

PLANNING FOR PERMANENCE

PSALM 103:15-18

This Psalm begins and ends with the same phrase: "Bless the Lord."

This is a Psalm about the Lord.

- His benefits.
- His deeds.
- His grace and compassion.
- His sovereignty.

But when we come to verse 15, there is a change.

The focus of our attention is shifted from the Lord.

For a short time, it centers upon MAN.

*As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
When the wind has passed over it, it is no more;
And its place acknowledges it no longer.
But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on
those who fear Him,
and His righteousness to children's children,
To those who keep His covenant,
And who remember His precepts to do them. (Psalm 103:15-18).*

Of all the chores around the house, I would have to say that my least favorite is mowing the lawn. Why? Not because it is so difficult. I enjoy fire fighting and a lot more time and effort goes into that job. Nor is it because I have such a big lawn. I don't. From start to finish rarely takes me more than an hour.

No, the reason I don't care for mowing the lawn is because it is one of those chores that, no matter how well you do it, within another week or so it will need to be done again.

There is a great truth here. It is that grass doesn't stay mowed. No matter how carefully manicured my yard might be this week, by next week there will be change and the need for more care. The Psalmist says that the life of man is like grass. Let's look at it.

MAN IS TEMPORARY

*As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
When the wind has passed over it, it is no more;
And its place acknowledges it no longer. (Psalm 103:15-16).*

We live in a temporal age. It is an age of transience. There are disposable dishes, disposable diapers, and among many, there even seem to be disposable marriages.

How many times have you heard someone say, "They don't build things the way they used to."

This passage tells us that this is neither a new or exclusive phenomenon. It is not new because David penned these words 3000 years ago. And it is not exclusive because verse 15 says that it applies to MAN.

This does not let women off the hook. This is speaking of man in the generic sense. The particular Hebrew word used for man is ENOSH - it views man in his mortality - mortal man.

Man is like grass. In what way? The passage goes on to explain:

*As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
When the wind has passed over it, it is no more;
And its place acknowledges it no longer. (Psalm 103:15-16).*

How is man like grass? There are two ways.

1. He is like grass in that he has a time of growth.

*"As a FLOWER of the field, so he FLOWERS."
"As a BLOSSOM of the field, so he BLOSSOMS."*

The illustration is of a flower whose petals have opened and which has come into full bloom.

The time of growth has completed and the flower has come to the point in its development where the petals separate and split apart to reveal the inner core of the flower.

It looks beautiful. It is the one time that we see the flower in all of its glory. But it is also short-lived. The moment of greatest beauty does not last long. The bloom of the flower also marks the coming of the death of the flower. By the end of the season, the petals will begin to droop and the leaves will turn brown and wither and the beauty will fade.

Man is like this. For a time he flourishes. During his season, he has the capacity to do great things. For a brief period, there is nothing that he cannot accomplish.

But then age begins to take charge. The eyes begin to blur. We begin to "play the trombone" as we read. Aches and pains begin to develop in places where there never were any aches and pains.

Ecclesiastes 12:3-4 speaks of that time when...

- The watchmen of the house tremble (hearing).
- The mighty men stoop
- The grinding ones stand idle because they are few (teeth).
- Those who look through windows grow dim (eyes).

Bernie Kuiper, the pastor the Village Seven Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs got up into the pulpit a few years ago and told his congregation that he had an announcement to make. He had learned that he had an incurable disease. And that this disease was ultimately terminal. He went on to say that his entire family had contracted the same disease. And that they would all ultimately die. By this time, there were people in the congregation who were beginning to openly weep. Then he named the disease with which he was afflicted. It was OLD AGE.

2. He is like grass in that he is temporary.

*When the wind has passed over it, it is no more;
And its place acknowledges it no longer. (Psalm 103:16).*

What does this wind have to do with grass? To understand this, we must take note of the land of Palestine. You have two types of wind in Palestine.

- There is the WEST wind which blows off the ocean and brings rain upon the mountains.
- There is the EAST wind that blows off the Arabian Desert. This is a very

DRY wind. When it comes in the summer, the grass that was green at the end of the springtime quickly withers and dies.

Where there was once a field of tall grass spotted with field lilies, there is now only the brown decay of rotting vegetation.

No one ever made a monument from grass. You can travel to the ancient world and see...

- the Pyramids.
- the Parthenon.
- the ruins of Babylon.
- the earliest foundation stones of Jerusalem.

And not one of them will be made of grass. Here is the point. Grass does not last. And neither does man.

When it's all said and done, everything that you own is going to end up in the county garbage heap and you are going to be planted in a hole in the ground.

GOD IS PERMANENT

But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him (Psalm 103:17a).

God is eternal. He never had a beginning. He shall never end. He is the eternal "I AM."

You remember the story behind that title. It is found in Exodus 3. Moses is "on the lam" from the Egyptian police. He is hiding out in the Desert. And the Lord appears to him in a Burning Bush.

The Lord says, "Moses, how would you like to do something exciting? I want you to go back to Egypt!" Moses is understandably reluctant. He is an escaped fugitive with a price on his head. And he isn't wanted for a parking ticket. His crime is that he has murdered an Egyptian police officer.

And these aren't like the days when Egypt was a third-world nation. Egypt in this day is a super-power. The armies of Egypt are marching all over the known world.

And so, Moses reasons that perhaps the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a bit

behind the times. God might be a little outdated by recent current events. After all, this God doesn't even have a proper name. Hasn't He heard that there are many gods down in Egypt? Times have changed. Doesn't He know that He is only one among many?

But God answers Moses in that striking declaration. "I AM THAT I AM!" "Tell them I AM has sent you!"

Do you see the significance of this name? The Lord is saying, "I am never old-fashioned or out of date because I AM ETERNALLY NOW.

And if He is NOW when He spoke to Moses, then He is also NOW when He speaks to you. If He was able to deal with the problems of Moses, then He is also able to deal with your problems.

But it is not merely the EXISTENCE of God that is said here to be eternal. It is the LOVINGKINDNESS of God that is in view.

This is good news. It is one thing to know that God...

- Is Eternal.
- Is Everywhere.
- Knows everything.
- Is All Powerful.
- And that He is ABLE to save.

But it is another thing to know the LOVE of God and that He WANTS to save. This is the message of the Psalmist. It is the message of the lovingkindness of God. It is the message that God loves and that He has been loving for a very long time.

That lovingkindness is "from everlasting to everlasting." This is a Hebraism. It is a way of saying that God's love runs the gamete of two forevers. It has existed forever. And it shall exist forever.

Don't miss this! The reason that you can be assured that God's love will last forever is because it already has lasted forever.

God's love for you did not start when you trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. When you were an enemy of the Gospel, God loved you. He loved you before you were ever born.

Do you have a hard time understanding this? Don't worry - the infinite God doesn't

always fit between two eardrums. You don't have to understand it. But you DO have to believe it. And if you believe it, then you can enter into that permanence.

WE CAN ENTER INTO THAT PERMANENCE

*But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,
and His righteousness to children's children,
To those who keep His covenant,
And who remember His precepts to do them. (Psalm 103:17-18).*

We have a promise of permanence. There is within every person two basic desires. The first is a desire for security. The second is a desire for significance.

Both of those needs are fulfilled in the Lord. We can enter into a place of complete and eternal Security. And we can live the most significant lives possible, lives that will have an eternal significance. We have a promise of permanence.

1. It is a Promise of Permanent Righteousness.

*But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,
and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS to children's children (Psalm 103:17).*

The permanence of God's gift is not limited to eternal life. It also includes an eternal righteousness. You've heard me say it before, but it bears repeating...

- God is righteous.
- God demands righteousness.
- God freely provides what He demands.

When you come to Jesus in faith, trusting Him as your Lord and Savior, you are credited with the very righteousness of Christ.

God reckons you and considers you to be as righteous as His own Son. That is a permanent righteousness. It is a righteousness that does not depend upon YOU. Forever you shall be trophies of the righteousness of Christ.

2. It is a Promise of Permanence both for Us and for our Children.

But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children (Psalm 103:17).

How many of you have either a parent or a grandparent who is (or was) a Christian? The reason that there are so many is that the promise of Permanence is meant to be given by us to our children and to our children's children.

Fathers, you are called to be the spiritual leader to your children. Are you fulfilling your calling? You wouldn't think much of a father who refused to provide for the physical needs of his children, but are you providing for your children's spiritual needs?

I don't mean bringing them to Sunday school and church. That is a good beginning - but it is only a beginning. Are your children learning to pray because you pray? Are you reading the Bible with them? Do they look at you as the example of what a godly parent is supposed to be?

You've heard the story of the man who went out walking through the winter snow with his young son. He looked behind him and saw his little boy taking wide steps so that he would place his foot exactly into the footprint left by his father.

The truth is that you ARE your children's spiritual leader. They are going to follow in your footsteps. And the question before the house is where those footsteps lead.

Grandparents, you also have a part in this process. It is often the case that you have both the wisdom of years as well as the available time to spend with your grandchildren. You can have a tremendous ministry in their lives.

3. It is a Promise that Calls for Obedience.

*To those who keep His covenant,
And who remember His precepts to do them. (Psalm 103:17-18).*

How do you keep the covenant of God? How do you remember the precepts of God? What is involved in doing the work of God?

Jesus said it best. This is the work of God - that you believe in Him whom God

has sent.

Have you obeyed the command of the Lord? He commands all men everywhere to repent, to turn from their sin and to recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Did you hear about the teenager who bought his girlfriend an orchid? It was the first orchid he had ever bought and the first one she had ever received. There was a card with the orchid that said, “With all my love and most of my allowance.”

When God acted out His love for us, it was with all of His love and all of His allowance. That act of love calls for a response on your part. It is a response of obedience.

Have you responded to that call? You are invited to do so today. For what are you seeking? Security? Significance?

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”