

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

Psalm 103.19–22

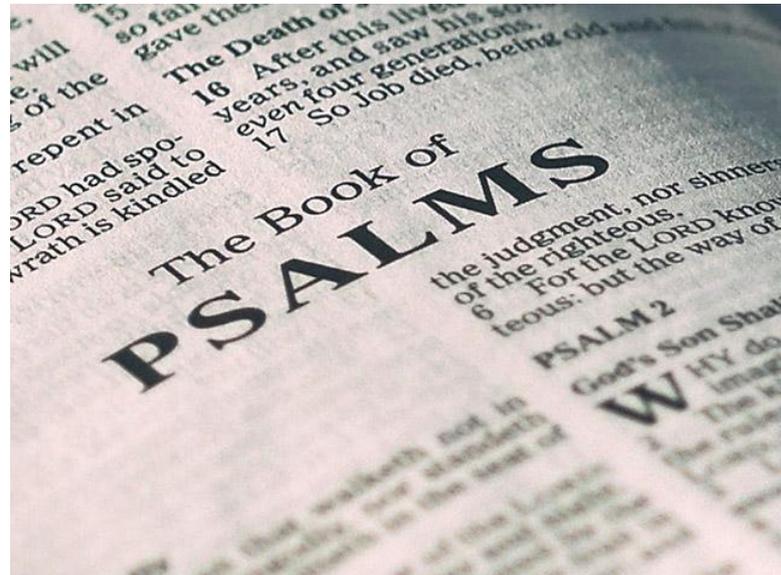
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In the weeks, hopefully months ahead, in my sermons I hope to focus on the Psalm that we have read in our time of bible readings.

The Psalms were the Prayer Book of Israel, and they have always been the Prayer Book of the church.

They were also the Prayer Book of Jesus; He knew the Psalms very well; we know this because He often quoted from them.

My hope is that this focus on the Psalms will help us - you and me - to pray better.



Prayer is something we must learn to do. The disciples came to Jesus and asked him, ‘Lord teach us how to pray’, and Jesus then taught them.

1. We are made to bless the Lord

This morning we have read a small part of Psalm 103; you should read the whole Psalm at home. It is a wonderful hymn of praise to God.

It speaks of God who redeemed his people Israel by leading them out of bondage in Egypt. And how He had forgiven their sins. And how his loving care was the basis of all God’s dealings with his people:

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. (Ps 103.12)

The Psalm then ends with the verses 19-22; we have read those today. God is all powerful. His throne is in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. Over this whole world. Over us all.

David sings that the throne of God is established in the heavens. It is immovable. Settled. Very different from our often rather instable governments.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a Baptist preacher in London in the 19th century, has left us a great commentary on the Psalms. This Prince of Preachers, as he was called, wrote this about this immovable throne of God:

About his government there is no alarm, no disorder, [...] no hurrying to and fro in expedients, no surprises to be met or unexpected catastrophes to be warded off; -- all is prepared and fixed, and he himself has prepared and fixed it.

[His] matchless sovereignty is the pledge of our security, the pillar upon which our confidence may safely lean.

He now reigns universally, he always has done so, and he always will. To us the world may seem rent with anarchy, but he brings order out of confusion. [He is] King of kings and Lord of lords. [...]

He who has [this view] cannot do otherwise than bless the Lord with all his soul.

He is Israel's Father and King. So how should Israel respond? What is the proper reply to his authority and love?

Four times in the few verses that we have read, we saw the commandment: Bless the Lord. Bless the Lord. Bless the Lord. Bless the Lord.

We did not read the beginning of the Psalm; had we done so, you would have heard three calls for God's Name, for his Being, for Who He is, to be blessed.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. (Psalm 103.1-2)

So this Psalm is a sevenfold call to bless, to praise, the Name of God, our King and our Father.

The Angels are told to praise God, his Mighty Ones, his Hosts, his Ministers. All must bless God.

Angels, Mighty Ones, Hosts, Ministers, these are words that seem to designate different sorts of beings that populate the heavens.

The Apostle Paul also speaks of Angels, and Principalities and Powers, in his letters to the churches in Ephesus and Colosse and elsewhere.



In the time of Jesus some Jews went as far as describing in detail the ranks of these beings, and some even worshipped these spiritual powers.

This was totally rejected by the early church. We do not worship them, we do not give them too much attention. But the church has always, with Israel, believed that they exist.

The spiritual realms that God created around us, are populated with spiritual beings.

After these spiritual beings are exhorted to praise God, then also all creation on earth is told by David to bless the Lord.

Bless the Lord, all his works. All his work. Trees, rocks, birds in the air, horses, all things created by God, praise God.

And finally, the author turns inward, where he also began in the beginning of the Psalm. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

I, David, I have to praise the Name of God. We humans, all of us, we have to praise God. We were made for this.

Israel had been formed by God to be the voice of nature, to be priests in the temple of creation, to be the cantors in the worship of the universe. God chose his people to bless the Lord on behalf of all creation.

2. Jesus blessing God

Our Lord Jesus Christ often quoted from the Psalms. He knew them well; He was often in the temple to worship God, and an important part of the temple worship was the singing of the psalms. They were the liturgical Prayer Book of Israel.

How would Jesus have understood Psalm 103?

He was totally used to bless the Name of God, his Father, in a manner that we will not even begin to understand.



He was present in the throne of God from eternal times. And he rejoiced - at the time of creation, when together with God his Father He created all things.

When Jesus prayed Psalm 103, He knew what He was speaking about.

In the letter to the Hebrews in our New Testament we read that through the Son, God created the world. That son is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of God’s nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of his power.” (Hebr 1.2-3)

This is our Lord Jesus Christ, far more powerful than all angels. He actually created the angels; He is the one who upholds the world by his power.

So when Jesus, on earth, read, or sang, or prayed Psalm 103, He told the angels that He created, to worship God. He told all spiritual beings who obey God, that they should bless the Name of God.

For us it sounds a bit strange, that David should tell the angels to worship God. Or that we should do that. Who are we, after all. But for Jesus the words of this Psalm were so much more reasonable. Let me paraphrase his words:

‘Hey you angels, worship my Father. And you, mighty ones, don’t forget why I made you! Obey and worship! And you, ministers of God, do what you exist for! Bow down. Bless his Name. Worship the Almighty, my Father, the King of the Universe!’

“My Father”, Jesus could say. “I belong to you.”

God the Father did not create Jesus. There was never a time in eternity when there was no Son.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit co-exist in an amazing unity, and they have always within themselves, within the community of the one God, communicated - and their language of communication was love, and peace, and joy.

That is actually the highest, and a very unique, form of prayer, when Father, Son and Holy Spirit all the time treat one another worshipful. Loving. Full of adoration.

So without any reservation Jesus, the Son of God, could also say to his own soul: “Bless the Lord, O my soul!”

For him that was the most natural thing to do. Better than anyone, He knew the greatness of God, his Father.

Ofcourse he blessed the Name of God. His God, his Father. The one where he belonged.

No wonder Jesus prayed a lot. He tried to have times-out in order to be with his Father in heaven. That was the most natural place for him to be. Even as a boy.

Once he was lost, and where was he found? The 12-year old Jesus was in the Temple in Jerusalem: “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2.52)



3. The Psalm, Jesus and us

For a short time, for the salvation of mankind, to make God known to mankind, Jesus had left that lofty heavenly throne, but He had not forgotten who He was, and who his Father was.

He was God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God. For us, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven and became man.

The Psalm says, “Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion.”

Jesus had come to our world to bring the works of God, including us, his handiwork, back into a loving relationship with God.

So that we would praise Him, wherever we are. So that for us communication with God would be the most natural thing again, just as it was, back in paradise, for Adam and Eve.

We can only truly bless God, praise Him, by being connected to Jesus Christ, the only true and perfect God-praiser.

Being part of Jesus Christ, by faith, makes us children of God - a people who enjoy God's love, and forgiveness, and care.

And the first step in our relationship with God, is praise. The praise of God, the blessing of God. It is the realisation that God is great, and we are small. That He is holy, and we are sinners. That He is almighty. And we are not.

He is the King. And we are his subjects, his servants. That He is our Father - and we are his children.

The main reason why Jesus came to us, was to relate us to God, and to teach us how to live in a relationship with God. He came to teach us how to pray.

When his disciples asked Jesus, please teach us to pray, he taught them what we now call ‘The Lord's Prayer’.

What do we pray in the Lord's Prayer?

We address God our our Father in heaven, and the first thing we do is to pray that God's Name be hallowed. To hallow means: to treat as holy.

That is what we do when we bless and praise God.

We recognise in the Lord's Prayer that God has all Power, that his is the Kingdom, that He is Glorious.

And in the Lord's Prayer we pray that as God's will is done in the heavens - by the Angels, the Spiritual Powers - that so God's will is also done on earth. Among us. By us.

It almost sounds as if Jesus teaches us to pray Psalm 103!

Conclusion

Psalm 103 begins and ends with the exhortation to bless, to praise God. As our life should be a praise to God from beginning to end.

As our prayers should begin and end with praise to God.

Ofcourse we pray for this and that, for the things we need, for what other people need, but that should really be sandwiched as a hamburger in between the praise to God, and the praise to God.

Just as The Lord's Prayer begins with the hallowing of God's Name, and ends with a recognition that he is the Almighty One. 'For thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory'.

The Psalms, and Jesus, teach us that the praise of God must always come first. The 'give me, give me', in our prayers ought to be sandwiched between, "Lord, I bless you", and "Lord, I praise you".

In church, we praise God a lot in our liturgy. And in our personal lives, let us make it a point to always think of this sandwich when we pray. First praise to God, then my needs, your needs, the world's need, and finally praise to God again.

For yours is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory.

Amen.