

Psalm 136 The Great Thanksgiving

Before us today, we have a Psalm of Great Praise and Thanksgiving to God for his goodness to the world and particularly to his people. In every verse, we find something for which to give thanks by form of praise to God. And in every verse, we see the repeated phrase: “*his steadfast love endures forever.*” Now, a couple things about the Hebrew and our English translation. In English (ESV) we have 6 words: “For his steadfast love endures forever.” In Hebrew, it is only 2 words: *chesed*, and *olam*. The 2nd word is very clear. It means “eternal” or “forever.” The 1st Word, “*chesed*,” can be translated: “mercy,” “kindness,” “favor,” “love,” “pity,” “goodness,” and “loving-kindness” (others also). And connected with this word when used to speak about God, there is a deep understanding that God has a great desire to act in such a way. With this in mind, outside the names used for God Himself, I am not sure we can find a word with more meaning in all the Bible than “*chesed*,” as a way to describe the character of God toward his people. We fall short when we translate it merely as “love,” or only as “kindness,” or simply God’s “mercy.” It is almost like the word “glory.” We know God is “glory.” But we don’t know what His glory looks like unless we observe the effects of glory in creation. In the same kind of way, we know what “*chesed*” looks like in the ways the Psalm describes the acts of God toward his people (and the world). If I were to describe define “*chesed*,” I would say that it is God’s unending, loving, merciful, benevolence toward an undeserving people. I have 8 reasons we give thanks today. Some I will merely mention, others I will give more attention as we consider Thanksgiving this week.

1. We give thanks for the goodness of God. V. 1: “**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good . . .**”

This first truth really captures everything that follows in this Psalm. God is good. God is the definition of goodness. For all goodness flows from him. God is good to create and take care of his creation. God is good to send rain and sunshine. God is good to give us such a fitting place to live. God is good to give us EVERYTHING He gives us, particularly the giving of his Son.

2. We give thanks for his sovereignty. Vv. 2-3 “**Give thanks to the God of gods . . . Give thanks to the Lord of lords.**” If there is anything God’s people find comfort in it is this: God is Lord! In the midst of trials, tribulations, sickness, death, wars, famines, changing times, whatever this sinful world brings, WE KNOW that God is in control. In this we find great comfort.

3. We give thanks because God is unique. Look at v. 4: “**to him alone . . .**” And then in v. 26: “**Give thanks to the God of heaven . . .**” When the Psalmist remembers the wondrous acts of God in the life of Israel he gives thanks because God is the ONLY ONE who could do such works. For He is not a “god” of this earth. He is the God of heaven. Brothers and sisters, we are creatures. We are of this earth. And the things we do are of this earth. But, God is wholly other. He is heavenly. This doesn’t mean he merely lives in heaven. NO! This means He himself is different. He is eternal. We are not. I am frail. I am so influenced by the things of this world. I am so reminded of this fact as I consider my weakness the past couple weeks. But God is our creator. He stands outside his creation. He does not sleep nor slumber. Nothing catches Him by surprise. And for this we give thanks!

4. We give thanks because he does great wonders. Look again at v. 4: **“to him who alone does great wonders . . .”** In this Psalm alone we see many of these. V. 5 He **“made the heavens.”** V. 6: **“He spread out the earth.”** V. 7: **“He made the great lights”** (speaking of the sun, moon, and stars). V. 10 **“He struck down the firstborn of Egypt.”** V. 11: **“He brought Israel out of Egypt.”** Vv. 13-14: **“He divided the Red Sea in two”** and **“made Israel pass through the midst of it.”** V. 15 **“He overthrew Pharaoh and his host.”** V. 16 **“He led his people through the wilderness.”** V. 17: **“He struck down great kings”** and v. 18-22: **“He killed mighty kings . . . Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel his servant.”** Every book of the Bible is FULL of the wonderful works of God. Starting with creation and moving through mighty acts of power and then moving to all the miracles we see in the Scriptures we praise God for his great wonders.

5. We give thanks because God protects his people. Look at v. 11: **“He brought Israel out of Egypt . . .”** And then in v. 13-14: **“He divided the Red Sea in two”** and **“made Israel pass through the midst of it.”** And then in v. 16 He **“led his people through the wilderness.”** And then in vv. 17-22 He fights for them and defeats mighty kings. Then he gives them a land. For all these things the Psalmist give thanks to God. Now, I must ask, *“Does God always protect his people?”* Because we know that the King of Babylon destroys Jerusalem, many are killed, and the rest are taken into Captivity. Now, we know that judgment came upon them after many many years of God’s pleading and his prophets preaching. And, as a whole, they were judged for their idolatry. But, the answer is still **“Yes!”** God protects his people. But, this does not mean we will be protected from many of the consequences of sin in this world. Death still comes to us all. Sickness and troubles along the way are our lot in this life. We still suffer ungodly policies of government. Life is short and full of troubles. But, God certainly protects his people. He will not let us perish, but will lead us all the way to heaven. 1 John 5:18 says, **“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”** This truth must bring us great comfort. We know that as we follow his Word, do his will, in this life, God will work things for our good. And we must remember the world does not have such protection.

6. We give thanks because God leads his people. Look at v. 16: **“to him who led is people through the wilderness.”** The journey through the wilderness/dessert has no parallel. It abounds in wonders and mercies. They could have, should have, been destroyed at every turn. But, God leads them the to the exact places he wants for them. The Prophet Isaiah remembered those days saying, **“Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name”** (Is. 63:11-14).

Today, we give thanks that God leads us. He is the great shepherd of his people. Ps. 23 **“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his**

name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Is there anything in this life through which and by which He does not give you leadership? Brothers and sisters, He has given us everything we need for life and godliness! 2 Pet. 1:3 says: **"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence . . ."** We have his word. We have been given the Holy Spirit. And all these blessings come to us through the Son.

7. We give thanks because God remember us in our lowly state. V. 23 **"It is he who remembered us in our low estate."** I think this is where we begin to understand the word "*chesed*." God looks down on our lowly state. And what does he see? Of course he sees lowly creatures. That is what we are. But there is more. We are sinners. And when God looks down upon Israel, he sees an idolatrous, rebellious people. And in this regard, we can understand why the "*chesed*" is often translated as mercy. The ESV says, **"for his steadfast loves endures forever."** The KJV says **"for his mercy endures forever."**

Brothers and sisters, God does not have to save anyone. He is not obliged or obligated to do so. This is why God's love is understood in the form of mercy, and can be called "lovingkindness." And it is not as though we so much as plead for mercy. As Jimmy shared last week, **"But God demonstrates/commands his love toward us, in while were yet still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8). Brothers and sisters when God saved me, I was going my own way, doing my own thing, enjoying his gifts in this life and not acknowledging Him as the One who gave them. I think of the Apostle Paul as he considers his life before Christ. He says to Timothy: **"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"** (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

8. We give thanks because God delivers his people. Look at v. 24: **"and rescued us from our foes."** The Psalmist is remembering all the times God rescued Israel from their enemies. Of course the greatest example is Egypt. V. 11: **"God brought Israel out from among them."** Vv. 13-14: **"to him who divided the Red Sea in two and made Israel pass through the midst of it."** V. 15 **"but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea."** Then, he delivered them from the wilderness (v. 16). And he struck down great kings (vv. 17-20). Well today, we remember and give thanks for a greater deliverance. It is our redemption from sin in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Col. 1:12-14 Paul reminds us to **“give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”** And in Eph. 2:1-6, we read: **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”**

For all these things and so much more we give thanks today.

Consider Jill’s dad as an example of “steadfast” love and care. I could say the same about my dad, or my mother, and others in my life. But none of them compare to the loving kindness, the mercy of God in Christ, who is faithful to the very end. He can and does this because He is eternal.

Let’s finish this morning by reading the Psalm. I will read the first line and you read: **“For his steadfast love endures forever.”**