

Andrew K. Frey. New Year's Eve. Psalm 103:1-13.  
December 31, 2020. St. John, Town of Center, WI.

Theme: Bless the Lord, who Forgives All your Sins

2020: the worst year ever! You've heard people say that, and it certainly has felt like that at times, didn't it! I don't really need to go into detail or remind you of such things. When one thinks of 2020 you think of the virus that caused the death of many. It led leaders to shut down countries, ruining economies that hurt and harmed many more people. Loved ones weren't allowed to see each other, business owners were kept from making a living, people stayed secluded from each other in the idea of safety; we could go on and on! It wasn't just that, of course, for 2020—we had a major election that perhaps didn't go your way. There were riots and lawlessness, the love of most people continues to grow cold, and wickedness and debauchery are not only out in the open for all to see, but even celebrated by the masses. It was a frustrating year to say the least, one that most of us won't be sad to see it in the rear-view.

But, is 2020 really the worst year ever? It may not have been pleasant, but it's probably not the worst year ever. The Spanish flu of 1918 killed an estimated 50 million people (far more than the estimated 1.8 million people who have died from Covid). In 1520 smallpox ravaged the new world, killing between 60-90% of the land's natives. Going back even farther was the year 1349 when the Black Plague wiped out half of Europe's population. Then there was the year 536, when a volcanic eruption in Iceland caused global temperatures to plummet and a massive famine; when it was all said and done about five years later about 100 million people died. 2020 might not be the favorite year in our lives, but it is far from the worst!

And besides, can we call any year with all our modern amenities the worst year ever? Think about it, we enjoy today what people for thousands of years never could have dreamed of. Electricity, indoor plumbing, temperature control, the internet, TV, cars, planes, the countless medical advancements made the past century, the list goes on and on and on. We enjoyed all of these things this year, making our lives that much better than those who have lived in the centuries before us!

Plus, when did we start judging our year based on the temporary, based on the earthly and physical? As Christians we know better than that; and yet we still do it. It's all too easy for us to judge our year based on the temporal and let such things affect our praise and adoration of our Lord.

If you're anything like me, you've spent a lot of time this year complaining—complaining about the virus, about masks, about the shut-downs, about our leaders, about other people. We are fed up and frustrated. Things didn't go as we planned, people don't act as we think they should. And how quick we are to blame God for everything that is going on! Isn't he in control of all of this, isn't he responsible? Why did he allow all of this to happen? You'd think that if God controls the entire world and loves us as he says he is, then 2020 wouldn't have been so horrible. Since we partially blame God for what has taken place, and we have the tendency to focus on the earthly and temporal, we complain about 2020 and about God, instead of our words to him being filled with praise and adoration.

So today we are going to look the words of David from the 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. David starts out this Psalm by encouraging us to bless the Lord. That word bless has two different, yet related connotations. The first is that the Lord blesses us by showering us with many good things. The second is that we bless him by thanking and praising him for all the good things that he gives us. David writes:

**<sup>1</sup>Bless the Lord, O my soul. All that is within me, bless his holy name.**

**<sup>2</sup>Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits— <sup>3</sup>who pardons all your guilt, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup>who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with mercy and compassion, <sup>5</sup>who satisfies your life with goodness, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.**

**<sup>6</sup>The Lord performs righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. <sup>7</sup>He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.**

**<sup>8</sup>The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. <sup>9</sup>He will not always accuse. He will not keep his anger forever. <sup>10</sup>He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He does not repay us according to our guilty deeds.**

**<sup>11</sup>Yes, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so powerful is his mercy toward those who fear him. <sup>12</sup>As distant as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our rebellious acts from us. <sup>13</sup>As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.**

You may not think of Psalm 103 as one of the greatest chapters in all of Scripture, yet you hear verses from this psalm time and time again—and know some of them by heart. And most of what David mentions have to do with forgiveness and salvation! Today we are going to walk through those verses as we marvel at God’s love for us.

Verse 3—**The Lord pardons all your guilt.** The price we ought to pay for our sins is like a big debt we owe a lender—an impossible debt for us to pay. But the Lord in his love and mercy erases that debt by paying the price for us, the price of his blood. This is the picture behind the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18—God is the king who erased the impossible debt of his servant.

The second half of verse 3 reads, **who heals all your diseases.** “Does he?” You might ask. “What about people who die from diseases? What about diseases that still have no cure despite years and years of research?” The Lord can and does often heal our diseases (even Covid)—and even if he doesn’t, we know that he makes our diseases and sicknesses turn out for our good in one way or another.

Verse 4— **who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with mercy and compassion.** This word for pit can often be translated as grave, at times it can refer to eternal damnation in hell. The wages of sin is death, and the sting of death is sin. But Christ paid the price for our sins; he paid our ransom price and purchased us back for God. By this act of redemption he has saved us from the horrors of death and damnation in hell, and by his resurrection he has won the ultimate victory over death, giving us the crown of life. This is strictly an act of mercy and compassion—not because we have earned or deserved it!

Verse 6—**The Lord performs righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.** The Lord is certainly just; he is also righteous in all that he does. And to satisfy his justice he punished his Son for us in our place. And his Son, Jesus, lived a perfect life for us, so that we would be righteous in his sight. We were oppressed by sin, death, and the power of the devil; but not any longer through Christ.

Verse 8—**The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy.** We all have tempers in one way or another; there is always something that makes us snap, that really gets on our nerves. But not the Lord. Sure, he hates sin; and we have seen his wrath recorded in the Bible; but the Lord always acts in such a way reluctantly. Instead, he has compassion on us, he gives us time to repent of our sins. In mercy, he leads us to turn to him in faith.

Verse 9—**He will not always accuse. He will not keep his anger forever.** The Lord is our judge, who will come again on the Last Day. But he doesn't want to accuse us punish us. For our judge is also our Savior, who suffered our punishment for us already. It is by the work of Christ and we are declared not guilty, justified by God!

Verse 10—**He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He does not repay us according to our guilty deeds.** What do we deserve for our sins? Death and eternal punishment. What could God do to us for all the sins we have committed against him? In the end, it doesn't matter because he doesn't treat us as we deserve or repay us according to what we have done! And that's a good thing. We'd like to think that we've earned God's favor and that he owes us for all the good we've done; but in the end, we don't want God to give us what we deserve, and out of love for us, he doesn't!

Verses 11 and 12—**As high as the heavens are above the earth, so powerful is his mercy toward those who fear him. As distant as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our rebellious acts from us.** Who can measure the distance between the earth and the heavens—it all depends what part of the heavens you are talking about! Who can measure the distance between east and west—it's an infinite number! The idea is that God's love for those who fear, or believe in him, is so great, so vast, that it is unmeasurable! He has removed our sins so far from us that they will never return to us to haunt us or condemn us!

Verse 13—**As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.** Good parents love their children and do what is best for them. They may be seemingly hard on them at times, but do so with their best interests in mind. Good parents don't expect more from their children than they are capable of at a given age. God knows our limitations we have because we are sinners; and what we can't do, he sent Christ to do for us!

As we have quickly hit on some of the highlights of this Psalm, we see the many different ways David expressed the forgiveness of sins provided for us by the Lord! And this forgiveness that David spoke of about 3000 years ago is still the same forgiveness that the Lord gave to us in 2020 and will again in 2021!

You look around at everything that has taken place in 2020, and we are tempted to complain and we let it alter our praise and adoration of God. Yet, you can still call this year a good year! Why? Because the Lord still doesn't treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our guilty deeds. He still gracious and compassionate toward us; he is God of mercy who is slow to anger and abounding in love. He still has removed our sins far from us—as far as east is from west. His measureless love still surrounds us. And as we'll see first-hand, he still gives us his true body and blood in the Holy Sacrament for the forgiveness of our sins! For all these reasons—and many more, 2020 has been a good year, and so will 2021! And so we can join along with David, **Bless the Lord, O my soul. All that is within me, bless his holy name.** Amen.