



**Psalm 103**

**Autumn 2024 Sermon Series**

 **Christ Church**  
Hillsborough & Wadsley Bridge

## A guide to the sermon series

### Why preach Psalm 103?

#### Looking up

In our preaching cycle we use the Autumn term, leading up to Christmas, to **look up** at the character and person of God.

#### The hymn-book of the church

CH Spurgeon considered Psalm 103 to have all-embracing scope – celebrating the whole praise-worthiness of God. He wrote, “There is too much in the Psalm for a thousand pens to write, it is one of those all-comprehending Scriptures which is a Bible in itself, and it might alone almost suffice for the hymn-book of the church.”

That has been my personal experience of this Psalm too.

In searching for a single part of scripture that paints a comprehensive picture of our God, it’s hard to imagine a better text for our sermon series.

#### Core memory

Christians throughout history and across the globe have been blessed by memorising Scripture. Since Psalm 103 is short – just 22 verses – I’m hoping that we can use this term to commit it to memory as a church family.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to encourage one-another with the bigger picture of who our God is and what he's like because we've learned Psalm 103 together. I long for the day when a brother or sister from Christ Church says to me, on a bad day, "Jim, remember this: *The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger abounding in love.*"

## How to preach Psalm 103?

While we're alternating between All Age and Communion services, we will continue to repeat sections for 2 weeks in a row. This gives us a chance to share them once in an all-age service and once as a full sermon.

Over the 12 weeks of this sermon series, we will therefore cover 6 parts of the Psalm twice each.

The Holy Spirit uses the preparation process to show us what and how to preach, but here are some thoughts to shape our preparations.

## Me or him?

The Psalm paints a picture of the character of God.

- He is holy (1).
- He is a God with benefits (2 ff.).
- He works righteousness and justice for the oppressed (6).
- He has revealed his character and deeds to his chosen people (7 ff.).
- He has compassion on all who fear him (13 ff.).
- He has established his throne in heaven (19 ff.).

And yet, technically, the Psalm is not addressed to God. It is addressed to myself (initially author and now reader). Praise the Lord, *my soul*. (1, 22).

That is why we've called the series, 'The King and I'. Ultimately it is *both* about him *and* about how I respond to him. That means our sermons should usually be about both too.

## Father or Son?

Jesus is not mentioned by name in this Psalm (of course). And yet, all the Psalms point to Christ in some way, and I want us to be preaching Christ. How does that work in Psalm 103?

In some psalms particular verses pre-figure Jesus and his mission and work. Consider Psalm 22 where the whole Psalm points to the work of Christ on the cross.

One way of looking at Psalm 103 is that Jesus is the answer to the *how* question.

- How does God forgive & heal (3), redeem & crown (4), and satisfy (5) in our experience? Answer - through Jesus.
- How does God work righteousness and justice for the oppressed (6) in our time and place? Answer - through Jesus.
- How does God complete his cosmic Kingship (19) – replacing the Prince of lies in the earth with the Prince of light? Answer - through Jesus.

In that sense no part of the Psalm is not about Jesus!

## Application

The Psalm makes its over-arching application very clear indeed. It is an expression of, and an inspiration to, praise.

If our hearers don't feel more ready to praise God as a result of our preaching either their hearts are hard or we haven't done our job.

Please ask yourself the question (as you write and when you've finished) how will this leave my hearers disposed towards their God? If it's likely to make them feel guilty for failing to appreciate God, or thinking of themselves (whether they think more or less of themselves), or even simply moved to activism, please reconsider your message.

The praiseworthiness of God is not a passive application of scripture. In the end there is no greater stimulus to praise and change and action than the character and works of God.

## Overview

### Personal mercies

In verses 1-5, David addresses his own soul. He reminds himself of God's mercies to him. Of course we are not David, and we do not experience exactly the same mercies in exactly the same way. Pastorally speaking, for example, there may be people whom God has chosen not to heal of 'all their diseases'. But you can be confident of this. There is no-one who has not received mercy upon mercy from our God.

### Dealings with people

Verse 6 probably summarises verses 7-18. These verses therefore describe God's dealings with people – '[working] righteousness and justice for all the oppressed'.

Furthermore, there is a paragraph distinction between verses 7-12, and verses 13-18. The first section seems to describe the 'special grace' God shows to his covenant people to whom he has revealed his ways and deeds (7). The second section seems to describe the 'general grace' God shows to all people – particularly all who fear him (13-17).

### Cosmic sovereignty

Verse 19 probably summarises verses 20-22. These verses therefore describe God's sovereignty over the cosmos. And, as verse 22b reminds us, the cosmos includes me!

We therefore have an ending which combines, in one coherent whole, both the widest possible angle on God and the most personal angle. The praise of my soul is part of a cosmic song of praise. What a way to finish!

## Section by section

### All my inmost being, praise (1)

Before giving any reason to praise God (personal, human or cosmic) David calls on his inmost being to praise his holy name. This echoes the 'first golden rule' – *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'*. (Mark 12:30 referencing Deuteronomy 6:5)

A person doesn't (and shouldn't) need reasons to praise God – any more than a child needs reasons to praise their parent. By the law of justice, he is worthy of our praise by the very nature of things. Also God has made us worshippers by design; we are most complete and healthy when we are fully turned out from ourselves in praise.

### Forget not all his benefits (2-5)

A human needs no reasons to praise God (see above). Nevertheless, in his grace, he gives us innumerable personal reasons to praise him. Not only the law of justice, but also the law of gratitude calls out our praise. The problem is, we often overlook these reasons – taking them for granted.

Even popular psychology proclaims the benefits of the 'attitude of gratitude'. What a lot of reasons we have for gratitude to God!

Bear in mind this is David's list – not necessarily yours and not necessarily your hearers'. It's worth taking care to address people who would love God to have healed 'all their diseases' or who don't feel God has '[redeemed their] life from the pit'.

But this truth is still true – that every good thing we have comes from God's hand. He also typically uses adversity or waiting to make us more like Christ. And finally, he has paid the ultimate price to purchase for us an inheritance where every tear will be wiped away. Therefore, whilst we should be pastorally sensitive to those who are hurting, the main way we will bless them is by reminding them of the bigger picture.

“Memory is very treacherous about the best things; by a strange perversity, engendered by the fall, it treasures up the refuse of the past and permits priceless treasures to lie neglected.” (Spurgeon)

There is also an order to these blessings. Forgiveness is first in David’s list and, as Spurgeon points out, ‘Till iniquity is forgiven, healing, redemption, and satisfaction are unknown blessings.’

David probably had specific events from his personal history in mind when he wrote these verses. Maybe we could encourage our hearers to remember specific events in their stories.

### He made known his ways (6-12)

There is a beautiful phrase that recurs throughout the OT. It speaks of the personal relationship God seeks with people – of knowing and being known. It is ‘*You will be my people and I will be your God*’. It is then expanded in the prophetic transition towards the New Covenant.

*“No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord.”* (Jeremiah 31:34)

Knowing God’s unchangeable character and ways is a big deal!

And the heart of that nature is compassion and grace. This is what he showed Moses on the mountain (Exodus 34:6 & 7) – causing his face to radiate.

In Exodus, God’s compassion is expressed inseparably from his justice. Here too, the justice of God (so precious to the oppressed – v.6) is inseparable from his compassion. There must be a bringing into the light and an accounting. And in the face of that accounting, how precious is God’s mercy and forgiveness (v.12).

“It is an attribute to God himself.

And earthly power doth then show likest God’s

When mercy seasons justice.

Therefore, Jew, Though justice be thy plea, consider this-

That in the course of justice none of us

Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,

And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.” (Shakespeare)

### The Lord has compassion (13-18)

God is compassionate to those to whom he has shown his ways. And God’s nature is consistent; he is also compassionate to the rest of his children. As Jesus says, *‘He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.’* (Matthew 5:45). This is God’s ‘common grace’.

- What is the basis of this compassion? According to these verses it is paternal connection (v.13), intimate knowledge (v.14) and awareness of our vulnerability (v.15). He is just a like human father with a small child – but better.
- How solid is this compassion? According to these verses it is as everlasting as we are transitory (v.17).
- And how should a person respond to God’s compassion? According to these verses in fear (v.13 & 17) and obedience (v.18).

The last verse is a regular feature of the OT – *‘those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts’*. And the witness of the OT is that no-one does. That is why God provides a new covenant in Christ – replacing our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

But the failure of humankind to respond to God’s ‘general grace’ doesn’t change the fundamental fact of his compassionate disposition towards his children. He is not ‘for’ some and ‘against’ others. Indeed, it is because he is so committed to his children that he finds a way around our resistant nature.

### His Kingdom rules over all (19-22a)

The Lord is worthy of praise from individuals (1-5), from his covenant people (6-12), from all mankind (13-18) and also from the cosmos (19-22a).

The whole psalm escalates, and so do these verses – from angels, to the heavenly hosts, to all his works everywhere. Why? Because his

kingdom is universal (v.19). There is no power or authority that can resist the LORD.

This section anticipates the finishing note of the whole Psalter – especially Psalm 148 which celebrates God’s universal glory, and the final verse in the Psalter (150:6) which says *‘Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!’*

God’s universal kingship is very good news indeed. It means that every wrong will be righted, every tear wiped away, and goodness and light will reign forever. That is why Jesus teaches us to pray, *‘Your kingdom come, your will be done – on earth as it is in heaven’*.

But before that he teaches us to pray, *‘Hallowed be your name.’* And that is because the pure praise of God is not a means to an end, but an end in itself. God’s praise is the universe working as it should.

[Praise the Lord, my soul \(22b\)](#)

The Psalm ends as it begins.

Suddenly the frame narrows from the cosmos to one soul – the author’s soul and now the reader’s soul.

This last sermon reminds us of the purpose of the whole Psalm. If we’re not left wanting to sing God’s praises, then we have missed the point.

There is an opportunity here to review the Psalm – and all the many reasons it gives for God praise.

There is also an opportunity here to make the connection – to invite our hearers to step from thinking to praising and to consider what praise is. The praise of the soul is more than just well-sung worship songs, more than lives of obedience, and more than words of adoration. It is not less than any of these things, but it is more. It is *‘falling in love’*.

## Resources

Spurgeon, CH (2008) The Treasury of David, vol 2 of 3, p.275 (pdf available here <https://gracegems.org/Spurgeon/103.htm>)