

Psalm 103. 8-12

- ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.
⁹He will not always chide:
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
¹⁰He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Sometimes poetry can almost take on an aura of the visual arts. Poetry's use of symbolism, imagery, metaphor, likeness, etc. grant us the freedom to form pictures in our minds. A picture, they say, is worth a thousand words.

The King James Bible's 79-word translation of this passage contains unimaginably broad horizons and an expansive universe that boggles the mind. We would need a book of meditations to capture the grandeur found in this one Psalm. We would need more books than the world can hold to capture the grandeur of the God whom the Psalmist discovered and seeks to reveal. What follows is the smallest nibble from the sumptuous feast that is Psalm 103.⁸⁻¹².

"As far as the east is from the west."

How far is that? However far it is—and it is very, very, very far—that's how far God can and does "remove our transgressions from us." I can think of a half dozen ways to imagine this. I can, for example, see myself standing on a broad flat limitless plain. I look to the eastern horizon, its features tiny, unfocused, and indistinguishable. I then look to the western horizon, its features equally incomprehensible. Then, I physically move myself eastward until I come to that first eastern horizon that I made out earlier. Then I look to the west. I look for that western horizon that I saw before. But I can't see it. It has disappeared from view.

That, the Psalmist testifies, is what God does to and with our sins. He moves them. Moves them very far away. So far that we can no longer make them out. So far that we cannot see them. So far that they have no power to impact and impress themselves upon our senses. This is a way of saying that the impact of our sins upon us is reduced to nothingness. But this unimaginable feat is just the tip of the iceberg. For, God removes sin so far away that even He—He of perfect sight and knowledge and memory—even He can no longer see them.

As they disappear over the far horizon of eternity, we find Him negligent in dealing "with us after or sins" or rewarding (punishing) "us according to our iniquities." Even if He looked for cause to chide and upbraid and accuse—which He does not—He would come up empty. Sin has fallen off the edge of the universe. It has been disappeared. Annihilated. But this has nothing to do with the size of the universe or the breath of our horizons. Rather, it is about the immensity that is in God. The divine attribute of "mercy" is as high and wide and long and deep and expansive—infinite—as the universe is huge. "Were it possible," the prophet Enoch declared,

"that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be

a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still; and yet thou art there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end.”¹

Yes, the curtains of His mercy are “stretched out” as expansively as His creations. We have not yet discovered the beginning nor the end of the universe. Neither have we discovered the expansiveness of His mercy. We probably never will. Probably the expansiveness of His mercy would shock our senses. Possibly offend our sensibilities. I believe that it was this, or at least that portion of it that is comprehensible to the human mind, that came rushing in “with great force into every feeling of [Joseph Smith’s] heart” when he read James. God was not an upbraider.² He did not find cause to accuse. Not because there was no cause, but because God was more righteous and powerful than puny human sin. He obliterated human sin, sending it to the furthest reaches of the unknown universe.

It is all hard to believe. And there’s the rub. But Lent is a good time to scan the universe, scour its every nook and cranny in search of a place where sin can survive God’s hostility toward it. It’s a good time to experience the muscular arms of God seize hold of our sins and hurl them into the furthermost abyss of nothingness. Lent is a good time to come under the commanding influence of the Holy Spirit and “shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.”³ such that all may hear and join in the grand Hallelujahs of Easter.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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¹ Moses 7.³⁰⁻³¹

² JSH 1.¹²

³ 2 Nephi 31.¹³