

The Steadfast Love of the Lord

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright!
Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre! Make melody to Him with the harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song. Play skillfully on the strings with loud shouts.
For the word of the Lord is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice.

The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.

[1 : 01] He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap. He puts the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

For He spoke, and it came to be. He commanded, and it stood firm. The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. He frustrates the plans of the peoples.

The counsel of the Lord stands forever. The plans of His heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

The people whom He has chosen as His heritage. The Lord looks down from heaven. He sees all the children of man. From where He sits, enthroned, He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth. He who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. The King is not saved by His great army. A warrior is not delivered by His great strength.

[2 : 03] The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him.

On those who hope in His steadfast love. That He may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. Oh, our soul waits for the Lord.

He is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in Him because we trust His holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in You.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. May you take your seats. I felt very weak.

That sense of God's presence was completely removed from me. After the first couple weeks, I felt abandoned and everything was going wrong.

[3 : 13] These words were spoken in an interview by Andrew Brunson, an American pastor, former missionary to Turkey. He was falsely accused of espionage and terrorism, and he ended up in a maximum security prison as a political pawn for almost two years.

He was hungry, sleepless, isolated, and wrongfully imprisoned. Andrew was absolutely powerless to change his circumstances.

He goes on to describe some of the spiritual battle that he encountered, and I quote, I kept getting worse and worse, and I thought, where is my kind, gentle father?

This is after I've been a missionary for 23 years. The pressure I was under, the lack of sleep, the fear, the panic attacks.

I was feeling overwhelmed by this, saying, where is God? Why aren't you intervening in some way that will strengthen me? And this took me into questioning his existence.

[4 : 24] And I said, no, you must exist, God, because you're the only reason I'm being persecuted. But then it took me into really questioning God's character, his love, his faithfulness, his goodness, his truth.

Not many of us are going to experience that, but that sense of abandonment by God, that feeling like, Father, where are you? We're tested in different ways.

Mine was a very intense prison experience, but the area of the heart that is tested is the same. End quote. It's true.

We will be tested by some form of waiting. Maybe it's the pregnancy test that always comes back negative.

Or the prospect of marriage seeming to fade away. Or the chronic pain with no relief in view. Maybe it's the limbo of a difficult job scenario with no alternatives.

[5 : 30] Or maybe a child running from faith. Or a marriage that just seems stalemated by past hurts. The psalm begins with this jubilant praise.

And then it concludes with waiting, hoping, and trusting. How can we praise him while in prison? How can we worship while we wait? Psalm 33 calls us, it calls believers, to both praise and hope in the Lord.

The psalmist here, he's drawing our gaze up and away from our circumstances to see that the Lord has not abandoned you. He has not abandoned us.

The Lord has not forgotten us. No, instead, the Lord has been at work and is even now powerfully working in all of creation and all of history through his steadfast love for the good of his people in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 43] And he is worthy of our praise while in prison. He is worthy of our worship and our waiting. So I think very simply, the main point for us this morning is praise our sovereign creator, who is powerfully working for all who hope in him.

This is his word to us this morning. And we're going to break this into four points, the first of which is rejoice as the people of the Lord.

Verse 1 draws our attention very abruptly. Shout for joy in the Lord. Oh, you righteous. Praise befits the upright.

So who should be shouting for joy? When someone yells, hey you, across the parking lot, you kind of look around to see if they're talking to you or someone else that's behind you.

This is a hey you moment right here. The psalmist is commanding someone to shout, to praise, to give thanks, make melody, to play skillfully.

[7 : 50] Certainly he's not talking about me, you may think. He must be talking to someone else in the parking lot. Someone that's outgoing. Someone that's more expressive.

The one who feels happy. It's not me. But the psalmist clarifies who this command is for. Hey you righteous.

Hey you upright. Ah, you may think he is talking about someone else then. Me righteous? Me upright? The praise must be for someone else then.

I don't think so. For two reasons. First, the language connected to the righteous and the upright we see here actually points away from the righteous and the upright toward the Lord.

Shout for joy in the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord. Make melody to the Lord. Sing a new song to the Lord. All of the calls to action for the righteous and upright are in response to the Lord.

[9 : 00] So, so why this response? Psalm 33, if you look at the very top, it has no superscription. Those are the words that typically are at the top of the psalm that tells about who wrote it or maybe even the situation that it's written for.

But the psalm even without that seems to have many connections to Psalm 32 just before it which we see if you look was written by David, a mascal of David.

So even though they're different songs, there are several striking connections between these two.

For one, David, if you look in 32, he requests and he receives forgiveness of sin from the Lord.

If you look at verses 1, 1 and 2, a mascal of David, blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit. Verse 5 says, I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity.

[10 : 13] I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. And then, after this exchange, David, the king, he appeals for those who have been made righteous and upright by the Lord to trust in the Lord, to be glad in the Lord, to rejoice in the Lord.

Look at verse 10 of Psalm 32. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice.

Here it is, O righteous. And shout for joy. Here it is, all you upright in heart. So it seems that Psalm 33 is a corporate response of the people to the testimony of King David in Psalm 32.

That's what's happening. They were sinners who confessed to the Lord and He forgave them and made them righteous. He made them righteous.

He made us righteous. In other words, the call that we see at the beginning of Psalm 33, to this exuberant praise is not based on your personality.

[11:37] It's not based on your current circumstances. It's not based on your opinions or your perceptions of things around you. The call to praise is based on the one who is praiseworthy.

That's what the call is drawing us to. Has the Sovereign Lord made a claim on your life? Has He forgiven your sin through Jesus Christ? Has He given you His righteousness?

If you're a Christian, then the psalmist is talking to you. Hey you! Hey you, righteous and upright! Hey you, blood-bought, forgiven ones!

Do you belong to the Lord? Then praise is fitting for you. Praise is fitting for you. In verse 3 it says, sing to Him a new song.

This new song is more than just pinning some new lyrics because it implies something about the state of the heart of those who sing.

[12:42] I think about the old songs I used to like. The old songs that represent the old me, they don't sing the same way anymore. I mean, even for all the beauty, for all the artistry, even the energy of songs I used to love, they're like Coke that's gone flat.

It's fizzless, it's disappointing to me now. But now, there are new songs in my mouth with sweet new truths.

I've got a new taste for them. They represent the new me. These are the new songs I think of in Christ alone. There in the ground His body lay, light of the world by darkness slain.

Then bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave He rose again. And He stands in victory. Sin's curse has lost its grip on me.

For I am His and He is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ. There's no guilt in life, no fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me.

[13:53] From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand till He returns or calls me home.

Here in the power of Christ, I'll stand. Is there a new song in your mouth this morning because of the Lord's forgiveness? Do you have new tastes because you've been made righteous?

Then the psalmist is addressing us. Regardless of our circumstances, we've been forgiven by the Lord and made into a new people with a new song for the Lord.

Point two, reflect on the power of the Lord. reflect on the power of the Lord. In verse four, the psalmist begins to outline reasons for the upright to praise.

not by looking inward at our perceptions, not by looking outward at our circumstances, but by looking upward to reflect on the Lord's power.

[15:16] Right now, right now in this room, we are spinning around at around 837 miles per hour.

837 miles per hour right now whirring around the axis of the earth. But it seems like we are sitting completely still, doesn't it?

The activity is so massive, it actually seems completely invisible to us. Well, in a much greater way, God is at work.

Massive work. There is action occurring right now as we sit, as we wait. The psalmist is going to draw us up and out to catch a glimpse of the power of this Lord, our Lord.

Verses four through nine highlight the word of the Lord, the Lord's word and his work. They're inseparable. Look at chapter 33 9, it says, he spoke and it came to be.

[16:30] He commanded and it stood firm. So what we're seeing is when he speaks, he acts. We see this most explicitly in his creation of all things.

Verse 6, by the word of the Lord the heavens were made. By the breath of his mouth all their hosts were being reminded of the Lord's intense creative power.

He alone could speak things into existence out of nothing. He's the only one. Verse 7 says, he gathers the waters of the sea as a heap.

He puts the deeps in storehouses. The vastness of the ocean and the deep waters, they've always been associated with fear, unpredictability, death.

I mean, personally, I have never gotten over how massive the ocean feels. When you're out in the deep with no shoreline in view, or if you're bobbing up and down on the surface of the water and a shadowy figure moves by, or if you've been drawn out unexpectedly by a rip current or you've been

thrashed by a giant wave without being able to come up and thrown over and over, then you know something of the magnitude and the chaotic power of the ocean.

[18 : 07] It makes you feel small. It makes you feel so fragile, so vulnerable. But our Lord gathers the waters of the sea as a heap.

The psalmist is showing the Lord is simply harvesting the water like wheat and then stacking it up where he wants for when he wants it. That's what it's showing about the Lord.

The Lord has dominion over this overwhelming mass. He controls and he maneuvers it exactly as he pleases. What feels overwhelming and chaotic to us is but a tool that does exactly his bidding to bring both deliverance and judgment as he pleases.

That's what's happening. This is exactly what the Lord did with his people at the Red Sea. When they left Egypt, the Israelites came up against the impassable water.

With the Egyptians in hot pursuit right behind them and the endless sea before them, they had nowhere to go. But the Lord worked for his people.

[19 : 24] The sovereign creator heaped up the waters. The great deep was leveraged by an even greater Lord for his perfect purposes.

That's what's happened. It's meant to be a reminder to us when all seems lost and overwhelming, when our toes are standing at the edge of our Red Sea.

God is the decisive actor. He has control over all of it. It's doing his bidding and it's pointing to his power.

And not only does he have immense power, there's also a character to his power. All of his actions, the scripture says, all of his actions are characterized by faithfulness.

What the Lord promises, he has power to do. We see in verse five that our Lord loves righteousness and justice.

[20 : 36] And as the psalmist points out, everything that happens is by his decree, even the events of history. But not everything that happens is in accordance with what he loves.

He loves righteousness and justice. The Lord is both powerful and he's good. the psalmist wants us to see not only the immensity of his power, but this character of his power.

He may not act how you expect him to act. He may not act when you expect him to act, but he will act in faithfulness, righteousness, and justice for his people, for you.

He will. A Lord like this must not only be praised by his people, but revered by all people. This is what we see in verse 8.

Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. Who else is deserving of this kind of reverential awe.

[21 : 56] If this sovereign creator that we're talking about is the wellspring of all existence, the only options are to either worship him as the rightful creator or worship his creation.

Those are the only choices. It's why we go to the nations. It is to appropriate all where all is due.

Then in verse 10, we continue to see the power of our Lord not only as the powerful creator but also as the one who shapes the trajectory of history.

Verse 10, the Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. He frustrates the plans of the peoples.

So all the collective counsel of the wisest politicians in the most powerful nations, all the talent, all the resources, all the vision, the innovation, all of it was and is subject to the Lord.

Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Byzantines, Islamic Caliphates, Ottomans, Europeans, Nazi, Germany, Russia, China, and the United States of America.

[23 : 34] All parties, all presidents, and all time periods, whether they recognize the Lord or not, are under his divine authority.

Right now, this is audacious. It certainly doesn't feel that way, does it? When wicked kingdoms are thriving, or there is injustice, we wonder, who really is in control?

Where is God? Does he know about this? That's certainly how Andrew Brunson felt, after spending nearly two years in a maximum security prison on false charges.

He went through three rigged trials with false witnesses bringing absurd accusations of terrorism plots. And upon entering his fourth trial, this is what he said, I quote, the setting was very intimidating.

It was a basketball arena that they turned into a court to have mass trials, and I was sitting there alone, facing three judges who were on a stand across from me.

[24 : 54] The prosecutor sat right next to the judges, so you know they were working together. My lawyer was 30 to 40 feet away from me, so I couldn't talk to him, and I was just standing alone in front of the judges.

It was the fourth trial. Unsurprisingly, they declared me guilty. I was sentenced to life in prison. And as I'm wrapping my head around going back into the prison, the lawyer came over to me and said, you're released, you can go.

What? I couldn't believe it. Within moments, I was whisked away and placed on Air Force One. It came out later that I had become more of a pawn than a pawn.

And within a day, I was in the White House sitting next to the President. It's incredible. Who was in charge here?

[25 : 59] Which part of that was God's plan? What about all the parts of injustice and accusations and waiting?

Waiting? Waiting? The psalmist is saying that the Lord is sovereign over all the affairs of the nations, even the wicked ones.

Like the Creator over the waters, so the King over the nations directs all kings and all things according to His purposes.

All of it. All of it. And He does so in such a way that even the wicked acts of rulers only serve His good purposes. That's what we can bank on.

What was meant for evil? God didn't work out for good. God meant for good at the same time. This is seen most climactically at the scene of Christ's conversation with Pilate, the governor with authority over Christ's life and death.

[27 : 09] John 19, the conversation, Pilate says to Jesus, beaten, battered, and bruised, you will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?

And Jesus answered him, you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above.

Do you see what he's saying? Jesus also said, no one takes my life from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down.

I have authority to take it back up again. This is what the Bible preaches to us. The book of Acts has us look back in Acts 2. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Both are true. He's working it all out right now. Whether through thwarting the plans of rulers or leveraging the plans of the rulers, the Lord of creation is also the sovereign over all kings.

[28 : 23] He's carrying out his unstoppable purposes in the world for his people, for us. It's good news for us. The king of kings is behind the scenes faithfully working for you.

Praise the Lord. Third point, review the fear of the Lord. Review the fear of the Lord.

Lord. In verses 13 to 19, there's an emphasis on the eyes of the Lord. Verse 13, the Lord looks down from heaven.

He sees all the children of man. Verse 14, he looks out. Verse 15, he observes. Verse 18, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him.

In these verses, the ever watching eyes of the true deliverer are actively scanning, not just deeds, but hearts.

[29 : 39] What's he looking at? He's looking at the contrast of hopes. Where will man place his hope?

His hope. There are echoes of the Tower of Babel here. Men, remember, they turned inward. They wanted to make a name for themselves.

They wanted independence from God and praise for themselves. So they pooled their resources, their technology, and they built a tower to reach higher and higher and higher.

the irony is that God comes down to see what they are doing. God coming down to man's highest high is telling, isn't it?

It shows the vanity of the goal to live apart from the Lord. In a similar way, verse 13 says, he looks down from heaven.

[30 : 47] In verse 14, it shows that he sits enthroned in heaven. And the question is whether he will be enthroned in your hearts.

Where will we place our trust, our hope? Well, we can usually get a sense of where our hope is by what our minds rush to when fears come up.

Where is your mind rushed to when fears come up. The psalmist draws out three timeless versions of false hope in verses 16 to 17.

Got the king, the warrior, and the war horse. The king represented any person of power who places his hope and the resources at his disposal because of his wealth or because of his relational connections.

the king, it says, is not saved by this hope. The warrior is a strong man who places hope in personal strength.

[31 : 59] Whether this is the strength of health or the strength of aptitude or mind, the strong man, it says, is not delivered by these.

And this war horse, the war horse is the symbol of the most advanced technology and advantage. It's this unbeatable weapon of the ancient world.

Saying, this also is a false hope for salvation. Instead, verse 18 says, that the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him.

On those who hope in His steadfast love. You know, our fears are often misplaced and our hopes are not far behind.

When we attempt to maintain control of the world around us apart from our sovereign Creator, we can become either arrogant or anxious.

[33 : 11] Think about it. When earthly comfort, wealth, security, health, ease, when these things are lifted up as our highest priority, we can be lured into false hopes.

False hopes. hope. Because these are not ultimate. These are not eternal fears anchored to these things. You know, the Lord is most concerned above all else about our sin separating us from Him forever.

hope. Don't be lured into false hope. Your greatest need is not earthly comfort, wealth, security, health, and ease.

Because you can get all of those things and be separated from God forever in hell. Think about it. Those aren't the things you should be most fearful about.

We need a proper perspective if we're going to have our hope appropriated. It's why Jesus said in Luke 12, I tell you my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and then after that have nothing more that they can do.

[34 : 42] But I will warn you of whom to fear. Fear him who after he is killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

Fear the Lord. This is an appropriate fear because the one who fears the Lord will actually be delivered by the Lord. That's the good news of the gospel.

Think of it. The thing we fear most, death and eternal separation from God, this has been taken care of at the cross.

That's what's happened. Verse 19 says, he is able to deliver our soul from death. Place your hope in the one who has all power.

The one who we should fear the most is for us. If you are in Jesus Christ, if you are not in Jesus Christ, I want to call you to lay down your arms and repent and turn to him.

[35 : 42] Receive the grace that he offers freely to you. You have a misplaced fear if you're not fearing God ultimately, and he wants to be for you, not against you. Point four, resolve to trust in the Lord.

Resolve to trust in the Lord. The righteous called to rejoice in the beginning of the psalm. They've reflected on their Lord's power and reviewed the fear of the Lord.

In the last few verses, it represents this pivot to the personal. Their soul becomes our soul. Those who wait become we who wait.

They've seen and heard enough. If the Lord is the one able to deliver their soul from death, like it says in verse 19, then their soul will wait for the Lord.

These last few verses are just brimming with this language of reliance. There's waiting. There's trusting. There's hoping.

[36 : 54] All of these express this posture of dependence. We used to have a dog that would sit at our feet at the supper table and just patiently just stare at us.

Endlessly, if they felt like. Just stare. Why? Because he knew that if he sat long enough, we would give him some food.

But he had to sit in humble, reliant tension. This is what we're declaring here.

We've seen enough of the Lord's character and His provision to stay put in wait. Stay put in wait. no matter how long we know that we can sit in humble, reliant tension.

The Lord has shown us not only that He is the Creator and the King, but He's revealed to us His character. When Andrew Brunson was stuck in prison, he had to decide where he would place his hope.

[38 : 04] and in the darkness of the prison, when he could not understand what God was doing, he had to remind himself of the truth. I quote, I had to make a conscious decision to repeat again and again, no God, you are faithful.

You do love me even if I don't feel it. Even if I don't see it. You are good. You are true. And to say these things even when my emotions are in turmoil and I'm in the dark.

Close quote. My friends, in our waiting, we aren't relying on some abstract, erratic dictator out there somewhere.

No, we hope in His steadfast love. That's His covenantal love. His promise keeping love. Our greatest need is not earthly comfort, wealth, security, health, and ease.

It is to be in relationship with God forever. The Lord against whom we rebelled promised to fix what we broke. All of creation, think of this, all of creation and all of history culminates in His grand plan of rescuing sacrificial love expressed at the cross of Jesus Christ.

[39 : 39] In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. He obeyed the Father perfectly. He died on the cross sacrificially.

He paid for our sins completely. That's what He's done. He's already done it. In steadfast love, He came for us.

In steadfast love, He saved us. And so we can pray in verse 22, O Lord, let Your steadfast love be upon us even as we hope in You.

The Lord has been at work and He is at work. Even right now, even while you sit in these very chairs, He is powerfully working.

In all of creation, in all of history, through His steadfast love for the good of His people in Jesus Christ. And let me tell you, He is worthy of all of our praise, all of our jubilant new songs.

[40 : 41] He's worthy of it all, even in our waiting. So, Trinity Grace, let me invite you to praise today, praise our sovereign Creator who is powerfully working for all of us who hope in Him.

Pray for us. Father, we cling to You, maker of heaven and earth, sovereign King over all kings.

You put a new heart in us and a new song in our mouth, so even while we wait, Lord, we can declare with glad hearts, we belong to You, the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

So, Lord, we now, regardless of circumstances and our perceptions, we now praise You with all that we are because of all that You've done to pursue us and are bringing us home.

We pray these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

[42 : 01] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.