

God is our King

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[0 : 0 0] Self-talking isn't a bad thing at all. In fact, God actually approves of it. So, well done, Helen, for self-talking at the very start. But see here in verse 1, Praise the Lord my soul, all my inmost being, praise His holy name.

Praise the Lord my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who is the psalmist talking to here? It's himself, right? His soul, his inmost being.

And so the fact that the psalm is in the Bible shows God encourages us to talk to ourselves in the same way. Not all the time, of course, but sometimes in the appropriate context.

Now, often this happens when things aren't going well. It's like a bit of a pep talk that we give to ourselves. At other times, it's because life is going unbelievably well, and we need to calm ourselves down to not get carried away with things.

I suspect, though, that as we look at this psalm today, it's more likely the former. The psalmist is probably facing a tough time, struggling to remain faithful to God, and trying to encourage himself.

[1 : 1 4] And so what he does in the same is to remind himself not to forget. You see, he's not trying to remember, just to remember, but rather he's reminding himself to remember.

That's where the self-talk comes in, you see. And so point one, and in verses one to six, he reminds himself not to forget all God's benefits.

Or as I put it on the slide, he reminds himself of the lows to highs of God's grace. So as we keep reading on from verse two, praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

What are they? Well, who forgives all his sins and heals all your diseases. Sorry, forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases. Who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.

Who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. Can you see here the movement from lows to highs, from the lows of sin, disease, life in the pit, to the highs of forgiveness, healing, and redemption.

[2 : 3 4] So that we're crowned with love and compassion from God and satisfied by good things that God gives us, resulting in his youth being renewed.

Something an older person might say when they found a new lease in life, that he now feels like he's an eagle, soaring high again. All this comes about because God works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed, the lowly.

It's in God's nature to look favorably on the lowly to those who are being mistreated and dealt harshly in life. But you've got to notice that the psalmist doesn't see himself purely as a victim.

Rather, he acknowledges his own sins, that he has a part to play in this as well. But God graciously forgives his sins. Now, these are all things that, as he's reading or saying this psalm, God has done for him in the past.

And while he doesn't describe his situation now, what he's doing is looking back on God's past acts of grace to remind himself that God will continue to be gracious to him.

[3 : 49] And that's the same for us right now, isn't it? Often when things are tough, as it is now, we can't quite see how it will end, can we?

How long we need to endure. For some of us, we thought, oh, come the 19th of October, here we go, we might get other restrictions easing as we were promised. But now it seems to be pushed back yet again.

And often when we go through tough times, God doesn't give us many answers along the way as well. He might not. He might not show us clearly what the way forward is.

But that's when it's good to remind ourselves not to forget what God has done in the past. Doing that helps increase our faith. Because we tell ourselves, you know what?

We've experienced God's faithfulness and goodness beforehand. And so if you are struggling right now, as I know many of us are, remember that God has already forgiven us in Christ.

[4 : 52] Remember all the times he's brought us out of a tough situation. Focus on all the good things that came after God's forgiveness and rescue.

His compassion and love. His provision for our needs. His gift of hope. God hasn't changed. He's still the same God now.

And so he will do what he did then for us now as well. So let me encourage you then to discipline your mind to meditate on these things and not just be fully consumed with all the things in the here and now.

Often you might hear advice of people to say, oh, you mustn't dwell in the past, but you need to live in the present. Well, actually that's only half true, isn't it?

Because when it comes to God's goodness and faithfulness, it's actually good to dwell in his past goodness. Not so that we live in the past, but so that we're encouraged to keep trusting in him now, even when the present times are tough.

[6 : 05] Well, having covered the lows to highs of God's grace, the psalmist now moves on to the short and the long of God's compassion. Now there may be a few puzzled faces to what I mean by that, but let me read some of the following verses and maybe you can see and understand why.

So continuing on in verse 7, he made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. You see, I think what we're meant to see here is the shortness of God's memory when it comes to our sins.

The psalmist doesn't quite use the word forget explicitly, but even as we've been urged not to forget God's benefit, we're taught here how forgetful God is when it comes to our sins.

[7 : 20] Not of course because he's got a faulty memory, but rather that he doesn't hold our sins against us. You know, there are people who say they forgive you, and then every time you get into an argument with them, they will still remind you of the very thing that they said they've forgiven you of.

Perhaps you yourself might be guilty of this. But not so with God. God, first of all, he's slow to anger.

Even though he's perfect, he's patient with our shortcomings and our failures. He's full of compassion and grace. Now, in case you missed it, those words there in the psalm are a direct quote from Exodus chapter 34 and verse 6, which I've got on the screen.

You can see, can't you, it's almost word for word. Compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. You see, the psalmist is reminding us, isn't it, that God's not simply good to us as individuals, but he's good to God's people, which is what he said to Moses, to the people in Exodus chapter 34.

Because of his promise to them, God is reminding us of his covenant with his people. But more than that, this incident in Exodus chapter 34 comes immediately after the events of the golden calf.

[8 : 45] Next year, hopefully, we'll get back into Exodus to look a bit more detail in that. But that was where Israel, less than 40 days after they saw God's glory on Mount Sinai, turned to idolatry in the form of a golden calf, which they worship.

And yet, straight after that, God forgave them. And when Moses met God again on the mountain, these are the words that God spoke to him for the people.

And that's why the psalmist says he's made known his ways to Moses. He's recalling that very incident, revealing his gracious and compassionate nature. Therefore, he is quick to truly forgive us, not treat us as our sins deserve.

In fact, as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. When he looks upon us, he does not associate us with our sins.

Isaiah chapter 43 and verse 25, on the next slide, put it this way, I, even I, the Lord says, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and remembers your sins no more.

[10 : 00] In other words, he's quick to forget our sins. This all-knowing God who remembers everything intentionally puts our sins out of his mind.

That's amazing, isn't it? And he does that on account of his son's death. Justice, you see, has been served by Jesus already. And so, friends, even though we may be struggling in life, perhaps there's sickness, there's joblessness, there's financial pressure, perhaps there's anxiety about not knowing what the future's like, if you're in Christ, then the one thing you don't have to worry about is your sin.

You don't have to shoulder the burden of what you've done wrong in the past because of the blood of Jesus. So don't allow the evil one to accuse you of that.

Don't be overwhelmed by the sense of what could have been full of regrets if only you had not done all these silly things, these sinful things in life. It's okay.

God has forgiven you. And God's favor, actually, is upon you because of Jesus. Sure, even though we have to work through some of the consequences of what we've done wrong, God's condemnation is not on us because of them.

[11 : 27] In fact, God himself is working to restore to us what has been lost because of our sin. Now, by contrast, if God's memory is short when it comes to repentant sin, our repentant sin, then God's memory is long when it comes to his love for us.

That's the short and the long of God's love. Because over and over, this phrase that is repeated, and that's why that's the sermon of the title, is God's love and compassion is on those who fear him.

We read it already in verse 11, but now again, there's two more times in the following verses. And so we read from verse 13, As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

For he knows who we are. He knows how we are formed. He remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass. They flourish like a flower of the field. The wind blows over it and it is gone and his place remembers it no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

[12 : 44] Again, I think we're meant to see the contrast and there are a number. First, whereas God forgives our sins quickly, look what he remembers. He remembers that we're dust, that we're frail.

We're like grass and flowers in the field. It doesn't take much to blow us over. Just like my coffee this week on my bike ride, one moment I was happily journaling it for Facebook and then the next it was gone on the pavement, blown over by a gust of wind.

Although I did manage to capture the moment perfectly on camera. So that was worth the \$4.50, I think. And that's us, isn't it? We may think 70 or 80 years is a long time in life, but in the overall scheme of things, it's really not, is it?

Just look at the age of the pyramids or if you stand at the top of the Grand Canyon, you'll realize just literally how much we're just a breath, aren't we, in history?

Within 10 or 20 years after our death, perhaps only our loved ones will remember who we are. And really, living through this pandemic at the moment, death hits home close, does it?

[14 : 08] Just like the flowers and the grass, once we're gone, the Bible says our place will remember us no more. A bit sobering, isn't it?

But then, consider this. By contrast, God won't. And even now while we're alive, God doesn't. God remembers us even though we're dust.

And of all the millions and millions of children that are His, He remembers who you are. He remembers that He's called you to be His.

He remembers that He sent His Son for you. As it says, as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.

So He forgets our sin, but He remembers us. There's another contrast. And He remembers us even when no one else will.

[15 : 16] But more than that, not only does He remember, His love accompanies that memory. This is covenantal remembering. A remembering with a commitment to fulfill His promises to His people.

And part of His commitment isn't just to us as individuals, but to the generations after us as well. for it says in verse 17, His righteousness is with our children's children.

Again, these words are an echo of Exodus. So in Exodus 34, the next verse, in verse 7, on the slide, says this, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving, forgetting wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. And this is also yet another reminder of the Ten Commandments, a bit earlier, where God said on the next slide in chapter 20, you shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but then, here's the contrast, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Now, it's not that God doesn't punish sin, He does it because it's serious, but the measure of God's love is way, way, way more than His punishment, a thousand generations compared to just three or four.

[16 : 52] And that's why here in Psalm 103, we get that phrase from everlasting to everlasting. If you ever had any doubt about whether it was worth it to fear God or not, then remember what amazing blessings flow from it, from your faithfulness to God.

Hang in there because it's not just you, is it? But it's for others as well. The Bible here talks about your children's children, but it's not meant to be taken mechanically mechanically, mechanically, mechanically, mechanically, maybe, that's a better way.

As though, if you're faithful, then God guarantees that your children's children will be blessed automatically. No, but the principle here is that your faithfulness brings blessing to others, yes, your children, but you know, some of us may not have children, but others will be blessed by us as well, those we are in relationship with, those we serve, those we are friends with, those we love.

God is saying your faithfulness, even one act of faithfulness, one small breath of faithfulness translates into blessing.

That's the contrast that He's trying to make. And in a small way, when we do that, we're following in Jesus' footsteps, aren't we? Because He's the model example of someone who was faithful to the Lord, loved his Father, and therefore became a blessing, a great many blessings to many people because of His obedience.

[18 : 38] Now, of course, this psalm also tells us what it means to fear the Lord, and we mustn't have the wrong idea. It's not about cowering in fear in the face of a tyrant. It's not about fear of being rejected because you intentionally said the wrong thing on Twitter, or the fear of being honest about your weakness and then have people judge you.

No, when we look at verse 18, this fear is explained to us, isn't it? It's expressed in keeping His covenant, in obeying His precepts.

And speaking of experience, the way I describe this is to call it a joyous fear. It's a fear that realizes just how mighty God is, how powerful He is, and yet He uses that power and might for good, for our good.

He uses it in compassion, in love for the oppressed. And so that's why in addition to obeying this fear, as the whole psalm alludes to, this fear overflows in praise.

And so with the final verses, we come back to where we started in verse 1. Because the last few verses again exhort us to praise. But this time, the heavenly hosts are called to join in praise as well.

[20 : 07] So look at verse 19. The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word.

Praise the Lord, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants who do His will. Praise the Lord, all His works, everywhere in His dominion. Praise the Lord, O my soul.

Now, you might wonder what's the point of suddenly mentioning the angels. Well, I think firstly in the context of the Lord who rules over all, He's saying that it's the angels that do His bidding.

The same Lord that has compassion on us is the same Lord that sits on His throne, and then He sends out His angels to do His bidding, to achieve His will on earth.

But the psalm then also bids these same angels to praise the Lord, before he then closes with that same self-talk of bidding his own soul to praise the Lord.

[21 : 09] And He does this because I think He's urging us to join with the angels in heaven. Firstly, to fear the Lord, for He compares, does He not, in verse 18.

When we fear the Lord by obeying His precepts, that's exactly what the angels do, don't they, in verse 20 and 21. They obey His word, verse 20, and they do His will, verse 21.

And then finally, we are to then join with them in praising the Lord as well, from the very depths of our inmost being. In other words, I think the psalmist is saying, you know, when we do all these things, we praise the Lord and we obey Him, we are almost as if we're elevated to the realm of heaven, together in unison with the angels, serving and praising the Lord together.

This lowliness that we have, this breath and the dust that we are, no, we are being raised up to heaven, to join with the angels and the heavenly hosts, to serve the Lord and to praise the Lord with the angels.

Just last month, we finished looking at Romans chapter 8, didn't we? And Brendan tonight, as he read from Romans 8, he reminded us of what it said in that New Testament reading.

[22 : 30] For me, the key verse there was the last one, which read, said, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any past, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And if you think about it, this psalm tonight is pretty much saying the same thing, isn't it? that the Lord's love, God's love, is with those who fear Him.

Except now in Romans, Christians know that to fear the Lord and to have God's love is to be in Christ Jesus. But otherwise, whether we say from everlasting to everlasting or we say nothing in creation, that's the truth, isn't it?

Nothing will separate us. That's the Bible's constant assurance to us that God's love is with those who fear Him. That means if we continue to keep His covenant by trusting in Jesus, if we continue to obey His word, if we continue to have faith in His Son, then we're fearing the Lord, aren't we?

And therefore, God's love is with us. So if you ever have any hesitation about that, if we ever have any doubts creeping in because life is hard and the way forward seems unclear, then tonight's psalm encourages us to look back, to remind ourselves not to forget what God has already done for us, that He's already given us the gift of salvation in Jesus, that He's forgiven us of our sins.

[24 : 15] God's love is the beauty of the Christian life is that the longer we walk faithfully in Christ, the more we have to look back on, don't we, to see how much God has loved us.

All the times He's continued to be patient with us, all the times He's lifted us up from the pit and rescued us. And that means we can be assured that He will keep holding on to us.

He will keep remembering us, even though we are dust. No, from everlasting to everlasting, His love is with us. And all we need to do is to fear Him.

Amen.