

Psalm 136

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Date: 04 August 2013

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[0 : 00] Now, we're going to do something a little different this morning. The passage that I'm going to expand was not read for us as our first reading or our second reading.

We are going to read it together now. Now, it's a psalm, and the Psalter, as surely we all know, comes to us as the hymn book and prayer book of the Church as it was before Christ.

The powers that be have ordained that during the month of August we study five psalms, and Psalm 136 is the first of them, a psalm of thanksgiving.

Would you please turn it up in the Pew Bibles, page 520? It's a song of thanksgiving, and it's a chorus song.

In some Bibles, it's printed with the second half of each verse in italics to indicate that this is the chorus which goes with the first half of the verse, which is what we would call the verse.

[1 : 35] We are used to chorus songs, are we not? We sang them at school, and we've sung them at parties, I'm quite sure. And the purpose of a song with a chorus is to bring everyone together and keep us together fully involved in the song that's being sung.

Because, of course, the chorus, though repeated again and again, is an integral part of it. Well, we are going to read Psalm 136 that way.

I'm going to read the first half of each verse as if I were the cantor, you see, though I shan't be singing, nor will you.

There are limits. But you, please, will read aloud, vigorously, the chorus line in each verse.

You'll be doing that 26 times. We read the whole psalm together. Let's go. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

[2 : 58] For his sake has thought, and he is forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. For his sake has thought, and he is forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords.

For his sake has thought, and he is forever. To him who alone does great wonders. For his sake has thought, and he is forever.

To him who, by understanding, made the heavens. For his sake has thought, and he is forever. To him who spread out the earth above the waters.

For his sake has thought, and he is forever. To him who made the great lights. For his sake has thought, and he is forever. The sun to rule over the day.

The moon and the stars to rule over the night. To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt.

[4 : 03] And brought Israel out from among them. With a strong hand and an outstretched arm.

To him who divided the Red Sea into. And made Israel pass through the midst of it.

But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. To him who led his people through the wilderness.

For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. To him who struck down great kings. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. And killed mighty kings.

For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. Zion, king of the Amorites. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. And Og, king of Bashan.

[5 : 08] For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. And gave their land as a heritage. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. A heritage to Israel, his servant.

For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. It's he who remembered us in our lowest state. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever.

And rescued us from our foes. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. He who gives food to all flesh. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven. For his steadfast love, the dewers forever. Well, as you see, it's a song of thanksgiving.

And this message of mine revolves around two questions arising from that. Question one, what is thanksgiving?

[6:09] And I reply, thanksgiving, as this psalm shows, is an expression of two things. The first is, quite simply, gratitude.

God honoring, God glorifying gratitude. With admiration for all that he is.

And you've got that in verses 1 through 4. God is celebrated in those verses as being good.

That means generous in the Old Testament. Generosity is always the top thought when the adjective good is used.

And he celebrated as being sovereign. He is the God of gods and Lord of lords.

[7:09] That's verses 2 and 3. And he celebrated as being wise. By understanding he made the heavens. So, it's gratitude with admiration for what God is.

And appreciation for what God does and has done. And the psalm moves to that in verse 5. When it speaks of God making the heavens.

And on it goes. The celebration of creation, I mean. Until verse 9.

Where you have, after the sun to rule the day. You have the moon and the stars to rule over the night. God made it all. God keeps it all in place.

God gives it all to us in its beauty. And in the power of the sun to give warmth and life.

[8:14] And the steadiness of the moon and stars. Producing the beautiful night sky. And then the psalm moves to history.

God struck down the firstborn of Egypt. Verse 10. And the celebration of the exodus. Goes on. Right through to verse 22.

Where Israel is followed. Till it reaches the promised land. And in the course of their journey. They are enabled by God.

To win victories over monarchs. Who oppose their passage. And the bottom line now is. That God. Look at verse 21.

God gave their land as a heritage. Verse 22. A heritage to Israel his servant. God has given. And given.

[9:19] God provides. God provides. God provides. He. And we can say this in modern terms.

He provides the weather. All this glorious sunshine. That we've been enjoying. For a little over a month now. It's the gift of God. God. And.

Where would we be. We might ask. Without the sunshine. Well we wouldn't. We wouldn't get the crops. The crops. Are the gift of God. All that's there.

In the supermarket. For us to buy. From the. Vegetable and fruit. Shelves. It's all.

The gift of God. And in a country. Like Israel. Where everybody lived. Off the land. The thought.

[10:16] Of God. As the one. Who gives the crops. Was a very big thought. A bigger thought. Perhaps. Than it usually is. In your mind.

And mine. And spiritual needs. Too. Are provided. By God. The psalm. Doesn't. Go to town.

On them. But. We should. For. We are sinners. Saved by grace. We.

Are those. For whom. Christ. Died. To put away. Our sins. We. Are those. In whom. The Holy Spirit. Of God.

Has. Brought. Faith. And repentance. And hope. And joy. To birth. So that.

[11:11] These. Are the qualities. That mark our lives. As Christians. We are new creatures. In Christ. With a hope. Of glory. In Christ. And we have.

Cause. To praise. Christ. Christ. And his father. Every day. Every day. Of our lives. And I hope we do. God. Provides.

He is the God. Who makes provision. For his people. These are all. Aspects. Of the generosity. That's being celebrated. In the first verse.

Of the psalm. Give thanks. To the Lord. For he. Is. Good. And then the second.

Element. In. Thanksgiving. Going with. Gratitude. For the past. Is. Trust. For the future.

[12:06] Triumphant. Trust. Confident. Trust. Assured. Trust. We know. That.

Whatever the. Ups and downs. Of the past. Along which. He leads us. He. Is. Bringing us. To glory. And again.

And again. We find. In this life. That after. A difficult time. We are brought. To a place. Where. We are made aware. Of his. Godness.

And his. Generosity. We are. Enjoying. Benefits. Now. Which we wouldn't. Be enjoying. If we hadn't. Passed. The difficult. Places.

Through which. He led us. And so. We. Review that. And we. Trust him. For the future. Here.
[13:02] I'm. I find myself. Thinking. Of. One of the. Verses. Of the hymn. That. Kit. And I. Sang.
With the congregation.

Fifty. Fifty. Eight. Years. Years. Ago. When we. Got married. Tis. Jesus. The first. And the last.
Whose spirit. Will guide us. Right home.

We'll. Thank him. For all that is past. And trust him. For all that's to come. Thanksgiving. For the past. And trust. For the future. Go together.

And this. Is one aspect. Of the thought. In the psalm. And that appears.

From the. The narrative. That was read. As our first lesson. Telling. How. One of. Those. Rarities.
[13:56] A good king. Of Israel. After David. And Solomon. Jehoshaphat. Was. Encouraged. By a prophet. To.

Lead. His people. In trust. And confidence. Into battle. With the. Moabites. And Edomites. Indeed. Battle. As it turned out.

Wasn't necessary. God. Moved. Among the enemy. And set them. At each other's. Throats. So that when.

Jehoshaphat. And his. People. His army. Went out. They found. That the enemy. Camp. Had been abandoned. And that there was.

Any amount. Of valuable. Stuff. Left in the camp. For them to pick up. And. Immediately. Before.

[14:52] Leading the people out. We are told. Jehoshaphat. Directed. The music. Leaders. Of the people. And.

In the temple service. There were quite a number. Of people. Who were appointed. As music leaders. In those days. The music leaders. Were directed. To sing.

To lead the people. In singing. What did they sing? Will they sing a song? What song? This song. They sang. We're given the first verse.

It's an indication. Though I think. That they sang the whole song. Before they were through. The first verse is. Give thanks to the Lord. For he is good. For his steadfast love.

Endures forever. And the story. From one standpoint. Is a celebration. Of how. Israel. At that time. And in that crisis.

[15:48] Proved. In experience. That that statement. Is absolutely true. God. Is good. His steadfast love. Endures forever.

He delivers. His people. From hostile forces. That stand against them. The triumph. Is God's. Time. After time.

After time. Well. Israel. I'm sure. Was encouraged.

Parents. Encouraged. That children. Older folk. Encouraged. Each other. To remember. That occasion. Over and over again. Just as.

I. And perhaps. Some of you. Yes. One or two of you. Are old enough for this. We remember. We remember. We remember. The second world war. Where.

[16:43] Three times over. The allies. Nearly lost. Who can remember this with me. I wonder. I was a teenager at the time. And it all made a vivid impression on me as it happened.

We nearly lost the army. But amazingly. They were saved. And brought back to England from Dunkirk. We nearly lost the Battle of Britain.

Where the Nazis decided that they had lost the air war. And so ceased. Sending squadrons of fighter planes over England.

For English planes to do battle with. They decided to do that at just about the same time that. Winston Churchill said to the first air lord.

And what about your reserves? And the first air lord said to Churchill. We have no reserves.

[17:53] Every plane we have is in the battle already. But the Nazis stopped the air war. And so we were preserved again.

And then we almost lost the Battle of the Atlantic. You know where ships bringing supplies from North America. Were torpedoed in great numbers.

Literally millions of tons of supplies that we needed. Went to the bottom of the Atlantic. But by the skin of our teeth.

We managed to beat off the squads of submarines. Submarines. German submarines that were doing all the damage. And so the Battle of the Atlantic was not lost. And Britain was not starved into surrender. And in those days. I don't know whether such a thing could happen today.

[18 : 58] But in those days. Britain had not altogether forgotten God. And we had days of prayer. And we had days of thanksgiving.

To the God who protects his people. As well as providing for them. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

His steadfast love endures forever. So question two. Quickly. Why thanksgiving? The question I think answers itself.

In fact. In light of what I've already said. Thanksgiving. Deepens. Our relationship. With our God. Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving. Is vital. For spiritual health. Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. Is prescribed. As. A priority.

[19 : 56] For Christian life. Just as. It was prescribed. As a priority. For Israel. Long ago. Give thanks to the Lord.

Here. Just for a moment. I'd like. You need not. Turn this up. But. I would like to read you. Some of the verses. Out of Paul's little letter.

To the Colossians. You know. There's only four chapters. In it. But. The. Thanksgiving. Theme. Turns up. Again. And again. And again. Just listen.

Paul starts. By telling them. Chapter one. Verse three. We always. Thank God. The father of our Lord. Jesus Christ. When we pray for you. Since we heard of your faith.

In Christ. And so on. And when he gets. To the essential message. Of Colossians. Which is chapter two. And verse six. Well.

[20 : 54] He. Charges them. To. As you. Well. Read it. As you received. Christ Jesus. The Lord. So. Walk in him.

Rooted and built up in him. And established in the faith. Just as you were taught. Abounding. In thanksgiving. That's an important. Indeed. A basic element.

In being a faithful disciple. Of Christ. Says Paul. And he comes back. To the same theme. In chapter three. Verses. Fifteen. Through seventeen.

Go like this. Let the peace of Christ. Rule in your hearts. To which indeed. You were called. In one body. And be thankful.

For. But that's not all. Let the word of God. Dwell in you. Richly. Teaching and admonishing. One another. In all wisdom. Singing psalms.

[21 : 51] And hymns. And spiritual songs. With thankfulness. In your hearts. To God. And verse seventeen. It comes again.

Whatever you do. In word or deed. Do everything. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Giving thanks to God the Father. Through him. Constant thanksgiving then.

Is to be a regular element. In the healthy Christian life. Faith and hope and love.

Are strengthened of course. If our minds are constantly reviewing. The good things. The generous things. The gracious things. The glorious things.

That God has done for us. We can appreciate perhaps. The significance of that. If for a moment. We think about marriage.

[22 : 50] Or indeed. Any good friendship. And reflect on how important it is. That in such twosomes.

One shows appreciation. For the other party. And how it drains the life. Out of.

Well. Marriage. Friendship. Any relation. Of two people. When one has to say. He. She. Doesn't appreciate me.

What's the problem? Well. Well. The problem is that. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thankfulness. Isn't there in the heart. And thanksgiving. Isn't.

Therefore expressed on the lips. For a healthy relationship. Which has love. As part of it. And faith.

[23 : 48] I mean trust. In the other party. Reliance. On them. And quite simply. Hope. Of the future.

As. The two of you go on together. For that sort of relationship. The sense of. Appreciating. The other party. Needs to be there.

All the time. And needs to be expressed. Constantly. Well. That's what. The psalmist. Is telling us. Reminding us of. With regard.

To Israel. The people of God. His steadfast love. Endures forever. Remember it. Never forget it. And constantly.

Thank him. For the way. That he shows us. His love. By what he does. For us. And here. There pops into my mind. A hymn.

[24 : 43] By. John Newton. Let me just. Quote one or two verses. Be gone unbelief. My savior is near. And for my relief.

Will surely appear. By faith. Let me wrestle. And he will perform. With Christ in the vessel. I smile at the storm. Where does that confidence.

Come from. Next verse. Tells us. His love. In time past. Forbids me. To think. He'll leave me. At last. In trouble.

To sink. Each sweet. Ebenezer. I have in review. Confirms. His good pleasure. To help me. Right through. Remember. Ebenezer. The name.

That Samuel gave. To the. The rock. Of remembrance. That Israel set up. To celebrate. The way that God. Had given them victories. Over the Philistines.

[25 : 39] Yes. Faith. And hope. And love. Need to be there. If our relationship. With God. Is to be. What it should be. And faith.

And hope. And love. Are watered. Fertilized. Brought to.

How shall I say. Brought to flowering. By Thanksgiving. And here. Perhaps. We'd better. Remind ourselves.

That this very service. Which we attend. Sunday morning. By Sunday morning. Is. In. Very much. Of Christendom. Called. And actually. Rightly.

Called. The Eucharist. And Eucharist. Is a. Greek word. Eucharistia. That means. Thanksgiving. First. And foremost. It's a service.

[26 : 34] Of thanksgiving. To our Lord Jesus. For the redemption. Which is ours. And. Within. Which. Our communion.

With him. Is. The. Joyful reality. That in fact. It is. Is. Well. Let me.

Let me. Pull the threads together. Simply. By saying. I don't think. That we do. Enough. Thanksgiving.

My observation. Of us. Christians. And indeed. My observation. Of my own. Track record. Is. Is. That in. Our. Concerns.

And. Anxieties. About. The future. We don't. Spend. Enough. Time. And energy. Giving. God. Thanks. For the.

[27 : 28] Mercies. Of the past. Christ. And so. I'm. Challenging you. As I challenge. Myself. To. Review. That aspect. Of our. Christian. Walk. And. See. If there are. Adjustments. That need. To be made. If we find.

That we are. Well. By the grace. Of God. Let's make them. Think. About. The goodness. Of God. As you've.

Known it. Right up. To the present. Moment. And. Thank him. For all. That he's. Given. And all. That he's. Done. His.

Steadfast. Love. Endures. Forever. His. Grace. Is. Continuous. Permanent. And.

[28 : 23] Glorious. Thinking. Is. The key. To thanksgiving. Thinking. Leads.

To. Remembrance. And. Remembrance. Brings. The. Expression.

Of. Joy. And. Gratitude. To the surface. So that we. So that thinking it. We say it. And we sing it. And we go on our way. Rejoicing.

That's. That's. The message. I think. For us all. Out of. Psalm. One hundred and thirty six. And. Because.

We are all of us. Called. To. Christian lives. That are meant. To be healthy. And strong. And even. Exuberant. May God.

[29 : 16] Give us. Hearts. To digest. The message. And to respond. To it. As we should. God bless us all. Amen. Well.

Let's. Uh.