

PSALM 103

GOD, THE REDEEMER

(Vv. 6-12)

John Kachelman

PSALM 103 is among the sweetest hymns contained in the entire book of Psalms. "It is a Psalm of inimitable sweetness and excellence; contains the most affectionate sentiments of gratitude to God for his mercies; and the most consoling motives to continue to trust in God, and be obedient to him."¹

David praised Jehovah for the abundant favors of life in verses 1 through 5. In the next paragraph, David sharpens his focus on the goodness of God's character. He develops a comprehensive picture of God that has brought cheer and courage to pious saints for thousands of years. Here in simple terms is described God, the Redeemer!

Verses 6 through 12 speak of the great redemptive power of Jehovah. What a marvelous scheme of redemption through which God made possible the salvation of erring man! Just thinking of this great scheme of redemption will cause praise us to have and thanksgiving similar to that uttered by Paul:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the

forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:3-7).

Consider how God is revealed as "the Redeemer" of mankind.

THREE DESCRIPTIVE TRAITS

The Redeemer is righteous (v. 6). In the Bible, the two separate concepts of righteousness and justice are scarcely distinguished. They unite to inform man that Jehovah is a God whose ways are constantly right. Whatever God does, He does right. There is never a question about the "rightness" of God's acts.

When Abraham interceded for the righteous souls in Sodom, he asked of God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18:25). The psalms and the prophecies depict God as an all-powerful ruler, reigning in majestic righteousness: ". . . Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (97:2; see also Jeremiah 12:1-4; etc.). The victorious saints sing a heavenly hymn of praise which has the theme of righteousness and justice: ". . . Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. . . ." (Revelation 15:2-4).

In Psalm 103, David's focus is upon the way God balances life's iniquities. The word "performs" in verse 6 signifies constant action. God is ever watching for those who injure His saints. He is vigilant regarding those who trespass His holy commands. Because of this "performance" of righteousness, *all* wrongs will be corrected, and *all* oppressed saints will be avenged. "Justice may at time leave the courts

¹Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible With a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, *Job to Solomon's Song* (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 543.

of man, but it abides upon the tribunal of God."²

The righteousness of God ought to cause great comfort for Christians. But think! If this trait calms the saint's troubled heart, it must terrorize the sinner's soul! All who understand God's righteousness comprehend the tragic fate of anyone who has to face His holy wrath (cf. Hebrews 10:31).

The Redeemer is revealed (v. 7). We are not left to speculate about this majestic being. God wants man to know all about Him. Consequently, He has revealed Himself in many ways. The realm of nature reveals God's majesty, but nature alone is insufficient. We need God's revealed Word if we are to have full knowledge about Jehovah (cf. 19; Hebrews 1:1, 2; etc.).

God's desire to be fully known is stated by David: "He made known His ways." David's reference to Moses helps illustrate God's desire for men to know all about Him. Moses wanted to know God (Exodus 33:13), and God was eager to respond to Moses' request. God's desire to reveal Himself to man is the theme of Paul's great sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:20-27). Paul told the Athenians that God was eager for man to seek and discover Him.

The Redeemer is merciful (vv. 8-12). The third trait of mercy provides an adequate balance to the portrait of this Redeemer. Without this feature, we would serve a God of legalistic fact, an eternal watchguard, an omnipotent umpire!

After Moses stated his desire to know about God, He revealed Himself to Moses by these terms: "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth: who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, . . ." (Exodus 34:6, 7). God's mercy adds balance to His justice and righteousness.

David said that, first, God is willing to forgive (v. 9). God's anger can cease. The record of our transgression can be erased. God, unlike man, does not bear grudges, nor does He keep an account of every sin that has been forgiven by Him. Second, God is willing to relent in the punishment we justly deserve as transgressors

(v. 10). Third, God is willing to relent in anger and forgive our sins because His mercy is extended toward all who "fear" Him (v. 11). The gracious mercy is limited by this response ("fear") from man. Even though God's grace has appeared to "all" men (Titus 2:11-14), it cannot assure forgiveness until it has been accepted with obedient faith.

The marvelous mercy of God is illustrated in verse 12. Whenever one "fears" God, the forgiving mercy accomplishes full erasure. The expression "as far as the east is from the west" means that sin's guilt has been taken to such a distance that it can never return. In the place of sin's burden there is pardon, renewal, justification, and sanctification (cf. Colossians 1:21, 22; Romans 6:17-23). What wonderful news this is to those who are bowed with guilt and remorse. Full pardon! Complete restoration! Their sins, which had hung heavily over their lives, are now placed so far away that never again will their burden be felt. "So far has He removed our transgressions from us." The good news of the gospel is certainly "glad tidings."

These three traits stand together and present to all a portrait of a loving God who desires that all repent of selfishness and become a part of Christ's body through immersion, washing away the guilt and consequences of sin (cf. Acts 22:16). As David contemplated these aspects of God, it is no wonder that he took a pen and composed this lovely hymn of praise to Jehovah!

THREE BIBLICAL TRUTHS

Three significant truths regarding Jehovah must be admitted by all.

First, *righteousness is God's only standard*. The righteousness and justice of God demands eventual equity of all wrongs. The persistent sinner will be destroyed; the humble saint will be rewarded (Romans 11:22). The question that is posed to each reader by this truth is, "Will you join with the heavenly throng and sing thanksgiving for God's righteousness and justice?" (cf. Revelation 15:3).

Second, *obedience is God's only request*. The gracious Redeemer has revealed Himself in such detail for one reason: to seek and save the lost through an obedient faith. It is reasonable for God to expect man to be awed at the divine efforts to restore fellowship between the Creator and the created. It is reasonable for God to expect man to study the revelation of Himself. The only

²C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d.; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978), vol. 4, 451.

request made by God is that man obey that heavenly will. All who humble themselves in obedience to God's will can find comfort (1 Peter 5:5-6). It is folly for one to keep resisting obedience (Acts 22:16).

A person's failure to obey may be explained by many excuses. One excuse refers to God's abundant love and mercy. Those who use that excuse believe that since God is so loving He will not punish the disobedient. I think the following is an excellent response to all who try to excuse disobedience:

God's justice stands forever against the sinner in utter severity. The auge and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all pleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unregarded. As responsible moral beings we dare not so trifle with our eternal future.³

Third, *fellowship with man is God's only objective*. Our fellowship with God is lost because we sin (Isaiah 59:2). The Bible is a record of how God sought to restore lost fellowship. God's love prevents Him from keeping an account of injuries done to Him. He longs for the moment when He can erase all sin and restore fellowship to Eden's beauty (2 Peter 3:10). The holy anger will relent; He is not implacable (Ezekiel 18:27).

But how can this lost fellowship be restored? How is it possible for erring man to escape the penalty of spiritual death (Romans 6:23)? An answer to this question is found in the Old Testament. In the days of Israeli slavery in Egypt nine plagues struck the hardened sinners and the tenth was announced. The death of the firstborn of every house, Egyptian and Israeli alike, would occur. But Israel was offered an alternative: She could escape the penalty of death. God told Israel about a substitute that could take the place of the firstborn. A Passover lamb was to be killed, and its death would take the penalty of death announced by God. If Israel obeyed God's instructions, the nation would be dealt with mercifully. The lamb was to be an unblemished one-year-old male. It was to be killed at twilight, and its blood was to be placed

on the doorposts and lintels of Israeli houses. God told Israel,

For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt both man and beast; . . . I will execute judgments—I am the Lord. And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:12, 13).

We face the same dilemma—a death sentence. But we have been offered an alternative through which we can live. This alternative comes through the death of our "Passover Lamb," Jesus Christ (John 1:29; 1 John 2:1, 2). Christ, our substitute, has taken the penalty and assures us that we can receive the mercy of God. Unless we accept this alternative, the blood of Christ is useless! Unless we follow God's commands, the divine penalty of death will come upon us. Should we neglect or take for granted Christ's blood, there "remains no more sacrifice for us" (cf. Hebrews 10:26-29).

For this reason, Christ came to earth and died upon the cross. God was offering man the only way that divine fellowship could be restored. This was God's objective. When sincere hearts come to understand this truth, an imperative question will arise, "What shall we do?" God's Bible responds with simple answers: Having heard the gospel's good news and believing that Jesus is the Son of God, we must repent of our sinful ways, confess Christ's deity, and be immersed (cf. Romans 10:9, 10; Luke 13:3; Acts 22:16). As we follow these instructions, we will be saved "having called upon the name of the Lord" (Romans 10:13).

THREE PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS

As we read verses 6 through 12, three exhortations should be carefully observed. First, let all of us be prepared to meet the righteous justice of God! (Amos 4:12). This is only possible if we seize the moment to obey God's will (2 Corinthians 6:2). Second, let the redeemed offer praise and thanksgiving for the gracious Redeemer (1 Peter 2:9; Jonah 2:2, 6, 9). Third, let all imitate the wonderful traits of God, the Redeemer, which have been emphasized in these verses (Ephesians 5:1, 2).

CONCLUSION

A gentleman was visiting a slave market and was deeply moved by the agony of a slave-girl

³A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), 95.

who had been delicately reared. He feared she would fall into the hands of a rough master. The gentleman inquired of her price, paid it to the slave-trader, and then placed the bill of sale into her hands. He told her she was now free and could return home. The girl could not realize her freedom at first but then ran after her redeemer crying, "He's redeemed me! He's redeemed me!

Will you let me be your servant?" This is how the Christian should feel toward God, the Redeemer. We have been saved from sin and hell. We did not deserve this salvation. We could do nothing to accomplish it. Pure mercy offered an alternative to the penalty of death!

May we have the deepest appreciation for God, the Redeemer.

Applying the Psalms to Life

Is Longevity of Life Our Goal?

Once Sir George Adam Smith, the great Old Testament scholar, found as his seat-mate on a train a young missionary who was going out to a foreign field. The young man was handsome and brilliant, and his talent was soon evident as they talked together.

The young man told Dr. Smith that he was going to a part of Africa where, at that time, a white man's life was measured not in terms of years but of months. The climate, the disease were simply more than the body could stand. There were no medicines or inoculations available. To Dr. Smith, the young man's undertaking seemed a waste of life, talent, and ability. He tried to reason with the young missionary; surely there was some other place of significant service where he might invest his great abilities for a longer period of time and, therefore, for a greater good. But, the young man was firm; to the needy but dangerous lands he must and would go.

The train came to the station where Dr. Smith was to depart and the young missionary was to continue his journey. The

older man still tried to reason with the younger man. But, as the train left the station, the young man was in the door of the train, and the last words the young man said to him were these: "He loved me and gave Himself for me—Can I hold anything back?"

Doing No Harm

A soldier was missed amid a battle, and no one knew what had become of him, but it was known that he was not in the ranks. As soon as an opportunity came, his officer went in search of him and, to his surprise, found that the man, during a battle, had been amusing himself in a flower garden. When it was demanded what he was doing there, he excused himself by saying, "Sir, I'm doing no harm." But he was tried and convicted. What a sad but true picture this is of many who waste their time and neglect their duty, and who can give no better answer than "Lord, I'm doing no harm!"

Preach with Simplicity

In the Berlin Congress on Evangelism in 1966, one of the papers read by an American

theologian was deep and involved. Many of the Christians really did not understand what he was talking about. But an African was there, dressed in his native dress, and he had not been able to make out a thing that the learned professor had said. But he went right up, hugged the speaker, and kissed him in front of everybody. And he said, "I don't understand a thing you say, but I'm so glad that a man who knows as much as you know is on our side." The sentiment was great, but we must communicate so that people understand as well. Preach the Word with simplicity.

The Love of God Never Fails

Niagara stopped once! Owing to an ice dam thrown across the river, the waters failed, the rainbow melted, the vast music was hushed. But there has been no moment in which the love of God has failed toward the rational universe, when its eternal music has been broken, or the rainbow has ceased to span the throne. There never will be such a moment. The crystal tide flows richly, and flows forever.

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