

Isaiah 40

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[0 : 00] We are all forgetful people, are we not? And because of that, we all need reminders.

If you don't use reminders, you need reminders. Some of you might live without them, and so invariably forget a long list of things. You know who you are.

Some of you actually use your diary. Others of you, maybe like me, have a phone or a watch sort of relentlessly beeping at you through the day. Sometimes I have the sense to label the various alarms that go off.

Other times I just stare at a beeping phone. The only thing I'm being reminded of is that I've forgotten something. We have places we need to remember to be.

We have people we need to remember to see, things we need to remember to do. And when we know we need to do something, we know we need to remind ourselves to do it.

[1 : 10] Psalm 103 is one big reminder. It is a psalm written by David to himself.

There's something he needs to do, and so he reminds himself what he needs to do and why he needs to do it. That's the psalm in a nutshell. David reminding himself what he needs to do and why he needs to do it.

Look there at the first and last lines of the psalm. Praise the Lord, my soul.

End of verse 22. Praise the Lord, my soul. David is speaking to himself. And the psalm starts and ends with exactly the same phrase, doesn't it?

This is what we call an inclusio, if you want the fancy word for it, to impress absolutely no one.

Where a psalm, or anything, is bracketed, start and end, by this exact same phrase.

[2 : 16] And it's helpful because it tells us, loud and clear, what this psalm is all about. You can't miss it. It provides the framework, the walls within which everything in the middle, in between, is filling out.

So what is Psalm 103 all about? It is about David reminding himself, commanding himself to praise the Lord.

And everything in between is telling us why. Why the Lord is worthy of our praise. This psalm is a command to your own soul to praise the Lord.

And before we dive into the filling in the middle of this sandwich, it's worth spending a little time thinking about what's going on in this one line, right? Because it sets the foundation for the whole psalm.

If we want the building to be solid, we need to make sure the foundations are well set, don't we?

Too often, I think, we think that in order for our praise to be genuine, to be true, it must be spontaneous.

[3 : 38] As if praise is only proper when we can't help but do anything else. Look here, David, right?

The great King David, a man after God's own heart, had to command his own soul to remember to praise God.

That there might be times when you do burst out in praise. Whether on a Sunday when you're reminded again of his goodness. Or maybe out in his creation, right?

Atop a mountain. At the shores of a beautiful lake, looking up into the night sky. As you behold his great creations, there are times when we will spontaneously burst out in praise to our God.

And that is good, that is great. But that is not the only way we can truly and properly worship God. Because telling yourself to do something doesn't take away anything from the substance of it.

[4 : 45] In fact, quite the opposite, I think. Because praising God is a good, a great exercise for your body and soul. On the odd occasion that I go for a run, and it's odder than I'd like it to be, I often have to force myself to do it, right?

I have to tell myself to get out the door. I have to remind myself that it is a thing worth doing. But just because I have to make myself do it, that doesn't make the running any lesser of an exercise. It doesn't take away from it at all. But the fact that I force myself out the door, that I say to myself, I say to my limbs that want to stay on the sofa, no, you've got to go, it shows that it's a thing I think is worth doing.

It shows what I value. That even though my body can't be bothered, my mind knows what's more important. Telling yourself to do something you don't spontaneously feel like doing doesn't take away from the action at all.

It actually shows what you really value and treasure. Do we value praising God?

[6 : 17] Do you know that it is a good thing for your soul to do? If you do, then don't be afraid to tell yourself to do it.

Like David, call out to your own soul. Praise the Lord. Do it, not just because you've got a notion for it in a particular moment, but because you know that it's the best thing for you to do.

Don't just sit around waiting for the day to come. When your praise will flow naturally from your being, because you might be waiting a very long time. If you value it, if you care about it, if you think it's a thing worth doing, command yourself, like David, to praise the Lord.

And if you don't think it's a thing worth doing, well, wait and see what else David reminds us of in this psalm. And hopefully your mind will be changed. But before we get into the rest of the psalm, there's something else I just want to pick up here from these opening lines.

Look down there at the second part of verse one. David wants everything that is in his being to praise God.

[7 : 50] He is addressing his inner soul, everything that is within him to praise the Lord. Put it another way, here is a man with no time for paying lip service.

It's very easy, isn't it? To come in on Sunday, to just sing along with the songs, drift off in the prayers, pay a little bit of attention to the sermon. And on the outside, it all looks great, ticked all the right boxes.

But your heart isn't really engaged at all. Your mouth looks like it's praising God, but your mind is thinking about the 12 o'clock kickoff.

Probably a three o'clock kickoff today. To worship God doesn't just mean paying lip service, right?

It's not about looking like you're worshiping God.

It's about truly praising God with all of your heart, mind, and soul. The Pharisees, right, in Jesus' time, were excellent at looking like they were doing all the right things.

[8 : 59] They looked really religious to all the onlookers, didn't they? They kept the rules that they had made for themselves.

They stood on the streets to pray so everyone could see them. They were the kind of people who would have been in here every Sunday, morning and evening, singing and praying, looking to all the world like they were good people who worshiped God.

But their hearts were far from it. What does Jesus say to such people? You hypocrites.

You honor me with your lips, but your heart is far from it. They worship me in vain. It's worth asking yourself, isn't it?

Do you mean the words when you sing them off the screen, or do you just make the right noises with your mouth? Are you singing praise to God most high, or just joining in a nice tune that makes you feel warm and fuzzy?

[10 : 07] When you listen to God's word, are you wanting to hear him speak to your soul, or are you just looking for a nice anecdote?

David knew the danger, the danger we all face. So not only does he remind himself to praise the Lord, but he addresses his innermost being, his heart and all that was within him, to join in the praise.

But why? Why should I remind myself to praise the Lord? It's a good question to ask, and it's one this psalm gives us a very good answer to.

If we want to praise the Lord, or if we want to know why we should praise the Lord, why he is worthy of our praise, there are two things about him that David reminds himself of. Two things we are called to remember.

Remember his blessings, and remember his love. Remember his blessings, and remember his love. So first of all, remember his blessings.

[11 : 20] Look there at the end of verse two. It's again what David calls himself to do, isn't it? Forget not all his benefits. Well, what are these benefits, these blessings we have in God?

Just read on. Remember all that God has done for you.

Don't forget it. There's far more here than we have time to properly unpack. Let me just give you a flavor, a reminder of the blessings that you have in Christ, of what benefits God has blessed us with.

First of all, our sins have been forgiven. Don't forget it. It's very easy to, isn't it? In Christ, there is no condemnation.

You will have done many things in your life that you regret. There will have been times when your conscience has pricked you, when you know you've crossed a line, even if you don't know what that line was.

[12 : 47] You have done things that you fear the consequences of. You've done things you hope no one ever finds out. In Christ, every single one of them is gone.

Gone forever. There's no coming back. There's no guilt. There's no more shame. There's no more condemnation. So praise the Lord, because he has forgiven all your sins.

They are gone as far as the east is from the west. So far has he removed them from you. Praise the Lord, second line of verse three, because he heals all your diseases.

You might be sitting here this morning suffering from some terrible illness. Maybe you live a life of pain. Maybe you're crippled by anxiety.

Depression overshadows every moment of your day. Should you praise the Lord because he heals your diseases? Remember that the life and ministry of Jesus was full of healing, wasn't it?

[13 : 56] He made the lame walk. He healed the ill, cleansed the lepers, gave sight to the blind, caused the mute to speak and the deaf to hear. And that is all a picture of what is to come.

He has come once to heal us from the greatest disease of all, but we'd be foolish to say every disease under the sun has been healed. But he will come again.

He has promised a day to come when illness, every illness will be wiped out. A day when bones will ache no more. A day when pain and suffering will be gone forever.

Praise him because he is the Lord who heals diseases. Jesus showed us a glimpse of what is to come during his life.

A glimpse of a future when every disease will be healed. So praise the Lord because in Christ today is coming when disease and death, pain and suffering, both physical and mental, will be no more.

[15 : 03] Praise the Lord because he has redeemed your life from the pit. Praise the Lord because he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. Praise the Lord because he satisfies you with good.

How quickly we forget the emptiness of life before we came to Christ. The world around us is searching desperately for fullness.

We have it in Jesus. All of the blessings that Paul ruffled through in that passage Margaret read earlier for us in Ephesians, every single one of them are yours in Christ.

Not because of anything you've done, but because of what he has done for you. Just listen. Listen to what you have in Christ.

If you are a Christian here today, listen and know and believe and rest in this. You were chosen before the foundation of the world.

[16 : 14] You have been adopted as a son or daughter of the Most High God. You have been redeemed.

Your sins atone for. You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. Right? Right?

No scheme of man, no power of hell can ever pluck you from his hand. You have an inheritance waiting for you.

One that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. you have a new resurrection body to look forward to.

You will have a whole new creation to enjoy forever. You are going to spend eternity in a place where there will be no more weeping, no more tears, no more suffering, no more sickness, no more death.

[17 : 25] You will be forevermore. That is the blessing you now have in Christ. Remember it.

Dwell on it. Know it. Believe it. And so praise the Lord because of it. But remember also his love.

It's not just about the blessings we have. It's about the one who has blessed us. Have you cast your mind back a couple of months ago to Christmas morning or any Christmas in the past when you got

a present you were pretty excited about?

As you unwrapped it and felt that joy and excitement, that really good gift. Are you excited about the gift? Are you thankful to the gift giver?

Hopefully both. You should be thankful for good gifts you receive. Good gifts are there to be enjoyed. And that's what we should do with these amazing blessings we have in Christ.

[18:42] But we should not and must not forget about the God who has given them. We give thanks for the gifts, but we also give thanks to the gift giver, don't we?

That's what David does in this psalm. He first remembers the blessings he has in God and then turns his focus to the one who has given these amazing gifts.

Just glance down through the rest of the psalm with me and see what we learn about the gift giver.

Verse 8, The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Verse 10, He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to his 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 as he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

[19:56] Verse 17, But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children.

Do you get the picture? Remember God's gift and remember God's love because here is love like no other. Here is a love that cannot be measured.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love. He is abounding in love and it lasts forever, from everlasting to everlasting, from before the beginning of time and beyond eternity.

God's benefits are good. They are great. But his love is greater still. And all the blessing we've just considered are only ours because of his love for us.

Praise the Lord because he has loved us with a love that is infinite and everlasting. He has loved us with a love so great he gave up his own son for us.

[21:17] For that, as we read many times in the New Testament, is the greatest display of love there ever has been and ever will be. Just read a few of them.

Romans 5, 8, God demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Ephesians 2, 4, but because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ.

John 15, greater love has no one than this. To lay down one's life for his friends. 1 John 4, this is love.

Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

That is what Christ has done for you and he's done it all because of his love.

Praise God because he has for us and has displayed to us a love like no other. But there is a condition here that we would be remiss to ignore.

[22:37] God's love is great. It is infinite. It is eternal. And it is offered to everyone. But not everyone accepts it. Look at verse 11 again.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. And then to verse 17.

From everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him, with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

This great, infinite, eternal love of God and the blessings which flow from it are for those who fear him. For those who keep his covenant, for those who obey his commands, for those who hear his voice.

The invitation is open. But many reject it because they would rather not obey his commands.

[23:50] They would rather live according to their own law. Deciding for themselves what is right and wrong. And so they reject God's love. They reject his blessings just so that they can reject his law.

God does demand obedience from his people. But if you look down there at verse 13, it is the same obedience that a parent rightly demands from a child they love because they know what is best for them.

And it is only after he has showered us with all the blessings we've been thinking about, only then does he expect us to hear and obey his word.

This great, infinite, eternal love of God is for all those who accept his gift and who accept the greatest gift of all.

If you have repented of your sins and believe in Christ and you want to live for him even though you mess up time and time again, then know that God's great love is for you. That he has forgiven your sins.

[25 : 04] That he will heal your diseases. That he will satisfy you with good and you can rejoice in his great love. But if that is not you, if you have rejected and are continuing to reject the good gift of God, if you don't believe in his son, then take a moment, I beg you, to stop and think about where you are going in this fleeting life.

Look down there at verse 15. The life of mortals is like grass. They flourish like a flower in the field, but then the wind blows over it and it is gone.

And its place remembers it no more. God's love is eternal. But life is very, very short.

If you are not in Christ, I know you are not satisfied. I know that you feel guilt and shame.

I know that you worry about the future. And I know that you do not know and feel the love of God.

But I also know you can have your guilt taken away.

[26 : 41] You can be filled with all the fullness of God. you can have a sure and certain hope beyond the short years of this life.

You can know the love of God by just rooting and grounding yourself in the love of Christ. And the most gracious, loving God will embrace you with open arms.

And so will his people. But to those of us who have already put our hope in Christ, praise the Lord. Praise the Lord because the blessings are great and his love is greater still. What does it look like to praise the Lord? It means being here, but hearing his word not just with our ears but with our hearts. singing his praise not just with our lips but our souls. It means going out from here and praising him by doing what he has given us to do.

[27 : 49] Loving him and loving others and giving thanks to him in everything. Praising the Lord in all life doesn't mean attending a never-ending Sunday service.

It means worshipping him here and then going about and doing everything he has given you to do to the best of your ability. Giving thanks to him in everything for every good gift you have.

Give thanks for the food on your table. Give thanks for the air you breathe. Give thanks for the roof over your head. Give thanks for the clothes you wear. Remember, brothers and sisters, to praise the Lord.

Set a reminder on your phone if you need to, but remember to praise the Lord. Command your own soul to do it. Remind yourself of all the amazing blessings you have in Christ.

Remind yourself of the infinite, eternal, everlasting love of God with which he loves you and praise his holy name.

[28 : 56] God's praise. That is exactly what we are going to do now as we sing our final hymn together. Based off Psalm 103, bless the Lord, O my soul.

And as we sing, command your soul to join in. Let us praise our loving God together. Please do stand if you are able as we stand to sing God's praise together.

Thank you, sir.