

Give Thanks for God's Enduring Love

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[0 : 00] Well, there's an outline in the bulletins that you can follow along and there's Bible passage from Psalm 136 page 620 or be on the screen as well.

Michelle Caruana mentioned, the kids, Minister mentioned before about our dog, which my daughter got last year. And she does love him way more than I do, but so much so that she's willing to even let him sleep in her bed under the covers.

That's, you know, the things people do for love, right? Switching a tact, another thing people do for love in terms of extravagant marriage proposals.

So this has been viewed 32 million times since June this year. It was about a guy, Luke, who took his girlfriend, Lauren, for a candlelight concert with an orchestra.

And he hired an actor to pretend to be the official photographer. And so during the intermission, the actor said, oh, look, can I take a photo of you guys? Why don't you come on stage while there's intermission? Set them all up.

[1 : 00] And then suddenly the members of the orchestra came in and started playing with the candles burning in the background. And then he got down on his knee and said, Lauren, will you marry me? And then Lauren said, a million times, yes.

And all the girls here go, oh. And all the guys go, thanks for setting the bar so high. The things people do for love.

And yet, as we'll see today, that's nothing compared to what God has done for love. Today is our Thanksgiving Sunday and our psalm begins and ends with a command to give thanks.

And in between, it gives us three big reasons to give thanks. God's character, creation and salvation. And so let me briefly show you the structure of the psalm.

It begins with God's character, verses 1 to 3. Then it talks about God's creation, 4 to 9. And then God's salvation, which is the big part, 10 to 22. And the psalm ends by kind of touching on and summarizing those three topics again.

[2 : 07] God's salvation, verse 23 to 24, summarizing it. And the psalmist includes himself this time. And then God's creation and then God's character at the end.

But behind it all is a fourth reason to give thanks, which is God's love. It's mentioned in every verse to highlight it, that we might especially give thanks for it.

Now, we'll come back to this later. Firstly, let's see why we're to give thanks for God's character. So point one, verse one, and I'll just read the verses rather than the refrain.

Give thanks to the Lord. Why? Well, for he is good. Here we're to give thanks for God's character, firstly, in terms of his goodness.

You see, we could have been created by a bad God for sport, like it is in some religions or mythologies. After all, some people today sadly live under dictators, don't they?

[3 : 08] And so it is conceivable that we could have been created by a dictator God, and yet we weren't, were we? The true God, our God, is good, which is a great relief, isn't it?

And it means that if he is good, he is incapable of doing bad. And so we can trust him to only work for our good in our world and in our lives.

You know, to bring good things out of the bad things. And so when we suffer because of sinful people, or because we live in a beautiful but broken world, we can still trust that God will work only for our good.

Even when he doesn't give us what we pray for at the time, it will still be for our good. For example, I would love a million dollars. Actually, he doesn't buy you much in Doncaster.

Let's go for \$10 million. But if God gave that to me, it would not be for my good, because I, and I'm guessing you, would also start to trust more in the money than in God, wouldn't we?

[4 : 17] Or I was speaking with one of our members a couple of weeks ago about how God only gives good gifts. And he added, even when he does not give us gifts, it's still for our good.

And that struck me because I remember praying for him a few years ago when he was going through cancer. And at the time, it looked like God would not give him healing. It got pretty bleak, pretty bad.

And yet, as he looked back, he could see that even that, not answering his prayer at the time, was for his good. Because it actually grew his faith.

It forced him to trust God when he didn't know why this was happening. And then interestingly, once he trusted God and was content, God did give him healing.

Even sometimes when our prayers aren't answered for our loved ones. One of our 9 o'clock members lost his wife earlier this year. We were praying for healing.

[5 : 14] But she knew, sorry, he knew that she was in an incredible amount of pain. And so he shared in our 9 o'clock service, he wanted to give thanks, even for her passing, because it meant he knew she was in a better place.

She was pain free. God could still work good in that sense. God is good. He will only work for our good in our world and in our lives.

Working through the bad. He's not responsible for the bad, but he can work through the bad. Even if we sometimes have to wait till heaven to be able to look back and see the good that he brought.

And so the fact that God is good is worth giving thanks for. Of course, it's one thing to want to do good. It's another thing to be able to do good, right? Next month is one of my daughter's dance concerts.

And I remember one year that she needed help doing her makeup for the concert. And now I wanted to help, but I have no ability to do makeup. I don't know what the difference is between blush and foundation and everything else in their bathroom.

[6 : 17] And so if I tried to do good, I'm pretty sure I would have done great bad, right? But God is not like this. He not only wants to do good, he is able to do good.

For God is greater than all others. So verse 2 goes on to say, Give thanks to the God of gods. He's greater than all so-called gods. Verse 3, give thanks to the Lord of lords.

He's greater than all earthly lords. And verse 26 at the end summarizes, Give thanks to the God of heaven. He is above all and so greater than all, you see.

He is greater than all, which means he has the power to bring good out of bad. And so God is both willing and able to bring good in our world and in our lives, even if we can't see it at the time.

But the fact that we can know that helps us to keep trusting him. And it's a reason to give thanks to him. As is his creation, point to verse 4.

[7 : 18] To him alone who does great wonders, who by his understanding made the heavens and spread out the earth upon the waters, who made the great lights, the sun to govern the day, and the moon and stars to govern the night.

God created our world out of nothing by his word. There had to be a first cause and it was God. Now Christians might disagree about exactly how his word created the world, but the point is that his word created the world.

And what a world he created. I mean, have you been away somewhere and seen a beautiful sunrise or a beautiful sunset and just been struck by its beauty? Or seen some other scenes overseas like Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe?

Or those lavender fields in Provence, France, which kind of matches our flowers behind us actually? Or Banff National Park in Canada or the beaches that we have here in Australia?

The list goes on. God has given us such beauty, hasn't he? But also variety. We just saw a variety of environments. There's a variety of animals as well. It reminds me of a child's prayer, Norma, who said, Dear God, did you mean for a giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?

[8 : 32] No, Norma, it was not an accident. It's part of God's generous variety to us, you see. And there's also ordered regularity. The word govern in verse 8 and 9 kind of speaks of order.

And so there's an ordered rhythm to life. We roughly know when the seasons are. I say roughly because this is Melbourne. But it's ordered regularity.

There's night and day. It helps us to plan and to pace ourselves. It helps us to not just work during the day but have time to rest at night. God has given us all this in his creation to enjoy and help us live.

As well as, verse 25, food to every creature including us. You see, God's generosity has given us beauty, variety, regularity as well as every dietary thing we need.

And then some. I don't know about you, but I sometimes forget to thank God for his generosity towards us. Until something stops, of course. You know, if the rain stops or if there's too much rain or the thing at the shops you want it, the shelf's empty or whatever it is.

[9 : 45] But God has been very generous to us in creation. And that's worth giving God thanks for, isn't it? As is salvation, point three.

Here the psalm draws special attention to God's salvation of his people because it stands in the middle of the psalm and is the longest part of the psalm. So, verse 10.

To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt. And this is really tracing the history of God saving Israel from Egypt. And brought Israel out from among them with a mighty hand and outstretched arm.

To him who divided the Red Sea asunder and brought Israel through the midst of it, but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea. To him who led his people through the wilderness. To him who struck down great kings and killed mighty kings.

Sion king of Amorites and old king of Bashan. And gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to his servant Israel. And then verse 23 to 24 summarizes, He remembered us in our lower state and freed us from our enemies.

[10 : 53] This is God's salvation of Israel, isn't it? Tracing Israel's rescue from slavery in Egypt to life in their promised land. In the words of 23 and 24, God remembered their low estate as slaves.

And freed them from their enemies like Pharaoh. Bringing them to life with him in their promised land. This was the great act of salvation for Israel. And they were especially to give God thanks for it.

Of course, this part of the psalm looks different for us, doesn't it? We can apply the other parts directly to ourselves. So like Israel, we're to give thanks for God's character, his goodness and greatness.

We're to give thanks for God's creation with its beauty and variety. But when it comes to our salvation, it's a bit different. Unlike Israel, our lower state is really slavery to sin.

And our enemies are death and the devil. And yet, God has saved us and freed us from them, hasn't he? For Jesus died in our place to pay for our sins.

[12 : 02] And then rose again to prove that he'd done it. That our payment has been paid on our behalf. And so the devil can no longer accuse us and demand that we pay for our sins because Jesus has already done it.

We're free from the devil's accusations, you see. And he's given us instead life with God. Life with God now in this world with purpose and meaning, with peace and genuine, certain hope.

Then life after death with God in heaven and then life to the full in the world to come. Our promised land. Where there'll be no more suffering or brokenness in our world or death.

God's greatest act of salvation for us was at the cross of Christ. And this is especially what we're to give thanks for. Meet Zoe.

She was addicted or enslaved, if you like, to drugs. But the Sir David Martin Foundation paid money for her to attend a camp in New South Wales called the Triple Care Farm.

[13 : 12] Where she was able to get clean. In other words, she was saved from slavery to drugs and given new life. She says in her bio or testimony on the website.

Too small to read. Let me read it for you. I can honestly say with first-hand experience, I've seen what drug addiction can do to a person's capacity to mature, to grow and to love.

And so having been saved from it, she writes, words cannot express my gratitude. We were addicted not to drugs, but to sin.

We couldn't actually please God. We were enslaved to sin. Which stopped us from having any capacity to love God. Or to grow as one of God's people.

And it steered us towards judgment eternal. And yet not a foundation, but the person of Jesus. And so they are Zoe's words. And how much more so should our words express gratitude?

[14 : 25] And if those three things are not enough to give thanks, behind them all is God's love. Point four. The refrain, his love endures forever is like the chorus that sings of another reason to give thanks.

But it's also the chorus that stands behind the verses. Giving a reason for the verses. You see, our refrain in our Bibles is actually missing a word at the start.

It's missing the word for or because. The refrain should really say, for his love endures forever. And so God is who he is and does what he does in this psalm, because his love endures forever.

Other parts of the Bible give other reasons, but this psalm gives love as the reason. And so, yes, God is good and greater than all others, simply because he is good and greater than all others.

But this, his love gives us an additional reason. God is good because his love endures forever. It's another reason for his goodness, you see.

[15 : 38] And God is greater than all other gods and lords for or because his love endures forever. Unlike all other gods and lords, his love never runs out. It endures forever.

And it's this love that's the reason behind creation and salvation. This is what God has done for love. You see, God didn't have to create us. It's not as though God was lonely and needed us. God is three persons in one. And so, he would have been perfectly content to live eternally by himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. What's more, he knew that what would happen if he did create us.

He knew how humanity would reject him and effectively spit at him. Yet he created us anyway. Why would you create a world you knew would reject you and cause you grief?

Why? Because his love endures forever. That's why. Indeed, why would you create a world when you knew it would cost you your only son to save people in that world?

[16 : 45] Why? Well, because or for his love endures forever. That's why. This is what God has done for love. Our love, creation, our salvation.

Our problem, of course, is we hear about God's love so often our gratitude can wane, can't it? It's like during our first Bible reading when we were doing it responsively.

We all started off enthusiastically. His love endures forever. And I think it was about verse 14. I noticed, his love endures forever. And then I don't know who it was in the kids talk.

You know, what do we hear today? His love endures forever. The solution to that though is to periodically take time to ponder it. Rather than simply repeating it.

To take time to reflect on it. Like now. To realize that the Hebrew word for love here is one I've told you about before. It's that word hesed. Which talks about God's deep or abundant.

[17 : 44] His unmerited or undeserved. Gracious and kind love. You kind of have to add all these describing words, these adjectives to it. To even get a small glimpse of it.

That's how great his love is. It's an out of this world kind of love. In our second reading. In Romans 5. In Romans 5.

The pinnacle of human love is someone dying for another righteous or good person. Although it adds at the very start, very rarely will this happen. Which is why it makes the news when it does happen.

Like last week. Last week. Last week. The BBC published an article about two Nepalese students who were studying and working in Israel. Back when Hamas attacked two years ago.

I think they released it because of the two year anniversary. And during the attack. Hamas threw a grenade into a kibbutz. And one of the students. Bipin on the right.

[18 : 45] Threw a grenade back. Threw the grenade back. And saved his fellow student on the left. Only himself to be captured by Hamas as one of the 250 hostages they took.

And soon killed. I mean that's a pretty extraordinary act of bravery and love. Instead of just running for it to save yourself. Isn't it? But imagine for a moment that inside that kibbutz was not his fellow student.

But another Hamas soldier. And Bipin was an Israeli. But still instead of running for it. Threw the grenade back. Risks his life picking up this grenade.

Threw it back. To save that other Hamas soldier. What kind of love would you have to have for that enemy soldier to do that? Especially when that enemy would then capture you and kill you.

It's an out of this world kind of love isn't it? But that's exactly the kind of love God has for us. The rest of our second reading went on to say, But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

[19 : 54] While we were still sinners. And in fact the passage two verses later calls us enemies. While we were still enemies of God. He gave Christ to die for us.

While we spat in God's face. Even though he gave us this world. While we rejected him. And lived our own way. God gave his son and allowed his enemy.

Humanity to capture him. Arrest him. And kill him. Crucify him. And Jesus willingly went for us. That's how much he loves us.

It's an out of this world kind of love. And it will continue for us. Remember the chorus. For his love endures. God will continue to love you that deeply.

That abundantly. Forever. Ponder that. That our gratitude may not wane. But our hearts might be filled with thankfulness.

[21 : 01] And so. We're to give thanks. For God's character. Of goodness and greatness. For God's creation with its beauty and variety.

For God's salvation from slavery to sin. To life with him. And for his love that endures forever. Let's start. By saying thanks. Now.

pray.