

Because Yahweh is King...

Psalm 101:1 *A Psalm of David.*

I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music.

2 I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house;

3 I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.

4 A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil.

5 Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure.

6 I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me.

7 No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes.

8 Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked in the land, cutting off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.

Psalm 102:1 *A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.*

Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you!

2 Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!

3 For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace.

4 My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread.

5 Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh.

6 I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places;

7 I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.

8 All the day my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse.

9 For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink,

10 because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me down.

11 My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations.

13 You will arise and have pity on Zion; it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come.

14 For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust.

15 Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.

16 For the LORD builds up Zion; he appears in his glory;

17 he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer.

18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD:

19 that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,

20 to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die,

21 that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise,

22 when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.

23 He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days.

24 "O my God," I say, "take me not away in the midst of my days-- you whose years endure throughout all generations!"

25 Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,

27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.

28 The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.

Psalm 103:1 *Of David.*

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

15 As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;

16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,

18 to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!

21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!

22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!"

PSALM 101-103

Nobody Expects ...

IN HIS BOOK ON THE SHAPE of Book IV of the Psalter, **Robert Wallace** begins the section of our three songs today with a rather famous quote (if you know and like British comedy that is).

NOBODY expects the Spanish Inquisition! Our chief weapon is surprise ... surprise and fear ... fear and surprise Our two weapons are fear and surprise ... and ruthless efficiency Our three weapons are fear, surprise, and ruthless efficiency ... and an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope Our four ... no ... Amongst our weapons Amongst our weaponry ... are such elements as fear, surprise.... I'll come in again.

(“**The Spanish Inquisition Skit**,” Monty Python)

If you've never seen the sketch, it always begins immediately after a completely unrelated sketch where they the character comes to a point that they say, "I didn't expect a Spanish Inquisition!" Suddenly, **Michael Palin's** Cardinal Ximénez character bursts through the door in his blood-red robes along with Cardinals Fang and Biggles: "Nooo-body expects the Spanish Inquisition!"

Immediately, Ximénez starts listing off their terrible weapons (surprise, fear, etc.), but he keeps forgetting things and has to start over, listing them again but with more. It finally gets the point where he just stops and says he'll just come in again and start the whole thing over. "Nooo-body expects the Spanish Inquisition!" This is the way, Wallace suggests, Psalms 101-103 appear in the Psalter. "As the reader comes to Psalm 101, it seems the Psalter has 'come in again.'" But, "revisited by themes found prior to and earlier in Book IV ... the reader can [now] note theological adjustments that have taken place in the interim. Just as Cardinal Ximénez's second entrance reflected what was learned from the first entrance; so also, this new telling of

the story reflects what the story of the Psalter ‘has learned’ coming through Book IV.”¹

The three songs come at the end of a string of songs that have taught us what it means that Yahweh is King. Those began because Psalms 88-89, which ended Book III, both end rather badly, anticipating the need for God to intervene, especially in the Davidic covenant which, while the promises are eternal, sure seems at the present moment to have utterly failed.

This was the moment an old voice was heard for the first time in the Psalter. Moses begins to speak in Psalm 90, and Moses is mentioned seven times by name in Book IV of the Psalter. Taking us back to the time before David, between Moses and Samuel, these 11 songs start to teach Israel that it was never about the Davidic king, because for all those centuries when God lead Israel out of Egypt, through a desert, into the Promised Land, through wars and wicked judges, *He* was their King.

Even though his royal kingship was discussed in Psalm 89, David himself has not been heard from as a psalm writer since Psalm 86. When you think that virtually every song in

¹ Robert Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, Studied in Biblical Literature 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 51.

Book I was by David, going fifteen songs without a song of David seems like an eternity. In Psalm 101 and 103, David returns as the writer. Both the position and similarity of opening in Psalm 102 has led some to conclude that its position is also meant to be read as Davidic.²

Reading through Psalms 101 and then 102, you are struck by how the first is clearly **a kingly declaration** of obedience, while the second is that of **a person undergoing great suffering**. Someone has put it that in Psalm 101 we have a royal defender, but in Psalm 102 we have not a warrior, but a humble supplicant who looks remarkably like **the suffering servant** of Isaiah.³ Psalm 103 then comes into this mix as another psalm of David. But whereas Psalm 102 has this great suffering caused by Yahweh, Psalm 103 is a great hymn of thanksgiving blessing the LORD for his mercy, and his ability to heal all things, even saving a life from Sheol.

² **Erich Zenger**, “The God of Israel’s Reign over the World (Psalms 90–106),” in *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah and the Psalms*, ed. Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger; trans. Everett R. Kalin (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000): 184. Compare the superscription here “*A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.*” with Psalm 142:1-2, “A Maskil of David ... I pour out my complaint before him.”

³ *Ibid.*, in Wallace, 55. Also Dahood, *Psalms III 51–100*, 10; J.H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 123.

When you combine these together—a perfect life of a king, overwhelming suffering, and God who can save even from the grave, something very unexpected emerges. Something we’ve seen in different ways throughout the Psalms. Something we now have new eyes to see because of the Kingly subject matter of the recent songs. Something that people would not be able to understand for hundreds of years. Something many people today still do not see because they have not learned to read the Psalms as the Lord Jesus read them. The songs are “**coming in again,**” but this time, we are able to make great sense of them.

Psalm 101: Perfect Life

As we think about each song, we are going to do so on **more than one level**. I’ve just hinted at the level so many will miss. This is **the Christ-focused level**. But we do not want to miss the other level either, because it is **that other level** that brings the songs home to each one of us individually. For Psalm 101, I want to ask two questions about this latter level. First, what is it that the LORD required of Israel? Specifically, think of their leadership and how it was that whenever a leader followed the LORD there was blessing

and whenever they didn't, things went badly for everyone. Second, what is it that the LORD requires of you?

As we've seen, the song is "*A Psalm of David.*" David is the great king of Israel. It is therefore the king that begins singing, "I will sing ... to you, O LORD, I will make music" (Ps 101:1). This is very fitting for the sweet psalmist of Israel! But with David, it is *never just about the music*. In context of these songs, the king is singing to The King! Throughout the Psalter, the *music is ever only there to complement the lyrics*. This is a truth that cannot be repeated enough in an age where all across the land each week tens of thousands come sometimes to only one megachurch, a fresh set of earplugs in hand, on their way to the latest greatest free concert in town. Coming to church for a concert has the whole point exactly backwards.

So, he says, "I will sing of steadfast love and justice" (1). *Two curious things* that many might think are contradictory. How can love and justice be sung about together? Doesn't one reflect that NT God of love and the other that OT God of wrath? I know people that will say such things.

Well, *steadfast love is covenantal love* and the covenant is built upon law and obedience. In Psalm 89 it said, "My

steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him” (Ps 89:28). God enters into a covenant via love. God maintains the covenant via justice; when sin is committed, justice is dispensed. When someone repents, love brings them back into the fold. The whole relationship is upheld by God’s love and justice, and it makes David want to sing.

We get a clearer view in vs. 2. “I will ponder the way that is blameless” (101:2). For his part in the covenant, David wants to be just. Wallace notices that now, instead of Moses emphasizing the Sinai Covenant and Torah, we get David remembering Moses, the Sinai Covenant, and Torah.⁴ In other words, David is asking the question about what God requires of him as king. But he is also asking the question of what God requires of him as an individual.

Where does he discover the requirement? Torah. What is that requirement? The blameless way. But as soon as he asks this, he cries out, “Oh when will you come to me?” (2). This is the most talked about phrase in the song. It is the reason that some add to the classification of the song as a Royal Psalm to a more specific Royal Lament. But what would he be lamenting?

⁴ Wallace, 52.

Part of the problem is that the next couple of phrases can be translated as either **a future** (ESV: “I will walk” and “I will not set”) or **a past** (LXX: “I have walked” and “I have not set”). In the one, David would basically be promising to be a better person. In the other, he would somehow be reflecting upon his past through the lens of “blamelessness.” We’ve seen that before, though we’ve noted that with him it isn’t blameless perfection that he is suggesting of himself. It is **basic integrity**, which includes repenting of his sin when he fails. Whatever the case, it is clear that he is in great need of God to come to him in his steadfast love and justice.

For now, let’s proceed with the ESV’s “future” translation. As he ponders the blameless way, like Jonathan Edwards, he resolves himself,⁵ “**I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless**” (2-3a). The word “worthless” is different than we saw in 96:5 and 97:7 (*elilim*), though the idea isn’t that different. Here the word is *beliyya’al* from which we get **Belial**, a word which gets associated with Satan (2Co 6:15). It is often translated as “wicked,” but it clearly has a supernatural connotation, just like *elilim* did in the

⁵ For the famous Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards see the blog entry, **Jonathan Edwards**, with subheadings by Matt Perman, “The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards (Dec 30, 2006), at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards>

previous songs. David is saying that he will not (indeed, has not) worship or follow anyone but Yahweh.

Thus he continues, “I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not climb to me” (3b). This isn’t talking about general sin, but the sin of forsaking Yahweh to follow the Baals and Asherahs. David did a lot of things, but never that!

The next verse is transitional. “A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil” (4). Up to this point, this means particularly the perversity of giving religious affections to someone other than the LORD. However, this always turns into other sins. “Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure” (5). The sin of slander destroys others, while the sin of pride builds up self unjustly. They are opposite sides of the same coin. Both come from a heart that refuses to be humble and acknowledge its own sinfulness. For why else would a person slander and profane their neighbor and puff themselves up in their own eyes if they were not thinking more highly of their own goodness than they ought? Isn’t it interesting how all this comes because David is reflecting upon the “blameless” way? You are now learning what the blameless way is.

But we also need to remember that David is the king. His job is to promote justice in the land. So, he says, “I will look with favor on the faithful in the land” (6a). This is faithfulness to all the commandments which are summarized by the Two: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. It is faithfulness to Yahweh and faithfulness to brothers, sisters, neighbors, aliens, widows, orphans, and so on. These are the people the king will not forsake.

Vs. 7-8 have two different interpretations. Some think David continues to speak. Others think these are the words of Yahweh. “No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes. Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked in the land, cutting off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.” As you think about these words, I want to help you do it by considering the first of three Psalms from the perspective of not David’s future, but one of David’s sons.

Based on what we have just seen, someone has written, “Some interpreters believe that Ps 101 signals a ‘new’ David in the Psalter.”⁶ I agree. But while you could interpret this as the literal David resolving to be a better person, there is

⁶ Wallace, 56.

something more to think about. Maybe it really is a brand new David, literally.

As the **Lord Jesus** taught us, we are to **read the Psalms about him**. How many Psalms in are quoted as being fulfilled in Jesus by the NT? Dozens. But now think about Psalm 101 coming right after we have considered a set of songs about Yahweh as King of Israel. Consider how some of those predicted that Yahweh himself would come in the future to be King. And consider how Jesus Christ is considered by king of Israel (son of David) and Yahweh by the NT.

Then think about the life of the Lord Jesus. As Hebrews says, “**He was tempted in every way, yet without sin**” (**Heb 4:15**). He is the **holy, innocent, unstained**, priest separated from sinners” (**7:26**). Paul says, “**he knew no sin**” (**2Co 5:21**). Peter says, “**He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth**” (**1Pe 2:22**). Does this song not begin to teach you that there is in fact a king of Israel who considered the way that is blameless, resolved himself to live according to the Law of Moses, and in fact by the power of the Holy Spirit done so perfectly?

He walked in *full* integrity of heart. He never set before his eyes a worthless, wicked thing. He detested those who claimed to love the LORD but fell away as children of Satan.

He did not bring them into his close counsel. He knew nothing of evil. He judged those who slandered and were full of arrogant hearts. As King, he looked with favor on the faithful in the land. He chose for himself ministers who would be blameless. As Yahweh, he will destroy at his glorious Second Coming all the evildoers from the city of Yahweh, as he teaches us in the last chapter of the Bible.

Yes, Psalm 101 teaches us about David. And this is more important than you know, as we will see in a moment, to keep this in mind. But it also predicts David's greater Son, the King of kings, who had God come near to him even as he came near to us, so that his God would uphold him in the midst of his public ministry that was so testing and trying from the likes of us. It teaches that Jesus, who is himself God, but is also man and King, carried out Psalm 101 to perfection. Why?

Psalm 102: Perfect Suffering

This is where Psalm 102 becomes important. It was placed after Psalm 101 for a reason. This song is much longer, and we will not look at every word. But notice its superscription. *“A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and*

pours out his complaint before the LORD.” As we look at the highlights of this song, keep in mind David. But also keep in mind the Lord Jesus, especially his entire public career that lead him to *suffer so greatly on a cross.*

The Psalmist begins with a *prayer of distress.* He is crying to the LORD (*Ps 102:1-2*). He realizes that his life is fleeting: like smoke (3), an evening shadow, and grass that withers (11). His life, like all of our lives, is momentary.

He won't last much longer. His bones are wasting (3). His heart is struck down. He forgets to eat (4). He is suffering. It is causing him to groan (5). His bones cling to his flesh (5). He is like a desert owl of the waste places (6). He lies awake like a lonely sparrow on a rooftop (7). All day he is taunted by enemies and his name is used as a curse (8). He eats ashes like bread and his tears are mingled to become his drink (9).

Yet, he is *full of indignation and anger,* because *God has taken him up and thrown him down* (10). What a horrible image or a nevertheless trusting man in a *sovereign God.* He never says God isn't in control. He only acknowledges that God is actively there in the process of his suffering. This is all quite typical of earlier psalms of lamentation. These psalms teach you that it is more than OK, it is necessary to

Speak aloud about the suffering you go through, to acknowledge it rather than pretending it isn't there; to face your weakness in it rather than pretend you are Superman through it.

Here, reflect on what we said earlier about how the singer of his song seems so very much like Isaiah's [suffering servant](#)? But who is Isaiah's suffering servant? He is none other than Jesus Christ. I think especially of this last line with regards to something like [Isaiah 53:10](#), "It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief." Or in the NT, [Acts 2:23](#), "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Or [Acts 4:27-28](#): "Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." [God picked him up and threw him down](#), and the Lord Jesus after all that suffering, died. So, this part of Psalm 102 follows quite perfectly Psalm 101's [life of Jesus](#). We now think about [his death](#).

As you think about David's suffering, your own suffering, or Jesus' suffering, remember that Scriptures never permit you to do this apart from also praising and glorifying God. This is a thing foreign to the ears of unbelievers. How could anyone praise God for such a thing? Isn't this the very reason we *shouldn't* believe in a God? That's exactly why the Scriptures are here to teach you that you must praise God through the suffering.

Only a God sovereign in suffering could be worthy of the things that are now said, as [part II of the song](#) commences. Because only a God that is sovereign like this could also *be in control* of that suffering. Since he is in control, he is worthy of praise. “[But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever](#)” (12). [Yahweh is King](#); this theme returns. But now, thanks to so many previous songs, we're able to see what kind of a King his is. This King is remembered throughout every generation (12). He has never been forgotten, never not been worshiped. For thousands of years, every single day, he has received praise. No other king in history comes close to saying that.

Part of the reason? [He remembers his people and has pity on them](#) (13). This is in God's sovereignty too, because he

does this at “the appointed time.” In other words, the suffering is ordained, but so also is the relief!

The song remembers a time of ruin of Jerusalem. The stones are dear. Her dust is precious (14). But now, God is returning to rebuilt Zion (16), and therefore nations will once more fear the Name of the LORD (15). It is vital to remember that this “appearing in glory” is exactly how John starts his gospel of Jesus Christ. “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14).

But God is returning to regard the prayers of the destitute (17). He is coming to save them. This needs to be “recorded for a generation to come” (18). These curious words point us towards the future, that even you and I may praise the LORD (18). “That he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, that they may declare in Zion the Name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD” (19-22).

How does Jesus’ ministry begin? In a synagogue reading from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of

sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). What does his ministry bring? Shouts of Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord! (Matt 21:9). The term “Name” here is one of those places where it is especially important to see it Christologically, as in Acts 5:41, “They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name.”

All this culminates in the Psalm and in the Gospels with something akin to vv. 23-24. “He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days. ‘O my God,’ I say, ‘take me not away in the midst of my days—you whose years endure throughout all generations!’” You couldn’t get the order of Christ’s life more perfectly if you were to write a Gospel about it!

But, if reading this as being ultimately fulfilled in Jesus is not something you are yet comfortable with, the psalm ends with a curious doxology. “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall

“dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you” (Ps 102:25-28).

What does that have to do with Jesus? You might read this as being about the Father. That’s very typical of how 21st century American Christians read passages like this. Yet, Heb 1:10-12 quotes all but the last verse as being spoken to Jesus. “Of the Son he says...” This song is therefore about Jesus, without question. This creates a very interesting opening for our third song in this set of three. For after it has just said his days are shortened (Ps 102:23), now it says your years have no end (24). There is only one thing this could be talking about if both are about Jesus.

Psalm 103: Perfect Salvation

Psalm 103 is only a bit shorter than 102. It is, again, “*a Psalm of David*.” Its structure appears to be *chiastic*.⁷ It begins

⁷ Robert L. Alden, “Chiastic Psalms (III): A Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 101-150, *JETS* 21/3 (Sept 1978): 200 [199-210].

1a	A Bless the LORD, O my soul
1b-5	B The God who meets all our needs
6	C The God who does right
7	D He reveals himself to the children of Israel
8-9	E The eternal mercy of the LORD
10	F How God does not deal
11-14	G Comparisons to God’s excellencies
15	G Comparisons to man’s frailties
16	F How God does not deal
17a	E The mercy of the LORD is eternal
17b	D His righteousness to children’s children
18	C Those who do his precepts
19-22a	B All that God rules should bless him
22b	A Bless the LORD, O my soul

with two verses that “bless the LORD” (Ps 103:1-2) and ends with three of the same (20-22). In between, it worships the LORD who does right, while showing a transference of “righteousness” to his people.

How does it fit with the other two songs? Think of it as the things that come because Christ has lived a perfect life, given that life up sacrificially for those who will believe in his Name, been raised from the dead by omnipotent power, and now lives to be united with his people, thereby giving to them all that belongs to him. This is a great way that these three songs “come in again.” We are learning something.

It famously opens, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy Name” (Ps 103:1). There’s the Name again, tying the songs together! Who do we bless? We bless the LORD *and* we bless his holy Name.

Why? “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (2). The Bible never tells you to believe in a God because he is a Brute Force that created all things, even though he did create all things and creation is a reason to bless him. He could be a Despot that would not be worthy of blessing. But though King, this God is not a Despot. This King bestows boundless benefits. Like what?

The first is **forgiveness of sins**. “Who forgives all your iniquity” (3a). How is iniquity forgiven? Fittingly, from the work of Christ in the first two songs! “Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22). But, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10:4). Therefore, “When Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me” (5). “Therefore, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book” (7). Jesus’ perfect life fulfills the laws demands, and therefore Jesus’ perfect act of obedience on the cross is able to forgive all sins! The other two songs show you how God can forgive sins.

Forgiveness becomes an extended theme in vv. 9-13 and probably beyond. “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 ... As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.” Is there anything more important than knowing that God is like this? Sure, proud people don’t care. People who

think they have never done anything wrong, people who refuse to believe in God—usually because they blame him for something.

But what about you? When you know yourself to have sinned, to have fallen and failed the LORD, is it not vital that you remember that **God does not treat you as you deserve**? If you don't remember this, what does it do? You confess your sins and yet you fail to recognize that God has removed them as far as the east is from the west? What does this do to your soul? Why would anyone who does not believe this ever turn to this God in the first place? In fact, this is exactly why John tells us that people refuse to come to God. **“For fear that their evil deeds will be exposed”** (**John 3:20**). Of course, the ironic thing is that they will! If—they do not turn to the Lord humbly seeking forgiveness. But if you do, this is the kind of God he is.

A Second benefit is that he **heals all your diseases** (**Psalm 103:2b**). Eventually all diseases will be healed, as it says in Revelation, **“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes ... neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, anymore”** (**Rev 21:4**). But **the chief diseases of the human race is death**. Thus **vs. 4**, **“Who redeems your life from the pit”** (don't forget Rev21:4's **“... and death shall be no**

more”). The word “pit” here seems to imply **the corruption of the present age** and all that goes along with it: sickness, physical death, and even the place where we all deserve to go for our sins, the lake of fire.⁸ You can also hear in this echoes of things like **Psalm 16** and the resurrection of Jesus whose body would not see corruption.

It is vital to remember that all of the benefits we have in Christ our ours because he is alive. It is through **vital union** with the risen Savior that to us belong Christ and all his benefits. But it is also his death through which the benefits are received, especially in the Lord’ Supper. Thus **Calvin** writes, “**I call Christ with his death and resurrection the matter, or substance. But by effect I understand redemption, righteousness, sanctification, and eternal life, and all the other benefits Christ gives to us ... It [is] of chief importance to know how the body of Christ, as once for all it was given for us, is made ours, and how we become partakers of the blood once shed. For that is to possess Christ entire, crucified, that we may enjoy all his benefits.”⁹**

⁸ This is not the expected “*Sheol*,” but rather “*shachath*.” It is translated as “destruction” (YLT) or in the Targum “*Gebinnom*” or in the LXX “corruption” (*phthoras*; see **2Pe 1:4’s** “**having escaped from the corruption that is in the world**” and **2:19’s** “**they themselves are slaves of corruption**”).

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1372, 1405.

A third benefit sung about is the steadfast love and mercy of God (Ps 104:4) who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles (5). Here we return to our initial covenantal theme of Psalm 101:1. But it is a theme that will not go away in this song. And why should it? The love of God is the precious pearl of great comfort to all of God's people.

Vs. 8 sings of his “abounding steadfast love” which is displayed in his mercy and grace and longsuffering. Vs. 11 sings of how this steadfast love is “so great ... toward those who fear him.” How great? As high as the heavens are above the earth! His love will not fail you, anymore than he himself can be confused with the creation. It returns yet again in vs. 17 which teaches that this love of God towards his people is from everlasting to everlasting because it comes from the eternal God and to children's children because God continues to show love every second of every day to every generation because that is his gracious merciful plan in Christ.

Who does he show this love to? Here is where we have to think of the transference. Somehow, righteousness in God is transferred to his people. In the parallel of the poem, the LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are

oppressed, forgiving them, relieving them, saving them. In turn, they fear him (17) and keep his covenant and commandments (18). OT theology knows nothing of God showing love to perfect people. Rather, it shows that blameless people are considered as such because the righteousness of God is credited to them by faith, a righteousness that is theirs because of union with Christ. A righteousness of Christ that is theirs because they have been given new life by the Spirit. A righteousness that loves God and wants to keep his commandments, but when fails turns to him for forgiveness.

A fourth benefit also returns us to Psalm 101:1. “The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed” (Ps 103:6). In the song, this remembers God’s “ways” and “acts” to Moses and the people of Israel (6-7), a people long in bondage and slavery to Egypt, whom God delivered with a mighty arm through powerful miracles. In other words, he is active in this world and proves himself time and again. The greatest proof of these things he has ever given to you is Jesus Christ, whom as we have seen in these songs lived a perfect life, suffered greatly for your sake, died and was raised to give you such great blessings.

Why would God do all this? The song answers, “For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass (we’ve seen that before); 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” (14-16). God does not just know this with his mind. Because Jesus came as one of us, he understands it personally, having taken our very nature to himself. In reasons that will always remain just out of reach, God has had pity of man, and offers to give them eternal life though they are dust.

Your job? **Believe these things** that we sing about in these songs. Believe that God grants forgiveness and obedience and love for him for it. Remember the kind of God he is in his covenantal love, which, because King Jesus has come, has not failed, but is now eternally firm to the end of time.

Then, with Psalm 103, you can sing bless the LORD. Indeed, that is what all creation must do, especially that part of creation that keeps God’s Word: **The Holy Angels**. “**Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion**” (20-22). The psalms

have come in again, for now we see that Jesus is King! His kingdom rules over all (19). Therefore, because he is King and Jesus has done all these things, Bless the LORD, O my soul! Bless his Holy Name.