

# Psalm 103

by Carl Armerding

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*The psalmist in Psalm 103 gives us five great reasons to worship God, including forgiveness of sins, healing of soul diseases, redemption from destruction, loving kindness and tender mercy, and satisfaction of our needs.*

**Duration:** 33:52

**Scripture:** Psalm 103:1, Ephesians 5:18

**Topics:** "Psalms"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of giving to God and living a life that is not wasted. He shares his experiences as a chaplain in a sanatorium, witnessing people on their deathbeds. The speaker highlights the need to prioritize helping others and performing acts of mercy, just like a mother who helps deliver a baby. The sermon also mentions the blessings that come from God, such as being crowned with loving kindness and tender mercy, and having one's youth renewed like the eagles. The sermon is based on Psalm 103 and encourages listeners to live a life of purpose and service to God.

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## Transcript

Before we turn to the book of the Psalms, I'd like for you please to turn to a passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 4, chapter 5, I should say, Ephesians chapter 5. Whenever I have a microphone like this before me, I generally count on it, but if you don't hear me, I'll try to raise my voice a little higher. Is everybody here now? Thank you. The fifth chapter of Ephesians, in verse 18, Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now this morning, I want to take a psalm which I believe fulfills the very thing that we're exhorted to do here. And so we'll turn please to Psalm 103. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and here we find the psalmist doing exactly that.

Because you'll notice here in Psalm 103, he says, Bless the Lord, O my soul. He's talking to himself, he's speaking to himself in this psalm. And all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfyeth thy mouth, or rather, thine old age with good things, so that thy youth is renewed

like the eagle's. This lovely psalm divides up into four parts, and we've just read the first of these four parts. There is something about this book of the psalms which I'd like to mention before we go into meditation itself, and that is the fact that the book of the psalms is divided up into five sections.

And these five sections are clearly indicated because at the close of each one of them, we have a doxology. I know some people think that it was Dr. Skopje that made this division, because that's the only place they've ever noticed them. But the fact of the matter is that the Holy Spirit made these divisions for us.

And if you look carefully, you'll find at the close of Psalm 41, there is a doxology. Psalm 72, Psalm 89, and again Psalm 106, and then of course the closing psalm is in itself a great doxology. And we believe that these five books, these five sections answer to the first five books in the Bible.

In other words, this is referred to sometimes as the Pentateuchal structure of the psalms, that word Pentateuchal being taken from the name which is usually assigned to the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch. And, in a sense, these sections resemble the first five books of the Bible. In those first 41 psalms, we get things that answer quite nicely to the book of Genesis.

And certainly in the second book, that which answers to the book of Exodus. The third section, again, answering to the book of Leviticus. The psalm that we're going to look at this morning is found in the fourth section, which answers to the book of Numbers.

Now, if one reads the book of Numbers, he may be painfully aware of the fact that God's people do not always praise. There seems to be a great deal of murmuring, complaining, and so on. But here is the psalm which comes in the fourth book, and there's not one word of complaint in it.

There's not even a word of prayer in it. This is a psalm which is praised from start to finish. And this expression with which the psalm opens up, "Bless the Lord" is simply a way of saying, "Worship the Lord, O my soul." And this tells us immediately where true worship has to come from.

It has to come from within. Worship is not something that we make up in our brains, but it's the overflow of a heart, as it has been defined, the overflow of a heart that has no request to make. That's real worship.

And we're going to see the reasons for this worship here. Very briefly, we're going to call attention to at least five great reasons to make the soul sing like this, making melody in our hearts to the Lord for five great benefits that he has bestowed upon us. And actually, you'll notice that the first benefit is where we all began when we got to know him as our personal Lord and Savior, for it says here in verse 3, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." And you'll notice that in this word, iniquity, you have perhaps the strongest word in the language for our sins.

I know sometimes we try to tone this down, as though the sins which we commit were nothing more than mistakes. I remember when I was on my way to the mission field for the first time, early or late in 1911, early 1912, before the steamer arrived in Central America. And I had been witnessing on the ship, and a lady came to me.

She said, I understand you're going to the mission field. I said, yes. She said, oh, I'm so interested.

I said, thank you. I hope you'll pray for us. She said, you know, my father was a minister.

I said, that's nice. She said, but Father had some rather interesting definitions of biblical terms, and I began to get suspicious. I wondered what this was going to come to.

She said, you know, Father never mentioned the term sin in his sermons. He would always just refer to them as errors or mistakes. And she said, I'd rather like that.

It didn't hurt so much. I said, well, now let's see. If that's a good translation, it ought to fit in some of the text in which we find the word sins.

So I quoted a few of the well-known texts in the New Testament, that Christ died for our mistakes, according to the Scriptures. She said, well, that doesn't really sound quite complete. I said, no, lady, it doesn't.

It doesn't. If Christ died only for my mistakes, God help me for the rest. You see, the word of God is very plain, outspoken, but it doesn't go any further than at least, and this word iniquity is a strong word, but it hits the nail right on the head.

It means out of equity. The things that you know are not right, things that you do in spite of the fact that you know that they're wrong. See, that's an iniquity.

And here the psalmist is using the strong word in the language when he wants to talk about God's wonderful, forgiving grace. And notice that he doesn't leave out anything. He says, who forgives all my iniquities.

And I take it that this enables me, allows me to say, all my iniquities, past, present, yes, and even future. All of them. I thank God that when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, he died for all of my sins, all of my iniquities.

It made a complete job of it. When he said, it is finished, that meant exactly what he said. Is there a soul in the house this morning, and I trust you'll forgive an old man for coming back again and again to this, but I have learned this, that even in an audience like this, where we can almost assume that we have 100% Christians, occasionally, like last year here in the morning meeting for the remembrance of our Lord, we had someone present who, until that moment, had never yet confessed the Lord Jesus Christ, his personal Savior.

It may be that you're here this morning, my friend, a child of Christian parents, maybe a parent yourself with a Christian wife or husband, as the case may be. I wonder if the Holy Spirit of God would speak to you this morning and ask you, have you had this blessing? Could you praise the Lord for this benefit, who forgiveth all my iniquities? And then again, what do we mean by the word forgive? What does this word mean? Does this simply mean that God has over let us forget it? Oh no, that isn't what it means. The word forgive, in both the original languages of the scripture, means to take away and to put somewhere else.

And this is exactly what the Lord has done with your sins and mine. He laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Yes, that's the doctrine of substitution, as we sometimes say.

He suffered what I deserve, and this is the way God forgives. No wonder the psalmist perched forth into praise and said, Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thy iniquities. Blessing number one.

Sometimes I'm asked by well-meaning Christians, Brother, have you had your second blessing? I feel like saying, have you had your first? Do you know what it means to have all your sins forgiven? To have a clear slate for as far as God is concerned, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleansing from all sins. But now we come to benefit number two here. He says in the end of verse three, Who healeth all my diseases.

Somebody says, now, I go along with you on that first one, but I don't know that I could on this second, because I know that a good many fine Christian people are still suffering a whole lot. Are you telling me? Friends, I know something about this from experience. The dear one who has gone home to glory from my home for the last twenty-three years of her life suffered, suffered with an incurable disease.

The doctors said when they discovered it that she wouldn't live but two years, but she lived twenty-three years. And when I faced the doctor with it, he said, well, there's only one way to explain it. She had the will to live.

But she suffered just the same. And very often the question was raised, why, oh why? I believe I have some personal answers to that question which I shall not disclose. I believe God was speaking to me through these very things.

But does this scripture speak of that kind of disease? Let us see, let us see the opening of this psalm again. The psalmist is not addressing his body, he's addressing his soul. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and the soul's iniquities, who forgiveth all thy and the soul's iniquities, who healeth all thy but soul's diseases.

Oh, you say, I didn't know the soul had diseases. Well, you sometimes think about them, don't you? There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no, not one, none like him could heal all our soul's disease. I dare say when I mention a few of the symptoms, you'll recognize it.

You know, friends, when you and I lose our desire to pray, we lose our desire to read the Word of God, we lose our desire to fellowship with the people of God, we're sick, something's wrong. These are symptoms that we need to watch, and the moment we discover them, let's go to him of whom it is said in this psalm, who healeth all thy, that is, the soul's diseases. You see, grammatically this is so.

You know, you and I learned when we went to school that pronouns were nouns that stand for another noun, and so the pronoun thine stands for another noun, and that noun is found earlier in this psalm. That noun is the word soul, who healeth all thy, the soul's diseases. And I might be speaking to some here this morning who perhaps came to this conference up here at Bristol in just that state of soul.

Perhaps for some time back now, you haven't found you had a real desire to pray, a real desire to read the Word of God, a real desire to be found in your place, Lord's Day morning, for the remembrance of the Lord. That's a bad symptom. But the moment you discover it, as I said a little while ago, let's go right to him who can heal all our soul's diseases.

Let's get down in his holy presence. I'm so glad that I was brought up in a home where Saturday night was still observed as a sort of a preparatory time for the Lord's Day. In fact, my dear father, it was so strict that no shoes were shined Sunday morning.

That had to be done Saturday night so that when you put your shined shoes on to go to the meeting on Sunday morning, there was no work to be done there. Nothing unnecessary was done on the Lord's Day. And that wasn't because my father was a legalist.

He wasn't. But he observed rigidly the Lord's Day. We were brought up to this.

And that was a sort of a preparatory service. And then in my early boyhood days, observing the way the Lord's Supper was served and observed in the communion where I was attending at that time as a boy in the Presbyterian Church, they had a preparatory service, getting ready for this service on the Lord's Day. It's a wonderful thing.

I would suggest it to you, my dear friend, if you have not done so, to sit aside some time Saturday evening to really get ready for the remembrance of the Lord on the Lord's Day morning. I found this a wonderful experience. It enables one to get things cleared out of his life and his memory and his conscience on the Saturday night.

To come with a mind that is perfectly free to commune with the Lord and with his people on the Lord's Day morning. Yes, he heals all our soul disease. We learn in Psalm 107 how he does this.

Just keep your bookmark here in Psalm 103 and turn over for a moment to Psalm 107. And here you will see how he does this. He says here in verse 20, Psalm 107, verse 20, he sent his word and healed them.

This is the way of the Lord. This is his medicine for healing us. And so we find that not only do we come into the presence of the Lord to confess, to own up to all of these things which have disturbed our communion, but to read his word because this is the medicine that heals me and prepares me for the next thing.

So coming back now to Psalm 103, let's look at benefit number three. We find this in verse four, who redeems us by life from destruction. Just before the meeting this morning, Fr.

Phillips and I were having a little bit of a conversation over here, and I referred to a young Scottish lad whom we had at the seminary in Dallas when I was a teacher there years ago. Dr. Chaffer, who founded the seminary, would get some of us together, largely morning at seven o'clock, for the remembrance of the Lord. Fr.

Ironfield had a wonderful influence in those early days, and as a result we were using a little hymn book called the Little Flock Hymn Book, and we had no musical instruments. Dr. Chaffer was a good musician, but he always, as we say here in the Southland, he hearted the tune, and we all sang a cappella. Occasionally this Scottish lad would get up, and in his baroque he would say, Reverend, let me read you the paraphrase.

And he'd read us a paraphrase in Psalms, and they were wonderful. Well, I want to give you a homemade paraphrase of this statement here in verse four. Instead of reading, who redeems us by life from destruction, let's put it this way, who saves your life from going to waste.

You know, there are a lot of people whose souls are saved and whose lives are lost. Oh, I've stood by so many bedsides, and I suppose I've seen more people die than most of you, because for ten years I was honorary chaplain of a sanitarium in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and it seems scarcely a week, and sometimes more than once a week, we are called to sit by the bedsides of those who are passing from this life into the next. It's interesting to hear some of the things they said in those last moments, and I can't tell you how many of them said something like this, Oh, brother, if I only had it to do over again.

How I wish now I had lived the kind of a life that I would like to have lived right up to now. Friend, don't let that be your experience. You don't have to come to the end of life like that.

You can come to the end of life like the apostle Paul did when he said, I have bought a good life. I've finished my course. I've kept the faith.

Yes, he was sure of it, and you can be just as sure of it, but let me just point out to you that this requires some surrender on your part. Who regimeth thy life? He buys it back and saves it from going to waste, and he tells you and me in the epistle of Romans how it is done. In the twelfth chapter of Romans we read, and how sweetly the apostle puts it, he doesn't say, I command you, he doesn't say it.

He says, I beseech you by the mercies or the compassions of God that you present your body, present your body, an acceptable sacrifice, a holy sacrifice to the Lord, your body which is your intelligent or reasonable service. God wants you to do that. This is something which you do in addition to putting your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

You surrender this to him. I remember when that verse first struck me. I went to a young fellow who was baptized the same night I was, received into fellowship, the same day I was received into fellowship.

And I said to him, Sam, I said, have you ever read Romans 12 and 1? I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies, a sacrifice holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable or intelligent service. Yes, and I've read it a lot of times. I said, have you ever done it? He said, no, I don't think I have.

I said, do you know how it's done? No, he said, I don't think I do. I went to another fellow who likewise was baptized in that same group that night. I said, Arch, have you ever read Romans 12 and 1? Yep.

I said, have you ever done it? No, he said, I don't think I have. I said, do you know how it's done? No, he said, I don't think I do. He said, you're no help.

So I went to his father, dear old brother Archibald McCallum. I said, Mr. McCallum, I've been reading in Romans 12, 1 and 2 that I'm to present my body as sacrifice to the Lord. I said, will you tell me how this is done? Well, he said, I don't know that there's any particular way in which it is done, but I think I know a way in which it is done.

And I was all ears listening. He said, I would suggest to you that you go to your room with your Bible, close the door, lock it if necessary, so you won't be interrupted. Open your Bible to that verse, get down on your knees, put your finger on it and say to the Lord, Lord Jesus, I'd like to do this.

I was a teenager, 17 when that happened. I had been saved for two years. And I thought, my, this is simple.

And I did exactly as Mr. McCallum told me. But you know what? When I put my finger on that text and said to the Lord, Lord, I'd like to do this, a cold sweat came out on me. For I began to realize that in the presentation of my body, this meant my brain, that with which I think and sometimes think things that I wish I could forget.

These eyes with which I looked at things which I wish I had never seen. These ears that took in things which I wish I'd never heard. This tongue which says things which I wish I'd never said.

These hands which do things that I wish I'd never done. And these feet that took me to places I wish I'd never gone. Oh, a cold sweat came out on me as I went into this transaction with the Lord.

I was almost tempted to die, but I realized this was a crucial time in my life. And how I asked the Lord that I might be able to carry this through, realizing that in my own strength I'd never be able to do it. But oh, how wonderful to have the privilege of presenting this body as sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable or intelligent service.

My dear friends, many years have passed since then. More than sixty years have passed since that wonderful transaction that day in my little room. I have never regretted it.

I've had many times to confess that I haven't regretted it, but I've never regretted it. Oh, who could regret giving to Him who gave Himself for us to give to Him His Spirit and Soul and Body, who redeemed us by life from destruction, who saved us from going to waste. My dear friends, it is my earnest hope that the Lord carries and I have to pass through the article of death that so many of my forebears have, that I, too, will be able to say with the Apostle Paul, I've had a good time.

I've finished, of course. I've kept the faith. Oh, let's come to a triumphant end like this.

And then this brings us to blessing number four, which we have right here in this fourth verse, the latter part of the verse, who crown Him with faith, with loving kindness and tender mercy. And notice how all of these verse are in the present tense. Who forgive us, present tense.

Heal us, present tense. Redeem us, present tense. Crown us, present tense.

This isn't something that waits until you get over yonder. This is something you wear now. It's a kind of a crown that doesn't weigh heavy on your head.

A crown of tender mercy. Look at that. Isn't it lovely? Loving kindness and tender mercy.

You say, well, I don't know that I've ever seen anybody wear a crown like that. Well, maybe I dare to use my beloved mother as an example here. Mother was a mother of ten children.

Lots to do. Not able to afford servants in the home. A lot of work to be done.

Dressed to be baked. Sewed to be washed, ironed, and mended, and all the chores that go with it. Yet, time to help the neighbors.

One day news came to us that a little one was expected next door, and the doctor's buggy had broken down. We said, Mother, please come over. And see Mother gathering a few things together in a little bag and going over there and helping to bring this little one into the world.

And as she came back, my dear brother Henry, up to whom I made reference last night, we were watching her as she came back from this home, having performed this errand of mercy, and Henry said to me, Carl, isn't Mama Queen? And she was. She was a queen wearing a crown as we have described here, loving kindness and tender mercy. Don't you covet to wear a crown like that? This kind of a crown, as I said before, doesn't weigh heavy on your head.

You're never going to get a headache from wearing this one. And I'll tell you this too, you won't get a swell head from wearing this one. This is the kind of a crown which, I pray God, may adorn the heads of most of

us, if not all of us.

And then this brings me to the final thing here, and that is satisfaction, verse 5. This seems to be the climax of this section here, who's satisfied. And you'll notice that I altered the reading to conform to other translations. Mr. Darby tells us in his footnote that it could be either Old Age or Mouth or even another translation.

It's one of those words that's very versatile in the original. So we're going to use the Old Age this morning, who satisfied by an old age with good things. You know, when I was a boy, I heard this statement that the devil has no happy old men.

And I've been looking at old men ever since. And I know that statement is absolutely true. The devil has no happy old men.

But the Lord does. It's a wonderful thing to grow old in the grace of God and to have a joy which increases with the days. Friends, if there's one text I love in the Bible, it's the one which says in Philippians 4, Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

This is the way we give evidence of what he means to us, that he really satisfies us. Really satisfies us. Satisfies to the point where the things of time and sense have little or no appeal.

You don't need them. I've been asked very frequently, Why don't you this? Why don't you that? I remember we moved into a home some years ago in Dallas, and the neighbor lady came over, the moving men were moving the stuff in, and said to my wife, she said, Y'all don't have your stove set up? Now come on over to my house, she said, and get your lunch ready. In fact, she said, I've got stuff in the refrigerator.

Please come on in. Real Southern hospitality, you know what I mean? And so we accepted it and went in, and I noticed after a while she got into conversation with Mrs. Armerding, and she said, Did y'all play bridge? And Simon said, No. Did y'all go to the theater? And Mrs. Armerding said, No.

Did y'all play card? And Mrs. Armerding said, No. Did you play golf? No. What do y'all do to have a good time? And then my wife had to tell us that we found our joy in a different way.

She said, You know, we go down to a little meeting down here on Fitzgerald, where a group of Christians meet to remember the Lord and the Lord's demands, where they meet for the preaching of the gospel Sunday night, and where they meet for prayer and Bible study. And this woman said to me, Please tell her, you need to tell me, did you get pleasure out of that? My wife, I was listening to the conversation, she said, Not only did we get pleasure out of it, she said, it's the real pleasure. The real pleasure.

Oh, the satisfaction of being with the Lord's people and enjoying the Lord. So now, we're going to take a minute or two more this morning. I know the time is up.

But I would like to apply a few measurements to this. And these measurements are given us right in this psalm itself. I was trained to be an engineer.

I wasn't trained to be a preacher. My profession was to have been mechanical engineering. And so I'm still in the habit of making measurements.

So I come into a room like this, I wonder how wide it is, and how long it is, and how high the ceiling is, and whether this beam above me is going to break down on me. Verse 10, Will you please? He has not dealt

with us after or according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities, for as the heaven is high above the earth. There's a measurement for you.

How high is that? Our astronauts have been going up. Yes, they've been right going up into the arms of stratosphere. Way up there they've been going.

They still haven't reached it. As high as the heaven is above the earth so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. What a measurement that is, isn't it? There's only one word that fits this, and what is it? It's the word infinity.

As high as the heaven is above the earth. I remember when they were planning that big telescope at Palomar, in my student days, and I remember saying to my professor of chemistry, I said, Dr. Clark, I said, what do you think they'll discover when they get that big telescope in place down at Palomar? He looked at me with a very sleeping in his eyes. He said, they'll discover how little they know.

How high is it? Nobody can tell. This is infinite. But then there's another measurement given to us in verse 12.

For as far as the east is from the west, so far has been removed our transgression from it. How far is that? Well, you say, that can be measured. Can it? If it had said from north to south, you might be right, because there is a place in this old globe where you couldn't go any further north, and there's a place in this old globe where you couldn't go any further south.

But if you're traveling from east to west or west to east, you can keep on going even though you reach the same point, you still go on. Again, it's infinite, isn't it? And here we have two lines of measurement. One is perpendicular, the other is horizontal, and you put the two of them together and what do you have? You have a cross.

This is the measurement of all these blessings we've been talking about. This is the measurement, measured by that darkness, measured by those suffering because he endured on that cross. Oh, how deep God's love must be.

Then one more measurement, and this is found in the 17th verse. This is the time measurement. You know, the philosophers are very fond of talking about the space-time continuum.

Well, here's the time measurement in verse 17. The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. So you see, that wherever you apply these measurements, you have them in infinity.

There they are. And in whom do we find all these? We find them in one blessed person in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, beloved friends, I trust that having looked again at this wonderful inventory of our blessings, our benefits, that we shall go away from this conference not any richer than we came, but more aware of the riches which are ours in Christ Jesus. Who, though he was rich, that for our sakes he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich. I'm satisfied that Fanny Crosby must have been thinking about this psalm when she wrote this lovely hymn number six in our hymnal.

She said, Praise him, praise him, Jesus our blessed redeemer. Sing o'er earth his wonderful love proclaim. Hail him, hail him, highest archangels in glory.

Strength and honor give to his holy name.

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