

# Keynotes from Tim Gamston's am Sermon on 15/08/2021

Text: Psalm 103 Mini-Series Part One of Three

Title: "Praising God from the depths of despair"

## Scripture references from the ESV

**Psalm 103** Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

<sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.<sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.<sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.<sup>9</sup> He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.<sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.<sup>13</sup> As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.<sup>14</sup> For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

<sup>15</sup> As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;<sup>16</sup> for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.<sup>17</sup> But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,<sup>18</sup> to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.<sup>20</sup> Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!<sup>21</sup> Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! <sup>22</sup> Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

In any given week, there will be people in church on a Sunday for whom life is particularly a struggle at that time for all kinds of reasons, both big and small. In those circumstances, to be asked by the worship leader to praise the Lord means that their mouths may be declaring truths that their hearts don't feel.

Throughout his word, God calls his people to praise him and to do that not just with our mouths but from our hearts.

**We are meant to be a people who delight in our God and express that delight with words.**

What happens when life is so bad that we just don't feel like praising? How, in those circumstances, are we meant to obey God's command to praise him from our hearts and lift our souls to him in adoration?

**Psalm 103** points us to the answer. The book of Psalms is the prayer book, or song book, of the Bible. If you want to know how to speak to God, these are words that he has given to us which we can use to speak to him. The psalms give expression to every emotion we feel – joy or despair; confidence or fear; hope or disappointment; guilt or shame. This book of the Bible is given to us by God so that we can:

- explore our emotions and give expression to them
- bring ourselves to have confidence in God regardless of what we may be facing

The Psalter is divided into five books, and Psalm 103 is in the fourth book. The psalms in Book 3 (**Psalms 73-89**) express the despair of the people of God with brutal honesty as they:

- Feel overwhelmed by sin and abandoned by God
- Are attacked by their enemies
- Struggle to make sense of God's promises, which seem to have failed.

In **Psalm 73**, Asaph, the writer, is having a crisis of faith. He can't make sense of why the wicked prosper while the godly suffer. Because of that, Asaph, Israel's chief worship leader, is about to give up on God.

**Psalm 89** (see p4) begins by recounting God's past blessings but ends with words of despair from the king, who cries out to God on behalf of himself and the people:

**How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? (Psalm 89:46)**

That is where Book 3 of the Psalms ends.

In jarring contrast, Book 4 commands in **Psalm 100:1-2**

**Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing.**

When we come to church, struggling with life and feeling as if **Psalm 89: 46** exactly expresses how we feel, just how are we meant to praise God from the heart? **Psalm 103** teaches us an important principle:

**Remembering the greatness of God leads to the praise of God.**

The Psalmist gives himself a good talking to, and he commands his own soul to praise God (**vv1-2** above). To bless the Lord means to speak words of excellence about God, to praise him in words. The Psalmist says this has to come from his soul – it isn't just something done with his mouth.

**These are words of praise that come from a soul that is delighting in God.**

How can he do this from the backdrop of Psalm 89 where he feels abandoned by God? The answer to that question lies in **v2 Forget not all his benefits.**

As David begins to remember the benefits that God has poured into his life, his soul begins to praise. The key to heartfelt, joy filled, soul motivated praise is to:

- remember all that God is for us
- remember all that God has done for us
- remember all that God will do for us

This psalm is a celebration of all of those things. It gives us a way we can remember God's greatness because

**remembering the greatness of God leads to the praise of God.**

Over the next three weeks, we will look at the greatness of God in Psalm 103, starting with **God's steadfast love.**

God's steadfast love is spoken of four times (**vv4,8,11, and 17** above). From these four references, we can get a picture of this steadfast love and see how it is the foundation of all the benefits that David speaks about in **vv3-5.**

**Remembering the greatness of God leads to the praise of God.**

**a) The Lord's steadfast love is abounding love (vv7-8)**

David is referring to a narrative in Israel's history. God had just delivered them from slavery in Egypt and they were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. God gave Moses his commandments for Israel. God was entering into a covenant relationship with his

people, committing himself to them and calling on them to commit themselves to him.

The commandments told the people what they could expect from God and what he expected from them in return, but while Moses was up on the mountain, the people grew impatient. They made a golden calf from their jewellery and began to worship it, giving it the status of God and attributing to it their deliverance from Egypt. God threatened to destroy them and start again with Moses but Moses prayed for them and God relented. (**Exodus 24- 32**).

After all this, how could God's people be sure that he wouldn't change his mind about them, that he really would forgive their sin and remain committed to them even after they disowned him?

God declared his own character to Moses, so that he could let the people know what God was really like. He told the people that he was **abounding in steadfast love**. (**Exodus 32:5-6** see p4). In love, God had chosen to take these people to be his, and the love that caused him to choose them was a love that the people could never exhaust.

God's love for his people, which includes those of us who are Christians, is a love that will never run out. We have the assurance that we will never outlive his love.

**It is steadfast love – love that doesn't give up.**

**b) The Lord's steadfast love is eternal love (v17)**

- This steadfast love is **to everlasting**. Even in 10 billion years' time, God will still be pouring his love out on us.

Paul describes this love in Romans **8:35-39** (see p4). Not only is this love **to** eternity, but it is also **from** eternity.

- Go back 10 billion years, before there was a universe, back to a time when God alone existed as Father, Son and Spirit then keep going back even further and God was already loving his people!

**Before there were stars, planets, earth, water, plants and trees, animals and people,  
God was loving us, the people he would save as his own people.**

God didn't love us because of how beautiful our lives were, or how obedient we were. He loved us before we even physically existed on earth, and before we had done anything either good or bad.

**It is a love rooted in eternity and in the sovereign choice of a gracious God.**

**His love for you is not conditional on how well you perform.**

**c) The Lord's love is great love (vv10-12)**

David reminds us of God's mercy (v8), and he shows us what that mercy is like in v10. God does not deal with us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities. Our sins deserve eternal death, but instead (v12) he removes our sins from us. **He chooses not to charge our sin to our account.** The Bible shows us that he can only do this because our sin was charged to the account of Jesus. He paid the price our sins deserved. God looked upon the sacrifice of Jesus and was satisfied. He was able to forgive us our sin. David tells us this is because of the greatness of God's steadfast love (vv10-11). God's love is infinite love, great enough to cover all our sin and iniquity.

**As far as we can tell, the heavens are infinitely far above the earth  
and that's how great God's steadfast love is**

**d) The Lord's steadfast love is crowning love (vv2-4)**

God lifts us from the pit of death, to the height of his heaven, crowning us with his steadfast love. (More next week!)

There is a question to be answered, however. We have seen what God's steadfast love is. It is

- **Abounding love** – we shall never exhaust it
- **Eternal love** – we have always been the objects of God's love and always will be
- **Great love** – it covers all our sin
- **Crowning love** – lifting us out of the pit and raising us to the heights of heaven

The question is how can you know that you really are the object of God's steadfast love? The psalm gives us a clue (vv17-18). How we respond to God's steadfast love will reveal whether we truly are the objects of his love.

**If your response to his love is one of indifference** so that you continue unrepentant in your sin, neglecting Christ and his offer of salvation, then you cannot assume that you are the object of his love. You are still under his wrath.

**If your heart is melted** to the point where you desire to live in obedience to God, and Christ is precious to you, then you can have assurance that God's love has won you to himself.

**The acid test is our love for God and particularly our love for Jesus**

The Father loves his Son eternally, and within the Trinity there has been an eternal love between Father, Son and Spirit. When God, by his Spirit, comes to live in us, then we too come to love God. The Lord Jesus Christ becomes the object of our love, just as he is the object of the Father's love and our response will be to say:

**Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! (v1)**

**Psalm 73** – Please find this in your Bible. It is too long to add here!

**Psalm 89 vv1-2** I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;

with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

<sup>2</sup> For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever;

in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.

**Psalm 89 vv 46 - 51** How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?

How long will your wrath burn like fire?

<sup>47</sup> Remember how short my time is!

For what vanity you have created all the children of man!

<sup>48</sup> What man can live and never see death?

Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah

<sup>49</sup> Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,

which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

<sup>50</sup> Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked,

and how I bear in my heart the insults<sup>[fi]</sup> of all the many nations,

<sup>51</sup> with which your enemies mock, O LORD,  
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

- Please find the whole Psalm in your Bible.

**Exodus 34:5-6** The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands,

**Romans 8:35-38** <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.