

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

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[0 : 00] First, before we go to the text, just a brief word of explanation that in the last year and some months, at the behest of this congregation and with your blessing and our pastor's encouragement, I have had the privilege of serving as a pastor.

I was an interim pastor in a sister church in Chillicothe. It's about an hour and 20 minutes or so drive, depending on deer and weather, and I have ample time to pray for many of you that I dearly love and care for and also for the fellowship here.

It's been my blessing in that absence to enjoy listening to the services on a regular basis, and I am blessed to listen to the ministry of the Word of God and also your singing, but I have to tell you, you sing well.

You heard me say that while I was here, but what a phenomenal blessing for me to sit up here again in this morning and just listen to you putting your hearts into it and kind of bearing testimony of the fact that when the Word of God is working in people's lives and the Spirit of God is working in people's lives, one of the ways it shows up is in joyful singing to the Lord. There is a spirit of thanksgiving and blessing in your singing, and I am so very thankful for that.

I will tell you, I have to ask you to pray for me. I've done that for all the years of my ministry, and I am mindful that apart from prayer, we don't get much done, and so you can kind of multitask.

[1 : 44] You've heard me say that many times, but go ahead and pray for me, and it won't bother me in the least if at some point you say it out loud. You know, you may feel I need a little extra help, and just go ahead and say it. Oh, Lord, help him. Do it out loud. Not going to throw me off. I know it. I know that.

But I will tell you that today, the fellowship, Calvary Baptist Church at Chillicothe is in the process of candidating. They are looking to call a man to become their pastor, and should that go well, I will be back here sitting in this fellowship and enjoying the ministry that you all have in declaring the glory of Christ.

And so you kind of pray for them as well. Pastor Rob Fowler is his name, and a good man coming from a sister church, and a man that has a heart for God and a heart for the Word.

And so you keep that in prayer, and I'll keep you posted how that is going. Well, with that said, let's kind of step in to the end of what preaching aims to do.

Preaching is an activity in which the Word of God is, it should be, the thing that's out front and center, right? When you walk away from here, one of the things that you should know is not that I was a storyteller, and I don't tell jokes because I'm miserable at them.

[2 : 57] My wife never laughs at them, and so it's like, let it go. But I want you to walk away saying, I heard the Word of God, and it affected my life, and I want to be different as a result of it.

I think about the passage in Jeremiah where the prophet made this statement. He says, is not my word a fire?

Is not my word a hammer that breaks the rock? And I'll tell you ahead of time what we're going to be talking about this morning is the matter of thankfulness. The Scriptures that call us to be thankful is one of those that not a one of us here is probably unaware of.

We know that we are to be a thankful people, and yet we live in a culture that is just kind of shot through with an attitude of ill will and unthankfulness at every hand. You go in Monday to work, and guess how a lot of the people are going to act?

I mean, they're not going to be happy. Am I right? I read an article last week talking about the fact that in this current political malaise, the majority of people that pay any attention to politics at all are generally pretty unhappy and angry.

[4 : 11] I can't understand that. But, you know, it's out there. We live in an unhappy world, and Romans chapter 1 tells us that that's one of the characteristics of an unbeliever.

And yet what I would ask you this as we kind of work our way into this text, Psalm 136, I want to ask you this. How often are you recognized by other people as being thankful?

How often are you recognized by other people by you being thankful? How many of you know people that are consistently thankful? Do you know? Wave your hands at me. I've been gone a long time, so some of you don't know how to do that.

But just, I get it. How often do you remember, that's a thankful person. That's a person that I can count on not to be grumpy and moody, not to be kind of surly and unhappy, not to be easily offended.

They're a person that on most occasions are going to be thankful. And by the way, a thankful spirit, as rare as it is, is a profound testimony in this unbelieving world, isn't it?

[5 : 17] How many times have you had people say to you, so, why are you happy? Well, what's going on in your life? What is the reason for the hope that lies within you, right, from 1 Peter?

And the reminder, our lives are to be marked by a spirit of thankfulness and joy that is a magnetic thing in the life of an unhappy and discontent and discouraged world.

Agreed? And so what we're going to look at this morning, Psalm 136, is an unbelievable psalm dealing with the subject of thankfulness.

Let's look at it. Let me read a portion of it, and then we'll kind of work our way into it. Psalm 136, verse 1, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

Right? Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. The next little line is, For His steadfast love endures forever.

[6 : 22] Verse 2, Give thanks to the God of gods, for His steadfast love endures forever.

For, To Him who alone does great wonders, for His steadfast love endures forever.

Now by that, by this point, you're probably thinking to yourself, Is He going to go on this way all the way through all 26 verses? And the answer is, Yes. It's not because the Holy Spirit couldn't come up with anything else.

It's because He wants us to know the supreme importance of His name, character, And the reason that we are to be thankful is that His steadfast love endures forever.

Do you want to be a thankful person? Do you want to be a person who in the swamp that we live in, in the unhappy, broken world that we are going to be sent out into tomorrow, to minister, and to be a testimony to the grace of God?

[7 : 38] Do you want to be a person who stands apart, who is different, who is atypical, and by that character draws people to wonder about why you're different? I think this passage has something to say.

And I would appeal to you, if you're sitting here in the honest heart that you have, you're saying, You know what? As a general rule, I'm not a very thankful person. I don't have to work very hard to be pretty moody and unhappy.

I'm pretty good at it. I would ask you to begin praying right now to say, This is the day that I am asking the Holy Spirit to change my attitude about the matter of thanksgiving, because His steadfast love endures forever.

Well, let's kind of step into the text a little more in detail, and recognize that actually this entire psalm is a psalm of thanksgiving. The word's actually only used four times.

You find it there, give thanks in verse 1, give thanks in verse 2, give thanks in verse 3, and then you can kind of work your way on down to the very end in 26, and it says, Give thanks. So why would I say that the entire psalm is a psalm of thanksgiving, and draws our attention to that obligation?

[8 : 55] Well, where's Jared Piles, the grammar Nazi? Okay? If you are a grammarian of any sort, and I'm not going to step into that swamp for the moment, but if you're a grammarian, you would know that if you look at verse 3, it says, Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His steadfast love endures forever, and then there's a little bit of punctuation there.

What is it? It's a semicolon, and it attaches the remaining verses from 3, actually 4 on to 25, and it's all lumped together as one declaration.

Here are the reasons that we are to give thanks. Give thanks, give thanks, give thanks, give thanks. The psalm wants us to be thankful in every situation, and it's interesting to recognize that this psalm also was one that was a centerpiece to Old Testament worship.

It was known as the Great Hallel, okay? And it was a psalm that was often sung, and some scholars say it was actually sung in every Sabbath worship service.

One of the songs that they would sing, one of the psalms, was Psalm 136. It depends on who you're looking at to kind of get out the information on this, but it was certainly one that was sung on a very regular basis.

[10:19] I remember a couple of songs we sang this morning, and we have some songs that are, we're not liturgical, but there are songs that are kind of at the foundation of who we are and our appreciation for God.

Isn't that right? Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures. And things that we often come back to touch on because they're foundational to us.

This was one of those psalms that the Old Testament saints sang on a regular basis, and it was a reflection of their heart in their worship.

It was also a psalm that was often used when people were struggling with adversity and difficulty. Now, none of you here have had any of those problems. Your life is probably just kind of peachy and all very good, and there's no adversity and difficulty, but this psalm is one that when the saint was struggling with a burden and a challenge, he would go back and he would recite this psalm to himself, and he would take comfort in knowing that this psalm was a reminder of the unfailing love of God.

One night in 358 A.D., the church father, Athanasius, held an all-night service of prayer at his church in Alexandria, Egypt.

[11:44] He'd been leading a fight for the eternal sonship and deity of Christ. Now, how many of you know that the issue of the sonship and deity of Christ was not a theological truth that was hammered out in the first three weeks of history after the cross?

It actually took about 450 years for the church to absolutely rock settled on the entire humanity and the entire deity of Christ. Athanasius was one of those scholars that was leading the fight, and it was a very adversarial and unhappy predicament for the church, and a lot of tension over it.

And on that evening that he was leading this service, this prayer service, for more political reasons than theological, there was a large gathering of soldiers that had come against the church.

And when Athanasius knew that the soldiers were outside the church, had surrounded the church, and meant ill to the congregation, what he instructed them to do, he said, listen, we're going to stop right now, and we are going to sing Psalm 136.

Now, how does that go? Let me do it again. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. And 26 times as Athanasius led the church in singing this, when they would come to the second part, guess how they would say it?

[13:15] They would thunder it out. Right? They would just bellow it. And when the soldiers actually broke through the big open doors to come into the service, they were blown away by the enthusiasm of saints, who in the face of adversity, were just kind of thundering this, for his steadfast love endures forever.

This psalm has been a comfort over and over again, when saints have found themselves in challenges, challenges that stretch them beyond their ability, and drive them to remember who their God is and how he loves them.

Let's think a little more carefully about what this psalm does, in terms of laying out the issues for us, and pick up, if you will, in verses 1 through 3, and understand that this first portion draws attention to the nature and character of our God.

So why are we to be thankful? Yes, consistently we are to remind ourselves that his steadfast love endures forever, but we are also to be thankful because he is our Lord.

He is our God. He is the Lord of lords. And that's what the psalm does here in the beginning part. He draws attention to the issue of who our God is by using three different names in the Hebrew.

[14:35] He calls God, first of all, Yahweh, which is I Am. And in relationship to that, the very first part of the verse, he says, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

He is good. He's always good. He's good in every case. He is the only one who is absolutely unchanged in His goodness, and there is not a part of Him that ever changes or drifts away from goodness.

How many of you have done good things but really didn't have a good heart? You ever done that? I don't want to bring it up, but you've taken flowers to your wife after there's been a little something

going on, and you use flowers as what?

A remedy for the problem? She'd much rather have you be good all the time than have flowers. And we've all done a variety of things to kind of compensate for our badness.

God's not that way. He is always good. He is always good. I have been thinking more often about what it means to get older.

[15:49] I like to look out and see all your young faces and no gray hair. There are some of you out here that have gray, but I appreciate that. You know, hey, getting older is actually, here's what I'm beginning to learn.

Are you listening? It is a heightening opportunity to discover the goodness of God. I mean that.

I watched my dad and my mom both go towards heaven, and every step of the way they grew in thankfulness and spirit-tuned sensitivity to the glory and supremacy of Christ.

And as I'm beginning to get older, and there are parts that ache in the morning when you get out of bed, it's like, I keep saying, hey, I want to grow to know you more and love you more.

He is always good. He is always good. And do not ever let the enemy of your souls rob you of the certainty that the God of this universe is good in everything He allows in your life.

[17:03] I look back in the rear view mirror, as many of you have done, and I have to recognize that every moment marked, whether it has been by difficulty or exceptional moments of joy, have been characterized by the goodness of God.

And here, as the psalmist starts into this psalm, he says, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

The second thing that we find here is that He is known as the Elohim, or He's known as Elohim, the Mighty One, the Judge, the Lord of all.

And I am so very thankful when I stop and think about the world that we live in that I know the One who is the Judge of the whole earth. You kind of listen to the political wrangling a little bit.

I can't take very much without getting my hair kind of ruffled, but you listen to some of that and you think, Man, what a messy world we live in. And it makes me think, I really am looking forward to when Jesus comes back.

Aren't you? We won't need Washington. We won't need Beijing. We won't need London. We won't need an army. We won't need...

[18:15] Man, I'm looking forward to when the Lord, my Savior, the Mighty One, the Judge of the whole earth, returns and brings His kingdom into being.

I'm reminded as well in this passage in verse 3, it says, Give thanks to the Lord of lords. And it's reminding us that He is the Adonai. He is the Mighty One. He is transcendent and creator of all.

Over and above all. And yet, in reality, while He is the creator and over all, He also pays attention to us personally.

And as we step from verse 3 into 4 through 9, what we're going to pick up here, and I'm not going to go into all the details of the text, but here we find that God's power and wisdom is on display through the activity of His creation.

Verse 4, To Him alone who does great wonders, for His steadfast love endures forever. To Him who by understanding made the heavens.

[19:18] Stop and think about that. This summer, Judith and I, as we would sit on our porch in the mornings, we discovered that hummingbirds liked our plants.

Well, that kind of prompted us to do a little further research, Google it, and figure out what else do hummingbirds like. And pretty soon, our porch, it was just a collection of all whatever would attract hummingbirds.

I mean, at the point you hardly see the road. They're all over the place. But then that wasn't enough.

We had to go by like three or four little hummingbird feeders, right? And we've got those things hanging out there. And every single time one of them showed up, we just kind of, this is amazing.

I mean, how did God do that? A little teeny little thing like this that flies with the most spectacular speed and mobility.

Am I right? Have you ever noticed hummingbirds? This is where they really show their abilities, when they're unhappy with each other and chasing each other. They don't share feeders very well.

And you'd see this, there would be hummingbird and suddenly, and then off they'd go.

[20:24] And how they, it's like, my God did that. That's the creator of this universe. universe. That's just a very small part of it.

And, and as I think about this passage, you kind of stop and recognize that this issue of God as the creator of the universe is one that is a center point to our faith.

How does Genesis 1, 1 start? In the beginning, God. How does John chapter 1, verse 1 through 3 get rolling?

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. And it goes on and says, and all things were made through him. Psalm 19, verse 1.

The heavens declare the glory of God. Romans chapter 1, verse 20. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world.

[21 : 38] And while many unbelievers do their very best to suppress down the spectacular wisdom of God in creation, it slaps them in the face everywhere they turn.

Unbelievable. The complexity and the beauty and the marvel of the creation that you and I enjoy, and we know the creator, and he is our Lord and our God.

I remember asking myself as I was praying about this passage, why is this issue of creation so important to my appreciation of God? Now there are many reasons that probably could be offered, but one stands out in particular.

And I want you to turn, if you will, just for a second, over to Psalm chapter 8. You're in Psalm 36, so turn over, if you will, to Psalm chapter 8. Hey, by the way, pastor, I want you to, ah, who put that up in the back?

It says 1152 here, and then it says 1143 over there, and on my phone it says 1143. We're in good shape. Okay. Do they do that to you? Do they mess with the time over here?

[22 : 50] Pastor, preach on. When pastors pay attention to time, don't take any note of it because they really don't, let me stop.

Psalm 8, verse 3 through 6. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?

I don't know about you, but I'm pretty impressed with my insignificance on fairly regular occasion. I'm going to be dust one of these days.

By the way, I won't be embalmed just in case you're wondering, so I will be dust. Okay. That's for real in my own pine box that I'm making myself. There you go. You didn't need to know that either, but I've told you. It's my last remodel job.

Oh, stop. Okay. What is man that you're mindful of him? Okay. And the son of man that you care for him.

[24 : 17] I hope you honestly are overwhelmed when you stop and think that the God of this universe knows you personally and cares about you personally as an interest in your well-being.

And if he has called you to be his son, having spent the blood of his own son for your salvation, he will do whatever is necessary to get you home.

Don't mess with him. The psalmist goes on and he says this, Yet you have made him a little lower than heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet. We serve as his vice regents.

We are charged with caring for his creation. And he has set his unfailing love upon us and his attitude and his heart towards us will never change.

[25 : 30] The second, third portion actually begins there in verse 10 and carries on down through verse 24. And I just want to mark in broad terms that this segment deals with God's great work in deliverance and provision.

Each note of his good work is followed by the repetition of that statement for his steadfast love endures forever.

The psalmist begins with the high point of the plagues that God afflicted on Egypt so as to deliver his people from slavery. Now, you may be familiar with this story but you may not.

So let me kind of just touch on it a little bit. It's really curious but worth our attention to recognize that while the Israelites were not entirely happy in Egypt they weren't entirely unhappy either.

In fact, they were really not all that settled about leaving. The unbeliever caught in the swamp of their sin doesn't like where they are but has no intention of leaving.

[26 : 41] And God had to do something pretty miraculous to get the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt. Did you know that the people the Egyptian people drove Israel out of town?

It's like get out of here. We're afraid of what else will happen. And by the way if you pay attention to the ten plagues each one incrementally got worse and worse more significant.

And remember when God told Moses I'm going to have people send you out and by the way they're going to pack you off with all kinds of good stuff. I'm going to spoil the Egyptians.

And their back wages in essence were paid as they packed up and left town. But we find here in this passage you look at the passage again you find that what takes place is that God reminds the nation over and over again I'm the one who did these things for you as I delivered you from the iron furnace and I brought you to the place of promise.

The text goes on to name one deliverance after another and we cannot read the text without being a little overwhelmed of just how gracious God was in loving his people.

[27 : 56] And by the way what were those people like? They were the most wonderful congenial happy enduring people I mean you know God took them a hard way but he did that he tells us in Exodus so that they would kind of toughen up and how did they do toughening up?

They whined every single day. They whined and complained about every single challenge that God brought into their life and on more than one occasion Moses just kind of threw up his hands and said ha!

And here we find as you work your way through this passage over and over again that God taking care of his people never changed his mind on them and never turned his back on them.

I love the flow of the text in particular in verse 23 and verse 24 let me read it to you there it says here it says it is he who remembered us in our low estate for his steadfast love endures forever and rescued us from our foes for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let me ask you a question when did Israel have foes? Most of the foes they had were self-inflicted because of their idolatrous hearts would you agree?

[29 : 24] they dug themselves holes repeatedly and God delivered them and here is the psalmist reminding the nation of the fact that over and against these heartaches and difficulties that they endured was the God who cared for them and never changed his mind about them.

While we'd like to think that we've been reasonably focused in our spiritual lives the truth of the matter is this is that we've been a whole lot more like the children of Israel than we want to admit. Our great consolation is this is that his steadfast love endures forever. Now before we take a minute to think in practical terms of the blessings of his steadfast love let's just kind of watch or let's think for a second about what is the significance of his steadfast love.

What is this steadfast love? I want you to know that for one his steadfast love is the centerpiece of our relationship with him. It's a centerpiece.

And you say well can you prove that? Well 1 John chapter 4 verse 19 how many of you know it without looking? Come on. We love him because he first loved us.

[30 : 40] If you're sitting here this morning and your heart has any level of affection for the Lord Jesus Christ it's not because one warm evening you decided as you were sitting over on the porch you know I think I need to start loving God.

Didn't happen. He chased you through the messiness of your life he found you broken and ruined and he lifted you up and he loved you unconditionally and slowly in your heart you began to appreciate the wealth and depth of that love.

His love is the basis of our salvation. There's not a one of you here probably today that doesn't know for John chapter 3 verse 16 for God so loved the world that he gave us his son.

And then we come to John chapter 15 verse 13 where Jesus said to his disciples greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his brethren. Jesus let those who he loved know that he loved them.

His love also assures me that regardless of where I roam he will not let me go. I got to tell you I'm an older guy now. And one of the advantages of being older is I kind of learned a little bit with messing with God is not a good idea because he won't let his children go.

[31 : 59] Do you follow that? He will do whatever is necessary to get a hold of you if you are his child. And I say that not on the basis of personal experience because that's irrelevant. I say that on the basis of Hebrews chapter 12.

Whom the Lord loves he chastens. If you're sitting here this morning and you're someone who's getting away with sin and it seems like God doesn't care you probably ought to stop and say why not?

Why not? If you are his child and you are drifting he will put his arm around you gently to start with but he will always step it up until he gets your attention.

That's one of the things I like about my age. Truthfully. When I begin to mess with bad attitudes and primarily attitudes is what I'm dealing with. Getting a little self-focused and you know whatever. God will tap me on the shoulder and it's like I hear you I hear you.

And then he'll say do you want to go any further and I say no no no. I get it. I've been there. I know how this ends. It's never fun.

[33 : 06] And so I want to tell you his love will not turn you loose. His love sets the boundaries in my life. It tells me in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 14 it says for the love of Christ constrains me.

I love my wife. I love my grandchildren. I love you. But it is not the thing that constrains me most. It is the Savior who has loved me unconditionally and never failed me.

That helps me set the standard and keep the course. His love is central. So let me ask you this question.

If the psalmist uses this repetitive phrase 26 times, do you think it's really important to think about on a regular basis?

yes? And the answer is yes. How I do that, I have a little routine with going to sleep at night.

[34 : 13] I'd like to say that I always go to sleep after I do the routine but it doesn't happen that way. But I do have a little routine. I get in bed and I say certain things to my wife. Whether she's awake or not. It's just kind of a habit.

How many of you understand what I just said? Okay, it's like, honey, I love you, you know, and whatever. And it's like, it's all right.

I say it. I did say it. And when I turn off my volume, the next thing I do is I talk to God and I say thank you for loving me and never stopping every night.

There are some habits that are worth developing. Wouldn't you agree with me? And Psalm 136 was one of the verses, the passages that hammered with driving home this point that appreciating the unchanging, unchanging, steadfast love of God was a principal thing to focus my thinking on.

Do you find yourself overwhelmed on a regular basis with the steadfast love of God?

[35 : 31] Do you find that thinking about his love tamps down your natural moodiness, your offendability index, and your hesitance to serve other people?

You remind yourself, he loves me. He loves me. And he will not change his mind about me. So, let me kind of put this together in a closing statement this way.

You are here this morning really in one of two conditions. I don't know some of you, your faces are new to me, others of you I've known fairly well. I've been your pastor for 31 years and now I am part of the congregation.

But I know you. people. And so, those of you that are here that ask yourself the question, am I affected at all by the steadfast love of Christ?

And if your heart is cold to that, let me ask you whether or not you really know Christ as your Savior. If you have been redeemed, one of the things that goes along with that redemption is you begin to fall in love with the Savior.

[36 : 36] Remember the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her hair? Right? Pretty spectacular. Do you know why she loved him like that?

She had been forgiven much. And when Jesus rebuked Simon for his squirrely little pinhead thinking, you know, it was like, hey, she loves me, man.

Get over it. And if you're here as a person who has been redeemed, and forgiven of all your sins, how can you not love him? Love can grow cold.

We can become indifferent to it. And so if you're here and there has been a time where you have had a heart that's been tuned to the Lord Jesus and yet you've kind of drifted away in your sensitivity to the unbelievable love of Christ that just is beyond imagination, let me encourage you with two closing passages.

Ephesians chapter three, verse 14 through 19, and we're not going to take the time to look at it, but she says this. Paul says, he's praying for the church. He says that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what?

[37 : 48] What is the breadth and height and width and depth of the love of Christ? And so if you're sitting here and you're kind of, eh, I'm not there. By the way, a thankful spirit is the fruit of appreciating the love of God.

Would you understand that? And if you're sitting here kind of a moody, surly, not really a happy Christian, the solution is not to take some other pills. It is to go to the Lord and say, I need a heart change.

And let's do it with reminding myself of the fact that you love me unconditionally. Ephesians, the apostle says, I pray that the power of the Holy Spirit would help you grow in appreciating and understanding the love of Christ.

One other verse and then we'll close. Turn to Romans chapter 5, verse 5. Romans 5, verse 5. And hope does not put us to shame because God love, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

[39 : 09] It's the Holy Spirit's business to pour into your impoverished impoverished and dry soul and appreciation of the love of God for you.

And he is glad to do that. Ask him and say, there is something that the Holy Spirit is called to do and I need it done.

My devotions this morning were about a lady that came asking Jesus for a miracle. Daughter was sick and it says twice, Jesus answered her not a word.

What? Poor lady was pouring her heart out. She was broken. Her daughter was suffering and he didn't say a thing. He was really checking her determination.

Am I right? And so if you're dissatisfied and an unhappy heart and an unhappy and unthankful spirit is the characteristic of your life and you're a believer, the prudent thing to do would be to profess you need the help of the Holy Spirit to grow in understanding the depth, the magnitude, the awesomeness of his unfailing love.

[40 : 30] love. Let's close in prayer. miracle miracle miracle Thank you.