

Talk to yourself

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[0 : 00] So the sermon will be on Psalm 103, or at least part of it. But let me explain how I got here. This is actually something that we looked at in my own church quite recently.

because before the summer I was thinking with our people we put our faith so as to be saved and renewed and given new life.

But his followers take on a new life when they follow him. And the influence that they can have in the world is huge. He says you're like a preserving agent, keeping the true good.

And you're like lighthouses pointing the way to me. So Christians don't claim to be anything special by themselves. That would sound a bit arrogant and it may feel a bit misplaced.

We're just ordinary people after all. But Jesus really does say to his people that you may be salt and light in the world. And what I was thinking about was, well how can we be salt and light in the world?

[1 : 08] And of course one of the most obvious ways is by how we speak. So it's how we act and all kinds of things as you live in your families and in your communities.

Bearing witness, trying to bear witness. And speech is one of the key things. So what I'm doing with our own people is looking at different ways in which we can speak so as to be salt and light. So here's one way.

Talk to yourself. Now that might sound a weird thing to say, but I hope it will become clear what I mean by that. It's holiday time, so you might have been on holiday. If you've been on holiday, if you've been on a plane, or if you've been on a plane anyway, you'll know that they give you the security or the safety announcements just before you take off.

And one of the things they say to you is, in the event of an unlikely depressurisation in the cabin, an oxygen mask will drop from above. And the rule about that is that you're to put on your own oxygen mask before you try and help anybody else.

And I think actually that's something important for us as Christians, as a kind of principle there. And that is that before you're able to help others, let's say by being salt and light and seeking to, by the way you speak, bless others and share Jesus, you've got to put on, if you like, the oxygen mask, so as to breathe gospel oxygen first.

[2 : 28] And the more you do that, the more gospel oxygen and the knowledge of Jesus and the benefit of Jesus is, as it were, invigorating you and giving you new life.

It's coursing through your veins. It's making you alive. Those circumstances around you may be difficult. The more able you'll be, let's say by your speech, to help others.

So my point in introducing all this is to say that for a Christian, it's important for them to talk to themselves first about who they are, to remind themselves, to remind yourself about who Jesus is and who he's called you to be.

The new identity that he's given you, all the promises and all the blessings that he's given you, so that you're sure about that, so that it really is something that changes your life. And then by God's grace, you're ready, at least more ready, to be able, by the way you speak, to be a blessing and a help to others.

Now, I'd like to suggest that we see that quite often in the Psalms, where the psalmist says, for example, Oh my soul, why are you afraid? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him.

[3 : 39] That's the kind of thing you come across every so often. It's like the psalmist is talking to himself. He's saying, have you forgotten? You used to know, but it's like you've forgotten. And you need to remember again who you are and who God's made you to be, so that you can be back on course, ready to face the world one more time.

And the first point I'd like to make is simply that talking to yourself is healthy, and we see that in the first couple of verses of Psalm 103. I mean, talking to yourself is something we joke about.

So if a pal accuses you of talking to yourself, he's usually laughing at you. You know, caught you talking to yourself again. We joke about, it's kind of abstract, isn't it?

You're walking around the house and, I don't know, you're looking for the butter. I'm sure I put the butter down here somewhere. Who's moved the butter? I can't, they've moved it, they've done it again.

Whatever it is, you just find yourself rambling on about something abstract, not particularly important. Sometimes we talk to ourselves to encourage ourselves. So if you're doing a 5k for the first time, just after Christmas, you're going to get fit again, you're doing a 5k, and there's 1k to go, you might say, come on, Tom, keep going.

[4 : 53] You can do this. You can do this. And it's a way of geeing yourself up, isn't it, to encourage yourself. Sometimes you talk to yourself in a bad way. You find conversations playing out in your mind about what you would say to that person who lives four doors down, who's just a nightmare, and you've had enough, and you say all the things that you really want to say to them, and it's full of bitterness.

It might be justified, but it's still a pretty nasty conversation. So there's all kinds of ways in which we find ourselves talking to ourself. The Bible gives us another way to talk to yourself.

Like I said, it's a way in which you can more deliberately and specifically say, who am I based on what God says to me about myself?

Verses 1 and 2, let's take a look at them. Praise the Lord, my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name, praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

So like the Psalms often do, he repeats a line a couple of times for emphasis. He says it at different points during the course of the Psalm, and actually you'll notice if you look at the last verse, he says the same thing again, praise the Lord, O my soul.

[6 : 02] So it's like the Psalm is bookended by this statement where he talks to himself and says, O my soul, the best thing you can do right now is praise the Lord.

It's a specific and a deliberate act. So not like I was saying earlier, where you find yourself rambling around the kitchen saying, where's the butter? However, this is where you need to sit yourself down and as it were, give yourself a talking to.

O my soul, praise the Lord. That's what the Psalmist is doing here. And as I said, you find it in different parts throughout the book of Psalms, but also more generally throughout the Bible. In Psalm 43, the Psalmist says, why are you cast down, O my soul?

Why are you in turmoil? Hope in God, for I will yet praise him. I mean, it's really like he's talking to himself there, isn't it? Hope in God, for I will yet praise him.

So there's a slightly different scenario where the Psalmist is obviously in trouble. Don't know exactly what it is. The Psalmists lived in very real situations. They faced all kinds of difficulty, David particularly.

[7 : 06] And what's interesting about this one, the one I quoted from Psalm 43, is it's as if he's in the middle of his difficulty because he says, hope in God, for I will yet praise him.

So do you see what he's doing there? He's saying, things are pretty bad right now. And I guess you know what that might feel like sometimes in different situations. But what he's saying is, based on who God is and what he's done for me and can do for me again, I'll come through this.

So it's not just some random, come on, self, keep going, you'll do it, you can make it because the strength lies within. He's saying, my strength lies outside of me in God and in who he is.

And like I was saying, there's other examples throughout the whole Bible. In the New Testament letters, often we're encouraged to focus our minds so as to have a sense of renewal.

In a slightly different way, Paul, the famous apostle, says in the book of Romans, don't be conformed to this world. In other words, don't be swamped. Don't let just the world and all the ways of the world, maybe sinful ways, just take over you.

[8 : 11] Rather, he says, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. So what Paul the apostle is saying is actually important for a Christian to get these moments where they can set themselves down and as it were, as I've been saying, give themselves a wee talking to.

Remind themselves, be refreshed in their minds of who God is and who he's called them to be. I was reading a few books about this subject and one person put it like this.

I quite like this. This person said, the will of the psalmist is lecturing the emotions of the psalmist. The will, or the mind, is lecturing the emotions.

Now, we'll just chew that over for a minute. Sometimes we don't like getting lectures. Have you ever found yourself saying to somebody, will you stop lecturing me?

Because that's just annoying when it feels like somebody's just maybe feeling like they're a bit above us and they know what's best for us and it feels like they're just giving us information and they think they'll give us a quick fix for our situation.

[9 : 19] That can be annoying. So you might find yourself saying, stop lecturing me. And lectures can also be just dry because they're just information, aren't they? What is a lecture? It's information given from one person to a group of people.

You just take notes. If you regurgitate your notes in the exam, you pass the exam. Thumbs up. But why is this person saying the will is lecturing the emotions? Well, because sometimes our emotions need information.

If all we have is information and we feel dry and parched, but if all we have is emotion, then we can get swamped and we can feel all at sea.

Our emotions sometimes need information, particularly gospel information. God information to help us remember who we are and to help us get our bearings or find our feet in the middle of a difficult situation that we find ourselves in.

And that's why I think the writer was saying that here the psalmist's will is lecturing his emotions. He feels all at sea. He doesn't know which way to turn.

[10 : 27] He doesn't have the strength within himself to fix whatever situation he's facing. And what he needs is to sit down and say, oh my soul, who does God say that you are?

And who is God? And what are the ways in which he can help us? And that's what I'd like to look at. Secondly, this introduction is really just all about the ways in which we need sometimes to sit down and say and talk to ourselves.

But talk to ourselves about what? You're going to talk to yourself about yourself and about the fact that you're a Christian. Well, what do you say to yourself about who you are and who God is? The psalm gives us some answers.

So the second point I'd like to make is first, talking to yourself is healthy. And secondly, knowing the God that we talk to ourselves about brings us benefits. Now I say benefits because you'll notice at the end of verse 2, the psalmist uses that word.

He says, praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. So if you want to know one of the things that the psalmist is doing when he talks to himself, he's deliberately and specifically remembering the benefits that he receives from God.

[11 : 39] So benefits. Benefits not like your Tesco club card or your Asda, whatever card.

there's all kinds of cards. Everywhere you go, they'll offer you a card. You might end up with 15 cards for all the shops that you go to. And you would take the card on whether or not you think it's going to benefit you or not.

Is it actually worth having 15 cards in your wallet? Or are they just there for no real reason? Tesco club cards might get you points. Points might get you money off.

You've got a way up. Is that something you want to have? The benefits that we get from God are not like Tesco club cards. They're life changing. In fact, they're the kinds of benefits that you base your life on.

And in fact, what I want to say is that without them, you're lost, the Bible tells us. You're so much worse off than just not having a Tesco club card. And the other thing I want to say by way of introduction about benefits is that sometimes we feel a bit bad if, say, you've got a friend and the friend accuses you of really only hanging out with them when you think you'll get something from them.

[12 : 53] Sometimes we feel a bit of a burden to people. We only go to them when we need something. And people accuse us of being just like mercenaries, really, only in it for what we can get. So we don't always like it when people are too aware of the benefits they'll get from other people.

But with God, it's different. God wants you to come to him for the benefits he can give you because he knows that without him you don't have the life that only he can give you.

And all the benefits that he can give you are so that you can live and have new life and be a new person. And actually understanding that is vital for our well-being. And so as we think just for a minute about the kind of benefits that the psalmist says we get when we come to know God, it's

also important for us to think that if you don't know God, you don't have these benefits. These are not for you. You can't lay claim to them. You don't have them as it were in your wallet. You don't have them as a part of your makeup. And I'd love you to have them. And that's why preachers always want to say come to God and know him, put your faith in him so that you can know the benefits that he gives you for your life.

So what are these benefits? I'm just going to pick out a few. I think the way in which we can think about the psalm is that verses 3 to 5 give you like a squished or a miniature version of the different benefits that you can get.

[14:21] And then the rest of the psalm really gives you more and more detail of all the ways in which these benefits work. So for example, if I just look briefly again with you at verses 3 to 5, it says he forgives your sins.

It says he heals your diseases. He redeems your life. He crowns you with love and compassion. He satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

There's a list of benefits the psalmist believes that he has received and that you should believe that you can receive if you put your faith in God. So like I said, these are not the kind of benefits that we might pick up on a par with a club card or even some other human being because after all, what other human being can say to you your sins are forgiven?

Nobody has the right to do that. Only God. So just to take a few of these and look at them briefly. Number one, God forgives your sin. Use the question I used earlier.

If you're not a follower of God, you don't have this benefit. Where does that leave you? Well, it means that you still are accountable for your sin. That's what the Bible reveals to us.

[15:38] Now, we know that about ourselves. Even people who are not Christians will sometimes talk about the mess they've made of life or the skeletons in the closet or the things we've done wrong. We see evidence of it in broken relationships.

You feel bad because of it. All the ways in which life just feels rubbish sometimes. Ultimately, the Bible tells us that's because of sin. Sin that we commit and sin that's committed against us.

So we experience and feel it all the time. What do we do with our sin? Sometimes people nowadays will try and maybe justify themselves or prove themselves, try and make themselves better.

But that is a huge mountain to climb for you. And also, the Bible tells us that really, we're accountable to God for our sins. But the God to whom we're accountable promises to forgive our sins when we put our faith in Him.

We have more information about this than the psalmist does. Nowadays, in what we call our New Testament era of living, that is after Jesus coming into the world, we have so much more insight into this.

[16:47] And so, if you were to sit yourself down and talk to yourself about who God is and what He's done for you, what you should be able to reflect on is the fact that you know how God has done this. The psalmist is able to say He forgives your sins and he had insight into this as an Old Testament believer.

He would have to perform sacrifices, he would have to go to the priest and all of these different things. You can read of how the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, came into the world to willingly become the sacrifice.

He gave up his life. He was perfect but he gave up his life so that anyone who puts their faith in Jesus can have their sins forgiven.

So, I would suggest that that is worth spending some moments of your day reflecting on. Oh my soul, have you forgotten that Jesus gave up his life for you?

Or you could say, oh my soul, don't forget that Jesus gave up his life for you because Jesus doesn't want you to forget that he gave up his life for you. In fact, he wants it to be a daily thing.

[17:54] So, Christians have a reason to sit down and reflect on what God has done for them. But can I just for a moment apply this and take it right back to my opening question?

How does this change the way we speak and become salt and light in the world? Well, I think for a person who sits down and thinks, Jesus gave up his life for me and if I trust in him, he's forgiven my sins.

That means, even though I might still feel shame for them, I might still feel guilt in God's sight, the slate is wiped clean. It couldn't be any cleaner. I couldn't be any more forgiven.

That means, surely, the way I speak to other people has more humility. It means I'm no longer trying to prove myself or justify myself based on just my own performance because what I rely on is what Jesus has done for me.

And it means, surely, as well, that I'm no longer so arrogant maybe towards other people or judgmental because I know how much I've wronged others and yet I've been forgiven.

[18 : 59] So there's just a little window there into the way in which sitting down and reflecting on who God is and what he's done for us, remembering again all the benefits that we have in God, changes not only our hearts and our minds, but also by God's grace, the way we speak.

There's one benefit, he forgives your sins. Second one I want to mention is that he demonstrates what I'm going to call covenant love to you. There's a couple of times in the Psalm, I'll show you in verse 11, it says, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

And then in verse 17 it says, from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him. That's a particular word in the original language, sometimes it's translated steadfast love, and it has to do with this idea of covenant love, and that means that God makes a promise with his people that he never ever breaks, and a promise to his people that he always follows through on and comes good with.

So, Bible writers like the Psalmist, or people in the Gospels, or the letters, can reflect on the fact that what God says he'll do, he always does. Now, can you, as somebody who, I hope you know Jesus, if you know Jesus today, can you say the Lord comes good on his promises?

If God says to you, as we've already looked at, to those who trust in me I will forgive their sins, you can say yeah he did that, because Jesus came and gave his life and rose again and ascended back into heaven.

[20 : 36] And he gives you other promises in the Bible as well. He says in the Psalms, I'll put a new song in your mouth. That's something that he promises and surely that's true for Christians if, as we've been thinking about, he gives us new life.

He changes our perspective on ourselves. He means that it's no longer just up to ourselves to make something of us in our lives because he calls us his children.

He calls us his beloved sons and daughters. believers. So again, thinking about the way in which we see here as we reflect and remember on what God's done for us, we see that he demonstrates commitment in the love that motivated him to send his only son into the world.

And again, just as you apply and think about that, how does that change the way you speak? Surely it gives you a security, it gives you a sense of being grounded based, again, not on yourself but on what God has done for you.

God loves me. Do you know that? Do you find it hard to believe? Well, God demonstrates his love for you in his gospel work and in all that he's done for you.

[21 : 48] And that, I think, gives us a sense of peace, maybe in the way that we can speak to others. Here's a couple of other benefits that we get. We're talking about the benefits that we get from knowing God.

Verse 5 says, he satisfies your desires with good things. Mick Jagger says, I can't get no satisfaction. Sometimes it might feel like that for us.

I think that the world at the moment is almost built to keep us dissatisfied because it's very distracting. Maybe it's always been that way. There's a million things you could go chasing after in the world.

And with the way in which the world works now, with the devices that we carry around, we're constantly getting pings and messages and adverts and lifestyle choices in front of our eyes. We're constantly getting suggestions as to how you could be a better new you. And maybe that's true. Maybe there are some useful ways like taking up 5k.

[22 : 48] It's good for your health. Not a bad thing to do. But the satisfaction that you need, the deep satisfaction that makes you a human being, a true human being, a new self.

It gives you complete confidence in the fact that you're a forgiven human being. It gives you new purpose for life, like I was saying. You can be salt and light in the world.

It gives you eternal security, a hope that nobody else in the world can give you. Eternal life with God. Well, that satisfaction comes to you from God. And again, that's what the psalmist is saying here.

So, sometimes when you're tossed to and fro in your emotions and you're looking at adverts or you're looking at what people are saying to you and they're telling you all kinds of things about who you could be or who you're not, you're not good enough, it's important for us to sit down and say, oh my soul, who am I based on who God is and what he's done for me?

And there, again, I believe we find satisfaction. And the apostle Paul says in one of his letters again, I've learned the secret of being content.

[23 : 57] whatever situation I have in life, he says, whether I've got a lot or whether I've got a little, because the bedrock of my life is now Jesus. And wherever I am, if I'm somebody with a lot of wealth or absolutely none, or whether I've got health or none, Jesus Christ is my bedrock.

And he is the one who actually, whether I'm rich or poor or whether I'm healthy or unhealthy, Jesus loves me the same and you also. So there is satisfaction to be found.

Now there's a lot of other examples I could look at here. I'm just going to touch on one more because here again, like I'm saying, these are not benefits like your club card. These are benefits that are deep and life-changing.

If I move just to the end of the psalm now, almost, there's one more benefit that I think helps us, particularly in the swirling news stories that we face today, where the world seems totally chaotic and fearful, fear-filled.

The psalmist says towards the end of the psalm, verse 19, the Lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all. You know what that tells you?

[25 : 10] And if you sit down and speak to yourself and say, who is God? Well, it tells you that somebody has got this world, if I can put it like that. There are many human beings who try to have this world.

I mean, they may try and have it by taking its resources. We look at tyrants in different countries who are trying to have dominion over different nations or they're trying to strip the assets of different nations.

And all kinds of stuff goes on. And it results in suffering for ordinary human beings. And it always has done in many ways. The history of the world is littered with this kind of stuff. Human beings warring against other human beings to try and get ahead.

Well, here we learn that the Lord has established his kingdom. Jesus taught us that as well. Again, we have insight into this when we look at the New Testament and the work of Jesus Christ because Jesus came preaching about himself and saying that the kingdom of heaven is near.

What he means there is that for any person, whether you live here in Winchborough or whether you live in Brazil or South Korea, as I was praying about earlier, there is a kingdom that is above all the earthly kingdoms, all the power plays that are going on in this world.

[26 : 22] These power plays can exist at a local level in your street or they can exist in your family or they can exist at government level. But above all of that and actually woven through all of that are individual people like you and me who are called from our everyday lives into this new community, this new family, this new kingdom of people whose motivation and as I said, whose bedrock is now the governance of Jesus Christ.

And that means, I think, again when we're thinking about our speech, I speak to a lot of people now who are afraid, afraid of the world, afraid of war, afraid of environmental collapse.

How are we going to fix the world? Well again, like taking up your 5k, it can be good. Doing our little bit, maybe recycling or different things that you can do to help the world are good.

But over and above everything that I may do is the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is revealed to me clearly in the Bible. And the period of time in which we live now is one in which we're waiting for his return.

So if you feel tossed to and fro by your emotions and by fear, or maybe it fears contagious and all your people at work are worried and scared or however people feel.

[27 : 46] Sometimes there, especially, we need to sit down and say, oh my soul, remember the Lord Jesus Christ is King. And that's not just something you say to try and make yourself feel better. That is a reality that Christians can take hold of that is life-changing.

It changes our confidence. We're not self-confident, we're Jesus-confident. And we have Jesus hope because he says he's coming again. And that means that all the justice that needs to be dealt out, all the dealing with the wrong that's ever happened in the world, all the question of what's going to happen with the world and who will fix, well, all that we can give to Jesus and he says he'll take

care of.

So again, when we think about the way in which we speak, being salt and light in the way in which we speak, surely then we've got a new confidence that isn't based on ourselves, but it's based in Jesus and who he is.

And those words to somebody at just the right time may help them open up their minds and their hearts to somebody who just changed their lives as well.

A neighbour you know, a friend, a pal who you've known for 30 years, and you're not really sure how to help them. Maybe you don't have the ability to help them, you're just a pal. That in itself is important, but the way in which you can speak to them of the Jesus who is over all things may one day be life changing for them.

[29 : 15] So talk to yourself. Make sure, and here's something that we can do, that you get time to sit down and say, who is it that God is? What has he done?

And how does that change my life? And what I think that what that does is it changes our hearts, calms your soul when you're feeling turmoil in life.

And I believe as well it also gives you the basis upon which you can speak to others. What you notice, and I'm just about done, but what you notice in the psalm is that he starts off, like I said in the first five verses, by being very specific and talking to himself.

And he ends the psalm as well. But in between, he starts to speak to what we could say is the congregation. The people who are surrounding him about God. And actually, the end of the psalm, he just throws it wide open and he starts telling everybody what they should know about God.

Verse 20, praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding. Verse 21, praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, all you his servants who do his will.

[30 : 19] And so, because the psalmist has got a deeper sense in his own heart of who God is and what he's done for him, it draws him more and more to speak to himself about who God is.

But it also helps him start to think about how he can talk to others. Now, as a church, in a community, with a mission to go out and seek to make disciples of all nations, there's a starting point for us.

Making sure that we speak to ourselves about who God is and what he's done for us. And we pray on that basis that we can then go out and talk to others and share something as God gives us opportunity of the new life that we can have in Jesus.

Let me pray with you just to finish and then we'll close in singing together. Let's pray. Again, Holy Spirit, we pray that you'd please take your word and plant it deep in our hearts.

Thank you for the psalm here that we've been able to read and think for a little bit about. And we pray that you'd help us to take the advice of the psalmist and also to do what he does.

[31 : 33] And we pray that you would help us then to have more confidence, not in ourselves, but in you and all that you've done for us. Lord, speak to us as well about you and who you are and what you've done.

And remind us over and over again, because we're liable to forget that you are the one in whom our hope is found. So teach us this, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.