

**PSALM 103:1-22 ESV**

1 Of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. 13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. 14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. 17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, 18 to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. 19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. 20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! 21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! 22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

STRUCTURE

- I. **A personal call to bless the LORD – rooted in His covenantal love (1-18)**
 - a. The personal call to bless the LORD (1-5)
 - i. Forget not His benefits (1-2)
 - ii. The benefit of forgiveness (3a)
 - iii. The benefit of healing (3b)
 - iv. The benefit of redemption (4a)
 - v. The benefit of covenant love (4b)
 - vi. The benefit of youthful satisfaction (5)
 - b. The LORD's covenant with Israel (6-18)
 - i. The LORD's passion for the abused (6)
 - ii. The LORD's passion revealed in the Exodus (7)
 - iii. The LORD's passion revealed in His name (8)
 - iv. The LORD's passion revealed in His mercy (9-14)
 - v. The LORD's passion revealed in His enduring covenant (15-18)
- II. **A universal call to bless the LORD – rooted in His universal reign (19-22)**
 - a. The LORD's universal reign (19)
 - b. The angelic call to bless the LORD (20-21)
 - c. The creational call to bless the LORD (22a)
 - d. The personal call to bless the LORD (22b)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Psalm 103, a Psalm of David, is a call to bless the LORD—to return thanks for blessings received. The Psalm begins and ends with a personal call (“Bless the LORD, O my soul”), where the psalmist commands his own soul to overcome the inertia of self-centered thinking and to worshipfully remember God's diverse blessings. In the first stanza, those diverse blessings include forgiveness, healing, redemption, love, and youthful satisfaction (vv. 3-5), all of which are rooted in God's covenant with Israel. In the final stanza, the blessings are not listed, but the root of them is. The universal call to bless the LORD is rooted—not in God's covenant love for Israel—but in His universal reign over all (v. 19). In other words, because God reigns over all things, all things must praise Him. Since David belongs to both God's nation and His creation, he has a double responsibility to praise the LORD. It is the same with us. As believers, we live under the shelter of God's covenant love, so we must command our own souls to bless the LORD; as humans made in the image of God, we live inside of God's good creation, so we must command our own souls to bless the LORD. Like David, we have a double-responsibility to bless the LORD.

In between this personal and universal call to bless the LORD, the middle section expands upon God's covenant love for Israel, making it the most lengthy portion of the psalm (vv. 6-18). Structurally, the extra content devoted to God's covenant love conveys the weightiness of believers' responsibility to bless the LORD. We are not just beings created in the image of God; we were enslaved nobodies redeemed by a God who is passionate for "the oppressed"—whom I have called "the abused" because it means the same thing but in language we more commonly relate to. When David sang, he reflected on the Exodus, where God redeemed an abused nation from slavery. In Christ, we are redeemed from slavery to sin. Therefore, we reflect on God's greater redemption from our greater enemy, as well as our greater covenant—sealed not with the blood of bulls or goats but with the blood of God's own Son.

Overall, the trajectory of the psalm moves from our covenantal obligation to bless the LORD to our creational obligation (although I don't love the term obligation, we do in fact have an obligation to worship). This movement starts small with just David; it moves from David to Israel; then it expands further—to angels, to all God's works, and then interestingly, back to David. Poetically, this movement from small to large and back to small reminds us that God's love and glory demands not just generalized worship from all created things, but personal adoration from David, from you, and from me. The universal call to bless the LORD never ceases to be a personal call to individuals.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 Of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

—"Of David": for a Davidic Psalm, this one presents fewer enemies, griefs, turmoil, and tragedy than most of his other ones.

—"Bless the LORD":

- To bless God is to return thanks and praise for blessings He has bestowed.
- David begins with intimate praise and builds toward calling on angels and creation to join Him (vv. 20-22a), only to conclude with another personal exhortation to bless the LORD (v. 22b).
- Worship that starts in the heart overflows to all creation, including angelic and inanimate creation. Once your heart engages, you can't contain the crescendo.

—"O my soul... all that is within me":

- Similar statements throughout the Psalms (not comprehensive):
 - 42:5: Why are you cast down, **O my soul**, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.
 - 62:5: For God alone, **O my soul**, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.
 - 104:1: Bless the LORD, **O my soul**! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty.
 - 116:7: Return, **O my soul**, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
- Worshiping God is not natural; worshiping self is natural. Therefore, we must command our souls to do what we know is right and wholesome—praising God, not ourselves (cf. Pr. 27:2: "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth...").
- The parallel statement "all that is within me" clarifies the meaning of "soul". David commands praise to erupt from every inward fiber of his being. Implicitly, this eruption of praise would explode outwardly also.
- Elsewhere, David prays to be protected from an "undivided heart" (Ps. 86:11 NIV); James warns of double-mindedness (Jam. 1:8) that ostensibly believes but in reality doesn't. David's desire to bless the LORD with all his soul / inmost being is a desire to worship wholeheartedly: not half-in, half out; not half-believing, half-doubting.
- O Lord, may we all be wholehearted worshipers! Protect us from half-way praising the One who gave it all on the Cross! Like You, may we hold back nothing! Lord, You gave it all for sinners. How much more should we give our all for the fountain of all goodness!
- Kidner refers to the "O my soul" verses as "the psalmist's rousing of himself to shake off apathy or gloom... using his mind and memory to kindle his emotions."

—“bless the LORD.... bless his holy name”:

- These parallels intend the same meaning. To praise God’s name is to praise God.
- Ps. 138:2: “you have exalted above all things your name and your word.”

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

—“forget not all his benefits”:

- Throughout the Psalms, we “remember” God not merely by calling Him to mind but by acting on that memory in worship (Ps. 42:4-5; 77:6, 11).
- Likewise, when God “remembers” Israel, He does not merely call them to mind but acts in saving mercy (Ps. 98:3; 105:42).
- Sometimes the Psalmist complains of feeling “forgotten” (Ps. 42:9; 77:9)—not just because God hasn’t been thinking of him but because God hasn’t rescued him.
- To “forget not all his benefits” means to purposefully call to mind His blessings and bless Him in return with praise and thanks.
- Hezekiah forgot the LORD’s benefits—in his case, a healing—and it was labeled pride: “But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 32:25).
- In Communion, to “do this in remembrance of me” means to proactively call to mind the blessing of Christ crucified and bless Him in return with thanks and praise. Martin Luther thinks of the “remembrance” as parallel to Paul’s nearby elucidation of Communion: to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (11:26). In other words, communion is a remembrance that proclaims. It is a “visible sermon.”
- Communion is perhaps our greatest means of remembering God’s benefits, for in it we bless God forgiving all our iniquity, healing our diseases, and redeeming us from death.
- O, how prone we are to forget the works of the Lord! Forgetting comes easily; remembering, not so much. This is again why we must command our soul to act.

—“forgives all... heals all”:

- Some struggle with God forgiving “all” sin. “Even that sin?” we ask. Yes, even *that*. All means all. Jesus’s blood is more than enough to drown our darkest secrets. (But we still must confess them—Jam. 5:16; 1 Jhn 1:6-10).
- Some struggle with God healing “all” diseases—especially considering David’s parallel with forgiveness of sins. Word of Faith preachers leverage this parallel to suggest that just as God forgives every sin in this life for the person who asks in faith, God likewise heals every disease in this life for the person who asks in faith.
 - Bill Johnson once said it like this: *“How can God choose not to heal someone when He already purchased their healing? Was His blood enough for all sin, or just certain sins? Were the stripes He bore only for certain illnesses, or certain seasons of time? When He bore stripes in His body He made a payment for our miracle. He already decided to heal. You can’t decide not to buy something after you’ve already bought it. There are no deficiencies on His end – neither the covenant is deficient, nor His compassion or promises. All lack is on our end of the equation.”*
 - In other words, Jesus purchased healing and forgiveness as a package deal, and if we come in faith, we get both right away. Not only do I disagree with that reasoning; I find it hurtful. My friend grew up with a father who became handicapped through a horrific accident. The pastor of their church ostracized him for lacking faith. That’s the outcome of teaching “All the lack is on our end of the equation.” It leaves no space for mystery or sovereignty. I

believe healing, like forgiveness, is in the atonement—but God doesn't guarantee the timing.

- Timing is key. We can't assume God treats forgiveness and healing in precisely the same way. True, God forgives us at the moment we believe. But other blessings of the atonement await Christ's return. Christ purchased resurrection bodies and a renewed universe on the Cross, but we still haven't received these. Some blessings of the atonement come to us immediately, and others don't. The fullness of Christ's purchase on Calvary will not be realized until He returns.
- Given the promise of resurrection bodies, God really will heal all of our diseases. We pray He does so immediately, but even if He doesn't—He one day will.
- Note: it seems like Bill might have updated his view. After his wife Beni died, he stated, "God is not a vending machine"—implying that we can't reduce to a formula that says, "If I believe, I always receive it right now."
- David is an interesting case study in the different treatment of forgiveness and healing. When David sinned with Bathsheba and repented, Nathan responded, "The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). But David's son—the illegitimate offspring of his adultery—does not survive. Nathan explains, "Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die" (12:14). David fasts and prays for his son but to no avail (12:16-18). Forgiveness was immediate; healing was not. (Interestingly, David seems to imply that he would see his son in the next life—a healing in a different sense than what he prayed for. See 12:23. This verse gives me hope that I will see our three miscarried babies.).

—"iniquity... diseases... pit":

- "Iniquity" can refer to our bent or warped human nature; it can also be a general word for sin. "diseases" and the "pit" resulted from sin's entry into the world.
- The "pit" can be another name for the grave or "sheol"—the place of the dead.
- God delivers from each of these enemies of mankind. Sin destroys our soul, diseases attack our body, and the pit consumes our life.
- Jesus took on our sin (2 Cor. 5:21), He bore our infirmities (Matt. 8:16-17), and He swallowed up death in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

—In verses 4b-5, David shifts. Instead of focusing on SALVATION FROM, he hones in on SALVATION FOR. We were saved FROM iniquity, diseases and the pit (vv. 3-4a), but we were saved FOR "steadfast love and mercy" as well as satisfaction and renewal (4b-5).

—"crowns you with steadfast love and mercy":

- As we encounter so often in the Psalms, "steadfast love and mercy" refers to God's covenant treatment of His people. I find it beautiful that God "crowns" us with covenant devotion.
- We are born into this world chasing crowns: athletic crowns, academic crowns, career crowns, relationship crowns, financial crowns. We think that when we finally achieve these, we'll rest easy. But we don't. This list of "crowns" gave us something to chase, providing an arrow to direct our anxiety. But once we achieved it, the anxiety didn't ebb. Suddenly, we were concerned about losing the crown; we were concerned about rivals. Our insatiable desire to be crowned is innate because God made us to reign. But the crowning is not something to chase in the world of creation. It is something we receive from our Creator. Jesus chased us from heaven to earth, and He received a crown of thorns—so we might be freely crowned with "steadfast love and mercy."

—"satisfies you with good":

- God wants us to be satisfied. Here, He satisfies us "with good." This generalized term speaks of His disposition to bless us.

- While He allows suffering, He always aims for ultimate satisfaction. Suffering endured by faith produces sanctification (holiness), and holiness positions us to be satisfied in Him.

—“so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”:

- To have your “youth... renewed” is to be old yet but buoyant with energy. “like the eagle’s” qualifies the sort of energy. Eagles glide with ease. Even when an eagle gets tired, he can spread his wings and cruise faster than Usain Bolt in full sprint.
- “so that” indicates the source of our renewal: satisfaction with God’s goodness.
- When I think on times in my life that I’ve been deeply satisfied with God’s goodness, I have felt like I could sprint up a mountain. On the other hand, when I feel like God is a million miles away, it’s hard to get off the couch. Friendship with God is everything. His nearness is our good. It energizes us to encounter the bad things of life with bounce.

6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

—“righteousness and justice”: these words form a hendiadys (like, “nice and warm”—two words that combine to convey two aspects of a single idea as a rhetorical device that amplifies or emphasizes). “righteousness and justice” combine to amplify the nature of God’s rule.

—“for all who are oppressed”:

- Man’s rule protects the powerful; God’s rule cares for the vulnerable.
- The church must seek to emulate God’s rule, not man’s.
- This emphasis is everywhere in the Psalms. God’s worshiping community is often an oppressed community. It was the “distressed, indebted, and discontented” who came to David in the cave of Adullam; he turned them into a mighty army. It was the “harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd” who met Jesus beneath a roof of sky; he turned them into a church that the gates of hell would not outlast.
- I’m meditating on the place of oppression in Israel’s Psalter. We don’t tend to think about this in the context of worship. Abusers worship power: political power, economic power, religious power, physical power, marital power, technological power. Abusers leave a trail of bodies behind the powerful machine of progress and preservation. God resurrects the bodies and fashions them into a worshiping community.
- The oppressed are less likely to worship power because they have no access to it. Instead, they worship the God of all power who rightly orders it to save them.

—“ways/Moses... works/people of Israel”:

- Here, the Psalmist meditates on the exodus. As believers in Jesus, we focus less on the exodus than the cross and resurrection.
 - God made known His ways to Moses; He makes known His way in Jesus, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).
 - God made known His works in the exodus; Jesus “accomplished the work” God gave Him to do in His life, death, and resurrection (17:4).
- Earlier, David warned us not to “forget” His benefits. By invoking the exodus generation, we think of Israel who forgot God’s work in the exodus to test Him in the wilderness.
- As believers in Jesus, we must proactively avoid forgetting Christ, His work, and His benefits. Paul said, “I have resolved to know nothing else among you except Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). He warned of charismatic crazies who became inflated with visions of angels and lost touch with the head, who is Christ (Col. 2:18). He exhorted Timothy to avoid theological speculations based on genealogies and focus on the bread and butter: Christ (1 Tim. 1:4). In each of these cases, what distracted people from the gospel was not worldly things, but religious things.

- Likewise, we become distracted when we stop dwelling on Christ, His work, and His benefits, instead fixating on the next big thing, the secret of the Christian life, the more effective way to pray (i.e., “going to the courts of heaven”), and so on. There is no secret to the Christian life; the secret is the gospel. There is no secret to prayer; just pray.
- Kidner: “No story surpasses the Exodus for a record of human unworthiness: of grace abounding and ‘benefits forgot’. Its mention here (7) reminds us of the sullen ingratitude which God encounters in reply to the forgiving, healing and redeeming of which the opening verses sang.”

—“merciful... gracious... slow to anger... abounding in love”:

- After Moses prayed, “Show me your glory,” God “passed by” Moses and revealed His name like this: *“6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’”*
- This revelation of God’s character came after Israel worshiped a golden calf and in the context of God’s formation of the covenant with Israel. Israel “forgot” about their salvation in the exodus; they worshiped a false god; in mercy and grace, God forgave them and still married them (i.e., made a covenant with them).
- Throughout the Psalter, Israel repeatedly sings about God being merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. The name reminds them of how God binds Himself to Israel in covenant love despite their failure to remember His benefits.

9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

—In these verses, God’s covenant love manifests in what God does not do.

—To not “chide”: according to *The Theological Wordbook of the OT*, this word usually means to strive in terms of physical combat, but it can also refer to verbal or legal striving. Since the context is Israel’s covenant, it probably takes a legal sense here. God will not always enforce the consequences of Israel’s law. Israel should have lasted in the Promised Land for about five minutes, but God kept showing mercy. Ultimately, Jesus took the curses of Israel’s law upon Himself (Gal. 3:13).

—God’s love manifests in how He does not prosecute us, seethe with anger toward us, or make us pay the true price of our sinfulness—immediate death and eternal separation from God.

—Kidner: “These very human terms point the contrast between God’s generosity and the heavy-handed wrath of man, who loves to keep his quarrels going (‘chide’ translates a term much used for disputes, especially at law) and to nurse his grievances. God, infinitely wronged, not only tempers wrath but tempers justice (10)—though at what cost to Himself, only the New Testament would reveal.”

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. 13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. 14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

—Three analogies convey the richness of God’s love and pardon. The first two are geographical, and the last is relational. These provide the positive counterpart to the negative depictions of God’s steadfast love. Negatively, God does not prosecute, seethe, or repay us according to our sins; positively, God feels fatherly compassion that richly blesses and pardons us.

—“as high/heavens/above/earth... great/steadfast love”:

- By “heavens” he probably intends the sky and universe rather than what we mean by the word “heaven.”

- God's covenant love for us is bigger than the sky. However much we think God loves us, it extends yet further.

—"toward those who fear him": God loves everyone, but He reserves "steadfast love" for those who find refuge in His covenant—those who "fear him."

—"far/east/west... far/remove/transgressions": you can't get further from east than... west. The point of both analogies is that God's love and pardon are beyond comprehension.

—"father/compassion/children... LORD/compassion/fear": God is like a father to us. Those who fear God are like children to Him. He feels a familial bond for us. This bond provides maybe the best illustration of what it's like to be in covenant with God. We are His family. He feels for us like a good father does for his children.

—In light of our sinfulness (vv. 9-10), we can rest confidently in God's steadfast love, for it is great like the sky (v. 11), it casts our sins far from sight (v. 12), and it melts with fatherly compassion (v. 13).

—"For": the Psalmist is about to explain in v. 14 why God feels compassion for us.

—"he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust":

- A father knows his child's small frame; likewise, God knows our mortality and weakness. He does not expect us to be Superman. He expects us to be weak, to want to give up, and to fail often.
- It's easier to forgive a child losing his temper because "folly is bound up in the heart of a child." That's just what they do. Well, in a sense, we never grow out of that. In a sense, we remain fleshly and folly-full our whole lives. God knows this, and He easily forgives it.
- The "dust" reminds us of both creation and the curse.
 - Adam was created from dust, signifying his insignificance. God did not create man from a star or the wing of an angel. On his own, man is nothing more than the red speck that sticks to your shoe when walking along an Oklahoma dirt road. God "remembers" our insignificance when He considers our sin and folly.
 - Adam was cursed with these words: "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). This is the curse of mortality. Our origin becomes our fate.
- In light of our insignificance (we are dust) and mortality (we return to dust), God feels compassion. His far superior power does not lead Him to crush us but to pity us.

15 As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. 17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, 18 to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

—These verses continue the theme of mortality, where the Psalmist reminded us that "we are dust." Here, David changes the analogy: our "days are like grass", and our prosperity "like a flower of the field." The prosperity is short-lived: "the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more." Like the "days" of grass, we perish quickly.

—In contrast to man and his days, which perish quickly like grass, God's "steadfast love" is "from everlasting to everlasting." This is beginning to sound like a remix of Psalm 90:

- "from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (90:2).
- "like grass that... withers" (90:6).

—Psalm 90 speaks of God's nature, which is "from everlasting to everlasting"; Psalm 103 says God's "steadfast love" is "from everlasting to everlasting."

—None of God's characteristics exist in a vacuum; they blend. For instance, God's "everlastingness" bleeds into His other characteristics—here, with "steadfast love." He is not just everlasting, but everlastingly steadfast in His love. In addition, He is everlastingly kind, everlastingly just, everlastingly beautiful, and

everlastingly righteous. God's "simplicity" means that He can't be divided into parts, as if His attributes were slices of a pie comprising a whole, which is God. No, all of God's attributes comprise all of the pie (so to speak).

—"his righteousness to children's children" reminds us of the revelation of God's name in Exodus 34 (quoted above), where God shows "steadfast love" to "thousands" of generations. (The word "generations" does not appear next to "thousands" in the literal text, but it is implied contextually, which is why the NLT and CSB say "a thousand generations.")

—O Lord, bless our heritage to the thousandth generation!!

—"remember to do his commandments": this seems to play on the idea of "forget not all his benefits" (103:2). One way we express remembrance of God's benefits—His forgiving, healing, and redeeming grace—is by remembering His commandments. True faith works.

19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. 20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! 21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! 22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

—Verse 19 seems out of the blue. David has been singing about God's mercy; now He turns to God's rule: God "has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all."

—To us, these ideas are entirely distinct: on one hand, you have God's mercy, expressed in forgiveness, healing, and redemption (cf. 103:3-4); on the other hand, you have God's reign (the theological term is "sovereignty"), expressed in His righteous and just oversight of creation. In the Psalmist's mind, however, these divine traits blend. For instance, 103:6 celebrates God's "righteousness and justice"—characteristics of God's sovereign reign—but these sovereign traits manifest as mercy for the oppressed (103:5-8).

—Putting these apparently distinct traits together—namely God's mercy and God's sovereignty ("rule")—God rules differently than man does. As we saw above, man rules by protecting power, but God rules by caring for the vulnerable. His sovereign care for every detail of the universe is rivaled only by His sovereign care of the oppressed. He cares for each atom; He cares more for those made in His image—especially those suffering. As the Almighty Sovereign over all that is, His just and righteous rule expresses itself as mercy toward the vulnerable. This was always Israel's ideal for a king (Pr. 31:8-9). No king met it—until Jesus: "He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. 11:3-4).

—O Lord, how we long for Your sovereign and merciful rule! We know that every human falls short. We fall short. But in Jesus, the God-man, we place our hope! Rule us in mercy, King Jesus!

—The crescendo of praise that began with the Psalmist commanding his own soul now extends to angels and all creation.

—Imagine feeling so overwhelmed by love for God that you feel compelled to call on angels to join you. "Gabriel, Michael, seraphim, cherubim—come on, guys! Let's praise the LORD!" Personally, I just assume the angels are already doing that. Of course, they are, but that's not the point. The point is that when you encounter the sovereign mercy of our King, you can't help but call on every human, every angel, and all creation to join you. True worshipers are not satisfied to worship alone. Do you feel compelled to compel others to join you?

—O Lord, I don't! The worship in my heart is too small! My vision of You is too small! O Lord, enlarge our vision of You! Make our hearts explode with a cosmic summons to praise! Make us like the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4 who hurl their crowns—unable to think of their own glory—as they contemplate a fresh revelation of Your glory. O Lord, show us Your glory!

—"angels... mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word": unlike human beings, unfallen angelic beings obey God perfectly. How fascinating that David feels compelled to compel even them to

worship! This makes me think of the crescendo of praise in Revelation 4-5. Here is what I write about that in my (forthcoming, by your prayers!) book about Revelation:

"Given our Father's radiant presence, we might have imagined every creature erupting in worship simultaneously, but John's vision portrays something different. Like an ever-increasing mountain spring, cascades of praise build as they spill forth from the living creatures (4:8), to the twenty-four elders (4:9-11), to angels (5:12), and then at last, to every created thing (5:13). Even in God's throne room, worship is inspired not only by God but by other creatures' worship of God. This is what first spurs the elders' response:

*And **whenever the living creatures give glory** and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **the twenty-four elders fall down** before him who is seated on the throne **and worship** him who lives forever and ever (Rev. 4:9-10).*

Not until twenty-four elders hear the song of the four creatures do they drop to heaven's floor in obeisance. Worship is that way."

—"hosts... ministers who do his will": these words also portray angelic beings. They obey His word, respond to His voice, and now they do His will. "hosts" adds that they are an army. There are many of them, and they organize to serve God and combat evil.

—"all his works, in all places of his dominion": as we saw in our study of Psalm 98, David calls on all creation to praise God. This means that he wants creation to submit to God's perfect reign as it was before the curse fell: before death, futility, and chaos characterized creation. David's call on creation to praise God is fulfilled in Christ's second coming (Rom. 8:19-25).

—"Bless the LORD, O my soul": David ends like he began. Even after the cascade of praise has reached all creation, David still must command his own soul. He knows that his prayer has not yet been realized. The whole planet does not yet praise Yahweh, and until it does, we must keep commanding our souls. We must not become leaves driven by the wind of culture, waves tossed by the gust of new doctrine, or animals driven by the lust of instinct. As image bearers, God has given us command of our souls. Scientists have labeled the location of this command-giving functionality our "pre-frontal cortex." Humans have a huge pre-frontal cortex compared to the brains of every other living thing. God has given the man of dust a mighty brain; He has given us dominion. Until creation fully submits to us—and it will—we must first command our own souls.