

A Song of Eternal Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 July 2020

Preacher: David Trimble

[0 : 00] Is there anything more sung about than love? We love love songs, don't we? Most of us will probably have a favourite. Maybe it's the Beyoncé classic, Crazy in Love.

I quite enjoy Friday I'm in Love by The Cure. Going older, you've got the Beatles back catalogue, which is full of love songs. Even older, you might prefer the love songs of Robert Burns.

Even older than that, I'm quite partial myself to Shakespeare's love sonnets, if you count them as love songs. And if you keep going back through history, you will keep finding songs of love.

Psalm 103, the psalm we've just had read to us, is a love song. Though it's not a romantic love song. I've called it a song of eternal love.

Why do we listen to love songs? We all long for love, don't we? We long to love, but most of all, we long to be loved. It's a great tragedy of our messed up world that not everyone experiences love.

[1 : 04] And I don't mean romantic love, that's far too narrow. I mean the love that comes from friendship, family and community. Ultimately, the love that comes from God.

Our world is full of cruelty. It can be harsh and callous. So full of sin that children grow up without knowing love.

Many of us are often so lonely that we feel starved of love. Situations that the pandemic has certainly made worse. But God's love is always within reach for everyone.

At its heart, this psalm is the song of God's eternal love. God's love for his people never dies. It never wastes, never fades away.

It lasts forever and ever. It's a psalm that reminds God's people of God's love when they forget it. And it's a psalm that invites everyone who needs God's love to accept it.

[2 : 10] It was written by David, the great king of Israel. And David writes it as a song of praise. You'll notice that the beginning and the end are the same. Praise the Lord, my soul.

What we get in the middle is the reason David can say confidently, praise the Lord, my soul. And the reasons he can praise God, as we'll see, are amplified for us in the light of Jesus, King David's greater son.

Because of Jesus, these reasons take on a new depth. They take on brighter colors. The reasons begin at verse two. So we're going to look at the different reasons for praise, which can be summed up as firstly, the gifts of our God.

We see that in verses two to five. The forgiveness of our judge, which we'll see in verses six to 12. And the compassion of our father, which we'll see in verses 13 to 18.

The gifts of our God, the forgiveness of our judge, the compassion of our father. And then at the end of the psalm, we get an extended look at praise, which is due to God because of this love.

[3 : 21] And that's where we'll finish. But first, let's look at the first set of reasons that David gives her praise. The gifts of our God. So like I said, the psalm begins and ends with David saying, praise the Lord, my soul.

So from the beginning, this song is directing our minds to God and the praise that he deserves. From verses two to five, David then focuses his song on the gifts and the benefits that God gives to his people.

He says, praise the Lord, my soul and forget not all his benefits. This is a song addressed originally to God's people, Israel. They, like Christians today, had experienced the blessings and the benefits of being God's people.

Particularly during the reign of our songwriter, King David, who followed God wholeheartedly, unlike later kings and later generations. When God's people forget God's benefits, they no longer praise him.

That's a simple observation that the psalm is making. But when we remember God's benefits and his blessings, our hearts are naturally inclined to praise.

[4 : 40] What are the benefits? Well, David names a few. The forgiveness of sins is something that he'll major on in a few verses time. The healing of diseases.

The way in which he redeems his people's lives from the pit. A metaphor to show the way he brings his people out of adversity. The crowning of his people with love and compassion.

The satisfaction of his people's deepest desires. The renewal of strength so that his followers can soar with the strength of eagles.

Since lockdown, I've been at a few Zoom birthday gatherings. One of them was my own. And we did a Zoom quiz. It was great fun. Still, it doesn't quite beat birthdays as a kid, does it?

As a kid, birthdays are super exciting. And being the greedy little materialist that I was as a child, they were especially exciting because birthday equals presents.

[5 : 40] Gifts from all the family. Even family I'm sure that I'd never met. I had a great aunt who used to send me a tenner every year. Can't remember ever meeting her. I'm sure we had met.

I don't remember it. Still, she gave me a tenner every year all the same. So I was a big fan of this particular great aunt. Birthdays are great. God's greater.

And so are his gifts. Not only are they much more meaningful than anything we can get one another, they are much longer lasting. No gift lasts forever.

Clothes you outgrow literally first upwards and then sideways. Most other things you grow emotionally. Things get old, they get dated. But some gifts have an actual best before date printed on the side.

God's gifts never go out of date. His love never goes out of season. And the only way to understand some of these gifts is to see them in the light of eternity.

[6 : 44] God will often renew our strength. But never more so than when we go to be with him. God will often heal us. One day we will die.

True and perfect healing will be in the resurrection of the Christian. The satisfaction of our desires? Never will we be more satisfied than when Christ returns and brings us to be with him.

When David was writing this, was he thinking in explicitly eternal terms? Yes, I think he was. These benefits are often true for Christians on earth.

But not for all. They are true for all believers in the light of eternity. And with our knowledge of Jesus and his plan for his people, we have a deeper understanding of how these benefits are experienced in the lives of believers.

We tend to forget them because we can't always see them clearly in this world of pain and tears, can we? And that's exactly why David calls us to remember them and points us towards praise.

[8 : 00] In verse 6, David then introduces a new idea. He reintroduces God as the righteous judge and defender of the downtrodden when he says, The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

What we see in the next few verses is a particular benefit that David wants to focus on. If verses 2 to 5 were broad, David wants now to double down on specifics and show us in particular the forgiveness of our judge.

It's our second point. For that, he quotes from a very famous and important part of the Exodus story. In the Exodus story, God had just saved his people Israel from slavery in Egypt.

But whilst Moses, God's representative to the people, was up on Mount Sinai talking to God, the people began worshipping a golden calf down below.

And although there were consequences to this, God forgave them. What God said is quoted in verse 8. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

[9 : 20] This love is displayed in forgiveness. A central pillar to our understanding of the gospel is that humanity have sinned.

The New Testament tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The hope of the gospel is God's love displayed in the forgiveness of sins.

And so we get these wonderfully comforting verses which poetically express the total forgiveness that God offers his people. And I'm going to repeat them in full because they're staggeringly powerful.

David writes, In short, And more prosaically, The forgiveness God's people receive from God is total and unfathomable.

Our sins will never condemn us because they have been removed to a distance of infinite space. Next time the stars are out, Have a look at them.

[10 : 53] Take a good long look. Even the furthest star is closer to you than your sin. What David didn't see as clearly as we do now is that forgiveness is made possible through Jesus.

Jesus came to earth to die. Why? To take the punishment for our sin. That's what the cross is all about. A death that saves all who trust in Jesus from the fate that we deserve.

Because we have all sinned. We all, by nature, desire things that are bad. We all, by nature, treat people poorly.

We all, by nature, are selfish and self-serving. Not all the time, but often, aren't we? We are, by nature, sinful.

We are, by nature, in need of forgiveness. The Bible tells us this is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[12 : 10] Perhaps you're listening in for the first time and hearing the accusation of your sinfulness for the first time. And I make no apology for it because I believe it's true.

Yet, I and every other Christian in the world recognize that it's a hard thing to hear. But I'd encourage you to reflect on it and investigate sin and the cross further.

Because God's gift of forgiveness really is transcendent and beautiful. Many of us tuning in will be very aware of our sin.

And what the psalm calls us to do is remember that sin is forgiven. If you're feeling burdened by guilt or the fight against temptation is just wearing you down like steel chains, feel the freedom of forgiveness.

Repent and press forward because God forgives you. Or maybe you're listening and you know that you need a sterner warning.

[13 : 19] Perhaps you've forgotten that you're a sinner at all. No matter what we do, we are all sinners. And the moment we forget the forgiveness that we've received, and our desperate need for it, in fact, well, we will stop living for God and stop praising him.

And this psalm should guard us from that dangerous cliff edge. And it's worth noting that this gift of forgiveness is not limited to our lives on earth.

It is forgiveness of sins that allows us to experience all of God's blessings and the fullness of his love for eternity. We call this salvation.

And David would say, don't ever forget it. The second big benefit that David focuses on comes in verse 13.

Verse 13 says, As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. Focus is on the compassion of our father.

[14 : 27] God is the father of all who trust in him for forgiveness and salvation. This comes out most clearly in the New Testament, but it's pretty clear here in these verses.

What's really interesting is the reason that David gives for God's fatherly compassion on his people. Look at verse 14. When God created humanity, he created him from dust and breathed the breath of life into him.

When man then sinned and disobeyed, he was punished with death. And now all men and women in every age have returned to the dust of death.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Man wasn't made for death, though, but made for eternity. So God has compassion on his people because they will all die.

Unless Jesus returns before that can happen. Our lives are like child's breath blowing on a dandelion. There for a time, but then one breath and it's gone.

[15 : 54] An old mark of its existence is gone. You'd never know it was there. If you'll allow me a Shakespeare reference, I think Hamlet makes the point very clearly.

Hamlet, he's standing in a graveyard, he's holding the skull of a man that he once knew. And he soberingly realises that even the greatest men die and return to the dust and are just forgotten.

Alexander the Great died and turned to dust. As did the Caesars. And it says, He's dreadful.

And that's why God has compassion. What's wonderful is his compassion goes beyond empty promises and empty words that our shows of compassion can often consist of.

He's God. And so he does a lot better. Read from verse 17 with me. From everlasting to everlasting, God's love is with us.

[17 : 23] And to every generation that trusts him, his compassion is clear.

His everlasting compassion translates into us experiencing his love for all time. If you're exploring Christianity or just dipping your toe in the water with regards to church, this is the second part of the great Christian hope.

We mentioned forgiveness. The fruit of forgiveness is salvation. And the fruit of salvation is eternal life. God has compassion on his people and their fleeting mortality.

His gift to them is compassion that results in resurrection. Jesus didn't die, but he rose from the grave to give his children new life and life forever.

The way to be given this gift is to be God's child. And the way to be God's child is to trust in Jesus for forgiveness and follow him forever.

- [18 : 46] What David is wanting God's people to do is recognize the compassion God has on us. God loves you. He loved you so much that he sent Jesus to die for you so that you could live forever and escape the punishment for sins.

Isn't that amazing? The moment we forget God's great compassion, we're going to be in tempestuous seas because we will forget to praise him.

It's often so easy to forget God's love and compassion because we would blithely focus on ourselves and forget that Jesus is coming back. And forget that we were designed not for here, but for eternity.

Philippians tells us that we are citizens of heaven. You are a citizen of heaven. God cares for you deeply and intimately.

You have a hope that springs eternal. You have a love that never dies. So the final verses of the psalm urge us to praise God.

- [19 : 58] The song began with praise and it finishes with praise too. David's desire is that we sing to the praise of our king. Listen to those brilliant last lines again from verse 19.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.

Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.

Praise the Lord, all his people.

The world's the exception. The angels in heaven know the score. Creation knows the score. The score is God is to be praised. Down here on earth, we forget God and all his benefits of forgiveness and compassion and love because the world doesn't acknowledge them.

- [21 : 24] The world pushes them out of our minds. We become like Dory in Finding Nemo, constantly experiencing short-term spiritual memory loss. But the world in this instance is very, very wrong.

We need to get with the rest of the universe and praise God. We need to work hard to remember God's gifts and blessings. And you and I need to join the chorus of creation, which sings praises to God forever.

So don't let the world hold you back from praising God. Praising God may not be cool. And in some places in the world, it's not even safe to be a Christian and praise God.

But it is going with the grain of the universe. God deserves praise. So don't be afraid to worship God.

It's the only thing to reasonably do in light of all that he's done for us. And if you're not a Christian, well, I'd simply leave you with this thought.

- [22 : 35] Is it possible that the rest of the world might have got it wrong? Is it possible that actually God's gifts are real? And that to follow him will result in blessing and benefits beyond what you ever thought was possible?

God's love isn't worth ignoring. I wouldn't reject it out of hand if you think that there's even the smallest possibility that it might be true.

We began this talk by suggesting that this song is the song of God's eternal love. Let's finish with the hope that we will eternally sing of our love for God.

We love love songs. When we finally get to be with Jesus in his new creation, we will sing songs of love and praise to him forever.

And it's going to be wonderful. God's eternal love brings us into his eternity. And the famous hymn Amazing Grace puts it beautifully.

[23 : 43] And it's with these words that we close. When we've been there 10,000 years bright, shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began.

Praise the Lord, my soul. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and your compassion.

All the gifts that you've given us and the gifts that you've supremely given to us in Jesus. Father, help us not to forget them, but help us to remember them, to live them and to praise you.

And Father, remind us that we have a future in your new creation with you, where we will be able to praise you for endless days. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.