



January 5th, 2025  
“Building on Strength”  
Psalm 103  
Pastor Ken Stoesz

Before we get started into the sermon, I want you to look up 1 Peter 5:7: **“Cast all your cares upon the Lord for He cares for you.”** Take a couple minutes right now to write out what your cares are this morning. Big or small—it says to cast ‘all’ of your anxiety/cares on the Lord. Some of you are carrying heavy weight this morning; you are not to carry anymore but to give it to Him. Write out your cares, and before we get started, take some time to pray about them.

In Luke 14:25-30, there are these crowds that are following Jesus. They have a variety of motives: many are just curious about Him, some want something from Him, while others are drawn to Him inexplicably. Perhaps they are like you this morning, on the first Sunday of a new year...you have expectations, hopes, fears about the year ahead. This is not necessarily a sermon about new year’s resolutions or goals per se, but what I want to do with you this morning is look ahead and count the cost—how will this year be successful? Do you have what it takes to make this year the best you have ever had? No one wants to waste time, so why waste a year? How are you preparing for the year ahead? Back to Luke 14.

Jesus turns to the crowd and says, **“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?”**

What Jesus is asking of them then and now is—have you counted the cost of following Him? At the start of a new year are you like the crowd, wanting Jesus to fix a problem you’re in, or to provide something you do not have, or somehow to elevate your status—you would like 2025 to be better than 2024...that’s not wrong, but its deceptive.

Jesus constantly calls us to ‘follow Him’, to set His agenda first in your life before getting onto your own. What is God calling you to do this year? How is He asking you to set aside priorities in obeying Him? What patterns has he been putting his finger on that need to be addressed?

The people eventually left Jesus because He aimed to change their heart, whereas they wanted Him to change their circumstances. If the goal of 2025 is to have a changed circumstance, you will not have a changed life. If, however, you are willing to obey Jesus and invite Him to renew the work of changing you from inside, your circumstances change from being an end goal to being an avenue to transformation.

That comes with the call to that crowd on the hill 2000 years ago and it's the call to you and me this morning—can you trust God as you go into 2025? If you are in need and in hope of personal change, of a transformed heart and life—do you have the resources to make that happen? Will getting in shape or taking a trip, or getting a raise do that? No. Can you trust God to change you inside?

Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 103.

You're going into a new year. Before you wonder if you have what it takes to make this a great year, I want you to take stock of who God is; it is something that the people of God notoriously forget and in so doing, they lose their way. They make golden calves, they make all kinds of justifications for an expedient life, they trade truth for a lie—likely none of those people at the start of a new year said, 'Let's build a golden calf this year.'...no, they likely wanted to obey and know God, but life got tough, it got confusing and overwhelming and eventually...somebody had to do something. They (and we) simply forget who God is.

**“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” A.W. Tozer**

So, it seems appropriate this morning, the first Sunday of a new year—a Sunday of plenty of expectations—to take stock of who God is before you take stock of your abilities and strength. You have already taken stock of your cares, your anxieties. Now I want us to take stock of who God is through just one Psalm.

Here is what I want to do this morning, or rather provide for you: I want to give you 10 minutes (minimum) to read and meditate on Psalm 103. What I have found helpful to do and would encourage you to do is take your bulletin (or just a blank piece of paper) and draw a line right down the middle.

On one side write: '**God's Work**' and on the other side, '**My work.**' So read this Psalm, only 22 verses, and on the one side, write out all that God does and on the other side write out all that you do. After 10 minutes we'll come together again.

Before you get started just some basic rules: don't talk (if possible) to someone at this point. Let them (and you!) have the moment of quiet meditation. Don't check your phone. Just read this, slow down; you've already unburdened your mind of your anxieties (1 Peter 5:7) so don't pick them up again. Read what Psalm 103 says about God—let that begin to reorient your mind for the year ahead.

Read and meditate—take at least 10 minutes.

Now that you're done, which list was longer? Your list or God's?

Here is what I found: let's begin with 'our work': What are our marching orders for 2025?

Praise the Lord  
All that is in me (my soul) praise the Lord  
Do not forget all his benefits  
Keep his covenant  
Fear Him  
Be aware that life is short  
Remember to observe his precepts

That's it! What about God? What is His work for the year ahead according to Psalm 103? His list is just a little longer:

God:

1. Forgives sin—forgives ALL your sin (sin is described in 3 ways in this Psalm)
2. Heals your diseases (healed dis-ease)...what causes dis-ease in you...can you imagine that God would heal that? Cancer is a disease, but coveting is a dis-ease, loneliness is a dis-ease, discouragement is a dis-ease...fear of death is a dis-ease...anxiety, God can heal that.
3. Redeems your life from the pit. He 'buys you back'
4. Crowns you with love and compassion
5. Satisfies your desires (you have desires in 2025) with good things—Romans 8:24 'God works all things for the good of those who love Him'—so that your 'youth' is renewed...lost years, golden years...returned (not lost).
6. Executes righteousness
7. Executes justice (the world is not out of control) for the oppressed—He sees it all.
8. He makes His ways and deeds known—He's not a mystery or a puzzle to figure out; He will make Himself known to you if you seek Him.
9. He is compassionate
10. He is gracious
11. He is slow to anger
12. He is abounding in love (Ps.63:3 'Your love is better than life...')
13. He does not always accuse (not a grouchy parent with a stick waiting to catch you doing something wrong)
14. He does not treat you as you deserve
15. He does not repay you according to your iniquity (second aspect of sin)
16. His love is high as the heavens for those who fear Him. (Romans 8—nothing can separate you from the love of God)
17. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. \*note on sin—there are 3 definitions of sin in this Psalm: Sin—missing the mark; Transgression—cutting across boundaries; Iniquity—intentionally immoral, wickedness. Here He has removed your transgressions, earlier he says he forgives all your sins, then He says, he does not repay you according to your iniquities...
18. He has compassion on those who fear Him—is a Father to us.
19. He knows we are dust—God knows you are frail; He knows you are here for a short time

20. He has established His throne forever...He is sovereign, immovable. Ps.59:9 **“O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.”** Isaiah 40:5 **“And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.”** He is forever, we are not...we are dust, grass and temporary (so too are your anxieties and fears)...but God is eternal and is on a throne, meaning He is in control and can be trusted.

So, you're wondering how you'll come through another year...well that depends on what you're building your life on.

Jesus said in **Matthew 7:24-27**, **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”**

How have you measured your life; by what strength will you succeed? Look at the two lists again. Look what you are to do and look at what God is to do. He is the foundation you can build your life on and can trust. Measure the value of the two lists—what God does and what you do. I wonder how many times we get into trouble because we're not staying in our lane—we're trying to do what God alone can do.

Communion:

Jesus counted the cost. He measured what it would take to fulfill all the tasks of Psalm 103; Jesus would come and give His life to die for you. He came to pay for your sins; He came to give you life—and life to the full. He came to conquer fear and set you free. It's through His love for us that we are able to face the troubles of the year ahead and know Emmanuel, God is with us—He will not abandon us nor forsake us. All things will work for the good of those who love Him—and the love of Christ will enable you to overcome all obstacles in the year ahead.

All you have to do is praise Him. Remember what He did, fear and obey Him. So that is what we are going to do by taking communion.

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, He said, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' So when the bread and the cup come around, you take this in 'remembrance of Jesus.' When the elements come around, praise Him, give Him thanks; in your hands are symbols of God's great love for you. He has not treated you as you deserve, but rather took the punishment that you and I deserve.

Invite Him to take hold of your life in a new way today. To heal your dis-eases, to guide you in truth. You are not your own; you belong, body and soul to the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the first Sunday of a new year, you have no idea what the year ahead looks like. But He has proven that His way is best for you; the bread and the cup prove that, 'He who did not spare his own Son, how much more (along with Him) will He not give you everything.' In other words, in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus, God gave Him up—if He gave Him up for you, how much more can you trust Him with all your cares and start, even today, to build your life upon Him.