(Introduction to series) I preached a Psalm’s mini-series a few years back. I called that series ‘Jesus Christ in the Psalms.’ And one of the books that helped me with that sermon series is called ‘*The Messiah and the Psalms*.” It is by Richard Belcher. I highly recommend it! For those of you who do not know, Messiah is Hebrew for Anointed One. It is the name in the Old Testament that looked forward to Jesus. In Greek, Anointed One is Christ. So, Messiah and Christ mean the same thing. And in his book, Belcher rightly recognizes that all the Psalms are related to the person/work of Jesus. In **Luke 24**, we read about the risen Jesus meeting two people on the road to Emmaus. And here is what we read: “*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*.” And at that time, “*all the Scriptures*” was the Old Testament, which includes the Psalms. And later that same day, Jesus also appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem. And He said to them, “*Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*.” So, Jesus Himself knew that the Psalms were ultimately about Him.

Now, Belcher’s book describes two types of Psalms – **Direct** Messianic Psalms and **Indirect** Messianic Psalms. Direct Messianic Psalms are Psalms that are quoted by Jesus or by others in relation to Jesus, or that have some specific fulfilment in His time on earth. Perhaps the most obvious example is Psalm 22. It begins with these words – “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,*” words which Jesus later spoke from the cross. And the Psalm also includes these words: “*They have pierced my hands and feet [and] … for my clothing they cast lots,*” which had their fulfilment in the crucifixion. But today we begin a mini-series on the **Indirect** Messianic Psalms. And these are Psalms that Jesus does not quote or that do not refer to any obvious event in His life. But they are *still* about the person and work of Jesus. And we are going to see how that is so. Let’s read Psalm 103.

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Today we begin a mini-series of sermons that considers what we are calling the **Indirect** Messianic Psalms – Psalms that reveal the person and work of Christ, indirectly. And in Richard Belcher’s book, he breaks these Psalms down into three categories – Psalms of Orientation, Psalms of DISsorientation, and Psalms of New or REorientation.

And I will explain these categories as we go through the series, but we begin, today, with a **Psalm of Orientation**. And these Psalms are Psalms that just celebrate God and His many blessings. There is no specific issue or situation, just a general declaration of praise. Belcher says that they “articulate joy, delight, goodness, the coherence of life, and the reliability of God.”

And one example of this type of Psalm is the **hymn**. And hymns are Psalms that were written to be sung by a congregation in gathered worship. And Psalm 103 is the most well-known and much-loved hymn in the whole Psalter. We have four versions of it in our songbook and it is by far and away the most sung Psalm that we sing.

So, our chief goal today is to see how this Psalm points us to the person and work of Christ. But to get there we must first consider this Psalm in its original context: Why did David say the things that he said? What Old Testament events informed this Psalm? And we are going to consider these things as we look at the two, major parts of the Psalm: The **Call** **to Worship** and the **Reasons** **for Worship**. And having done that, we will then be ready to see how this Psalm points us to the person and work of Christ as we consider the **Object** **of Worship**.

1. So, let’s begin with the **call** **to worship** in Psalm 103.
   1. And the call to worship is very plain: “*Bless the Lord*.” Another way to translate the Hebrew words there would be “*praise the Lord*.” Song 103 in our hymnbooks begins with “Praise God, my soul.” And a much older song version of this Psalm begins with “Praise, My Soul, the King of heaven.” So, this Psalm is a call to bless or praise or worship the Lord.

* 1. And initially the call to worship is **personal and individual**: David says, “*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!*”
     1. And it is worth reflecting on this before we go any further in relation to the call to worship. Last Sunday we looked at the assurance of salvation. And we saw that God wants each believer to know with confidence and certainty that he or she is a beloved child of God. And this is meant to be a very *personal* assurance – He loves YOU and He will preserve YOUR faith and bring YOU to glory. And so, our love for Him and our worship of Him must be personal.
        1. I think I have told you this before, but for memory work in my catechism classes I provide students with all the Questions and Answers of the Heidelberg Catechism that are personal; that speak of my Lord and Saviour and what He did for me. And in the class, if I ask a student to explain what the topic that we are discussing means for them, if they reply with “Jesus died on the cross for our sins,” I will say, wrong pronoun. And that is because our worship of the Lord must be personal: Jesus died on the cross for MY sins; He is MY Saviour; He has given ME eternal life; I must follow Him; He deserves MY worship.
        2. So, this call to worship comes to each one of you as individuals.
  2. But note also, from **verse 6 onwards**, that there is an expansion of who is in view with the call to worship. David now talks about “*all who are oppressed [and] … the people of Israel.*” And from **verse 10 onwards**, it is no longer “*me*” and “*my*” but “*us*” and “*our*.” And then, eventually, in **verse 19**, David says, “*His kingdom rules over all*.” So, now the scope has become universal; God is not just *my* God but the King of *everyone*! And so, the Psalm ends with a universal call to worship in **verses 20-22**: Angels are called to worship, all the hosts of God and His ministers are called to worship, and *all* His works in *all* places of His dominion are called to worship.
     1. And this is, of course, the **fuel for evangelism and missions**. Why do we share the gospel with workmates and neighbours and school friends? Why do we plant more churches? Why have we sent Hans Vaaststra and Pieter VanderWel to PNG and Vanuatu? Because God deserves the worship of all people; He is their Creator, whether they accept that or not. And He can be their Father in heaven if they will receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

1. So, that’s the **call** to worship. And this brings us to our second point, which is the **reasons** for worship. And we see this in verses 3-19.
   1. And the word that this hymn uses to describe these reasons is “**benefits**.” In verse 2, David says, “*Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all His benefits*.” And benefits means anything that produces good or helpful results or effects or that promotes well-being. If you are considering buying something in a store, for example, the salesperson will point out all the benefits of buying that item – how it will make your life easier and save you time and make you feel happy, etc. Well, what verse 2 explains is that the Lord had provided David with many benefits or blessings, but that David too easily forgot them.
      1. And sadly, this was all too often the case with God’s Old Testament people Israel. Last Sunday we read **Exodus 14**, where God brought His people through the Red Sea on dry land and then drowned Pharaoh and his chariots. And in **chapter 15**, we have the song of Moses that celebrates this remarkable deliverance. And the people were singing and dancing! But then, in the very next chapter, we read that the people went three days into the wilderness and found no water, “*and the people grumbled against Moses*,” because they were thirsty. Can you believe it?! Just three days after being brought through the Red Sea on dry land, they had forgotten what God did for them.
      2. And David very much has this period of Israel’s history in mind as he begins to remember God’s benefits. You see, down in **verse 7**, David says, God “*made His ways known to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel*.” And **verses 8** **and 17** quote **Exodus 34:6**. That is where the Lord appeared to Moses “*and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*, *keeping steadfast love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.’*” So, that’s Exodus 34. And do you remember what had happened immediately before that? The people had made **the golden calf**, an act of outright idolatry! And when God told Moses that He was going to destroy the people, Moses called on the Lord to forgive them, and He did.
      3. And this is what David is remembering when he says, in verse 3, that God is a God “*who forgives all your iniquities*.” And he continues this thought in **verse 9**: “*He will not always chide, nor will He keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.*”
         1. You see, to look East you have to turn your back on the West, and vice versa. And so, When God forgives us, He puts our guilt and us on two different horizons. So, when He looks at our guilt, He is no longer looking at us, and when He looks at us, He is no longer looking at our guilt. Isn’t that a beautiful thought!
         2. And of course, if God forgave the people of Israel for their sin, He would also forgive David for his sin. So, he remembers this benefit of the Lord: “*who forgives all your iniquities*.”
      4. But wait! There’s more! For verse 3 also speaks about **healing**: “*He heals all your diseases*.”
         1. And again, way back in **Exodus 15**, after the people grumbled about no water, God miraculously provided water for the people. And He said to them, “*If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in His eyes, and give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer*.” And the Lord repeated these words in **Deuteronomy** and **Leviticus**; if the people obeyed Him, they would be healthy, but if they disobeyed Him, they would suffer illness and disease. And there are many accounts of wonderful healing miracles in the Old Testament. So, David remembers this benefit of the Lord too: “*He heals all your diseases*.”
      5. But wait! There’s more! In **verse 4** we see that the Lord “*redeems your life from the pit*.”
         1. And what is probably in view here is death. In **Psalm 30**, David says, “*O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit … What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness*?”
         2. So, here in Psalm 103, David is remembering the many times that the Lord miraculously spared the people of Israel from death.
         3. And David himself had experienced this mercy of God also, with the lion and the bear that he killed as a young shepherd, and with Goliath and the Philistines and King Saul.
         4. So, David remembers this benefit of the Lord too: He “*redeems your life from the pit*.”
      6. But wait! There’s more! For **verse 5** says that the Lord “*satisfies you with good*.” And here too, David probably had in view how God brought the people of Israel into a land of milk and honey, with vines that they had not planted and crops that they had not sown. And David too had experienced riches and abundance from the Lord. So, he remembers this benefit of the Lord too: He “*satisfies you with good*.”
   2. Now, in **verses 14-16**, David refers to our **mortality**. He says, “*For [the Lord] knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more*.” So, whether it be sooner or later, we will all die. The questions is: Will we enjoy all these benefits during our lives, or not? Well, that depends on who we are in relation to **verses 17-18**. For there we see who it is that enjoys all the benefits of the Lord: “*But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments*.” So, these benefits are not for everybody; these are **covenant** benefits for God’s covenant people.
      1. And so, a key question that Psalm 103 forces us to ask and answer is: **Am I a covenant person**? And the way to answer that question is to answer this one: Do you fear the Lord? Do you know that you are guilty of breaking God’s commandments, and that your only hope for salvation is Christ’s work on the cross? And if your answer is yes, is this seen in how you strive to obey His commandments? Are you so thankful for your salvation that you live to please Him? And when you fail, do you go to Him and confess your sins? That’s what fearing the Lord looks like. Is this you?
   3. Last week, I mentioned probably the first song that children in Christian families learn, which is ‘Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’ Well, another children’s song that I remember being taught at a young age was this one: ‘Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.’ So, brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, do you count your blessings? Do you remember the particular benefits of the Lord to all His people, throughout history, but especially to you? If you do, like David, and like God’s covenant people in every age, you will discover many reasons to worship the Lord!
2. Well, that brings us, thirdly and finally, to Christ as the **Object** of Worship. And here we want to see how this Psalm points us to the person and work of Christ.
   1. And this begins, already in verse 1! For David says, ‘*Bless the* ***Lord****, O my soul*.” In **Philippians 2:9-11** we read this of Jesus, “*Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*.” So, when we bless the Lord, we bless Jesus!
   2. And then, in verse 2, David says, “*Forget not all His* ***benefits***.” And we saw that benefits means blessings. Well, **Ephesians 1:3** says, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing*.” So, each and every blessing or benefit that comes to us comes by virtue of our union with Jesus Christ. As the hymn-writer put it: “How vast the benefits divine, which we in Christ possess.”
   3. In verse 3: “*Who* ***forgives*** *all your iniquity, who* ***heals*** *all your diseases*.” In **Mark 2**, we read about the time when a paralyzed man was let down through the roof in front of Jesus. And Jesus looked down at him and said, “*My son, your sins are forgiven*.” And the Jewish leaders were horrified at this, and they said to themselves, “*Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus … said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"- he said to the paralytic- ‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.’”* And he did. So, Jesus forgave this man’s sins and He healed him. And this was just a foretaste of what He did on the cross, to secure the forgiveness of all God’s elect ones, and what He will do, when He comes again, to bring in the new heavens and new earth, where there will be no more disease, no more tears, and no more death!
   4. In verse 4: “*Who* ***redeems*** *your life from the pit and* ***crowns*** *you with steadfast love and mercy*.” We saw earlier that what is in view here is being protected from death. Well, there are many times that we are spared death, but eventually, as we also saw, we will all die. But for those in Christ, the grave is not our final resting place. In **John 11:25-26**, Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live*.” And **1 Thessalonians 4:16** tells us that Jesus will come again and “the dead in Christ will rise” to everlasting life. And on the Day of Judgment, Paul says, in **2 Timothy 4:8**, “*Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing*.” So, the Lord Jesus redeems us from the pit and crowns us with steadfast love!
   5. In verse 5: “He **satisfies you with good**.” In **John 10**, Jesus spoke of Himself as the good Shepherd. He said, “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*.”
   6. And from verse 12, the **removal of our transgressions** from us, “*as far as east is from the west*” is possible only because of Christ’s work on the cross. He is the Lamb of God who came “*to take away the sins of the world*.” He is the reason why the Father, when He looks at us, does not see our guilt. For in Christ, that guilt has been removed, “*as far as the east is from the west*.”
   7. And this was possible because Jesus was fully God and **fully human**. Verse 14 describes us “*as dust*,” whose lives are short. Well, Jesus entered into our humanity. He was made like us, in every respect, except for sin. And so, He was able to represent us on the cross.
   8. Verse 18 says that the Lord blesses those “*who* ***keep His covenant*** *and remember to do His commandments*.” Well, ever since Adam, the reality is that not one human being, including King David, has perfectly obeyed God’s commandments. But Christ did! He obeyed His Father, perfectly, all the time. So, He is the covenant keeper! And, by faith, not only was our guilt put on Him and punished on the cross, but His obedience was credited to us! So, Christ is the covenant keeper of verse 18!
   9. Verse 19 says, “*The Lord has* ***established His throne in the heavens****, and His kingdom rules over all*.” Well, we have already seen that Jesus is the Lord. And after He died and rose again, He ascended to heaven. And **1 Peter 3:22** says of Jesus that He “*has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him*.” So, Jesus is the ruling king of verse 19.
      1. And this is massively important for you and me as believers. As we confess in Question and Answer 51 of the Heidelberg Catechism: Christ’s kingly rule in heaven benefits us because “through his Holy Spirit He pours out His gifts from heaven upon us His members [and] … by His power He defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies.”

And so, congregation, even though Jesus did not quote this Psalm and even though there is no specific event in the life of Jesus that is explicitly spoken about in this Psalm, I trust you can see that Psalm 103 is about the person and work of Christ! It is in Him that we have every spiritual blessing. And He is the Lord who is worthy of our worship! So, “*bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name*.” Amen.