

Prayer

When you think about yourself, do you ever feel that there are two of you?

We see this paradox in classical literature with **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, where a man through chemicals separates his moral self from his evil self and eventually gets overtaken by his evil side.

We see it in the character of Gollum and his lust for the ring of power where he switches back and forth between his good self, **Smeagol** and his utterly evil self **Gollum**.

These characters resonate with us because any self-aware Christian knows that there is a deep struggle in their own heart between good and evil.

This struggle does not stop at the door of church buildings. We will often find ourselves thinking about sinful things, even while we are involved in worshipping God and listening to the word of God.

Today I want to talk to you about this struggle & how it affects our worship & praise of God.

From the beginning of this year we have been studying Psalms that teach us why & how to praise God. Today we come to a beloved Psalm that teaches us about praising God in the midst of our deep conflict with sin and human weakness.

Please open your Bibles to **Psalm 103**. I would like to read the entire Psalm to you. **PSALM 103**

Last month we briefly introduced this Psalm and basically said that **verses 3-8** are completely unexpected. This is NOT the way we expect kings to respond to rebels. It should floor us. Its like a scrambled code that doesn't make any sense at all until a **Cypher Key** is added and unscrambles the data. That Cypher key is the cross of Christ. Only the death & Resurrection of Jesus makes sense of the way this king responds to rebels in his kingdom.

The message of **Psalm 103** is that :

God's Exceedingly Gracious Handling of Our Sin and Weakness Inspires Praise!

This Psalm has tension built right into it. Like a tightrope competition where two sides are pulling in opposite directions and the rope is under tension. The Psalm reveals the tension of God's children who are **marked by obedience** and yet are also **marked by disobedience** & weakness.

The great blessings of this Psalm are for those who are characterized as people who fear God. Note this in **verses 11, 13,** and **17**. So what does that mean?

We don't have to guess. **Verse 18** tells us. Those who fear him are those who "remember to do his commandments".

This is the defining characteristic of the angels that serve God as well. Note this in **verses 20 & 21!**

This is a theme found throughout Scripture. Those who call themselves believers—children of God— are characterized by obedience to his word:

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him. **1John 2:3-5**

While it is true that we are not saved on the grounds of our obedience, it is also true that obedience is the fruit of true saving faith. True believers want to obey God’s commands.

But this is where it gets tricky. Because we all know that even though we often want to obey, we often don't obey. Sometimes we yield to sin because of rebellious stubbornness. At other times we yield to sin because of certain sins tempt us easily because of our human weakness. That doesn't **excuse it**, but it does **explain it**.

“The Psalm finds itself walking around one of the trickiest of theological questions, the relationship between “divine commitment & human obligation”. It is possible only to walk around this question; it cannot be resolved. Our relationship with God is wholly dependent on divine commitment, yet unless that meets with a response in the form of revering and thus obeying God, an actual relationship cannot come into being” ” **John Goldingay**, Psalms Vol 3, p. 177

So what's to be done when we— who seek to obey God—**DON'T**. Instead we sin. Well...the easiest thing to do when stained by sin is to stop praising God.

We feel unworthy. We feel ashamed. We feel guilty. And our heart moves away from God rather than toward him.

Psalm 103 helps us with this very problem—a problem all of us experience at times in our life. Some of you may be experiencing that inner tension today.

Yes—our sin interrupts our fellowship with God and makes it hard to praise God BUT...

I. **The Way God Handles Our Sin Inspires Praise** (Psalm 103:9-12)

Look with me at **verse 9**. The word “**chide**” is not familiar to most people. It means **accuse**. There are two truths locked away in this verse.

First, God does accuse us when we sin. He does have anger toward sin because sin is rebellion against him and his perfect character. God reacts to sin because it is offensive to him. That is the part of the verse we would **expect**.

But the part that is **unexpected** is that God does not nurse his anger. Charles Spurgeon says it well:

“He bears no grudges. The Lord would not have his people harbour resentments, and in his own course of action he sets them a grand example.”

Charles Spurgeon - Treasury of David, p. 279

These verses give us an amazing picture of what God thinks internally regarding our sin and how he handles it.

Look at **verse 10**. If you are a believer in Christ, God handles you “**not according to your sins**”. He does not “**repay**” you for your sins. Do you see that?

How can this be? Did you know that the Bible teaches that in order to put right sin violations, the offence needed to be paid for with MORE THAN the actual offence committed. That is the basic **principle of restitution**. The offence to the offended one can only be removed by requiring more than what was initially done.

Offence is removed not just by an act of the will but by making **full restitution**. The Hebrew word for restitution literally means “complete”, “finish”, “end”.

"Excuses might be found for a thief who steals because he is starving. But if he is caught, he must pay back seven times what he stole, even if he has to sell everything in his house." **Prov. 6:30-31** (NLT)

“Normally, the thief had to pay back double because, in addition to requiring that he return the stolen property, justice demanded that he himself be defrauded the amount he intended to steal from the victim. “Seven times” is a figure of full compensation.” **Bruce Waltke**, Proverbs , Vol I, p.358

So when **verse 10** tells us that God does not repay us according to our sins it means that someone else has made full restitution for our sins...and they have been paid to the fullest extent of the law in order that the offence could be completely removed. **God NEVER forgives sin lightly**. He never just says—“I forgive you”. He forgives always & only on the basis of **a full satisfaction for the sin**—the sin is paid for with costly action.

God deals with us in the mercy and grace described in **verses 9-10** because he dealt with Christ on the basis of exacting justice. **Verses 9-10** don't make sense unless we add the phrase "**because Christ died for us**" at the end of each line.

What Christ did on the cross brought full restitution. God was fully satisfied with the settlement. The offence of sin is completely removed.

Look at the word "**remove**" in **verse 12**. If you are struggling to praise today because of sin you have committed, its because its **not removed in your mind**. The word remove means "far", "distant". You are treating the sin as if its close & a present barrier, but God has separated it from you. Are you really going to trust what **your mind says** about sin more than what **God's mind says** about it?

Not only does God not bear a grudge against us, but he never brings up sins he has forgiven again. For God forgiveness is final.

That's why we can praise God even though sin weighs on our heart.

Bless the LORD, O my soul....who forgives **all** your iniquity. **Psa. 103:2-3**

That alone should be enough to help me praise God...but there is even more!

2. **The Way God Handles Our Weakness Inspires Praise** (Psalm 103:13-16)

Why do we help old ladies across the street but not athletes in their prime? We are drawn to help what is weak not what is strong. So is God. We like to live under the illusion we are strong but God's perspective about us is very different. **Verse 14** says he remembers **we are dust**.

“We are on our way back to the soil. Therefore God does not treat us too hard”

John Goldingay, Psalms Vol 3, p. 173

Are days are like grass (**vs 15**). Each one of us here are dying. You are aging and getting older. Eventually you will die and return to dust. We imagine ourselves so invincible but we live such short lives. Within a generation or two no one even remembers us anymore (**vs 16**). We are temporary. Our lives are like mist—only present for a few brief moments.

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. **James 4:14**

God takes this into account. Yet he surrounds our brief quarter note of vanishing time with a endless pages of symphonic music before and after it revealing his everlasting love—directed to us long before we existed and following us through time into eternity. God’s steadfast love—that is—his never ending, never failing love is “**on those**” who fear him (**vs 17**)

Conclusion

So how do we gain from all the good in this Psalm? (**vs 2**) How do we remember...and more importantly, BELIEVE all this, when overwhelmed by our sin and our human transient weakness?

First, we talk to ourselves (vs 1-2). We tell ourselves the truth. Joanne has challenged me with these two questions to interrogate myself when struggling with sin:

- (1) Does that sound like something the Holy Spirit would tell you? If not, why are you listening to an internal narrative that doesn't come from him?
- (2) Who is **the spotlight on** in this scene? in these thoughts? Who is being lifted up or cast down? Is God in the picture at all?

“Bless the Lord, O my soul”. When was the last time you counselled your own soul? It isn't enough to read the truth, or hear the truth. We need to talk to ourselves...just the way we always talk to ourselves...only this time with Scripture truth about God inserted.

“Tim, yes you have sinned willfully. But have you gone to your Father for forgiveness? Do you own it as sin? Do you want to be free from it? Where is this sin you keep speaking about? Look! It is lost in the far reaches of the universe—God threw it there—he has forever removed it. Christ our scapegoat carried it away never to be found again. There is no sin that separates you from your Father. **Why do you keep remembering what God has forgotten?** Stop believing lies & be free!”

Second, we listen to others in the church.

In Psalm 103 the Psalm begins with the Psalmist talking to himself...but his greatest insights come when he switches from the singular “me” & “my” to the plural “**us**”, “**our**” & “**we**” starting in **verse 10**. It is in the community of faith that we are helped to see what God thinks of us, and why we always have reason to praise him.

What we often forget, we need others to remind us of. **We need others to exhort us to belief.** This is exactly why we have small groups in our church. This is why we have preaching like this Sunday by Sunday—because **we forget whats true** without it.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. **Heb. 3:12-14**

We need each other to believe whats real and to stop listening to the lying voices in our heads. The more we believe his words, the more we praise him for his grace!

Then they believed his promises and sang his praise. **Psa. 106:12 (NIV)**

My friends, we gather together like this to help each believe what is true.

What are you believing?...and how is it affecting your practice of praise to God?