Psalm 103:11-22

(The psalm - paired with Numbers 17 in our Torah readings, is repeated from the week previous, so we've split it up for study)

Psalm 103:11-12 - "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

The tense here is not only "is" but "has been" i.e. for Israel in the past.

Nothing we can do can ever remove our sin. But when God removes it, through Jesus' death on the cross, it is fully and finally removed, completely. Christ took our sins on Himself, bore the complete judgment for them in His own body on the tree. God's justice was satisfied.

- Romans 8:1 - "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..."

- Romans 3:24-25 - "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (hilastērion) through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;"

- 1 John 2:1-2 - "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation (hilasmos) for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

"propitiation" = hilasmos - an offering to appease an angry or offended party, used only twice for Christ's sacrifice.

The Septuagint also uses a form of this Greek word, hilasterion, to translate the Hebrew word kippur, as in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The analogies are even more striking to us today than they were to them, knowing the extent of the heavens. The pictures suggest an infinite distance.

Other analogies of God's love and forgiveness:

- Isaiah 38:17 - "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

- Micah 7:19 - "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."
- **Jeremiah 50:20** - "In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, a search will transpire for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for Judah's sins, but they will not be found; for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

But:

"them that fear him" - repeated again in **verses 13** and **17** below. The forgiveness applies to us only in a state of repentance, humility and fear of God.

**Like a Father**

**Psalm 103:13** - "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him."

Jesus' constant reference to God is as the Father.

- **Matthew 23:9** - "And do not call anyone on earth your father, for you have one Father, who is in heaven."

See especially the parable of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11–32**).

- **Romans 8:14-15** - "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

The fear of God here is compared not just to the respect of a father's authority, but to a son's admiration of his father and the fear of disappointing him, desiring to please him.

**Psalm 103:14** - "For he knoweth our frame (yetser-inclination); he remembereth that we are dust."

Probably the greatest comfort for us. "The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (**Matthew 26:41**).

The "Yetser Ra" is the phrase used by the rabbis for the "evil inclination" present in humans.

- **Genesis 6:5** - "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination (yetser) of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Targum: "for he knows our evil concupiscence, which causes us to sin; it is remembered before him, that we are of the dust"

The Septuagint makes this a petition: "remember that we are dust!"

Abraham remembered he was dust, and so should we:
- Genesis 18:27 - "Then Abraham answered, "Now that I have ventured to speak to the Lord— though I am but dust and ashes..."

Psalm 103:15-16 - "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more."

'enôsh (used here rather than adam) denotes man in his weakness and frailty

- Isaiah 40:6-8 - "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

- Job 7:10 - "As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to Sheol will never rise up."

We wither and die; Aaron’s rod budded and gave fruit

This whole passage concerning the fading away of plantlife and the temporariness of human life is in contrast to the miracle of Aaron's rod budding and bringing forth fruit - the resurrection - in Numbers 17.

Psalm 103:17-18 - "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."

The Targum: mercy "extending into the world to come"

The sacrificial Lamb was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8), died on the cross in history, is present with us now, and sits in eternity on the right hand of God, interceding for us.

How do we "keep" His covenant and "do" the commandments when we are "but dust"?

- Jeremiah 31:33 - "But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put My law in their minds and inscribe it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will each man teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity and will remember their sins no more."

How is this even possible?

Because God is sovereign, He is in control, His dominion is not time-dependent and He
will keep His promises.

**Psalm 103:19** - "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."

"prepared" = *kuwn* - prepare, firmly fix, establish

**From the Microcosm to the Macrocosm and back again**

The psalm began with calls for blessings by David personally and "all that is within me." Now comes a call for all the outward creations of God to bless him, and then finally David returns to himself again.

**Psalm 103:20-22** - "Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. "Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. "Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: "Bless the LORD, O my soul."

From the angels, to the stars and planets, to believers on earth, then to all nature David instructs them to praise his Name.

Psalm 148 adds even more detail to this kind of call:

- **Psalm 148:7-12** - "Praise the LORD from the earth, all great sea creatures and ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, powerful wind fulfilling His word, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, crawling creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth, young men and maidens, old and young together, Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted…"

Then David ends the psalm as he began it: "Bless the LORD, O my soul."