Title: From Dust to Doxology: The Immense, Intense, and Intimate Mercy of God

Sermon Summary: In this concluding message through Psalm 103, the pastor leads the congregation from a sober recognition of human frailty and insignificance to a sweeping, cosmic vision of thanksgiving and praise. Using the rhetorical structure of point-counterpoint and the image of an ascending spiral, the sermon contrasts the temporal, fragile nature of humanity with the everlasting covenant mercy of God. The pastor argues that true thanksgiving is not accidental but requires deliberate remembrance, honest self-assessment, and alignment with God's character. Mercy, he contends, is not merely a comfort but a transformative force that moves people from dust to discernment, and from discernment to lives that become a doxology. The sermon culminates in a call to expand one's vision of thanksgiving beyond the personal and national to the cosmic and eternal, joining angels, heavenly hosts, and all creation in blessing the Lord.

Key Points:

- Thanksgiving does not happen by accident; it requires intentional remembrance of what God has done and how much he has forgiven

- Human beings are cosmologically and historically insignificant, like grass or a flower that fades, and honestly acknowledging this is liberating rather than morbid

- Self-importance and pride flow from an inflated sense of personal significance, while humility, gratitude, and mercy flow from recognizing one's dependence on God

- The point-counterpoint structure of Psalm 103 presents human frailty not as the final word but as the backdrop against which God's everlasting mercy shines more brightly

- God's mercy is not bound to human existence, frailty, or sinfulness -- it is bound to God himself and extends across generations

- Three characteristics mark those who are being moved from dust to discernment: reverence for God, keeping the covenant by aligning with God's character rather than culture, and knowing God's word in order to do it

- The closing verses of Psalm 103 form an ascending spiral of praise that begins at God's throne and widens outward to encompass angels, heavenly hosts, and all creation

- Personal thanksgiving is never private -- it echoes through the cosmos and joins the eternal song surrounding God's throne

- Mercy is the gateway to purpose, and purpose is the solution to addiction and aimlessness

- The righteousness believers possess is not self-generated but is Christ's righteousness imputed to them through faith, as described in 2 Corinthians 5:21

Scripture Reference:

- Psalm 103:15-22, the primary passage, describing human transience contrasted with God's everlasting covenant mercy, his sovereign throne, and the call for all creation to bless the Lord

- Romans 3:23, affirming that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory

- Romans 3:9, declaring that both Jews and Greeks are under sin

- Galatians 3:22, stating that scripture has shut up everyone under sin so that the promise might come through faith in Christ

- 2 Corinthians 5:21, describing how God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on humanity's behalf so that believers might become the righteousness of God in him

- 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, declaring that God is the source of believers' wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption in Christ

- Philippians 3:9, expressing the desire to be found in Christ with a righteousness that comes from God through faith rather than from personal effort

Stories:

- The pastor describes walking through an old cemetery in Indiana during his seminary years and discovering the headstone of a First Sergeant who died in 1849 with a Medal of Honor, noting that no one in the cemetery shared his last name and no one remembers him, illustrating the historical insignificance of even decorated individuals

- The pastor shares a letter dated February 17, 1930, written by his great-grandfather George Burwell Booth to his brother Charlie, in which George reflects on illness as a spiritual blessing, warns Charlie about spiritual complacency, and expresses his desire for

their family to be united around the throne of God; George died on March 5, 1930, just days after writing the letter, and the pastor uses this as a meditation on legacy

- The pastor recounts standing guard at the Latrobe Gate of the Washington Navy Yard for more than eight hours past his scheduled relief, remaining at his post because military general orders required him to stay until replaced, using this as an illustration of faithful service and not abandoning one's post as a Christian