

The Believers Great Cause for Thanks

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[0 : 00] And take a practice smile. Come on. Everybody look up here. Give me a practice smile.!
Psalm 136.

Let me read just a couple of the verses and have you follow along. And then we're going to come to the Lord in prayer and ask the enabling of the Spirit of God that I may preach with His enabling and you may hear and apply with His enabling.

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

Give thanks to the Lord of lords for His steadfast love endures forever. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, for us, we are so comforted by the many reminders in Scripture of the glory of Your name and the sufficiency of Your person, of the satisfaction that we have in knowing You as our Father and as our God and our Savior, and for the encouragement of Scripture that we in our frailty may rely upon the Spirit of God to help us, that we can worship You.

And so this morning I'm reminded of what the prophet Zechariah spoke when he says, not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit. And this morning we ask, Lord, that as I preach, it may be an evident work of the Spirit of God and that as Your people listen, that the Spirit would enable them.

[2 : 18] And then we pray for those that are here that do not know Christ, that this would be the day when by Your loving kindness and Your mercy, You draw them out of the pit into everlasting life.

We are thankful. We are thankful. We are thankful. That which we cannot do ourselves, You sent the Lord Jesus Christ to do for us.

And that which we cannot do for ourselves today, even in the matter of corporate worship, we are thankful that we can rely upon You, that You might be glorified here among us as You are in heaven.

And we ask this in Your precious name. Amen. Well, I'm going to tell you that Thanksgiving, as we celebrate it here in America, or as celebrated in many different countries, was not really on the Jewish calendar.

If you were looking at the Jewish calendar and trying to make a determination as to what you were going to do to be a good Jew in your corporate worship, you wouldn't find Thanksgiving like we celebrate it.

[3 : 27] And I'm not going to belabor the point that we could go back in the history of our country and we could get some ideas about how Thanksgiving came into being. It's an appropriate day for us to celebrate.

But more important than the history of our culture is an understanding that God cares a great deal about the thankfulness of His people. I, earlier today, was kind of reading and reminding myself of what it says in Romans 8, in which it talks about the fact that all of creation kind of groans in travail, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God.

The truth of the matter is, is we live in a world that is filled with frustration and difficulty and disappointment, and there's not a one of us here that on occasion has not found good reason to frown in the present circumstances that we are.

And yet we know that one of the characteristics of a Spirit-enabled person, and we know that from Ephesians 5, verse 18 on, is that a characteristic of a believer who knows Christ and is enabled by the Spirit of God is that they live a thankful life.

In fact, it's commanded. It's an expectation that the thing that kind of sets us off from the chicken littles in the world is the fact that we know the Lord Jesus Christ, and there's evidence of that in the Spirit and the decorum with which we go through life.

[4 : 55] We look at this passage, and we are looking at a passage that was richly appreciated and enjoyed by the nation of Israel in the times in which they engaged in giving thanks.

Now, if you were a good Jew, you would know that there would at least be, I think, three different days in which you were supposed to gather formally and do big all-church dinner kind of things. Feasts.

They would gather in Jerusalem for the Passover and other celebrations, and it was a time when the entire nation would just really enjoy the blessing of all that God had done for them and who He was and their relationship with Him.

And no doubt, I shouldn't say in every case, but in many cases, this psalm in particular was one that the nation of Israel would have sung. Psalm 136, we know for a fact, was one that was greatly appreciated.

It was sung, for example, in 2 Chronicles 7, when the dedication of the temple took place. It was one of the songs that was sung on that special day.

[6 : 01] Interestingly enough, we also find that Jehoshaphat instructed the Levites to use this song as a battle strategy. Now, can you imagine that?

I mean, battle is generally some, a very gutsy, you know, stick each other with swords and spears and try to clunk each other on the head with heavy objects. Very brutal. And God says, hey, we're going to use a little different strategy here.

I want the Levites and the rest of the people just to sing Psalm 136 and it's over. And guess what happened? They sang and they gained the victory. And Psalm 136, this one that we're going to look at today, was the one that they sang in that passage.

The Jews called it the great Hallel. That means praise. And as we take up this song this morning, this psalm, I want you to remind yourself in essence that it is a reflection of many of the good things that cause us to be a people or remind us of why we should be a people that are thankful.

So let's take the text and work our way through it and allow it to become something that is woven into our heart and character so that we are not thankful just today or on Thanksgiving and we have kind of a pattern maybe in our homes where when we're having Thanksgiving dinner and you've got all that food spread out and you've got your family together, you go around the table and say, what are you thankful for?

[7 : 28] What are you thankful for? What are you thankful for? I want this psalm to be one of those things that just frames and affects what our genuine heart thoughts are regarding the matter of thanks.

Well, let's recognize first that we are commanded here. We're commanded to give Thanksgiving or to give thanks. You look there in the passage, it says, give thanks to the Lord for he is good and this psalm begins with three explicit commands, verse 1, verse 2, and verse 3 and when you stop and think about a command to be thankful, how many of you on occasion have had somebody say or maybe someone who's leading singing saying, hey, you guys need to brighten up a little bit and you're sitting there in a really moody spirit.

How many of you know what I mean by moody? And you're just, who are you talking to me about being thankful? I don't want to be thankful. There are some of you out here specialists at that. It's all right. I understand. I was born with the glass seven-eighths empty. I'm on your side. But here's the truth.

The one who is giving this command is not Bubba. It happens to be God. And he who instructs us and has authority over us is the one who says, you be thankful.

[8 : 53] Now, think about this with me a little bit. Some commands are nothing more than instructions from rather perverse people.

As I was studying this week, I thought about some of the individuals that over the years have commanded people to be happy when they're really not. And my favorite place when I'm thinking about that is North Korea.

You know, I recognize that Kim, I might get the name right here because I'm going to forget it, Kim Jong-un. He is the third.

There was Kim Jong-il. And now we have Kim Jong-un. And if you were in North Korea and Kim Jong-un said that you should be happy, guess what you would be?

You'd be happy or dead. I mean, choices are simple. I mean, that's the truth. People, when he walks into a room, guess what everybody's supposed to do?

[9 : 56] Glad you're here. You know, he is a very, very particular individual when it comes to watching people's emotional display.

When his father died, and I think I've told you this before, there were some of the North Korean generals that did not show adequate sorrow at the passing of Kim Jong-un or whatever his name was.

And as a result of that, they were tied to 155 millimeter cannon shells. And then someone backed way, way, way, way, way, far away and just pulled the lanyard and guess what happened?

So, when he says be happy, it's just to make him feel good. When God tells us to be happy, he is commanding us to do something that is righteous and good and for which he has given us all kinds of reasons to engage in it.

Now, why don't you think with me just for a moment about what the word actually means in the text when it says give thanks. We use the word thank you pretty freely.

[11 : 14] Thank you for opening the door. Thank you for plugging in my crockpot. Thank you for whatever. You know, there are things we say and we're just expressing an appreciation for what someone has done. The Hebrew word that's used here actually is carrying the idea of acknowledging something about God that's true.

Think about that. Give thanks to the Lord. In essence, it's saying that you are to think consciously and deliberately about who he is and what he has done for you.

To give thanks than is really to gladly admit what is wonderful and awesome about God. That's what it is. And so, just kind of stop and realize, now think with me here just for a moment, this is God giving instruction to people that he has redeemed from the fiery furnace, he has delivered from the pit, he has granted eternal life, and he says to you, you are to be thankful.

Why should we be thankful? Because of who he is. And when he tells us to be thankful, he is asking us to think consciously and deliberately about who he is and what he's done for us.

Now, as you work your way through this passage, we're going to break it down that it has this set of commands at the beginning, and then it immediately gives us theological reasons to be thankful that are framed in the character of who God is.

[12 : 46] So look with me, if you will, in verse 1, 2, and 3, and it's kind of very quickly we're going to touch on this. It says, why should we be thankful? Because he is the Lord and he is good.

He is the Lord and he is good. Verse 2, he is the God of gods. It says also, he is the Lord of lords. I'm not going to break these three separate titles down this morning and go into great detail as to what their significance is, though there is value in doing that because we're going to take a larger look at what this passage has to say to us, but recognize that at the beginning what the psalmist wants to understand or have us understand is that the reason for our thankfulness is not rooted in the things we have received but in the relationship we have.

And our relationship with God is the first reason for us to be thankful. Let me add to that and have you think with me. When I bump into individuals who are not thankful, who are professing believers, the real problem that they are having is not with their circumstances that they are in but in the attitude and relationship they have with the one who is the Lord of glory and their Savior.

So think with me about that. As we look here, we find that really the thing that causes us to be thankful above all other things is our relationship with Him.

And above all else, we who are His children have been blessed with salvation and all the forgiveness that we have as a result of that. We have been made to be His own beloved ones and at the center of our joy, at the center of the thing that makes us thankful people is the fact that He is our God and Savior and we are in relationship with Him.

[14 : 38] And I trust that is characteristic of you this morning as you sit where you are kind of pondering the complexity of the life that you're living. The most important thing is this, is that Christ is your Savior and you have a personal relationship with Him and you know how the story ends.

There's something else I want you to notice in this passage. You can't miss it. Twenty-six times. By the way, is that repetitious? How many would you agree?

Twenty-six times. Well, we won't go there right now. But anyway, twenty-six times. Here it says it.

Look at it. For His steadfast love endures forever. That's verse one, right? Let's try verse two.

See if it's a little different. For His steadfast love endures forever. Verse three. For His steadfast love endures forever. Remember, the fact that we see this pattern of repetition of perms that there are times when repeating something is not bad at all.

I have heard on occasion some individuals kind of have a negative attitude towards songs that have a certain amount of repetition in them. You ever heard about 7-11 songs?

[15:51] Kind of the overly critical spirit that says, well, you take 7 words and sing it 11 times. And I'm thinking to myself, well, that person probably has Psalm 136 taken out of their Bible because it's not 11 times, it's 26 times in which we find that the Spirit of God decided that it was appropriate for us to say the same thing again and again.

Now, why is that okay? When Christ spoke about the danger of vain repetition, he was talking about saying things without thought behind them and also believing that saying it more is actually more effective.

How many of you ever bumped into people who say, well, I'm really concerned about this so I'm going to get 200 people to pray about it? Question. In the economy of God, are 200 people really more significant in praying than one righteous man?

What's the answer from the Bible? Don't worry about the numbers. And so the idea that saying it more or having more people involved, that's not the key.

The issue is the heart with which you say it. Furthermore, when the heart is right, repetition is a blessing and an encouragement. How many of you as parents have decided that you're not going to tell your children that you love them very often lest repetition kind of dull their affection?

[17:21] Judith and I, when we go to sleep at night, standard protocol, that means what we do all the time, is that I will say to her, I love you.

She will say to me, I love you. Let me tell you, I was thinking about this, whether I should tell you or not, but I will. There are occasions where Mr. Moody, do you know who that is? decides that it would be appropriate just to let her know that I'm a little miffed about something.

How many of you have done that before? Anybody? Please raise your hand so I know I'm not the only one here. Okay? It's like, okay. I'm thinking to myself, there she is too.

She knows this anyway, so I'll tell her. But you know, I'm sitting there lying in bed thinking, what she said to me really wasn't very nice. I wanted someone to say something nice. You know, it's like, Tim, you're wonderful.

And she says, you know, she didn't say that and so I think I'm going to pay her back. I'm going to lie there in bed and I'm not going to say I love you. Oh, I can't go to sleep.

[18:31] Holy Spirit is bearing down on me saying, you petty little guy, you know, suck it up and act like a decent person. I love you. Will you forgive me for being moody and pouty again?

You know, you know what? Hey, listen to me. I like her to tell me that she loves me. How many of you there? Regularly.

A couple times a day doesn't bother. That's too many. Okay, no. And so, let's get this straight. I have no doubt, particularly when we think about what the scriptures have to say about the steadfast love of Christ, that the repetition of his love is a capstone for our thanksgiving.

It's a thing that kind of brings it together and helps us focus in. The fact that this passage is chosen to be communicated again and again and again means that the Father in Heaven wants you to be struck significantly by the unending, unchanging, absolutely consistent love of Christ for you.

I cannot tell you how many times as a pastor I've had individuals sitting in my office and I've thought to myself, I wish I were a doctor where I could write a prescription and then push a little bottle across the table that says Jesus loves you pills, you know, and have the people take those and have those pills cure their heart.

[20:17] The theme of the unending, unchangeable love of God for us is something that runs through the scriptures in relationship to those that are believers. His love will never change.

His love is constant. His love is not conditional. His love is that which gives us stability in a very unstable and frail world and when everything else is uncertain and we are struck by the insecurity of the circumstances we are in, here's the truth, He loves us and won't change His mind.

And so above all other things as you kind of think about this passage, I want you to understand that 26 times the psalmist says His steadfast love endures forever.

In addition to that we find that the psalmist having made this profound statement about the reality of the person of God at the heart of why we have reason to be thankful, he then adds some reasons.

So I want you to look at the added reasons for thanks. For one, the one who loves us is our creator.

If you will look at verse 4 and kind of carrying down on through verse 9, we're going to press it together here just for a moment, it says, to Him alone who does great wonders, to Him who by

understanding made the heavens.

[21 : 50] As I was studying this week, I was thinking about just how finely tuned creation is and how dependent we are on everything working exactly the way God has ordained it to work.

Whether it has to do with anatomy and physiology or it has to do with astronomy, in the details that God has ordained, is our safety and our well-being.

And here the psalmist, he says, man, the one who loves us is the one who put it all together. He's our creator. I can't help but think this morning about Psalm 8. Keep your finger there and go back just for a moment to Psalm 8 verse 3 and 4.

And as you look at this passage, you're just overwhelmed by the reminder of God's care for us personally. Verse 3 says, 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 and the son of man that you care for him?

Does he know when you're having a bad day? He does. Does he know when your heart is broken? He does. Does he know when you're discouraged?

[23 : 16] He does. And as you think about this this morning, as the psalmist gives us reason to have thankful hearts in the person of our God and Savior, he says, I want you to understand that the one who loves you is your creator.

We also find that the one who loves us is our deliverer. If you were to read through verse 10 through 22 later on your own, you would find that in those verses, the psalmist has kind of rolled out for us kind of an overview, a little historical snapshot of God taking care of his people who started out in a position of slavery and in great hardship.

Verse 10, to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, what's that talking about? The last plague. Who brought Israel out from among them with a strong hand and outstretched arm, who divided the Red Sea in two.

The psalmist reminds the nation of Israel and reminds us, the one who loves us is our deliverer, and as we stop and consider how many reasons we have to thank him, in addition to the fact that he is God and supreme, he's also cared for us personally.

He has an interest in you, and he has brought you out of the difficulties that you're in. You know, at the end of the day, when our life comes to a conclusion, I think that we will end up, if we're able, to make a very similar statement to what Jacob did when he came to the end and he blessed the two children of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh.

[25 : 05] Do you remember what he said as he brought blessing to those two boys? Listen, this is good. He said, the angel of the Lord who has delivered me from all evils, bless the lads.

Do you know what he was saying? He was saying, I'm not the hero of my journey or my story, and the one who has blessed me, the God who has blessed me, I can trust to care for you as well.

The angel of the Lord who has delivered me from all evils. You know what? Every one of us here, really, when we tell our story, we're Jacobs. perverse, unsettled, uncertain, troubled, and yet when we look back across our shoulder and we see what's happened, we see that the one who has brought us step by step in the journey of life is the one who is faithful and who is our God and our Savior, and he is the one who has delivered us.

One other thing that I want you to notice towards the end, the one who loves us, knows our baggage, and loves us anyway. Where do I get that?

Look at verse 23. He who remembered us in our low estate and rescued us from our foes.

[26 : 23] Now look at verse 1 of chapter 136. By the waters of Babylon, there we sat and wept. When we remembered Zion, on the willows there we hung our heads, for there our captors required a song, and our tormentors mirth.

What was going on in Psalm 137? The Babylonian captivity was in full cry. They were suffering because of their, what, disobedience to God, right?

And in that particular affliction, the Babylonians came along and kind of with a spear point would say, hey, why don't you smile today? How do you like being in Babylon? Go ahead and sing a happy song.

You know, it's like, can you do that? How many of you can sing when you're unhappy? And Psalm 136 is an overarching statement about you cared for us even when we were suffering.

And why were we suffering? Look at verse 23. You remembered us in our lowest state. You rescued us from our foes. And why were we enduring all of that? It was because of our own sin and

our own disobedience.

[27 : 31] Let me say it again slowly. The one who loves us knows our baggage. And he loves us anyway. And beloved, when you think about that this morning, that gives you great comfort, doesn't it?

Stop and think about what it says here. Verse 136 or chapter 136, it says, for his steadfast love endures forever. Above all, the reason that I am happy this morning is that I know for certain that the lover of my soul who has given me everlasting life in the finished work of Christ on the cross will not change his mind about me.

Is that a comfort? Is that a consolation? Is that an encouragement? It is. And the psalmist says, here's the reason for you to give thanks, because the God of this universe, the one who's created all, the God of this universe who has rescued you from the pit, the God of this universe who has not changed his mind about your recurring failures, that's the God that loves you, and that's the God that has made this abiding commitment to never change his mind and never turn his back on you. And so what is to be the characteristic of the believer who has confidence in his salvation and a certainty of where his eternal destiny is? What is it to be?

Give thanks unto the Lord for he is good. The normal characteristic for the believer who is thinking intelligently and biblically is to be a thankful person.

[29 : 15] Let me close up this way. If you are here this morning and the truth of the matter is, is that you have no confidence of where your eternal destiny is. It is not an accident that you sit here this morning under the preaching of the word of God because the God who loves his children this morning says to you, you desperately need the complete forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ for all of your sins.

God seeing your absolute inability to save yourself sent Christ into the world to die in your place and to satisfy the debt of your sin and he stands ready to forgive you and to make you his child and you know what it takes?

It takes a broken heart that is humble enough to say I'm a mess. I cannot save myself and I've had enough of the pit that I'm in.

I need Jesus as my savior. It's not hard. It's just humbling. It's not hard but it makes the world a difference and it would be a sad thing that on this day when we celebrate Thanksgiving together that those of you who are here that do not know Christ would wander out saying no to the God of this universe who willingly sent his son to be the sacrifice to pay the price for your sin and you have a sense of the darkness of your heart.

He sent Jesus to die in your place and I plead with you this morning in Christ's stead don't say no. Humble yourself and trust him.

[30 : 59] Let's close in prayer as John comes to lead us as we sing. Our Father God this morning as we think about the issue of why we as believers are thankful and we have so many reasons let us be a people that are genuine in our thanksgiving.

Draw us to delight in the Lord Jesus Christ and to do so by the power of the spirit of God. I pray for those that sit here this morning under the teaching and the preaching of the word of God that your spirit would convict those that do not know Christ.

That the misery of their soul, the fearfulness of their eternal destiny would bring them to the place where they would willingly choose in all humility to trust in what Christ has done for them.

They would stop saying no and they would trust you. And even as we sing this song in closing Father you work in their heart to draw them to the cross. We ask this in your precious name. Amen. Amen.