

Remember with Thankfulness

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 30] Thank you.

Thank you.

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[5 : 00] Thank you.

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[7 : 30] Thank you.

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[10 : 00] Thank you.

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[12 : 30] Thank you.

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[15 : 00] Thank you.

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[17 : 29] Thank you.

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[19 : 59] Thank you.

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[22 : 29] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[24 : 59] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[27 : 29] Thank you.

Thank you. Now, you're going to read you.

We're going to read you. Give thanks.

Give thanks to the Lord.

And you're going to read you. And you're going to read you.

[30 : 31] And you're going to read you. And you're going to read you.

And you're going to read you. And you're going to read you. And you're going to read you. And you're going to read you. He remembered us in our lowest state. His love endures forever. And freed us from our enemies.

His love endures forever. He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever. Amen. It's God's wonderful word for us today.

As we begin, how is your memory as an individual? Memory is a funny thing, isn't it? Some of us have photographic memories at one end. Others, I'd be on this end of the spectrum, have memories more akin to the SIV. Without a phone, very little would stay in. Some people have memories for names and faces.

Others, it's dates and places. Some people can do root maps. Some people can do song lyrics. Memories are really important to some people. Perhaps you're a very nostalgic person.

[32 : 14] I like to look back past family events, that kind of thing. Others, maybe we find that we've got a black hole where our past should be because our memory is so poor. Memory matters in a whole lot of ways, doesn't it? It matters in our friendships and our relationships. We find it so important to have that shared set of stories, a shared past, which forms that sort of solid foundation for so many of our friendships so that you probably have people in your life who maybe you don't see for months or even years at a time. But when you do, you can pick up where you left off because you have that shared past.

Of course, friendships can only be rooted in the past, but they certainly serve to give us a strong foundation. Today, our psalmist is helping us to recognize that remembering is vital for worship, that our relationship with God is built on his past acts and his enduring love. And that is intended to give for us faith for our present and to strengthen our faith into the future. In a sense, this is a history lesson for the people of God. And what shines through this lesson that they are supposed to take away is that God's enduring love is there at every point in their story, in the story of the church. You can see when you look at the Bible how important remembering and worship are and the connections. Let me give you a quick whistle stop tour. You think about the fact that in the covenants that are made, there are signs attached and those signs are supposed to be a reminder to strengthen faith. Think about the event of the Passover and that meal that then becomes a ritual celebrated every year where the Passover lamb is killed. They remember it's at the cost of blood and sacrifice that they enjoyed their freedom. You read through the Old Testament and at various points when the people of God are delivered by God from their enemy in some way or another, they'll set up stones of remembrance. So when they're walking that path, they'll remember this far has God helped us.

When God gives his people the law, he then asks the people, he asks families to make sure and to remember and pass on the law to future generations. And of course in the New Testament, Jesus gives us the gift of the Lord's Supper. And he says, do this, share the bread, share the wine in remembrance of me.

So Psalm 136 is in one sense a history lesson, but it's also a lesson in God's enduring love to lead us towards thankful worship. The tone is set in the first three verses and in the last verse, the tone is that of giving thanks. The people of God are called to acknowledge their covenant Lord, to recognize him as the one true God and King. So we begin and end with thankfulness and in between we discover 26 times why they should give thanks. They should give thanks because his love endures forever.

It's kind of funny reading that again and again. And usual we'd have sort of call and response, but it's certainly intended to drive home into our minds just how important it is for the people of God to understand God's love never fails. It also reminds us how prone we are to forget that God's love never fails when we have to be reminded over and over. So our theme this morning is this, Christians are those who actively remember with thankfulness God's unfailing love and that remembering drives our worship and encourages us in our faith. So we're going to see evidence of God's enduring love intended to lead us to praise and thanksgiving. The first evidence that we find in verses four to nine, it takes us to the story of creation. When you look at how the Old Testament speaks of the story of creation, it does it in different ways. In the book of Genesis you get sort of a theological retelling of the story. Book of

[37 : 03] Proverbs is a little bit different because it focuses on the place of God's wisdom and God's understanding in the story of creation. And we find that there in verse five, who by his understanding made the heavens.

But here the psalmist wants to emphasize that the people of God should delight in God's creation. That creation acts as a stage on which we see God's creating love, God's sustaining love, the beauty of God's love all around us. So Psalm 136 wants us to recognize that God as creator and to connect the gift that we enjoy of the natural world with God, the giver of that great gift.

What is it that you love about the natural world? We all probably go to different places. What is it that takes our breath away? For me it's usually coastlines and seeing the waves rolling in. But for others it might be the night sky, it might be a mountain scene, it might be animals or birds.

We had a French friend that came over to the highlands for a summer because he was fascinated by Scottish clouds. So it takes all sorts. There's so many things that we can enjoy in the natural world. And the question for us as Christians is this, do we just enjoy creation, good as it is, or does it lead us to worship the God of love? Because that's what Psalm 136 is wanting us to do.

[38 : 47] For a Christian, there should be an added dimension to our appreciation. When we think of who in the world loves the world the most, we probably think of somebody like David Attenborough and he has another program just coming out now. But Christians have that added dimension that we see in and behind all of creation, the hand of our personal loving God. We see creation as the display of his glory, of his love, leading us into joyful worship. So Psalm 136 is teaching us to remember, to connect our sense of wonder wonder with the God who, in verse 4, who alone does great wonders. So when we read this Psalm, remember that God's love endures forever, God's love never fails is not a hollow phrase. And one of the ways that that is filled out is as we see the consistent and majestic beauty of our world. It stands as evidence for the enduring love of our God. But he doesn't just stop there with creation. He takes us in verses 10 to 16 to see God as rescuer, more evidence of his enduring love. The focus here is on the Exodus story.

So verse 10, And to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt and brought Israel out from among them, to him who divided the Red Sea asunder, his love endures forever. In the Old Testament, the great story of redemption is that of the Exodus, of God working by miracles to defeat Pharaoh and Pharaoh's armies and the gods of Egypt in order that the people of Israel might go free. And so the Psalm is calling the people of God to remember God's decisive actions to save and to deliver. And of course, they already had the Passover as an annual call to remember those great and decisive moments of deliverance where the people were set free to become the people of God. To remember, as we have in verse 12, God's mighty hand and outstretched arm to remember God's extraordinary displays of power as he intervened in history for the sake of his people to rescue them. Here is a reminder of how important God's saving love must be to our worship. Ours is a rescue religion. We don't believe in moral reform to earn our place in God's family. No, we believe that we must be rescued. And we must remember God's enduring love that stands as the basis for our salvation. It's on the basis of his love and grace.

So we have a call as Christians and as a church to make the gospel, to make the cross of the Lord Jesus central to our story, to be preaching the gospel to ourselves, to recognize that if I am in

Christ, I am a new creation. If I am in Christ, I am adopted into God's family. If I'm in Christ, then I have the promise of eternal life in glory. Those are what define and shape us as the people of God. And so we come to church week by week to remember and to remember again God's salvation at the heart of our collective story. Maybe you remember from last year the story of the boys football team from Thailand that got stuck in some caves and had to be rescued. A very dramatic rescue played out in front of the global media. Well, there was also interviews done when they had been dramatically rescued and then they were safe, they were recovering in hospital. And it was so touching how almost to a boy, each of them had the same kind of message to those who had rescued them. Thank you for saving us. Thank you for not giving up on us. Thank you for being there for us. When you're in the dark and you feel death is coming, it's hard to imagine that you'd ever lose a sense of that thanksgiving, isn't it? But what the Bible tells us is that God's rescue of an individual Christian is more dramatic than that. Because the Bible is crystal clear that by ourselves we are dead in our sin and we are made alive only in Christ.

perhaps we can go to Ephesians 2 to think of a New Testament parallel to rescue from Pharaoh and slavery in Egypt. There Paul writes, you were dead in transgressions and sins. Not just paralyzed, we were dead and dead people cannot help themselves. He says of the church, in the past you followed the ways of this world and its ruler, enslaved by the devil. You were by nature objects of wrath. Now there is a misery darker even than the slavery of Egypt. Dead in our sin, enslaved to that sin, subject to the wrath of God and heading for the wrath of God. But as Ephesians 2 goes on, because of God's great love for us, our God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. We have the glory of God's rescue in and through Jesus at the heart of our worship, reminding us that God's love endures forever. The next piece of evidence that the psalmist invites us to remember so that we might give thanks is that God has stood for his people as a champion. And that's the focus of verses 17 to 22. So part of God's covenant promise given to Abraham, then given to the nation of Israel, is that he would settle them in the promised land. And to be settled, enemies needed to be defeated. Stronger nations, more battled, hardened nations needed to be defeated. And it was crucial for the people of God that God would fight for them, that he would be their champion. So that's the focus there from verse 17 to 22. To him who struck down great kings and killed mighty kings, Sion and Og, and gave their land as an inheritance, his love endures forever. It's a reminder to the people that their history was a history of God acting, intervening to deliver in specific moments of their history. And perhaps if we know our Old Testament and we think of those famous battles, think about the battle of Jericho, where the plan for the people of God was simply to march around the city a number of times and then to blow some trumpets and the walls fell down. The point? God gives victory.

[47 : 03] Or we can think of Gideon with an army of just 300 with some torches and some glass jars. Again, having a decisive victory against their enemies. And the point is God fights for his people so that God gets the glory.

And he would often say that to the armies of Israel before they went into battle. They say, stand still and see the deliverance of God. Or he would say, I will march before you to give you victory. God is the champion for his people.

And Psalm 136 is teaching us to give thanks that who we have on our side is none other than the almighty God. And all of his strength is for all of his people. Think about the greatest of all the champion stories of the Old Testament. It's the story of David and Goliath. And what do we have there? We have David, who was God's chosen king, going to fight Goliath in God's name for God's glory, defeating the great enemy of God's people, while the army were standing on the other hillside, shaking with fear and doing nothing. They needed God's champion. That great picture of what Jesus has come to do to fight for his church against those enemies we are powerless against. Satan and sin and death.

Jesus comes to fight and win a decisive battle for us there at the cross. And we need to recognize that his love endures forever. His love for his people, his power for his people, it never changes. So if we find ourselves in a battle today, if we find ourselves suffering, under pressure, frustrated, in despair, whatever it is, we need to remember Jesus, the one who fought for us then, the Jesus who fights for us and who is with us now. Psalm 136 is telling us how important it is for us as the people of God, as the church of God, to remember those specific times where God has been active to rescue and to help. Not just in the big story of the Exodus, but in all the small battles along the way.

How can we do that? How can we cultivate a good memory of God's acts of deliverance so that we might give thanks and have strong faith? Some people like to journal.

[49 : 49] Journal the prayers that they make, the situations they're in, and then to journal how God answers. You might find that helpful. Some people find it very natural to talk with Christian friends or family about their stories, about here is what I'm going through, and then I read this in the Bible, or another Christian spoke this to me, here's how God answered prayer. Certainly we should learn the Bible as our history. This is our God. These are our victories. This is God ensuring that his covenant promises would last so that Jesus would come and be the Savior for all who would trust in him.

Certainly as families, we are to pass our faith on to our kids to speak of God's enduring love through the stories of our Bibles and through our own stories of faith.

All to help us to see, as Paul says in Philippians, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. To recognize God's goal for us as Christians, for his church, is life with glory, life in glory with Jesus forever, and he will not fail in that purpose. He will not fail to be that champion that we need. One last piece of evidence of God's enduring love, his goodness to everyone, returning back to the initial theme. Verse 23 to 25, he remembered us in our lowest state and freed us from our enemies. He gives food to every creature. There's a shift from thinking about the past and past generations to now thinking about the present and the present generation. And the point is that every generation experiences the never-ending love of God. Everybody experiences the goodness of God. Every day we have breath. Therefore, everybody should repent and believe and live lives of worship.

What the psalmist does at the end is he moves from that sort of epic scale view of creation down through national salvation and deliverance, now here to a much more personal and a much more individual focus. But in each of these, the refrain is still there. Whether we're thinking about God in creation or salvation or God in our own lives, his love endures forever. Every act of God in the past or in the present is to be a fuel for our faith, an aid to our memory to lead us into grateful worship. As we recognize that God is unchanging, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, we recognize he is here for us today. He's still lifting people up today. He's still rescuing people.

[53 : 05] He's still providing our daily bread. So it's crucial for us, in a way that the psalmist could only anticipate that we remember Jesus as God's decisive evidence of his enduring love.

So if we are to be anything as a church, we must be gospel people. We must remember the good news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. To recognize, as the New Testament reveals us, that Jesus is our creator. And in him we become new creations. And in him we have the promise of new creation life when he comes again. We must see Jesus as our rescuer. He was the one who was the firstborn struck down for us.

He is the Passover lamb who becomes our substitute, giving us freedom and life as his people. We must see Jesus as the one who sustains us on life's pilgrimage. Often when we find ourselves, like the Old Testament Israelites, in the wilderness, to discover he is the bread of life. He is the water of life. He and he alone satisfies. He is our never-failing friend, the one who is with us always.

So we must be a people who are looking back so that our faith might always be moving forward with confident hope. To see that what God has been for his people in the past, he will be in the present and will always be in the future. To look back to keep us thankful, to keep us trusting, so that we can sing this refrain from our hearts, knowing that his love endures forever. Let's pray together again briefly.

Lord God, we thank you for the history that we find in the Bible, which stands as testimony to your steadfast love. We thank you for the history of our faith. We thank you that we have that solid foundation for our faith as we look back to decisive acts in our history. That we can look at you creating the world and we can see your love in enabling us to live in a world where we can see and enjoy your glory, where we are made to live in relationship with you. We can see your enduring love for your people in that central moment of salvation at the cross where Jesus dies and in the resurrection where his victory and vindication happens.

[56 : 07] And we pray that you'd help us to stay close to the cross, to recognize that you are a God whose love never fails. That whether life is good or life is really difficult now, whether we are experiencing times of joy or sadness, that we'd always have that solid foundation of your past actions to help us and to ground us and to keep us moving forward with faith in your goodness and in your grace.

Please help us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, we will sing a different history psalm. This is from Psalm 107. We will listen to it being sung.

You can sing it at home. The first nine verses we will hear from Psalm 107. Amen. Everyone, you can sing it at home. This is from quindi and to wake up and Ohlin.

Whether you learn from your lord and auge of sabfl Maori or Alberto ecosystem isesque. Some of these who appear from heaven israel to see and fire from the sun that you want. How do you support us as a set-campus music in the fountain? Continue to see. So let's see what lullázio for you.

Or ever long on earth where they listen to the correction of starvation? Let us be more tears to our feet and fear. Now it's beautiful. How do you say nothing to stop us all the way this entre Policy and merciful? What I lot of will do not to let us lie down in share dove of sanity? Some wandered in the desert wastes not finding any way to reach a city where they might obtain a place to stay.

[58 : 22] Their life and strength were ebbing fast in thirst and emptiness. Then in despair they sought the Lord who saved them from distress.

Straight was the path he led them on a city to attain. So for the Lord's unfailing love let them give thanks again.

And for the awesome deeds of power which he for them achieves. For hungry souls he fills with good, the thirsty he relieves.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen. Amen.

[60 : 37] Thank you.

Thank you.