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“EXALTED OR BROUGHT LOW”

- Week 5 -

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 103:1 NRSV

**1Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
    and all that is within me,  
    bless his holy name.**

MESSAGE

*Again, the original context for this series was the season of Lent and, specifically, the spring of 2020. Adjust the context to fit your time and place.*

We are in week 5 of our 6-week series for Lent, the season leading up to Easter. It’s hard to believe Easter is two weeks away! But we’ve been talking about surrendering our lives, our entire lives to God, and the problems that presents… what is required on our part and what God promises to do in return.

Now, the main problem is that, we *really* don’t like to give up control of our lives. We think we know what’s best for us. But anyone who has had that security taken away from them knows, control is often just an illusion.

Each week, our series has seemed more and more appropriate. If you’ve missed any of those Sundays, here’s the recap:

Week one, we started by talking about how to give control back to God. It begins with realizing our lives aren’t ours to begin with. Everything we have is a gift from God, including the life we have, and when we realize that, we can offer them back to God, the one who actually is in control in the first place. Doing so gives us a sense of peace on the journey.

Weeks 2 and 3, we started getting more specific, talking about surrendering to God the stress and anxiety we find in our professional lives, our jobs and finances, and then also in the times of suffering. And how through all that anxiety and fear, God promises to support and strengthen us.

Then last week, we talked about *holy* rest, and how sometimes giving God control means taking a break, reminding ourselves that the world will still go around even if we aren’t in control. So, this past week, I hope you were able to do that. Whether you’re in a situation where you have too much time on your hands or if you busier than ever, I hope you found some time for *holy* rest.

Well, today we’re going to shift gears yet again, and talk about something that can help us remember who is truly in control.

Now, if you’re just joining us, we’re using a prayer called the Covenant Prayer, written by a man named John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in the 1700s. This prayer beautifully and challengingly outlines what it means to give God control of our lives. We’ve been breaking it down line by line each week.

We started with,

**I am no longer my own but thine.**

Saying we’re giving our lives to God completely… trusting God with the outcome.

**Put me to what thou wilt,**

**rank me with whom thou wilt.**

Saying, whatever our station in life, whatever job we have, we’re going to be okay with that.

**Put me to doing, put me to suffering.**

Saying, “God, we recognize that tough times are just part of life,

and when those come… we’re relinquishing control to you.”

And last week:

**Let me be employed for thee,**

**or laid aside for thee.**

Saying, “God, I’ll fulfill my purpose in life, but remind me to take times to rest in you.”

Now this week, we get to this line:

**Let me be exalted for thee,**

**or brought low for thee.**

What do we mean here when we say “exalted” or “brought low”?

Here’s how I want us to think of this line. When we say, “let me be exalted for thee, or brought low for thee,” we’re really saying, “God when there are times where I’m recognized for following you… great. But in all of my life… let me be humble.” God, let me be humble.

And here’s the key… the key to humility is gratitude. When we see how much we truly have to be thankful for, when we see how much God has actually done for us, the natural response is humility.

Now, to help us with this idea of being brought low or being humble, there’s a passage from the Bible I want to take a look at.

You may not know this, but the Bible is FULL of songs... 185 of them, by some counts. A guy named King David was the most prolific writer of songs in the Bible, and his greatest hits can be found in a book called, Psalms, in the Bible. David was a king in Israel around 3000 years ago. If you are unfamiliar with this book, let me give you a brief overview…

First, it’s right in the middle of the Bible, (or under the letter ‘P’ if the Bible app on your phone is accidentally in alphabetical order, because some Greek linguist thought the word needed a silent ‘p’ at the beginning.) “Psalm” in Greek means, ‘the plucking of a harp,’ and later just became a word that means, “song.” The book of Psalms is comprised of 150 songs or poems, many of which are quite famous. Psalm 23, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” or Psalm 121, “I lift my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from?” Jesus even quotes Psalm 22 when he is dying on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

These Psalms were written and used for a variety of purposes. Some, like Psalm 119, were used as teaching tools to pass on theology or history to younger generations. Some, like Psalm 84, are songs of praise, “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere!” Some, like Psalm 23 or 121 are words of comfort, that we still use today in times of grief or distress. Others, like Psalm 13 or 22 are songs of lament, real and raw, where David bears his soul before God.

It’s an incredible book. So, if you haven’t read much of the Bible, or even if you’ve read the whole thing, let the Bible fall open to the middle and just pick a Psalm. It’s good stuff.

But today, we’re going to focus on one particular Psalm that is all about humility and gratitude and being “brought low,” Psalm 103.

*<It’s a little dated now, but if you have the worship team to do it, you might consider closing with “10,000 Reasons” by Matt Redman. The lyrics are straight from Psalm 103.>*

*We’re going to close worship today with a song straight from this scripture, called, 10,000 reasons, “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” comes from this Psalm. (Yes, it’s almost as if we plan these things.) Sure, Matt Redman is a genius, but he didn’t write that lyric. King David did.*

Evidently, when you’re king, you just get to sit around writing songs. This one was one of his best.

The NRSV uses this title:

**Psalm of David: Thanksgiving for God’s Goodness**

And as the title suggests, it’s about God’s goodness and how we are to be thankful for all God’s has done for us.

It’s kinda long, so I’m going to highlight just a few pieces of it.

**Intro Chorus of Praise:**

**1Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
    and all that is within me,  
    bless his holy name.  
2Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
    and do not forget all his benefits—  
3who forgives all your iniquity,  
    who heals all your diseases,  
4who redeems your life from the Pit,  
    who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
5who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
    so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.**

There are two things I want to highlight in this section that can help us with this idea of gratitude and humility.

First, when David says, “bless the Lord, oh my soul,” that’s just a poetic way of saying, “remember how awesome God is.” We’re struck with humility when we think of how awesome God is, and that the Almighty Creator of the Universe still cares about us. I don’t know about you, but that makes me pretty thankful, pretty humble.

But he really starts getting into it with that second line. He says,

**“ALL that is within me**,

**bless his holy name.”**

I love that image! We aren’t just to be thankful for God’s mercies when we feel like being thankful, and things are going well. No. David reminds us that we are to be thankful with ALL that is within us. Our gratitude must be deep and desperate. It should come from the very core of our being. It should be so foundational to our souls that every fiber within us aches to cry out to the Lord. ALL that is within us should bless his holy name.

The second thing I want to pull from this section is this.

The author says, **“Don’t forget all his benefits.”**

If you want to bless the Lord with ALL that is within you, here’s a tip… remember all the amazing things God has done for you.

And here’s the thing… if you start counting those blessings, you can’t help but begin to be thankful and praise God from that place deep and desperate longing. “Don’t forget all his benefits.”

And then David, just in case you can’t think of any of those benefits, spends the next 16 verses talking about those benefits: forgiveness, healing of our bodies, minds, hearts, souls, redemption, love and mercy, and a promise that God will provide for us as long as we live. That’s a pretty solid list of the amazing things that God does for us, if you ask me. And there are SOOO many more!

What benefits of God are you thankful for? What have you been blessed with?

*[Take some time here to let your congregation share some things they are thankful for.]*

So that’s the second step to being brought low, to humility and gratitude: “Don’t forget all his benefits.”

Now, I could spend the next hour, the next week, diving into each one of these verses about how amazing our God is. But I want you to do that on your own. Take some time this week to read this whole Psalm and ask yourself, where have you seen God doing each one of these things in your life? Sometimes it’s hard for us to see all the good that God does in our lives. Especially now, this is a difficult time to be thankful. So let this passage speak to you. Look at each line and go, “You know what, you’re right… I AM thankful for that.” And then your own gratitude will flow out and even in the midst of a really tough time, you’ll begin to see the places where God is working.

But there is one that I want to talk about, and what I want to close with. It’s verse 17, he says,

**“the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.”**

So yeah, our lives seem super small compared to the grandness of God, but that makes His love for us so much more impressive and awesome! Billions of people on this planet and throughout human history, and the Almighty, Omnipotent, Omniscient Creator of the Universe STILL cares for *each one of us*… even piddly ol’, insignificant, undeserving me! How special and amazing is that?! That is why I serve the God I serve. That is why I love God so much, and why I praise him with ALL THAT IS WITHIN ME. Because God deserves it. Because our God, who put the stars in motion, still loves even me. Man, if that doesn’t bring you low, make you humble, I don’t know what will.

Then, David, as any good musician does… closes with another chorus. (And you thought modern worship music was repetitive? David started it. Blame him.)

There’s nothing new in the last section. David just wants to put a nice, tidy bow on this Psalm, reminding us that God’s love is in all places, in all times, for all people… even the angels in heaven, and the most lowly of us here on Earth. We can be thankful because we are loved.

So there you go, when we pray this week’s line of the Covenant Prayer, “Let me be exalted for thee, or brought low for thee,” let it be a reminder to be thankful… to be humble…

And you do that by

1) remembering all the amazing things God has done for you,

2) and that even the Almighty Creator of the Universe… loves you.

So, I’m going to pray the prayer with you, and when we get to that line, think of it in this way, “God when there are times where I’m recognized for following you, great. But in all of my life… let me be humble.”

Let’s pray.

**I am no longer my own but thine.**

**Put me to what thou wilt,**

**rank me with whom thou wilt.**

**Put me to doing, put me to suffering.**

**Let me be employed for thee,**

**or laid aside for thee.**

**Let me be exalted for thee,**

**or brought low for thee.**

**Let me have all things,**

**let me have nothing.**

**Let me be full,**

**let me be empty.**

**I freely and humbly yield all things**

**to thy pleasure and thy disposal.**

**And now, sweet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,**

**I am thine and thou art mine.**

**And may this covenant made on Earth,**

**be ratified in heaven.**

**So be it.**