

Our Heavenly Father

Psalm 103

So, how should we celebrate Fathers' Day? I suppose the most obvious way is to tell all the fathers and grandfathers in our lives about how much they mean to us. That means making phone calls, sending cards, and buying presents. And guys being guys, food is always welcome, right? So, let's try to make it a special day for all the fathers in our lives.

And of course, verse 13 of today's passage reminds us that all those who trust in Christ have a Heavenly Father who pities, who has compassion on us in the same way that our earthly fathers do. So, if we take time to give our earthly fathers credit for all the wonderful things they've done for us, why not take some time to meditate on the many ways God has blessed us as well?

And just think about how generous God has been with His blessings. Verse 3 reminds us that God has answered so many of our prayers, bringing healing into our lives and the lives of our loved ones time after time. David went even further, saying that God had redeemed his life from destruction. Now, this is not a poet's overstatement, for as a soldier, he could surely have remembered many times when God had saved him from dying.

But soldiers or not, don't we all have stories we could tell of accidents averted, or of injuries that could have been so much more serious? In fact, can any of us doubt that God has been protecting us throughout our lives in so many ways?

And verse 5 reminds us of all the material blessings God has showered upon us, as He has filled our mouths with good things. Honestly, are any of us really wondering where our next meal will come from? So, if we've thanked our earthly fathers for the way they've worked so hard to provide for us, shouldn't we also give thanks to our Heavenly Father from Whom all our material blessings have so freely flowed?

But of course we find the greatest of God's blessings in verse 3: He has forgiven all our iniquities. Now, if we are honest with ourselves, we'll admit that our sins have earned God's anger and punishment, the sort of thing that our earthly fathers have administered to us from time to time. But even though we haven't loved God the way He deserves, even though we have rebelled against Him in thought, word, and deed, by things we've done and by things we've left undone, verse 9 tells us that God doesn't stay angry with us forever. No, because of the perfect sacrifice He has offered for us on the cross, Christ has allowed our Heavenly Father to be merciful and gracious to us, to remove our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

Now, think about that for a moment. Maybe when you look back on the last few weeks, you have some regrets. Maybe you've said some things you wish you could take back. Maybe you wish you'd taken the opportunity to make a visit or a phone call. Maybe on this Father's Day, you wish things were different between you and your dad. Maybe you wish you hadn't been so rebellious or disrespectful. Or maybe you wish your dad hadn't hurt you in some way, and you wish there were some way to patch things up.

Verse 12 reminds us that there is. For all who trust Christ as Savior and bow the knee to Him as Lord, all our sins, all those things we are so sorry for, all those things have been taken away from us so

far that we can't see them anymore. And if God has forgiven us so completely, can't we forgive others as well? Can't we forgive our fathers, or our children, or our friends for the way they've disappointed us?

Ah, but how can we forgive those who have wounded us so deeply? Well, why does God forgive all of us? We find one reason in verses 14-16 – God knows how frail, how insubstantial we are. In the sight of the eternal God, our lives are just as unstable, just as fleeting as wildflowers are to us – here today and gone tomorrow. One reason God forgives us is because He knows our weakness, our limitations.

And isn't that why our fathers put up with so much of our foolishness when we were children? Because they were adults, they knew that so many of our squabbles and jealousies just weren't important. And even while they tried to correct our fits of anger, they pitied us, they knew that time and discipline would eventually give us the same sort of perspective that they had.

So, if our fathers could pity us this way, and if God has pitied us this way, can't we pity one another? If we know we are nothing more than sinners saved by God's grace, can't we be gentle and generous with other sinners, remembering that they are no stronger than we are? After all, if there's any good behavior, any holiness, any sanctification in any of our lives, it's only because of God's grace to us. Shouldn't we thus show some grace to others, the way God has shown it to us?

But God doesn't just pity us because He knows we are weak. He also pities us, He also has compassion on us because of His love for us, a love that is as great as is His forgiveness. Verse 11 speaks of the greatness of this mercy, this faithful, covenant love, a love that is as high as the heavens are above the earth.

Now, we are all too familiar with the fleeting nature of Romantic love or friendship. Even the love between human parents and children can become strained to the breaking point. We all know how disappointments can harden into enmity and how wounds can be capped with a scab of bitterness. The human love we show to one another is all too tentative, all too conditional.

But God's love, a love that is as high as the heavens are above the earth, is unconditional. For God doesn't just love those whom He thinks are safe, those whom He is sure will love Him in return. No, because Jesus laid down His life for those who abandoned and betrayed Him, we can be sure that God graciously chooses to set His love on sinners like us. And because this love that is as high as the heavens is based on God's covenant promises, there's nothing that any of us can do to make God stop loving us. No, verse 17 says that God's mercy, His faithful, covenant love is from everlasting to everlasting, from generation to generation.

But verse 17 also reminds us that this faithful love is for those who fear God. And verse 18 says that this covenant love is for those who keep His covenant, for those who remember His commandments and put them into practice in our lives. In other words, if God is gracious to forgive us and welcome us and make us His own, we have a responsibility to respond to His love by trusting Him, and by doing what He wants us to do.

And again, this makes sense when we think about the way we interact with our human fathers, doesn't it? I mean, what would you think of a son who said, "Yeah, I love my dad, and I respect my dad, but I don't do anything he says. He says I have to be home at a certain time, but I don't think that's

reasonable, so I sneak out when he doesn't notice. I know he doesn't want me to smoke or drink beer, but I do it anyway – I just make sure he doesn't see me.” Would you say such a son really loves or respects his father? Okay, so how could we possibly love and respect God if we don't at least try to do what He says?

But how do we know what God would have us do? Verse 7 reminds us that God doesn't leave this up to our imagination. Instead, He has done many mighty deeds throughout the history of His people, many of which are recorded for us in the Scriptures. Moreover, He has spoken His Word to His people. He has given His law to us through Moses and He has expanded and applied that law even more fully to us in the teachings of His Living Word, Jesus Christ.

In short, David is reminding us that it simply isn't possible for us to embrace Jesus as our Savior without also surrendering to Him as our Lord. Our love for God, our response to His generous and gracious and faithful love must be expressed not only in songs and prayers and professions of faith – it must also be lived out in lives of obedience.

And it only makes sense for us to acknowledge God as the Lord, because He is in fact, the Creator and the Sovereign ruler of everything that is. We tend to stand in awe of human political leaders, and we worry about the impact their decisions can have on our lives. But verse 19 reminds us that God's throne is in the Heavens. There's no one who can stand in His way, and there's no one who can stop Him from bringing justice into the lives of the oppressed.

So, on this Fathers' Day, how can we respond to our Heavenly Father's love? We can do the same sorts of things we do to honor our earthly fathers, can't we? We can thank Him for His blessings, for the way He has protected us and provided for us. We can thank Him for putting up with our foolishness and for forgiving our rebellion. We can praise Him for His unconditional love, and for using His authority in our lives to bring us into line, to make us the sort of people that we ought to be.

Oh, and there's one more thing we can do, and it's the sort of thing you hear little boys telling one another on the playground when they talk about their dads. “My Dad's the greatest. Oh yeah? Well, my Dad can shoot a basketball better than your Dad. Oh yeah? Well, my Dad can throw a football farther than your Dad.” I suppose if I had engaged in such a contest, I would have had to say something like, “Well, my Dad can fill out a tax form more accurately than your Dad, and he can save you more money to boot!”

Just so, we don't just need to tell our Heavenly Father how great He is. We need to brag on Him to those around us, just as David did at the close of this psalm. For he didn't just tell his friends about God – he called all the angels of heaven to join his praise. He urged everything that God has made to celebrate God's righteousness and to acknowledge Him as Lord.

So, 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!”