involved for the thing to be hidden, and most of all it displeased God. David despised the word of the LORD by doing what was evil in His eyes (12:9). When God confronted David through Nathan the prophet, He said, "...the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own." This is what the LORD says: "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel." (12:10b-12).

The rest of second Samuel gives the sad consequences of David's sin: The son conceived in adultery died (12:14-23); The crown Prince Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom, and later was murdered by Absalom (ch. 13) Absalom fled and was estranged from his father for three or more years (ch. 14). Later Absalom conspired to take the throne from his father David with the help of the Ahithophe, Bathsheba's grandfather. The country was thrown into civil war, and David ran for his life. As a result of Ahithophel's counsel, Absalom slept with David's concubines on the roof of the palace in broad daylight. Eventually Absalom was killed and the throne restored to David, but what a cost (ch. 15-20). Later (I Ki. 1-2), Adonijah,

another son, tried to get the throne from David and Solomon, but was put to death also. (Remember Ex. 34:5-8? Our sins are never done in a vacuum.)

But David had this in his favor: he understood the character of God, and wanted to be right with his Lord more than anything. He knew he had sinned against God ultimately, but God had forgiven him (II Sam. 12:13 - God took away his sin so he wouldn't die). He repented privately and publicly (public sin = public confession - Psalms 32, 38 and 51). He depended on the loving-kindness of God (II Sam. 12:22-23) and God blessed him with another son through Bathsheba (v. 24-25). Solomon was the partial fulfillment of God's covenant promise to David in II Sam. 7. Although David blew it, God remained faithful.

I Chron. 21:1-22:1 = For some reason (cf. II Sam. 24:1) David decided to take a census of the people. Joab tried to dissuade him, knowing it would only bring trouble on the nation, but was overruled. God was displeased (pride, attitude, carried the census out wrong? Ex. 30:11-16; Ps. 33:12-22; 147:10-11). David realized he had "sinned greatly" and begged God to take away his guilt. But again there were consequences. David chose to fall into the merciful hands of God, rather than men or famine, and 70,000 men died by the hand of the destroying angel. When David saw the angel of the LORD standing over Jerusalem, he plead with God to end the plague on the people who were receiving the brunt of the punishment instead of David. God didn't want to destroy the city of Jerusalem, so in His mercy He told David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Araunah was willing to give David the site, but David would not offer a burnt offering that cost him nothing (wouldn't be a sacrifice then). God approved of David's sacrifice and answered him with fire from heaven on the altar and ended the plague. Later this place became the site of Solomon's Temple (22:1; I Ki. 3:4-5) and the place where Jesus died (cf. Gen. 22:14). In His mercy, God forgave and also designated the spot for the place of ultimate sacrifice. Wow!

Ps. 32 = David understood that he couldn't hide his sin and expect mercy (Prov. 28:13), and he couldn't do anything to make his sin right before God. He trusted God who justifies the wicked, and his faith was credited as righteousness (Ro. 4:4-8). His transgressions were forgiven, and his sins covered by the blood of Christ (Ro. 3:21-26). But before he confessed his sin, he suffered the consequences in his body as well as his spirit. In spite of his guilt, he understood God's love, forgiveness and deliverance, and finally confessed his sin. He knew God would help him to deal with the people side of things (v. 8-9). When he trusted his LORD, he found true joy.

Ps. 38 = David suffered greatly in his body as well as his spirit. He was a wreck physically (guilt can ravage the body - Ja. 5:13-20), his friends avoided him; his enemies plotted his ruin and acted like he couldn't hear them; they gloated over his supposed downfall. But he confessed his sin, knowing God wouldn't forsake him in his hour of need.

Ps. 51 = David fell on God's mercy, unfailing love, and great compassion. He understood that his sin was ultimately against God (Nu. 5:6-7) and that God had the right to judge him. So he wanted God's cleansing and forgiveness (I Jo. 1:9; Hyssop was used in the Passover ceremony - Ex. 12:21-23; also other ceremonies - Lev.

14:48-53). What caused David's greatest distress was losing his relationship with God, and possibly having God take his Holy Spirit from him (pre-NT Church; the HS can be grieved but doesn't leave the believer - Eph. 4:30; I Thes. 5:19). He wanted the joy of God's salvation back, and a willingness to persevere through the trials ahead. He also knew he was guilty of bloodguilt and could have the avenger of blood take his life (Nu. 35:19, 31-34). David knew it was the heart that mattered with God over any sacrifice he could make (Ps. 50:7-15, 23; Is 57:15; 66:2b; Mt. 5:3). And he was more than willing to tell others about God's amazing ways.

What a wonderful God we serve!

3. What is David praising God for in verses 1-5 of Psalm 103?

All God's benefits: forgiveness of sins, heals diseases (see Ps. 38), redemption, love and compassion, fulfillment of desires, renewal.

What do these things mean to you?

Because of God's amazing and unlimited grace I am forgiven, my debt is paid, I have been redeemed from the pit of hell and the slavery of sin. I am restored to favor with God, I am clothed in His righteousness, and can enter His holy presence with confidence. Wow!

FOR FUN: See if you can find out how an eagle renews itself. Jot down what you find.

Matthew Henry says this, but the total renewal seems to be a myth:

"He has given thee a prospect and pledge of long life: Thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." The eagle is long-lived, and, as naturalists say, when she is nearly 100 years old, casts all her feathers (as indeed she changes them in a great measure every year at moulting time), and fresh ones come, so that she becomes young again. When God, by the graces and comforts of his Spirit, recovers his people from their decays, and fills them with new life and joy, which is to them an earnest of eternal life and joy, then they may be said to return to the days of their youth, Job 33:25."¹

Lee's birds has this to say, which may be more plausible:

"Many articles can be found on the internet about an eagle going off and plucking its feathers and not being able to fly for about five months. The image has even been added that the beak and claws are knocked off and then grow back during that time, giving them another 10 or so more years to their life. I have been trying to find proof of that, and am not finding it. Most Eagle authorities state that that would not happen, because the bird would die during that time with no flight feathers or beak or claws.

¹ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible* - Psalm 103; BLB.

If those facts are true, then what is meant by God's Word about the eagle? I believe God's Word is true, so there has to be an explanation of it. From the Southwestern Bald Eagle Management I found an interesting chart that shows the different stages of plumage (feathers) as an eagle ages. They said, "In their five year development to adulthood, bald eagles go through one of the most varied plumage changes of any North American bird. During its first four weeks of life, an eaglet's fluffy white down changes to a gray wooly down. At about five weeks, brown and black feathers begin to grow. It becomes fully feathered at 10 weeks of age. In its first year, the mostly dark-colored juvenile can often be mistaken as a golden eagle. However, the bald eagle progressively changes until it reaches adult plumage at five years. Notice in the pictures how its dark eye lightens throughout its first four years of life until it becomes yellow. Also, see how its beak changes from gray-black to a vibrant yellow.

It is believed that the darker, more mottled plumage of a young eagle serves as camouflage, while the white head and tail announce that it is of breeding age."

That to me sounds a lot like, "So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." As the eagle goes through the different stages of its life, the new feathers are graciously provided by a Creator that sees to the needs of His creation by having designed those features to renew as it matures.

The Lord provides for renewal for His children as they mature. The following verses tell of a renewed right spirit, mind, spirit of your mind, and knowledge:

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalms 51:10 KJV)

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2 KJV)

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (Ephesians 4:23 KJV)

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (Colossians 3:10 KJV)"²

Marsha Burns says this:

"How does an eagle renew it's youth?

Three things: beaks, talons, feathers.

They have to keep their beaks and talons strong and sharp. Otherwise, they would die of starvation. The beak and talons are composed of hard keratin, similar to our fingernails. New layers of keratin growth build onto the old layers ensure a strong structure. The beak is kept in good condition naturally by eating tough prey and rubbing the beak clean on stones and other hard surfaces after eating. Eagles molt or go through a process of losing feathers because a bird's feathers suffer regular wear and tear and need to be replaced. The feathers are not all lost at the same time; they molt in a symmetrical pattern ... if a primary feather is molted on the left wing, the same feather is molted simultaneously on the right wing. They were created in this way so that they don't lose balance in flight. His renewal comes as he does what he was created to do."³

Are we doing what we were created to do? To praise, serve and enjoy our Creator forever? (Cf. Ps. 92:12-15)

4. How does the LORD work for the oppressed?

² <http://leesbird.com/2009/09/25/b-o-b-eagle-renewal/>

³ <http://ft111.com/resurgence.htm>

He works righteousness and justice for all.

Does it always appear like this to us? Why or why not?

No. We only see a small part of the whole picture, and things don't seem to happen in a timely manner or with as much severity as we think it should. But then, what would happen if we got what we deserved? (Cf. Rev. 6:9-11)

5. Verses 7-19. How did God describe Himself to Moses in Ex. 34:5-7?

The I AM, (the self-sustaining one), "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

How does David elaborate on this?

He quotes Moses word for word the first two lines then expands on it.

"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 (Ezra 9:13; Job 42:7-9; Ps. 130). 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 (Is. 43:25; Mic. 7:18-19). As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him, for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust (Ps. 78:32-39; Ps. 90:3-6; Is. 40:6-8). As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear Him, *and His righteousness with their children's children--with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts (I Jo. 3:21-24)*. The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all." (Rev. 19:1-8)

Notice that David reminds us that there are good consequences as well as bad. Those who live righteously and fear God can break the chain of generational sin. Hallelujah! He is sovereign.

Compare Is. 57:14-21. What do you find here?

Although our God is holy, high and lofty, living in a high and holy place, He also deigns to live with the person who is humble (contrite and lowly in spirit) to revive their spirits and hearts. He will not accuse forever, nor will He always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before Him--the breath of man that He created. He sees our sin and is angered by it, but He also heals and restores comfort and peace to those who

are contrite (acknowledge their sin and mourn over it - Mt. 5:4). There is no peace for the wicked.

What a loving God we serve. He looks out for our best interests so we may serve Him with a pure heart.

How high are the heavens above the earth?

If you don't hit anything, you can go forever!

If you're going east will you ever find west?

No. You can go forever. (How far is the east from the west? One scarred hand to the other. *Casting crowns*). Thank you Jesus!

What does God remember about us? Cf. Ps. 78:38-39.

That we are but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

Our lives here on earth are just a blink compared to eternity.

How does this show His compassion?

He doesn't expect us to be perfect. That's impossible while we live in this flesh, and without the Holy Spirit to help us we can't even begin to live in a way pleasing to God.

How is God's love and righteousness compared to our frailty?

Eternal, from everlasting to everlasting. He never changes!

Read Eph. 2 and Heb. 10. What do these chapters tell us about God's love and righteousness?

Eph. 2 = When we were God's enemies and objects of His wrath, He loved us and in His mercy and grace saved us through Christ: He made us alive, raised us up, seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. WOW!! There's nothing we have done; it's all His grace. We are His work of art, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Even us Gentiles who were without hope and without God in the world have now been brought near through the blood of Christ. Christ has brought us peace with God and with the Jews by destroying the barrier of the Law and reconciling us through the cross. Through Him we both have access to the Father through the Spirit. He has made us fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief

cornerstone. We have become God's holy temple wherein He dwells by His Spirit.
What an unbelievably precious gift! We are so loved!

Heb. 10 = The sacrifices required by the Law were merely a reminder of our sin and a shadow of what Christ would do for us on the cross. Christ made us holy and complete through His own righteous sacrifice once for all. There is no longer any need for sacrifices because we are forgiven in Christ and given the Holy Spirit to guide us. We can come before God in prayer with complete confidence and the full assurance of faith because of our position in Christ. He has cleansed us from guilt and given us a confident expectation of wonderful things to come so we can encourage our fellow believers. There is no sacrifice for sins left for those who deliberately keep on sinning after they have received a knowledge of the truth. All they can expect is judgment and raging fire that will consume the enemies of God because they have trampled the Son of God underfoot, treated as a common thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and insulted the Spirit of grace. No one wants to be in that position and have the righteous, holy God as their enemy. Because of what Christ has done for us we can have confidence even in the face of persecution. That confidence and perseverance will be richly rewarded when Christ returns.

*I'm forgiven because You were forsaken.
I'm excepted; You were condemned.
I'm alive and well, Your spirit lives within me,
Because You died and rose again.
Amazing love, how can it be,
That You my King should die for me?
Amazing love, I know it's true.
It's my joy to honor you.
In all I do, let me honor You.
(Billy James Foote)*

6. Verses 20-22. How are the angels described and what do they do?

The LORD's angels, mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word, His heavenly hosts, His servants who do His will (cf. Heb. 1)

What should be the response of the righteous to all God has done and all He is? (Cf. Ps. 89:5-17a and Rom 12:1-2, as well as what you've discovered in other passages in this lesson.)

To worship Him in unending praise, and to give everything for Him.

Ps. 89:5-17a = The heavens praise God's wonders and faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones, for there is no one like Him among the heavenly beings. In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; He is more awesome than all who surround Him. He is mighty and His faithfulness surrounds Him. He created the universe and with His mighty power and strength He rules over it. The mountains sing for joy at His name.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne, and love and faithfulness go before Him. Those who have learned to acclaim* Him and who walk in the realization of His holy presence are blessed. They rejoice in His name all day long and exult** in His righteousness, for He is their glory and strength.

*1. to welcome or salute with shouts or sounds of joy and approval; applaud: to acclaim the conquering heroes. 2. to announce or proclaim with enthusiastic approval: to acclaim the new king.⁴

**1. to show or feel a lively or triumphant joy; rejoice exceedingly; be highly elated or jubilant: They exulted over their victory. 2. Obsolete. to leap, especially for joy.⁵

Ro. 12:1-2 = In recognition of God's mercy, we should offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is our well-reasoned out act of worship. We shouldn't let the world squeeze us into its mold, but we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds (His Word). Then we can test and approve what God's good, pleasing and perfect will is.

Neh. 9:3-6 = The Israelites came together to read God's word, confess their sin, and worship the LORD. The Levites encouraged them to stand up and praise their God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. They began by blessing God's glorious name and acknowledging that He alone was worthy of all praise because He created all life.

Ro. 1:18-20 = Creation clearly displays God's invisible qualities so that men are without excuse. Do we reflect our Lord as well?

Write your own words of praise to God here.

God's amazing grace, mercy, love, faithfulness, forgiveness, compassion, etc., have been acclaimed down through the echelons of time by various authors and singers, so I doubt I could do better. But here's a song I wrote awhile back that fits pretty well.

ONLY A PERFECT MAN

Only a perfect man could save this lowly race,
So you Lord became man and by your grace
This poor lost sinner was rescued by looking on your face.

When you came into this world to die for my sin,
You took on yourself the guilt of all men,
So that I could be pardoned, made pure and clean within.

What anguish you suffered there alone on that day;
Not even the Father could look Your way.

⁴ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Acclaim?s=t>

⁵ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Exult?s=t>

Oh the depths of Your mercy I can't understand or ever repay.

For only a perfect man could save this lowly race,
So you Lord became man and by your grace
This poor lost sinner was rescued by looking on your face.

And now I'm free to tell the story of Your love,
How You gave up all glory to come from heaven above,
That others may know this peace that comes like a dove.

Only a perfect man could save this lowly race,
So you Lord became man and by your grace
This poor lost sinner was rescued by looking on your face.

May you rest in the security of His amazing love, forgiveness and faithfulness this week
and always. I love you.