

Psalm 136

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Welcome to the service again today. It's good for us once more to be able to come together in this way and worship God. We begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise and we'll sing from Psalm 136. Give thanks to God for good is he, his mercy for mercy hath he ever. Thanks to the God of God's give ye for his grace faileth never. Thanks give the Lord of hosts unto for mercy hath he ever who only wonders great can do for his grace faileth never. We'll sing down to the end of verse 8 of Psalm 136 to God's praise. Give thanks to God for good is he, for mercy hath he ever.

Thanks to the God of hosts give ye for his grace faileth never. Thanks give the Lord of lords thanks to God's praise and we'll sing to the end of verse 9 of the day.

Who only wonders great can do for his grace faileth never. Who by his wisdom made heavens high for mercies for mercy hath he ever. Who by his grace faileth never. Who by his grace faileth never. Who by his grace to the end of verse 106. Let's unite our hearts now in prayer let's pray. Our Heavenly Father we thank you once more that we are able to gather in this way and we're able to come round your word and to read it and to sing it and to meditate upon it and we acknowledge with thanksgiving that you are the God who is good, the God who is sovereign, the God who is our creator and the God whom we can know and walk close with because of the finished work of Christ our Saviour. We acknowledge Lord as we must that we are those who are sinners. We sin by word, by deed, by the things that we leave undone. We are sinners by nature, we are sinners by practice but we thank you that as we confess our sin you've promised that you will cleanse us of our sin in the blood of Christ and so we come once more at this time seeking that you would cleanse us from our sin that is ever before us. It comes into our mind's eye as we bow before you and we ask that you would wash it from us, that you would make us righteous in and through the finished work of Jesus. We thank you Lord that this work is all of grace. We are not deserving of forgiveness, we are not deserving of being made righteous but we thank you that you are the God who is gracious. Your love endures forever and we see that love so breathtakingly as we look to the cross. The cross is where we find our salvation, the cross is where we find our hope and Christ alone my hope is found and we pray that you would enable us to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus and we pray that you would give to us that faith that would cause us to cling day by day all the days of our lives to Jesus. So draw near to us Lord we pray in this time of worship may our thoughts, may our words, may all that we do be glorifying to you and we ask Lord that you would reach us, that you would touch our hearts, that we would know that you are God, that you are with us and that you are ministering to us personally.

We pray for those who are struggling at this time, we pray for those who are sick. We in this time of pandemic are aware of so many, some known to us and who are close to us in these communities and some who are far from us that are reported as part of news broadcasts. But we thank you that we are able to bring to you those who are sick, just as the friends of those who were ill in New Testament times carried their friends to Jesus. We thank you that in prayer we are able to bring those whom we care for to the great physician, asking Lord God that you would lay your hands of healing upon them.

[5 : 48] Pray for those who are cast down, who are despondent, who are anxious, who are struggling. And we ask Lord that you would meet each one at the point of their need. Help us, we pray, with your word open to preach even to our own souls and say, why art thou cast down my soul? Why in me so dismayed?

Trust God. Enable us, we pray, to be trusting God. We pray for those who are still outside of Christ, who may be healthy and who may be comfortable in the reality of this world's riches, but who do not yet have rest in Jesus. We ask Lord that you would touch their lives, that you would disturb them,

and that you would cause them to look to the one who promises that he will bring a rest which is constant, which is eternal to all who look to him. So hear our prayers. Help us, Lord, we pray. Bless us as we gather as a congregation of your people, and we pray for all other congregations and all other denominations across this island and across the nation and across all nations. May the Lord Jesus continue to build his church as he has promised that you will, and may we know your blessing as we bow in your presence. Hear our prayers. Continue with us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's read now God's word, the psalm that we sang, Psalm 136, and we'll read the whole psalm. This is God's word. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, his love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, his love endures forever. To him who alone does great wonders, his love endures forever. Who by his understanding made the heavens, his love endures forever. Who spread out the earth upon the waters, his love endures forever. Who made the great lights, his love endures forever. The sun to govern the day, his love endures forever. The moon and stars to govern the night, his love endures forever. To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, his love endures forever. And brought Israel out from among them, his love endures forever. With a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, his love endures forever. To him who divided the Red Sea asunder, his love endures forever. And brought Israel through the midst of it, his love endures forever. But swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea, his love endures forever. To him who led his people through the desert, his love endures forever. Who struck down great kings, his love endures forever. And killed mighty kings, his love endures forever. Sihon, king of the Amorites, his love endures forever. And Og, king of Bashan, his love endures forever. And gave their land as an inheritance, his love endures forever. An inheritance to his servant Israel, his love endures forever. To the one who remembered us in our lowest state, his love endures forever. And freed us from our enemies, his love endures forever. And who gives food to every creature, his love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven, his love endures forever. Amen. And may God give us understanding as we turn back to his word. And as we do, we'll pray just for a moment again. Lord God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it's inspired by the Holy Spirit. And we pray for the help of that same Holy Spirit, that he would be our teacher. And that the truth of this psalm, that emphatic truth, that his love endures forever. We pray that we would know it, not only in our minds, but that we would know it in our hearts. And we would praise you in response. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. And for Jesus' sake. Amen. There are some things which are worth repeating. We're approaching Christmas now.

Six weeks, I think, I'm told, until we get into Christmas week. And every Christmas, there are certain things which happen on repeat. Every Christmas, we see the same things on TV. The Great Escape will be on on Christmas Day. The Sound of Music. It's a Wonderful Life. Home Alone.

[11:04] A Christmas Carol. There's these films that are played every Christmas. We've seen them all before. But we don't object to them being on again. Because we recognise them as good films. They're worth repeating. Some things are worth repeating. There's some lessons that need to be taught repeatedly. Times tables and maths class. They're said over and over and over and over again until we grasp them. Because it's important that we know them. We can't progress without knowing them.

So these tables have to be repeated. And there are some things that we say in the course of our lives and our relationships. And we don't just say them once. But we say them over and over again. A husband and a wife in a healthy relationship will say to each other, I love you. Not just once in their relationship. Not just once in their marriage. But this is something that they should be saying day by day. And as we look at this psalm. The repetition in this psalm we cannot miss.

26 times we have that refrain. His love endures forever. So it's not hard for us to figure what is the central message of this psalm. Well the central message of this psalm is the message that's on repeat. It's the fact that his love, God's love endures forever. This is a psalm about the love of God. The never ending. The eternally enduring love of God. And that love, God's love shown to us in this psalm, it requires a response.

And I suppose when we think about it, all love requires a response. If a young man says to his girlfriend, I love you. And I want to marry you. He's going to be a bit put off of his girlfriend. He says nothing in response and walks away.

[13:25] And from the beginning of this psalm, God's people, those whom God loves, are called to respond to that love of God by professing their faith in God. And speaking out the fact of their

thankfulness to God. And so this psalm, as we see it, it begins with a profession of faith. That's our first point.

There's only two points this evening. And firstly, we see a profession of faith. Or we hear through this psalm a profession of faith. Look at verses 1 to 3.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of hosts.

His love endures forever. Now when something is exhorted in the Bible three times in a short space, it means that this exhortation is coming to us with great force, great emphasis.

And three times in these opening three verses, we are encouraged, we are exhorted to give thanks to the Lord. That's our response.

[14:46] In the King James version, it comes with more emotion. We read three times in the opening three verses in the King James, Oh, give thanks unto the Lord.

And that captures, I think, more of the earnestness, the fervency of this exhortation. We're to give thanks to the Lord.

Why do we give thanks to the Lord? Well, we give thanks to the Lord because of because of who he is. The Lord is good, verse one. The Lord is is is God.

He is God of gods. Verse two. And he is Lord of lords. Verse three. Spurgeon says, foolish persons have gathered from this verse.

It's verses two into verse three. The foolish persons have gathered from this verse that the Israelites believed in the existence of many gods, at the same time believing that their Jehovah was the chief among them.

[15:56] But this Spurgeon is an absurd inference, since God, gods who have a God over them, cannot possibly be gods themselves.

See, back in Old Testament times, and indeed through all time, still today, there's a wrestle for the title of God in our lives.

And in some countries, like there was in the ancient Near East, there were false gods that people bowed down to and worshipped, gods of wood and stone and precious metals.

In this country, we don't have statues that we bow down to, but we make gods of material things. We make gods of other people.

We make gods of ourselves. And what the psalmist is saying here, a message that was relevant back then, and it's just as relevant today, is that the Lord, he is God over all.

[17:03] He is the one, true, sovereign, good God. And as we see him, as we trust him, as we walk with him, we are to give thanks to the Lord.

And like the psalmist, we are to call and encourage others to give thanks to the Lord. God. But what does that mean? What does it actually mean to give thanks?

Three times we hear the exhortation. It's coming with great importance, and so it's important that we grasp what this actually means. So let's take a moment just to think about what it means to give thanks, what we are to do when we give thanks.

There are some birds and animals and they're so camouflaged you can't see them.

If you go up for a walk on the hill, you can be wandering along through the heather and all of a sudden there's a squawk and a grouse that flies out at high speed.

[18:22] It's so camouflaged you can't see it. Or you can be looking in the distance for deer and a hill, but they're so camouflaged they're almost invisible.

And for some people faith in God and thankfulness to God it may be within them but it's almost invisible and inaudible.

I was out for a walk with our dog Shoros on Monday night and as I was walking along crossing the road from the community centre to the barbers I could hardly believe my eyes it was a big hedgehog and there he was in the tarmac, he was bold as brass and he was just ambling along on the main road.

You couldn't help but see him. Shoros got the shock of his life. And if I could put it this way our faith in Jesus and our thankfulness to the Lord is to be more like the hedgehog on the tarmac than the deer on the hill.

It should be clearly seen. It should be clearly heard. If faith in God is possessed within our hearts then it should be professed with our lips.

[19 : 56] And that's what it means to give thanks. Kidner the commentator says give thanks basically means to confess or to acknowledge.

Eveson the commentator says to give thanks includes the idea of confession and acknowledgement of God and what he has done. This is something that should be seen as something that should be heard.

It's not something that should remain deep within us, known to us but no one else. If we want a New Testament illustration of this, what it looks like to give thanks, we can go to Mark chapter 5, verses 25 to 34.

I'll read this familiar passage. It says there a large crowd followed and pressed around Jesus. Jesus. And the woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years.

She suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak because she thought if I just touch his clothes I will be healed.

[21 : 12] immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him.

He turned around in the crowd and asked who touched my clothes? You see all the people crowding against you as disciples answered and yet you can ask who touched me?

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman knowing what had happened to her came and fell at his feet and trembling with fear told him the whole truth.

He said to her daughter your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.

See this woman that we meet in Luke chapter in Mark chapter 5 she had faith in the Lord Jesus.

She had sufficient faith in the Lord Jesus to come to the place where he was at to fight through the crowd in order that she could touch him.

[22 : 27] And as she touched even the hem of his garment she was healed and so she had reason to be thankful to the Lord for the healing that she had received. but having been healed Jesus called her to come out and to profess the fact that she had faith in him.

Jesus called her to proclaim her thankfulness to give thanks. And that's a New Testament illustration of what we are called to do in this psalm.

We are to give thanks to the Lord. We are to profess our faith in him. We are to speak out our thankfulness to him.

And perhaps there's someone who's watching this or listening to this and that's what you're being called to do today. To profess that secret faith that you have in Jesus.

To share with those around you your thankfulness to the Lord for who he is and what he's done for you.

[23 : 52] One of the things we've not been able to do during these times of restriction is to meet together on communion weekends. And so perhaps we haven't had the same opportunity to come forward and profess that our faith is in Christ and to show out our thankfulness to him for all that he has done for us.

But just because we don't meet at the Lord's table doesn't mean that we don't have an opportunity every day to come forward and profess that our faith is in Jesus.

So can I challenge perhaps some, can I encourage some, if you're trusting in the Lord Jesus, if you have received that soul healing that comes from believing in him, then give thanks openly, audibly, visibly.

give thanks to the Lord, let people hear that you are thankful to the Lord, that you are trusting in the Lord, profess your faith.

So that's how this psalm begins, it begins with that profession of faith that we are called to. And then the psalm moves on secondly to these pictures that we are given of God's love.

[25 : 17] And that verse that's repeated, that line that's repeated 26 times, his love endures forever. It's actually in the form of worship that we're reading through here, it's a congregational response.

We can hear it in our imagination. We have two voices in this psalm. There's the voice of the worship leader and then there's the response of the congregation as they say in unison, his love endures forever.

But for a congregation to be moved to respond sincerely to the reality of God's love, they need to be able to see God's love.

And so the psalmist, he shares some pictures of God's enduring love. And he begins by drawing from Genesis 1 and Proverbs 3 and Proverbs 8 with the wonders of creation.

So in these pictures of God's love, we see God's love firstly for us in creation. We see God's love in creation. And that stretches from verse 4 to verse 9.

[26 : 34] To him who alone does great wonders, his love endures forever. Who by his understanding made the heavens, his love endures forever. Who spread out the earth upon the waters, his love endures forever.

Who made the great lights, his love endures forever. The sun to govern the day, his love endures forever. The moon and stars to govern the night, his love endures forever.

We are seeing God's love for us here in creation. We stayed a few weeks ago back when we were on holiday in a home in Graver.

and when we arrived in the home, it was clean, it was fresh, it was warm, it had everything we needed.

It even had a pool table in it. It was such a pleasant place, such a warm and welcoming environment to be able to relax and to enjoy and stay in.

[27 : 37] And when we think about the world that we live in, the world that God has created, when we look into the heavens, when we see the moon and the stars on a clear night, when we see the beauty of the sunrise and the sunset, when we look at the vastness of the ocean, it says so much to us about the power and the love of God.

He didn't place us in a world that was ugly and barren and hostile. He created and he put us in a world that was good. Now we know sinners come into this world and scarred the world, but even still we see the beauty of God's creation.

And it speaks to us in picture form about God's love for us. Kidnow, the commentator says, this theme invites the Christian not to wrangle over cosmological theories, but to delight in his environment, known to him as no mere mechanism, but a work of steadfast love.

There's such truth there in that quote, isn't there? Now very often when people start giving us scientific detail on the how of creation, how it all happened, when people start talking about big bangs and detailed evolutionary theories, things that the Bible gives us no clarity on.

When we hear all that about the how of creation, our souls dry up. But when we consider the why of creation, something the Bible is clear about, our souls fill back up with praise and thankfulness.

[29 : 41] Why did God create this world as an environment for us to live in? Well, the answer is because of his enduring love for us.

Lane, the commentator, says these verses with their repeated refrain come nearer than anywhere in scripture to an answer to the question, why did God create the universe?

The answer, to express his love. So in these pictures of God's love, we see God's love for us expressed in his creation.

The second thing here is we see God's love for us in his rescue. That's verses 10 to 12. The psalmist, looking back in salvation history, says, to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, his love endures forever and brought Israel from among them, his love endures forever.

With a mighty hand and outstretched arm, his love endures forever. And just as the psalmist was in Psalm 135, we see also in Psalm 136, the psalmist is looking back.

[30 : 58] And he's looking back to dark years. He's looking back to years of captivity in Egypt, back to years when God's people were held in work camps and treated with great cruelty.

as many of God's people still are today in places like North Korea, we must remember them, we must be praying for them. So the psalmist here, he's looking back at how hopeless the situation had been for God's people.

They were so weak, the enemy was so strong, they had no way out. That was until God struck down their enemy.

he stretched forth his strong arm, he plucked them out of captivity, he rescued them. And if we are Christians, God has rescued us.

He struck down the enemy of our soul. He's lifted us from the muck and the mire of our sin and he set our feet on the rock of his salvation, that is on Christ.

[32 : 14] He's rescued us. Weerspey says, the Exodus is a picture of the redemption we have in Jesus Christ, the spotless Lamb of God, who shed his blood to set sinners free.

And why did he do it? God rescue us? Because he loves us with that enduring love.

So we see God's love for us in creation, we see God's love for us in rescue. The third thing here is we see God's love in his miracles.

Verse 13 to 15, to him who divided the Red Sea asunder, his love endures forever. And brought Israel through the midst of it, his love endures forever, but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea, his love endures forever.

And in this stanza, again, the psalmist is looking back, and he's looking back to a particular event that we can read about in Exodus 12.

[33 : 25] God's people, who had been kept in captivity in Egypt, the door had been opened for them to go. God was in the process of rescuing them, and they made their way, they began their exodus out of Egypt, but the armies of Egypt had second thoughts, they started to pursue God's people.

And so here are God's people, and they're trying to get out of Egypt, and they have an army behind them in pursuit, and ahead of them they have this vast sea, they have nowhere to go, they are trapped.

It looks like certain death. But what happened next? Well, God divided the sea, and he took his people through the midst of it.

He divided the Red Sea asunder. The place where the sea was was split. It was the place that they were able to go safely through, and when their enemies began to pursue them, that same sea, it came back together and it swallowed up and swept their enemies away.

That's what God did. It was a, it was a, an immense miracle. And people say that's impossible.

[34 : 58] But it's not impossible for God, it's, it's a miracle. You know, what is impossible for man is possible for God. And if we doubt God's ability to do miracles, then our God is, is too small.

And our God is not the God of the Bible. We see God's love for his people in his miracles as we look at the Exodus and even as we think about our own lives, we can, we can perhaps look back and think of times when we have known something of the miraculous power and touch of God, maybe in healing, maybe in provision.

As a congregation, we can, we can see, see something of that in recent history. The building that we hope to meet again and soon as a congregation, it seemed impossible for us to be able to purchase that.

But God made what seemed to be impossible, possible. And then in terms of our salvation, how can sinners like us be saved?

How can we who are sinful come into the presence of a holy God? How can we enter the kingdom of heaven? Well, it's impossible for us.

[36 : 31] The rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10 learned that as he walked away from Jesus. But Jesus said in that chapter, what is impossible for us is made possible with God.

And the salvation that we need, that we cannot earn, that we cannot buy, is gifted to us, is offered to us through all that was done for us in Christ.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. And because of all that he did for us on that green hill far away, because he died for us, because he rose from the grave, then the miracle of forgiveness is offered to us.

The miracle of his resurrection, eternal life, is offered to us. And when we think about these things, things that have affected God's people in the times of the Exodus, things that continue to be these truths that we cling to in this day, as we think about these miraculous interventions, of God, we are given pictures that speak to us about his vast, enduring love for us.

So we see God's love for us in his miracles. We see God's love for us in his rescue of us. We see God's love for us in creation.

[38 : 17] And we see God's love for us, fourthly in this point, in his care of us. As we look at God's people back then, how did they, God's people whom he rescued from Egypt, how did they manage to make their way through the wilderness and into the promised land?

And the psalmist answers very clearly here, it wasn't through their own competence, inheritance, but it was through the care of God. Verse 16 to 22, to him who led his people through the desert, his love endures forever, who struck down great kings, his love endures forever, and killed mighty kings, his love endures forever.

Sihon, king of the Amorites, his love endures forever, all king of Bashan, his love endures forever, and gave their land as an inheritance, his love endures forever, an inheritance to his servant Israel,

his love endures forever.

And so the psalmist is saying here, as they went from Egypt through the wilderness into the promised land, it was the Lord that led them. Verse 16, we can go to Exodus 13 and see that with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, it was God who led them when they would have been lost otherwise.

And it was the Lord that overpowered their enemies, verses 17 to 20, when they had no strength, they had no military force of their own. It was the Lord, verse 21, who gave them a home, who gave them an inheritance, verse 22, and in summary, it was the Lord who cared for them.

[40 : 07] He cared for them. And He cares for us if we are His people. He's given us His word through which we are led, through which we learn the way for lost sinners to be saved.

He's given us His own Son, Jesus, who overpowered the enemies of sin and Satan and death and hell. We could never do it on our own. He's given us the promise of a heavenly home if we trust in Jesus, an inheritance that cannot fade or perish.

How much He cares for us. How much He shows to us in His care of us the depth of His love.

We are speaking, says the Psalm reviews God's dealings with His people and turns history into theology and theology into worship. If our worship is not based on history, what God has done in the world, then it lacks a theological message and it is not true worship at all.

And that I think is a helpful quote. Now our worship, our thanksgiving, love, it is not mood related or it shouldn't be. It is something that is stirred within us by the Holy Spirit Himself as we consider the historical biblical facts of what God has done for us in Christ.

[41 : 50] Christ. So in these pictures of God's love, we see His love for us in creation, His love for us in rescue, His love for us in miracles, His love for us in His care of us, His ongoing care of us, and finally here, we see God's love for us in His remembering of us.

Verses 23 to verses 25, to the one who remembered us in our low estate, His love endures forever, and freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever, and who gives food to every creature, His love endures forever.

And we hear various echoes of previous verses in this closing section, but the word I want to underline in this final part is the word remember.

God doesn't forget us. He's the one who remembered us. And why did He remember us?

Was it because of how high and how worthy we were? No, He remembered us. Verse 23, in our low estate.

[43 : 15] I can recall somebody in a prayer meeting once, praying and thanking God for stooping so low to pick up so little.

He remembered us. Not because of our high status, but He remembered us in our low estate. Just like Jesus remembered the thief on the cross who cried out to Him.

God's love is not a fleeting response to some beauty in us. God's love is not conditional on some season of good performance from us, thankfully.

Remember the song in the 60s? tonight you're mine completely. You give your love so sweetly. Tonight the light of love is in your eyes.

But will you love me tomorrow? Is this a lasting treasure? Or just a moment's pleasure? Can I believe the magic in your sighs?

[44 : 31] Will you still love me tomorrow? See the thing about our love that is captured in that song and a million songs after it is our love is so insecure and God knows that and so He says to His people 26 times He says to His people in one song the love I have for you says the Lord it's not insecure it's not a fickle kind of love that causes God to forget us no His love endures forever so as we look at these pictures of God's love how reassured we should be within our own souls how thankful we should be that this is our God and how ready we should be to profess faith and say from our hearts and with our lips and with our whole lives give thanks to the

God of heaven His love endures forever we'll pray Lord God we thank you for who you are we thank you that you are the good God that you are the sovereign God the one true God who is over all we thank you for your great love for us that you show to us in so many expressions so many pictures of your love as we look around us in creation as we look back into scripture and to Calvary at our redemption our salvation we see the vastness of your love for us we thank you that this love is not shaky it's not insecure it's not fleeting it's not conditional on who we are and what we do but it's a love that finds its root in the perfection of who you are the God who is love so enable us we pray to

be those who are trusting you and enable us we pray to be those who are ready to tell you and to tell the world around us that we are those who are trusting you and who are thankful for the wonder of your salvation hear our prayers take away our sin we pray in Jesus name

Amen There is a green hill far away without a city wall where the dear Lord was crucified who died to save to save us all we may not know we cannot tell what pains he had to bear but we believe it was for us he hung and suffered there he died that we might be forgiven he died to make us good that we might go at last to heaven saved by his precious blood there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin he only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in oh dearly dearly has he loved and we must love him too and trust in his redeeming blood and try his works to do and I may the grace of our Lord

Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both now and forever more Amen