

When You Need to Shake off Apathy, Discouragement, or Gloom

Psalm 103

INTRODUCTION

Allen

Ps 103 opens a group of psalms of Praise, 103-107, In this first one, a “singer gives voice to the sentiments of the many gathered at the temple for a service of thanksgiving and thank offering in response to Yahweh’s benefits to them as individuals. His self exhortation is a message to each worshipper to lift up his own heart in earnest praise.” Is Psalm 103 a “more complete answer to the “depression” of Psalm 102?

Was the psalm composed for use by a soloist singer in the thanksgiving liturgy, to stimulate every individual present to praise Yahweh, and accordingly so composed as to reflect a number of experiences of deliverance in vv 1—6? Both individual and collective elements may be explained in this way.¹

My notes

Praise God for what he is and what he has done This may indeed keep one from the pit of 102 as well.

Leupold

Though it has long been quite fashionable to deny the possibility of Davidic authorship to this psalm, there is still sufficient reason for holding the old Jewish tradition, indicated in the heading. The so-called Aramaisms are never a sure index of date. Because of similarities with words of Job or of the second half of Isaiah it does not follow that our psalm was written later than these. It may be the original from which the other two borrowed. To tell the truth, little is gained by assigning it an earlier or a later date.²

Kidner

Psalm 103 and 104, In the galaxy of the Psalter these are the twin stars of the first magnitude. Admiring gratitude shines through every line of this hymn to the God of all grace, for which the next psalm, 104, seems to have been written as a companion (to judge from its matching opening and close). Together the two psalms praise God as Saviour and Creator, Father and Sustainer, ‘merciful and mighty’. **In the galaxy of the Psalter these are twin stars of the first magnitude.³ ... ¶**The closest of his psalms to this is Psalm 145 but there are others in which he similarly gives himself to some broad theme from the start: *e.g.* Psalms 8, 14, 19, **29**, to look no further. ¶Echoes of the psalm are heard in Isaiah and Jeremiah,(Je. 3:5, 12 has the same terse Heb. idiom as Ps. 103:9 for storing up anger, though indeed this was a standard expression, found also in Lv. 19: (and Na. 1:2). Commentators who take this psalm to be post-exilic naturally regard it as the borrower rather than the source of the similarities in Isaiah) and it draws on earlier scriptures itself, as the comments will point out. It has inspired one of the best-known hymns in our language, H. F. Lyte’s ‘Praise, my soul, the King of heaven’.⁴

¹ Allen, *Psalms*, p.20.

² Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 715

³ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 363, 364.

⁴ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 364.

103:1

Leupold

From time to time a man must bestir himself to offer praise to the Lord for the manifold blessings received. The writer feels the impulse to do this without apparently having been moved to do so by any one particular experience. The multitude of the Lord's mercies impresses him. **In addressing himself to the task he seeks to enlist the help of his whole personality ("soul") and of his entire inner being ("all that is within me"). Both terms seem designed to avoid praise that is merely external in character.** God's "name" is His character as He has revealed it to man in His dealings with him. This name is to be blessed.⁵

Kidner, 1-5, Personal Praise

It is more than eloquence that has shaped this stanza in the form of inward dialogue. **It is not the only instance of a psalmist's rousing of himself to shake off apathy or gloom** (*e.g.* 108:1; 42:5; 77:6ff., 11ff.), using his mind and memory to kindle his emotions. And there is fuel enough in verses 2—5 for more than kindling.⁶

103:2

Leupold

The second summons to engage in this task grows out of the common experience that we are so very prone to forget especially those mercies that come to us often. Forgetfulness in this respect is a danger that is especially to be guarded against.⁷

Kidner

Benefits is the noun that corresponds to the fervent phrase in 13:6, 'he has dealt bountifully with me'. **The fact that to forget such things may have a deeper and subtler cause than absent-mindedness is brought out in the Chronicler's comment on Hezekiah, who 'did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud' (2 Ch. 32:25). A similar point is made in Deuteronomy 8:12—14.**⁸

103:3

Leupold

Among the separate blessings that especially call forth the praises of the Lord, forgiveness of our iniquities very properly stands first. **There is no blessing that is greater in scope for poor sinners, nor any that is so entirely undeserved.** This approach is an indication of deeper spiritual insight on the part of the writer. When diseases are mentioned next in order, it is only too true that recovery from grievous or ordinary diseases is always one of God's major blessings as we recognize especially at the time of recovery. To this must be added another evil from which deliverance has been experimental, namely, that He has rescued the man's life from "destruction," which refers to anything that might have destroyed his life and the things that are important to him, that is to say, any threatening calamity and not only the pit or the grave.⁹

Kidner

⁵ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 716

⁶ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 364.

⁷ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 716

⁸ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 364

⁹ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 716

For all the similarity of these two phrases, there is a difference between God's handling of *iniquity* and of *diseases*, which was made plain in David's own case when he repented of his sin with Bathsheba. Forgiveness was immediate; but healing was denied, in spite of seven days of prayer and fasting (2 Sa. 12:13—23). If relationship with God is paramount, this makes good sense, for sin destroys it, while suffering may deepen it (Heb. 5:8; 12: 11). Yet 'we wait for..., the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:23), and enjoy already many foretastes of it.¹⁰

103:4

Kidner

At one level, to be redeemed from *the Pit* could be an expression simply for rescue from a premature decease (see on 6:5 28:1). But the larger question of man's ransom from death, 'that he should continue to live on for ever', is seriously explored in the Psalter (see, *e.g.*, 49:7—9, 13—15), and makes it possible, even probable, that we should take 4a in its strongest sense, as resurrection to eternal life. On this hope, Psalm 16 :9—11, which is also Davidic, is even more explicit.¹¹

103:5

Kidner *Old age issues in RSV*

As long as you live is a slight emendation of a puzzling word. Most modern versions adopt this solution; NEB, however, keeps the Hebrew unaltered, but translates it as 'in the prime of life', on the strength of an Arabic root connected with daybreak.² Both solutions are somewhat precarious. ¶The second line is not implying (as RSV's apostrophe suggests, and as some ancient commentators believed) that eagles have the power of self-renewal; only that God renews us to be 'young and lusty as an eagle' (PBv)—the very picture of buoyant, tireless strength which Isaiah 40: 30f. takes up. As Weiser comments: '**The poet realizes that the opportunities which life offers lie before him just as they did in the sunny days of his youth.**' In different terms, see on 92:14, with its serene prospect of 'fruit in old age'.¹²

103:6

Leupold

This section of the psalm is a broad background for the first section. The blessings that he personally enjoyed the writer sees against the background of his life in a nation that has also been the recipient of an unusual number of corporate blessings. These latter are also his because he belongs to this people. In addition, it should be noted that what the nation enjoyed is listed in a record of historical events that are the venerable tradition of this nation's past. A general statement opens the catalogue of the national blessings for which the Lord is to be praised: God is the Deliverer of "all who are oppressed." This is not based merely on an experience that was shared by a few. The *nation* was once in bondage—for it is back into the Mosaic days to which this word of retrospect goes—and the Lord manifested both His *righteousness*, that is, the vigor with which He maintains His covenant obligations, and His *justice*, that is, the fairness with which He upholds the rights of those who have been wronged. The specific action referred to is the deliverance from Egyptian bondage.¹³

103:7

¹⁰ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 364,65.

¹¹ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 365.

¹² Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 365

¹³ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 717.

Leupold

A further blessing for which the nation should never fail to be thankful is that “He made known His ways to Moses,” which statement should apparently be judged in the light of the prayer made by Moses in Exod. 33:13, where “ways” must mean “His methods of dealing with men” (*Kirkpatrick*) and not the ways that He would have them go. For this latter interpretation is scarcely in line with the second half of the verse, where “His acts to the children of Israel” must refer to the things that He had done for His people in leading and guiding them. These gracious ways in which the nation has been led are blessings for which God should be thanked.¹⁴

103:8

Leupold

From these more individual considerations the writer broadens his thinking to the point where he reflects on the whole nature and being of God, the chief attribute of which must for poor sinners always be the fact that “He is merciful and gracious” a statement which appears to be an obvious quotation from Exod. 34:6. For it must be remembered that the sentence which is being quoted is God’s own statement in which He conveyed to man a revelation of His inmost being. A significant negative concept is injected at this point, the thought, namely, that this God is “slow to anger.” Of that quality of His the nation also has had abundant proofs. To state it positively, He is “abounding in steadfast love.” This, then, is the broad, comprehensive picture of the Lord that the psalmist is drawing, and which he regards as living in the consciousness and experience of the children of Israel.¹⁵

103:9

The psalmist proceeds to make a fuller statement of this glorious truth about the Lord, that dwells in Israel. This means, among other things, that the Lord “will not always chide,” (cf. Is. 57:16). According to the peculiar flavor of the verb used, this means that, whereas the Lord would have a legitimate cause for striving with Israel, He does not carry this through to the bitter end. Another way of stating the case would be: He does “not keep His anger forever.”¹⁶

103:10

103:11

Leupold

Ah, yes! one might attempt to extol the vastness of this love more fully by several comparisons that have a tremendous sweep. One such comparison would reflect on the incalculable distance between the heavens above and the earth. To our limited human sight that distance spells infinitude. **But that, as a very proper phrase interjected at this point reminds all readers, is an aspect of the character of the Lord with which only “those who fear Him” may comfort themselves. The psalmist would not carelessly give unwarranted comfort to persons who are careless about sin.**¹⁷

103:12

Leupold

¹⁴ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 717.

¹⁵ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 718.

¹⁶ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 718.

¹⁷ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 719.

A second comparison follows. Its sweep is as vast as that of the first— “as far as the east is from the west.” That marks the distance at which He has put our sins away from us.¹⁸

103:13

Leupold

But the third comparison is the most effective of all: “as a father pities his children.” That brings a touch into the picture that almost all of mankind immediately appreciates. The force of the application of this comparison gains a special emphasis in the Hebrew in that a tense form is used that stresses the fact that the Lord “has *always* pitied those who fear Him.” The Lord has a long record among His own of pardons freely bestowed. But again, as in v. 11, only those who have becoming reverence for God (i.e., “fear” Him) dare hope to share in this rich mercy of God.¹⁹

103:14

103:15

103:16

103:17

103:18

Leupold

The eighteenth verse is a further strong reminder to all who read the psalm that the person who is grateful for the steadfast love of which the psalm sings produces the fruit of godliness by keeping the Lord’s covenant and His commandments. But the basic thought was to show how beautifully the loving-kindness of God is made to stand out by virtue of the fact that it is bestowed upon the weak creature that seems to have so little claim upon such kindly treatment. ¶ In traversing the ground that the psalmist has covered by recalling those things that call for praise he seems to be so deeply impressed by the magnitude of praise that the goodness of the Lord merits that he feels inclined to call upon all who could in one way or another contribute to produce adequate praise. He begins by reminding himself how wide the sweep of the Lord’s kingdom is. His kingdom rules over all, and His throne is established in the high heavens. No praise can be too great for such a king. ¶ The summons that are now addressed to one group after the other to contribute to the Lord’s praise grow out of the consciousness that all of those things and beings that God has created constitute one vast harmonious order, where all are minded as he is to sing the praises of the Almighty. The consciousness of the unity of the church above and the church below is in the background of his approach. There are first the great and holy angels themselves (v. 20), these mighty heroes, whose business it is to “do His commandments, obeying the voice of His word.” It is not presumption on the psalmist’s part thus to address these superior beings. The consciousness of being part of the same great church makes him feel that they are of one mind with him in this matter. Since they have been privileged to serve Him and to know the wonders of His gracious will as a result of such service, the psalmist knows that they will readily follow his suggestion.²⁰

103:19

103:20

¹⁸ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 719.

¹⁹ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 719.

²⁰ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 719-720.

103:21

103:22

When You Need to Shake off Apathy, Discouragement, or Gloom

Psalm 103

Background

Among scholars of all stripes, there is discussion as to the authorship of this Psalm. Whether it was David or not, the author is Spirit-inspired and God's Word speaks powerfully to you and me today.

God calls on you to praise his name

God calls on you to "arouse your emotions and mind," 1,2. The author models his responsibility in praise.

He needs to stir his "inmost being," "all that is within him,." He needs to arouse his emotions, in spite of how he feels, v 1.

He needs to discipline his mind to "not forget," to remember all that God as done for himself and others he knows, v 2.

The fact that to forget such things may have a deeper and subtler cause than absent-mindedness is brought out in the Chronicler's comment on Hezekiah, who 'did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud' (2 Ch. 32:25). A similar point is made in Deuteronomy 8:10—14.²¹

How is this done? By reflecting, remembering.

Reflecting on recent benefits received by himself and others in the "congregation," vv 3-6.

3a. "Forgives sins," doubtless the greatest benefit of all. David had much to say about these things, Psalm 32, 38, 51,

3b Heals diseases, what a great thing it is when God heals diseases, probably has reference to someone's recent healing.

4, Redeems your life from the pit, "could be an expression simply for rescue from a premature decease (see on 6:5 28:1)."

5, Allen's translation: "the one who has filled your existence with good so that your youth has come back, new as an eagle's"²²,

²¹ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 364

²² Allen, *Psalms*, p. 17.

...God renews us to be ‘young and lusty as an eagle’ (PBV)—the very picture of buoyant, tireless strength which Isaiah 40: 30f. takes up. As Weiser comments: ‘**The poet realizes that the opportunities which life offers lie before him just as they did in the sunny days of his youth.**’ In different terms, see on 92:14, with its serene prospect of ‘fruit in old age’.²³

6, the Lord had recently vindicated someone from injustice.

...the Lord manifested both His *righteousness*, that is, the vigor with which He maintains His covenant obligations, and His *justice*, that is, the fairness with which He upholds the rights of those who have been wronged..²⁴

By reflecting on the character of God as expressed in his great deeds to his people, 7-18

He revealed himself authoritatively to his people in history, this revelation is expressed two ways, v 7

By his compassionate forgiveness of sins (Exodus 34: 6-7)

Slow to anger, 8b, 9b

Does not treat us as we deserve, 10.

His forgiveness is “incomprehensible,” 11-12.

By his compassionate “fatherly” treatment, 13.

He knows us, v 14

He remembers of what stuff we are made, v 14

He remembers our “short-lives,” 15-16.

Because of this, his children can be assured of his compassion forever, 17-18.

By reflecting upon his sovereignty, v 19.

The author reminds all who read that believers never should grow careless about sin, 11, 13, 17-18.

But that, as a very proper phrase interjected at this point reminds all readers, is an aspect of the character of the Lord with which only “**those who fear Him**” may comfort themselves. The psalmist would not carelessly give unwarranted comfort to persons who are careless about sin.²⁵

The author calls on all beings of creation to bestir themselves to praise God, 20-22a.

But he reminds himself of the most important person in the situation who needs to responsibly praise God, Himself, 22b.

²³ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 365

²⁴ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 717.

²⁵ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 719.