

Thanksgiving Service: Psalm 136:1

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[0 : 00] Okay, tonight, as you know, is our Thanksgiving service. And I want us to look together at the psalm that we read, and especially at the words of verse one.

Psalm 136, verse one, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love and Jewish. Now, this is a wonderful psalm, and the whole psalm, in many ways, is a great and wonderful expression of thanks. It recounts the great works that God has done, and we constantly have this refrain, this repeated passage, for his steadfast love and Jewish forever.

We come to Psalm 136, we could look at many, many things. But tonight, I want us to just focus entirely on verse one.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love and Jewish forever. So, what does this verse say, and what do we learn from it?

[1 : 01] Well, if we look at the verse, first of all, and just see what it says, and look at the structure of it, we see that the verse breaks into three parts. You've got what we would call an imperative at the start.

This is for you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. So it's instructing us to do something. It's saying, give thanks. And then we have two phrases that basically give the reasons why.

For he is good, and for his steadfast love and Jewish forever. And the reason that we know that they are what we call, the reason we know that they are giving the reasons is because we have this wonderful little word repeated, for.

For. And that's basically the word that means because. For or because. And so that's telling us that if we can call these phrases, he is good and his steadfast love and Jewish forever, as we could call him, if you like, reason giving phrases, or clauses of reason, or something like that.

We are told to do this because of that and because of that. That makes sense, yeah? Quite straightforward.

[2 : 14] So the verses in three parts, it's an imperative, followed by two reasons why we should do that. It's basically saying we should give thanks to God because of two things.

One, because he is good. And two, because his steadfast love is forever. And so I want us to spend the bulk of our time tonight looking at these two reasons that we're given to give thanks.

These two clauses of reason that this verse contains. And we'll just look at them in turn together.

Give thanks to the Lord, first of all, because or for he is good.

That's one of those phrases, isn't it? In the Bible, that you can read and not think of it. You can read it so quickly. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, steadfast love and Jewish forever.

We know that God is good. It's so easy to read it and just to move on. But it's the kind of phrase that we must meditate on, that we must stop and think about.

[3 : 26] And that little phrase there, for he is good. It highlights many things, but I want us to take three points from this little phrase because he is good.

First of all, that's a statement about the nature of God. It's telling us what God is like. And so although it's only a tiny bit phrase, it's actually a profound theological statement.

The top tells us what the nature of God is. God's being, God's nature is good. If we ask the question, what is God like, that verse is saying he is good.

And it's very, very important that we remember that when we think of God. When we think of God, we are standing before the Holy Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit, the one who is set apart, the one who is utterly majestic, the one who is indescribably powerful, the one who is just absolutely awesome.

But he is also good. And that reminds us that at the core of God's being is righteousness. That's really the direction that this word is pointing us to.

[4 : 42] The fact that God is righteous, that he is the one who defines what is right and wrong. He's the one who defines what is good as good and bad. God has this level of righteousness, this level of goodness.

And he conforms to it all the time. Right across every fiber of God's being is the fact that he is good. And his goodness is at a perfect level.

Now, this is important because we can think of lots of people in life who are good. We know people who are especially good. People you meet and you think, these people, I want to be like that person.

We all know what it's like to be that person. But even if you looked hard enough, you would find faults because you can find fault with anybody. But never was God.

And that's a scene especially in the perfect character of Jesus Christ. You look at how he conducted himself, how he behaved towards people, how he obeyed his father, how he spoke so wisely and tenderly, how he lived so perfectly.

[5 : 52] Jesus embodies that goodness that is of the very nature of God. And so if you allow your mind to turn to that perfect character of Jesus Christ and dwell on the fact that he was always, always good.

Even when he was provoked to the very limit of human capacity, what does Isaiah tell us? He was oppressed. He was afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth.

Like a lamb that has led to the slaughter, like a sheep that before its shears is silent. So he opened not his mouth. He never retaliated. He never lost the rank. He was always good.

And when we think of that perfect character of Jesus and then we compare that to so much of what we see in the world today, we think of all the things in the world today that are not good.

You think of all the social problems that we have. You think of housing schemes where there are just a massive amount of problems. You think of the mess that some people's lives are in. You think of things that happen even if it's bullying, or gossip, or criticism, or tension, or enmity between people, all of these things that we see in the daily world all the time.

[7 : 01] When we think of these things, and when we're discouraged by these things, we should always, always remember, God is not like that.

God is not like that. When people mistreat you, or when people mistreat others, remember God is not like that.

And that should make us run to God when we see everything that's wrong with the world. So God is good. But there's an important application for that, for us as well as God's people.

Because that is what people should think of when they think of the Church as an encounter. That they are worshipping a good God.

And very often, nowadays, the only way people are going to see the goodness of God is when they see it in us. That's why Jesus said, people, don't light a lamp and put it under a basket.

[8 : 03] But on a stand, then it gives light to all the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who's in heaven.

God's goodness is reflected in and through us in the way that we live our lives. So first of all, it's a statement about the nature of God.

But secondly, it's also a statement about the works of God. And in many ways, this is what this Psalm emphasizes.

You go through the Psalm and it traces out different aspects of God's work. Versus 4 to 9, talk about creation. Versus 10 to 20, talk about redemption, particularly of the people coming out of Egypt.

Versus 21 to 25, talk about God's provision and his protection. The emphasis of this Psalm in many ways is on God's works. And we see that God's works are good.

[9 : 02] When God does something, he does it well. God works are good works. Now, if we're talking about God's works, we can, I suppose, put them into three main categories.

There's creation. And there it is. I'm going to check in which order I put it in. So I do it right. Providence. And any guess?

Redemption. Well done, darling. Redemption. There we are. We put it into these three great categories.

And all of these are great works of God. We should, with creation, God never tired of us going outside and saying, wow, Lord, your works are amazing.

And so never, ever, ever hesitate to just stop when you're going into the car and look and think, oh, wow, Lord, getting to your works. And we just admire the works of his hands.

[10:10] Same with Providence. Every day, we should stop and say, and look at our food, and look at our clothes, and look at our home, and look at our central heating system, and look at our family, look at our security, look at the fact that we have a Bible in our hands in our own language.

And we say to God, thank you for providing these things. We are what we are, and we have what we have, because God's works are good.

And perhaps most of all, we just marvel at God's work of redemption, the fact that God has done a good work in order to save sinners.

God's saving work of redemption, planned by the Father, accomplished by the Son, applied by the Holy Spirit, from beginning to end, is a good work.

Now, here's a really important point. Never forget that God is a perfectionist. You see that in creation. It was created, and it was good.

[11:12] And whether you're looking at the tiniest intricacies of the human body or the vastness of the galaxies of space, you see that he's a perfectionist. Same with Providence, even in our own lives, we can see how things have fitted together in a way that we could never have imagined.

And in so many different ways, the world is sustained by the word of his power. God's work of Providence is perfect. There's that perfectionism, if you like, in God, in the work that he is doing. But it also applies to this, because God looks at sinners like you and me, and he says, I'm going to do a perfect work in and for that person.

And that's why the end point for our salvation is not the forgiveness of sins. God's goal for you is not that your sins will be forgiven. God's goal for you is that you will be conformed to the image of his Son, brought to that level of absolute perfection.

Now, here's something that's really, really important. A perfectionist is not somebody who only works with perfect things.

[12:25] If you think about perfectionists that you know, perfectionists isn't somebody who only works with perfect things. They don't say, I'm only ever going to use a gold plate and I'm only ever going to use a platinum tape measure or something like that.

A perfectionist is not somebody who only works with perfect things. A perfectionist is somebody who takes imperfect things and makes them perfect.

Now, as you know, I used to work as an engineer, and my colleague was my brother-in-law, Robbie, who most of you will know, or some of you will know, probably through work.

Robbie is a perfectionist. And Robbie buys an old, clapped-out shogun to tow his caravan.

And he spends months doing that old banger of a shogun up. And you go and you look at it, and it's perfect.

[13:19] And I have to hold my hands up and say, I'm the opposite. My car is lucky, but it gets petrified. And not much else attention. But Robbie is a perfectionist.

But as a perfectionist, Robbie isn't somebody who only works with perfection. He doesn't go to the shop and only buy a brand new, whatever, super fancy Mercedes, four by four.

He buys something that's imperfect, and he makes it perfect. That's what perfectionists do. They make things that are imperfect into that which is perfect. And that is what God is life with us.

He takes those who are far from perfect, and he starts his good, good work.

Now, we often don't feel like that. And I'm sure there's a lot of people sitting here who think I am such a failure to God.

[14:15] And it's so easy to feel like that, and I feel like that. And if you feel like that, I want you to hold on tight to the words that I'm about to say. Because the words I'm about to say are for you.

And they come from Philippians 1, verse 6. I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

God's work is good, and you are that work. And he'll never give up on you. So that's the second thing. I should really have numbered them as opposed.

Number one, and number two, we see that God by nature is good. The works of God are good.

Thirdly, and very, very importantly, whether we can write this or those sort of matches, we must remember God will be good to us.

God is good towards us. And that's really, really important to remember. If God is good by nature, which he is, and if his works are good to the point of perfection, which they are, that means that

God will always, always, always be good to you.

[15 : 45] Now, that's our vital, vital theological point. And it's something that we must, must, must make sure we understand. And the reason why we must make sure we understand that is because this is where the devil attacks us.

This is where the devil tries to get us to do it, because the devil cannot deny the nature of God. And so he doesn't attempt to. The devil cannot pretend that God's works aren't good.

They speak for themselves. But the devil can very, very, very easily put a doubt in your mind that God will be good to you.

And that's exactly what he did with Eve. Let's read what happened in Genesis 3. The serpent was more crafty than any other place that appeared that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden. But God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree, and that's in the midst of the garden.

[16 : 44] Neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Now, God gave that command to Adam and Eve. And he did it for their good. That principle applies to every command that God gives. He gives his commands for our good.

But the devil tries to get Eve to question that. And he's saying to her, God didn't give you this commandment for your goods. He's giving it to you because he knows that if you do, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, and you'll know good and evil.

And the devil is trying to solve the doubt in Eve's mind to say, God's not actually being good to you. God's not being good to you. God's actually trying to restrict you.

God sees you as a threat, and he's trying to keep you down there. And he's not being good to you.

And this commandment is an unfair restriction. God does not have your best interests at heart.

[17 : 47] That is what the devil is trying to say to Eve. That's at the heart of the devil's deception, that God will not be good to you. And we see exactly the same thing today.

The devil tries to sow the seed of dirty people's minds, which says, if you keep God's law, it's not going to do you good. And if you ignore God's commandment, it'll be better for you.

And that's why the devil says to you, don't bother praying. You don't have time. It's a burden. And you better get on with your day. Don't read your Bible, because you've got too much else to do.

Just allow yourself that wee bit of indulgence, because you need it, whether it's food or money or whatever other form of immoral pleasure the devil might try and tempt us with.

The devil tries to make us think that God is not interested in our good. And it is the deadliest trap, because it's the minute we do it that we fall into bondage.

[18 : 54] If we imagine somebody who is free to drink as much as they want all day, every day, and they do it, is that person free, or is that person in desperate bondage?

The devil is sowing that seed of doubt in Eve's mind that obeying God won't be for your good. And he does exactly the same with us. God says, the devil says, don't become a Christian just yet, because it won't be good for you.

Don't go to the prayer meeting, because people will be talking about you. Don't go forward, because it's going to change things in your life for the worse. Don't invite somebody to church, because it'll offend them.

Don't get involved in church activities, because you'll fail and you'll make a mess of it. Don't think of yourself as a missionary, because that's only for the good Christians, and you're not one of them.

Don't devote your life to God's service, because you are better off just holding back and keeping it safe.

These and many, many others are the kind of lies that the devil tells. And I have fallen for that kind of thought so many times. And I'm sure you can relate to this.

[20 : 04] Well, it happened to Eve. It happened to us all. We think to ourselves, God isn't going to be good to you. And we ask ourselves, what's the answer?

And the answer is to have an absolutely unbreakable grip on the truth that is contained in this verse, that God will be good to you.

If you profess faith in Jesus, God will be good to you. If you get involved in church work, God will be good to you.

If you go into every day praying that God will work through you, no matter how feeble you may be, God will be good to you. If life brings changes and challenges and things that you dreaded and never expected, God will be good to you.

And even if you make mistakes, God will be good to you.

[21 : 10] God is good, and he will always, always, always be good to you.

Now, you may ask, how can I be sure of that? How can I be sure? Well, that's why it's good we have the second part, because that brings us to the second reason that this verse gives, his steadfast love in Jewish.

Now, this is one of these wonderful places in the Bible that, dear me, I always preach for too long, but I could preach really much, much too long in a place like this. It's a wonderful place.

I'm going to break it down into three parts just quickly for us tonight in the last 10 minutes or so. So it's in three parts. The three parts are, first of all, steadfast love.

For his steadfast love endures forever. Now, that phrase, steadfast love, is translating a Hebrew word, and the word is hesed.

[22 : 20] And the reason I'm giving you that Hebrew word is because it's a word that's pretty much impossible to translate into English, because it is describing a love that no one word in English can capture.

It's a love that is totally committed. That's why we have the word steadfast. It is absolutely committed. It's a covenant love. It's a love that's associated with God's covenant relationship with his people.

It is a totally committed love. And it's a love that goes right down to your very core. And so you think of the core of God, you will find steadfast love, right into the very, very depth of your being.

A heartfelt love. But it doesn't stay in there. It also expands through your whole being, and it manifests itself in action. And so it's a love that moves you to do something for the one you love, to act, to help, to do whatever you can for the benefit of the one to whom you have this love.

There's just no way of translating it perfectly into English. It is the deepest, deepest love. And it is exactly the kind of love that we see in Jesus Christ.

[23 : 36] We see in Jesus Christ and in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that God is so, so, so committed to you, that his love for you goes to his very core, which is why the Bible says it's that God is love.

God is defined by his love. And that love comes from his very core and moves him into action, which is why 1 John 4 says, in this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him.

In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Remember what I said? God is a perfectionist. And he loves you with that perfect, steadfast, untranslatable love.

His love is that. Amazing. So that's the first, I feel like, part that we're going to look at, the wonderful, wonderful, steadfast love of God.

[24 : 48] The second part of this verse is indicated by this word, his. Now that is telling us something about this steadfast love.

If you look at that phrase, the main word, if you like, is steadfast love. That's the focal point. But we're told a couple of things about it. First of all, we're told that it is his steadfast love.

The steadfast love is God's love. Now that's really, really important to remember. But it seems basic. But let's just think about it. And steadfast minds to think about the implications of that.

It is God's love that is the foundation of the gospel. It is God's love that is the foundation of our faith and our hope.

It is his, which means it belongs to him. It is his prerogative. It is his thing, as we would say. It is his steadfast love.

[25 : 50] And that is so important because it's a wonderful, wonderful reminder that our relationship with God is ultimately dependent not on us, but on him.

God loves you not because of your goodness or because of your worthiness or because of your loveliness. He loves you because this is his love.

And at that core of the unchangeable being of God is his steadfast love for you. And that's why the Bible tells us that we have been chosen in his love before the foundation of the world.

And that is why when we fail and mess up and stumble as Christians, our feelings have no effect on his love because it's his love.

It's his thing. And so at one level, I want to be careful when I say this because I don't want to confuse you, at one level, God's love is totally out of bounds to us.

[27 : 02] At one level, God's love is totally out of bounds. Now, what do I mean by that? Well, we often think of God's love as a fire.

So think of God's love as a fire, like that. God's love for you is like a fire burning. And we think that when we make mistakes, we quench it.

Our mistakes are like splashes of water getting thrown on that fire. We muck up and God's love diminishes. We make a mistake and we come back to church or come back to read in your Bible or come back to prayer or whatever.

And we think God's love for me is nowhere near to the walls because of everything that I have done. We feel very often that our faults and our feelings have an effect on God's love, don't we? Well, if you think like that, you are totally, totally wrong because God's love for you is out of bounds in the sense that your mistakes have no effect on it.

[28 : 19] You cannot dampen God's love for you because it's his love. It's his thing, not your thing. You're not earning it.

You're not making it what it is. You're not fanning it into flame. You're not having any effect on it because it's his. And he loves you.

And he'll never change. It's God's prerogative. And the depth and the strength of God's love is his business.

And you can't muck it up because the steadfast love of God as we sang in Psalm 36 extends to the heavens.

So if you want to think of God's love as a fire, I would recommend thinking of it like the fire of the sun. Have you tried quenching the fire in the sun?

[29 : 17] And had any success? No. That's a better image because just as the strength of the sun's heat and fire is out of your reach and out of bounds to you, so too is God's love.

We simply bask in its splendor. And receive the amazing, amazing privilege of being loved by God. Now you may think to yourself, hold on Thomas. If we fail, God doesn't ignore that. God will rebuke us, won't he?

That's absolutely true. But that's not because he doesn't love you anymore, it's because he does. And as our father loves our child and disciplines the child, that's exactly what God says, because his steadfast love for you, well, this tells us, doesn't it?

It endures whatever it is out of bounds. And so it's really, really good, I think, to reflect on the word his. His love for you is his love.

[30 : 39] His, his. And hold on to that. And that's why Eve News is good. That's why Eve News as a church is good, good, good news, because we can say to everyone, anybody in here or anybody in Carlyway who is longing for salvation and longing to be loved by God and knows that they need to be saved, we can say his love for you is just incredible.

And all you've got to do is trust in him. We've got really, really, really good news. Anyway, I'm so excited by that word, because I'm in the Mid-Kaida way. We've got to go on to the last one.

As I said, this is the main word here, steadfast love. The word his tells us one thing about it. This phrase tells us something else.

His love endures forever. That's a statement of who the love belongs to, it's God's. This is a statement of the quality of that love or the level at which that love operates.

Literally in Hebrew, it says to forever his love. Now we add the word endures because it helps us to understand more clearly what is meant. But basically it's saying God's love operates in the realm of forever.

[32 : 00] And that word forever is one of my favorite words. It's just amazing, because it speaks of so many things. I'm going to mention two. It speaks of constancy and it speaks of permanence.

God's love for you is constant. You think of all the changes of life, you think of all the uncertainties of life, all the challenges of life, all the things that come out of way that knock us and that trouble us, all the things that change that we wish would never change.

One thing doesn't change. The constancy of God's steadfast love. God's love for you is constant.

And that doesn't depend on how you're feeling, whether good or bad. You wake up tomorrow morning, you go to bed tonight, you lie asleep at half three this morning or whenever. God's steadfast love for you is constant. But it's not just constant, it's also permanent. And there's a subtle difference between the two.

[33 : 11] Constant is like the day to day to day to day to day of reliability. Permanence tells us of the end destination and there isn't one because it goes on and on and on. If you imagine that your life is a book, on the first page, the first sentence is this, it is God saying, I love you.

And if you turn through the thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of pages in that book and you go to the very last page in the very last sentence and God says, I still love you.

God's steadfast love endures forever. That's the realm at which it operates, in the realm of forever. God is a perfectionist and his love is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, perfect.

And that is why we know that this is true, that God will always be good to you because his love operates at the level of forever.

Now we have to remember that the world can never ever give us a forever promise. And we know that that's true. Nothing is guaranteed to us, whether in terms of people or in terms of ourselves, in terms of our health, our strength, our situation, our world.

[34 : 44] Things change. Nobody can give us a forever promise. But God promises us his love and he promises it forever.

It is a forever promise. And you know, behind that phrase there lies all the amazing doctrine of scripture.

Lies God's perfect plan of redemption, lies all the pages of the Bible and all the different pieces that came together, culminating most of all in the passion and work of Jesus Christ and everything that he did for you and the fact that he is now exalted at the Father's right hand and he has sent his spirit to come into our hearts and do that perfect work of redemption.

Behind all of that, behind that phrase is all of that incredible work because that is why God did it all. Because his steadfast love for you is at that level.

It is at the level that can never give up. You know that word forever means never give up, doesn't it? You can't give up and do something forever.

[35 : 57] And so that word tells you that God will never, ever, ever give up on you if you are trusting in him.

And we must keep that at the forefront of our minds and it should shape the way we live and it should shape our priorities and our whole lives are to be lived in his service, trusting him.

Now, that's the two reasons. So remember when I said at the start that the Rabbi did all my scribbles.

The verse is in three parts. The first part is an imperative, which reads a command.

An imperative just means stand up, open the door, do that, do this, whatever. It's an instruction. It's something that we have to do. And so we are told to give thanks to the Lord.

[37 : 04] And implicit in this verse is the question, why? We are here to give thanks to God. We're here at a thanksgiving service and instantly naturally we ask the question, why?

And the verse gives us two subordinate clauses of reason indicated by the word for two reasons.

And in just ten words, is that right? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

In ten words, God gives us reason to thank him for all time. Give thanks to the Lord for he is lived, for his steadfast love, and Jewish forever.

Amen.