

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

DOES GOD PLAY FAVORITES?

GOD GRANTS MERCY FOR HIS GLORY (ROM. 9:14-18)

MAY 15-21, 2016



MAIN POINT

God's mercy is undeserved but is given to further His plan for the redemption of lost human beings.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What are some of the easiest ways you get distracted? Zoning out to the TV? People watching? Checking Twitter?
2. What is one thing you have found particularly difficult in life lately?

Leader: Life is distracting and difficult. We live in a time where the world is more connected than it has ever been, and we are more distracted than we have ever been. Most of us carry more information than we could hope or desire to know on a small device in our pocket or purse. If you need a reason to miss out on what is important in life, you can surely find it. Yet, amid the distraction, God offers us Himself. In Psalm 103, God invites us to take a step back and remember who He is and how He has dealt with us. The psalmist describes how God is merciful toward us in Christ. His mercy is undeserved, but it is given to further His plan for the redemption of lost human beings.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 103:1-6.

3. What do these verses tell us about who God is in character and in action? What do these traits teach you about the character of mercy God displays?
4. What do these verses tell us about what God is doing in our world? Specifically, how is God working these things out in your life?
5. Why is it important for us to reflect on who God is and what He has done? How do we daily remain conscious of His work in our lives and world?

Leader: Psalm 103 is a song of praise to God for who He is and what He has done. When we think about God, it is important for us to realize that who God is can never be divorced from what He has done because God always

acts in accordance with His character. Because God is merciful, He extends His mercy to us. David opens the song with specific examples of God's mercy in action. God forgives us, redeems us, heals us, crowns us with love and compassion, and satisfies us. Though mercy is not specifically mentioned in these verses, God heals and helps us because He is merciful. Like Paul addressed in Romans 9:14-18 as it related to Israel, we do not deserve for God to treat us in this way; He does so for His glory and His purpose.

6. David challenges us to “forget not all his benefits.” What happens when you lose focus on who God is? When you do focus on God's mercy, how is your day different?

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 103:7-14.

7. From Psalm 103:7-14 and Romans 9:14-18, what do we learn about how God showed His mercy to the people of Israel? What does that say about Him?

8. What kind of treatment does our sin against God deserve? How has He treated us instead? Consider the specific metaphors David used to explain the way God treats His children (vv. 11-14). List how many ways God's mercy ought to change our day-to-day lives.

Leader: Like Romans 9, Psalm 103 reflects on the faithfulness and mercy of God toward His people. God is good and merciful to us. He has revealed His character so that we will have a clear picture of who He is. We do not have to wonder what God is like. Once again we see who God is (vv. 7-9), and how He deals with us (vv. 10-13). God is forgiving. Though we deserved God's wrath, we have His mercy and forgiveness. God has moved our sin as far away from us as possible, loved us, and welcomes us like a loving Father. No matter what comes your way, you have a Father who loves you and who has sought you.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 103:15-22.

9. How did David describe God's relationship to us in this section of Psalm 103? Why is it good that God recognizes our limitations? How does that increase our focus on God's mercy and His presence in our lives?

10. Why do you think David begins and ends his psalm with a call to praise the Lord?

Leader: God knows we are temporary and limited because He made us. But each of us has been built for eternity, where God desires for us to know and enjoy Him. Nothing can stop God from fulfilling His promises to those whom He loves. This should be a source of relief for every Christian man and woman. David begins and ends his psalm with praise because God's character gives us reason to worship Him. Thinking about the character and nature of God can be a heady exercise, but such reflection should always produce worship and affection in our hearts. Because God is merciful, He has been merciful to us. In response we praise Him for His kindness and faithfulness to us.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- 11. How will you “forget not” the benefits of knowing God this week?**

- 12. What are a few concrete ways you can express the mercy you have received from God to someone else this week?**

PRAYER

As you close, turn the words of Psalm 103:1-4 into your prayer: “Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

MEMORIZE

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. –Psalm 103:8

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

PSALM 103

103:1-2. The threefold repetition of praise represents the highest form of worship (Isa 6:3). The Hebrew word translated benefits means paying back what is deserved (28:4; 94:2; 116:12; 142:7). It most often describes God's divine wrath and retribution toward the enemy (Isa 59:18), but here it describes the Lord's blessings enumerated in verses 3-5.

103:3. Forgives, a cultic expression common in Leviticus and Numbers, finds fuller development in Isa 33:24; 43:25, although only Isa 55:7 includes the expressed condition of repentance. God heals Israel physically and spiritually, yet we should not associate all physical distress with sin. The Lord heals both body and spirit through forgiveness, providing a sense of wholeness (147:3; Isa 53:5).

103:4-5. The word redeems denotes the payment of a ransom price. The Israelite redeemed his firstborn (Ex 13:1-16). The family redeemer exacted revenge for wrongful death of a near relative, and he adopted the responsibility of raising a son to carry on a dead brother's lineage (Dt 19:1-13; 25:5-10; Ru 3:8-9). Pit refers to Sheol, the place of the dead. The people of God are adorned with covenant loyalty and mercy, like a wreath of honor or esteem presented to a dignitary or king. These verses convey a sense of divine providence and peace, so that youthful strength is renewed (lit "renews itself") like an eagle (Isa 40:31; 57:10).

103:6-7. Righteousness and justice toward the poor and needy in society reflect the ethical integrity of the king as God's representative. The Lord's revealing His ways to Moses refers to the divine formula describing God's character (Ex 34:6-7). God demonstrated His compassion through His mighty works of victory and the sustenance of His people in the wilderness.

103:8-9. In this allusion to Ex 34:6-7, the psalmist used the divine formula as the basis on which Israel experienced the Lord's forgiveness (cp. Isa 57:16 for parallel expressions and terms).

103:10. While God's holiness demands payment for sin, God's mercy and compassion restrain His discipline. The Hebrew word gamal, rendered repaid, forms a wordplay with verse 2. The Lord's people enjoy His "benefits" because He does not pay them back for their sins.

103:11-12. The extent of the Lord's covenant loyalty is incomprehensible, and His capacity for removing transgression is immeasurable. Once the Lord forgives sin it no longer exists (Isa 43:25), and the sinner is delivered from the Pit (Isa 38:17). The language alludes to Isa 55:6-9.

103:13. A godly father disciplines his child not out of malice, but because he loves him (Heb 12:3-13). The Lord demonstrates mercy and compassion toward His children through forgiveness of sin and blessing, in spite of their weaknesses.

103:14. God's intimate knowledge of His created beings affirms their origin and frailty.

103:15-16. The temporary nature of life is compared to the brief blossoming of grass and a flower, easily wilted by the elements. The same metaphor in Isaiah contrasts the power of God's word and the impotence of humanity (Isa 40:6-8).

103:17-18. Although God's people struggle with unfaithfulness, the Lord's covenant loyalty endures for those who fear Him (v. 11). The Hebrew word yara' ("fear") combines obedience and respect with humility before a sovereign God.

103:20. Angels of great strength, or "His angels, warriors of strength," act on God's behalf and minister to His people (91:11; 104:4; 148:2).

103:21. God's armies (or "hosts") refer to divine beings who dwell with God and serve Him.

103:22. The saving works of the Lord toward His people testify to His majesty and power (98:3; Isa 40:5).