

Thanking the One from Whom All Blessings Flow

Psalm 136:1-26

Halifax: 8 October 2023

Introduction

Monday is Thanksgiving Day.

- In many ways, it is a vestige from the past when our society as a whole acknowledged God as the source of every blessing.
- It was a day set apart to give thanks to Him.

It is a curious thing that there are many in our society who do not acknowledge God who still think it is important to, as they say, “Be thankful.”

- They know that it helps their overall attitude and mental wellbeing to consider the good things they have received and experienced.
- That actually makes sense, but the curious thing is that many of them do not regard anyone as the source of the things they are thankful for.
 - In other words, they don’t know who to thank—they are just thankful in the air—or in a vacuum. This affects us too.

This being so, I thought we would do well, with Thanksgiving coming up, to consider the one to whom thanks is to be constantly given.

- The Scripture passage I have chosen is Psalm 136.
- Listen. I will read it to you.
 - But before I begin, make sure that you understand that this is God’s word. Everything in the Bible is God’s Word.
 - That means that it is words that He gave us through His Spirit. His Spirit worked in men to enable them write what He wanted them to write to help us know Him.
 - The men who wrote these words knew that they had God’s Spirit to enable them to convey His message to us—to write, not the word of man, but the word of God that effectively works in those who believe.
- So consider well these words from Psalm 136 as I read them to you.
 - The songs of praise compiled in the Book of Psalms were given to the church to be used in her praises.
 - Jesus is the head of the church, and He has directed us to sing them before the Father. He (Jesus) leads the way, bringing to God a heart of true adoration and devotion, a heart of true wisdom, that is pleasing to the Father. As we sing under His headship (in His name as Saviour), God is very pleased with our praises.

Listen then to Psalm 136. This is the Word of God:

Psalm 136:1-26: Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever. ² Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy *endures* forever. ³ Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy *endures* forever: ⁴ to Him who alone does great wonders, for His mercy *endures* forever; ⁵ to Him who by wisdom made the heavens, for His mercy *endures* forever; ⁶ to Him who laid out the

earth above the waters, for His mercy *endures* forever; ⁷ to Him who made great lights, for His mercy *endures* forever— ⁸ the sun to rule by day, for His mercy *endures* forever; ⁹ the moon and stars to rule by night, for His mercy *endures* forever.

¹⁰ To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹¹ and brought out Israel from among them,

for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹² with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹³ to Him who divided the Red Sea in two, for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹⁴ and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹⁵ but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹⁶ to Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹⁷ to Him who struck down great kings, for His mercy *endures* forever; ¹⁸ and slew famous kings, for His mercy *endures* forever— ¹⁹ Sihon

king of the Amorites, for His mercy *endures* forever; ²⁰ and Og king of Bashan, for His mercy *endures* forever— ²¹ and gave their land as a heritage, for His mercy *endures* forever; ²² a heritage to Israel His servant, for His mercy *endures* forever.

²³ Who remembered us in our lowly state, for His mercy *endures* forever; ²⁴ and rescued us from our enemies, for His mercy *endures* forever; ²⁵ who gives food to all flesh, for His mercy *endures* forever. ²⁶ Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy *endures* forever.

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading and now to the preaching of His holy word.

This Psalm has but one concern...

- The whole Psalm is one great summons to give thanks to God.
 - It gives us the directive in verses 1-3 and in the last verse,
 - And it gives a list of particular reasons to thank Him in verses 4-25.
- When we sing it as God's covenant people in Christ, it serves not only as a summons, but it becomes itself an expression of our thanks to Him...
 - We call to each other's minds the great things He has done, and in Christ our praise rises up to Him like sweet incense as an offering of thanksgiving.

Let's take a closer look.

I. The Psalm opens with a strong summons to direct our thanks to God.

A. We need this strong summons!

- We need it because it is a rare day for God to hear expressions of thanksgiving to rise from us to Him in this fallen sinful world.
 1. Very often, we have little appreciation for the many mercies we enjoy each day—for the bread and water that sustain us, for the beauty that is all around us, and for all the good things of this life.
 - The God who made us is much more likely to hear curses and expressions of anger and frustration than expressions of gratitude.
 2. But even when we do have a spirit of gratitude, our thanksgiving is rarely directed to God.
 - We may thank other people, or mother nature...
 - We may speak of being thankful for this and that, but it is quite rare for us to actually thank the LORD Himself who is the author of every blessing.
 3. And perhaps even worse, we often give thanks to some idol instead of to the true God.
 - We give thanks to false gods that we or others have made up in our heads.

- Romans 1 identifies the problem when it says in verse 21-23: **although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.**
 - No thanks at all is offensive, but expressions of thanksgiving directed to idols are actually even more offensive to God.
 - He will not give His glory to another.
 - The prophet Habakkuk speaks of the wicked who have success and burn incense to their own net. They credit themselves instead of God.
 - The problem is that we don't want to acknowledge God's holiness and majesty, His infinite power and divine nature... that He is a God against whom we have sinned and with whom we must be reconciled through His Son's death on the cross... so we find other places to direct our thanks.
 - We are full of pride.
 - We want God to overlook our sin. Only then we will have Him—only then we will thank Him.
 - Don't you find that you are more comfortable expressing your gratitude to forces (the sun came out just in time for our walk, my package arrived just in time) than you are to give thanks to God?
 - This is what drives us to come up with a god—a false god—who will have us without bothering about reconciliation—either a god who is not so holy as God actually is, or a god who is impersonal (a force that we can manipulate).
 - But you cannot make God as you wish.
 - He is what He is, and you must deal with Him—
 - When you do—when you truly know and acknowledge the true God—you will find Him to be far more beautiful and glorious than you ever dreamed.
 - It was a happy day for Job when he was able to say to God, “I heard about you with the hearing of my ear, but now my eye sees you.”
 - He knew the true God before, but when he saw more of His glory and majesty, he was filled with delighted praise!
- Let's look at this strong summons to give thanks to God with which this Psalm opens.
- B. The three opening verses each begin with the words, **“O give thanks to God.”**
1. In the Old Testament, when something is important, it is simply repeated.
 - When it is really important, it is repeated three times!
 - So let it sink in—O give thanks to God! O give thanks to God! O give thanks to God!
 - This is something you need to actually do.
 - Don't just talk about it—actually say “thank you” to God.

2. The entire Psalm is subordinate to this three-fold call to thank Him...
 - Every verse that follows, except for the concluding verse, is subordinate to this summons to “give thanks to God”—
 - Look, for example, at verse 4 as an example of the pattern that all the other verses follow. It says, “to Him who alone does great wonders.”
 - That doesn’t make any sense without the main clause, “O give thanks to the God of gods... to Him who does great wonders.”
 - All the other verses are like that. They are all subordinate clauses that give us reasons to give thanks to God.
 3. The words “give thanks” translate the Hebrew word *yaw-dow*.
 - It is a word that means “to confess.”
 - It means “to speak the truth about something or someone.”
 - When we *confess*—*say the truth* about ourselves, we confess our sins.
 - That is what stands out about us before God.
 - But when we confess the truth about Him, we speak of His greatness and His perfections: “You are holy and righteous.”
 - When we speak of what He does, it comes out as expressions of thanksgiving. “You delivered us when we were helpless.”
 - And so it is that when this word is used to speak about God, it is normally translated either by the word, “praise,” or, as here in Psalm 136, with the words “give thanks.”
 - We are simply to confess the truth about God and about what He has done for us as His people—we praise Him and give thanks to His name!
- But that is not all that we find in these three opening verses.
- B. Each one of these verses is also aimed at making sure that we direct our thanks to the right place—to the true and living God.
- We have seen how that is a problem for us as sinners.
1. Verse 1 describes Him as “the LORD.”
 - When the word *Lord* appears in our Bibles with all uppercase letters, it refers to God’s sacred covenant name, Yahweh, or Jehovah.
 - This is the name He told Moses to use when he led the people out of Egypt, and it is the name that God made known by the wonders He performed to humble Egypt.
 - This name means, “I am that I am.”
 - It speaks of the LORD as the one who is self-existing—the one who is uncreated, but has His being from everlasting.
 - He simply exists. No one made Him, He does not change. He simply gloriously *is what He is*.
 - This name distinguishes Him from all other gods that are mere idols.
 - He is the One to whom we are to give thanks!

2. Verse 2 describes Him as *the God of gods*.
 - This title, *God of gods*, obviously sets Him above all others as the one and only true God.
 - There are others who call themselves gods, but He is the only true God—He is the God of gods.
 - If our thanks is not directed to Him, it is misdirected to another who is not truly God, but a demon or an idol.
3. Verse 3 describes the One to whom we are to give thanks as the Lord of lords.
 - This is a different Hebrew word than *Yahweh*.
 - This word, *Adonai* speaks of Him as the sovereign ruler over all things or as the Master.
 - He is the Ruler of rulers, Master of masters, the Lord of lords.
 - The final judge to whom all must answer.
 - Everyone must answer to Him.
 - He is also the one who sovereignly directs the affairs of the world.
 - The Bible says that all things work after the counsel of His own will. Every crust of bread you have ultimately come from Him.
 - You are to give thanks to Him.
 - Even when hard things—even terrible things come—you are still to give thanks for His mercy—that your trouble was not nearly as great as you deserve and that He sustained you through it.
 - That is the respect we are to show to Him.
 - The disciples in Acts 4 gave thanks that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus when they were beaten for preaching about Him and for healing in His name.

➤ So you see then, our praise is to be directed to this one who is Yahweh, the self-existing One, the God of gods and the Lord of lords.

 - He is the one who at last blesses or curses.
 - He is the ultimate author of every blessing, so all praises and thanksgivings must be directed up to Him as the fountain and source of all our mercies.

TRANS> So then, having seen that we are to give thanks to the true God, we are now ready to look at:

II. The reasons we are to give thanks to Him.

- A. The first reason is given in verse 1—“**Give thanks to the LORD because He is good.**”
 1. The word *good* here means just that—in the plainest broadest sense, God is good.
 - There is nothing false in Him, no impurity, no blemishes or flaws.
 - He is simply good.
 2. He also does good—only good, only what is noble and upright, just and true.
 - a. When we look at the creatures that God made, we see how He naturally delights in them. It is His native disposition to love them.

- There is that little statement in Genesis where it says that He looked on all that He had made, and behold it was very good.
 - He took delight in His creatures. He found pleasure in them.
- We see that He walked with Adam in the Garden in the cool of the day.
 - What a delightful thing this must have been. The God of infinite glory walking with those that He made.
- And even now, we see the holy angels who did not fall—how happy they are, praising Him and doing His bidding.
 - How good He is to them.
 - It is His way to be good. He is good.
- b. Of course, creatures who fell into sin do not think God is good.
 - They find fault with Him. We all do because we are all sinners.
 - They say He is unkind because His wrath and judgment fell upon them for their sins.
 - But this is His goodness, for He will not allow wickedness to stand.
 - It behooves us to repent—we must confess that we are the ones who are in the wrong—we are the ones who are not good. We must admit it.
 - Those who have been reconciled to Him through Christ see that He is good, and they come to know that more and more fully as the years go by.
 - More and more they see mercy everywhere.
- Yes, we are to give thanks to the true God because He is good!
 - The second reason we ought to give thanks to God is also found in the first verse.
 - In fact, it is found at the end of every verse of this Psalm!
- B. We ought to thank Him because **His mercy endures forever!**
 1. The word *mercy* translates the Hebrew word *hesed*.
 - It is a marvellously rich word that is well worth knowing.
 - It speaks of God’s faithful covenant mercy and love.
 - It is a loyal love that God sets upon His elect angels and His elect people—He has mercy on them forever, He sets His love on them forever.
 - Some Bibles translate it with the words “steadfast love.”
 - That is a very excellent way to translate it—
 2. It was a love that would not rest until it had secured our salvation in Christ—until Christ had come and given Himself for our sins.
 - Then it was a love that pursued you until it secured you in this salvation—if indeed you are among those God has called.
 - “I loved you,” says God, “therefore I have drawn you.”
 - And now, it is a love that will not rest until He at last brings to glory to live in His house forever and ever in a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells forever.
 - It is a mercy that is fixed upon us forever, a love that endures forever.

3. It is our appreciation for this *hesed*, this covenant mercy, this steadfast love, that is the foundation of all our thanksgiving.
 - It is at the heart and the root of it all—it grows out from it and there is not true thanks to the true God without it.
 - Until we have come to God in Christ, we cannot give thanks to the true God—for as Jesus said,
 - **Mt 11:27: All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**
 - We simply do not know the Father unless we know Him as Christ has revealed Him by His cross.
 - We cannot be grateful because, until we know Him in Christ crucified, we are His enemies.
 - If we think we love Him without Christ, we are wrong—it is not the true God, but an idol that we love.
 - The true God is the one who will not have any of us without Christ our Saviour. He is too good to have us without Christ.
 - Once we see that—and once we see what He did to save us—and once we come to Him, then and only then are we thankful—because then and only then do we see that His mercy endures forever—that His steadfast love endures forever.

C. In verses 4-25 we have a list of things that we ought to thank God for.

1. Verse 4 introduces them as wonders that He has done for us.
 - Wonders are things that are beyond human power that God has done for us.
 - They are words that surpass human wisdom and ability—mercies that are performed by God for us—to bless us.
2. Verse 5-9 include the wonders of creation—
 - **⁵ To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, for His mercy *endures* forever; ⁶ to Him who laid out the earth above the waters, for His mercy *endures* forever; ⁷ to Him who made great lights, for His mercy *endures* forever— ⁸ the sun to rule by day, for His mercy *endures* forever; ⁹ the moon and stars to rule by night, for His mercy *endures* forever.**
 - God made all of these things especially for us.
 - He made the heavens such that they inspire wonder and amazement in us—they display the glory of God by their vastness—by their extravagance.
 - On earth, He separated the dry land from the water, giving us a delightful place for our habitation—
 - With all kinds of interesting things to experience, to explore, to figure out, to develop, to entertain, to enjoy.
 - Everything from metals that can be made into jewels and machines to marriage and the marriage act that can express love and bring forth babies.

- When men reject God, they worship all of these glorious things, but when they are reconciled to God, they give thanks for them all—because His mercy endures forever... the mercy of our God who made these wonders.
3. Verse 10–22 speak of the wonders God performed when He delivered His church out of Egypt and brought them into the promised land.
- Most of you know the story.
 - Israel was in bondage under the most powerful nation in the world, and God came to take them out to be His people and to serve Him.
 - Verse 10-11: **To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, for His mercy endures forever; ¹¹ and brought out Israel from among them, for His mercy endures forever;**
 - Do you know Him as the God who delivers us from bondage? Have you been delivered from the controlling hand of Satan—set free to serve God? Then give thanks.
 - ¹² **With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, for His mercy endures forever; ¹³ to Him who divided the Red Sea in two, for His mercy endures forever; ¹⁴ and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for His mercy endures forever;**
 - He removes insurmountable barriers that stand between us and Him... the mountains of Bether that separate us from Him... He brings them down or opens a pathway through them so that we can serve Him.
 - His mercy endures forever! Yes?
 - ¹⁵ **But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, for His mercy endures forever;**
 - He crushes Satan and wo who stand in league with Satan.
 - ¹⁶ **To Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His mercy endures forever;**
 - We come up from the wilderness of sin, leaning on our beloved redeemer, Jesus Christ—we are brought out of the pit and established on the rock. Isn't it so? Then give thanks to Him for His mercy that endures forever.
 - ¹⁷ **to Him who struck down great kings, for His mercy endures forever; ¹⁸ and slew famous kings, for His mercy endures forever—¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites, for His mercy endures forever; ²⁰ and Og king of Bashan, for His mercy endures forever—²¹ and gave their land as a heritage, for His mercy endures forever; ²² a heritage to Israel His servant, for His mercy endures forever.**
 - There are giants that stand against us—giants before whom we are so small—but the LORD overthrows them all.
 - They may hold possession of the earth for a time, but it is not them, but the meek that will inherit the earth—those who wait on the Lord.
 - My brothers and sisters, as part of the church, this deliverance is our deliverance.

- It was in this that God showed us clearly that He is LORD. It was in this that He showed us the power He has over our adversaries—that none of them can keep us from serving Him.
 - He showed us that He is committed to delivering us that He might bring us into His house to serve Him.
 - These things became even more richly and fully displayed when Jesus came, and they will be all the more displayed when He returns and perfects all who trust in Him.
 - It is appropriate for us to give thanks for all of these wonders, for His mercy endures forever.
4. Even though we have fallen so low, fallen into the clutches of Satan and his minions, verse 23-25 remind us of what God has done:
- He is the one (verse 23): **Who remembered us in our lowly state, for His mercy endures forever; ²⁴ and rescued us from our enemies, for His mercy endures forever; ²⁵ who gives food to all flesh, for His mercy endures forever.**
 - Our thanks is multiplied when we remember our lowly, miserable condition.
 - He found us in our own blood, defiled in our own filth, and He rescued us.
 - But why does it add that He gives food to all flesh?
 - It adds this to show His general benevolence and kindness. Here is the God who rescues us and saves us—He is the God who feeds His creatures from the least of them to the greatest of them because He is good.
 - This is the God who restores us.

Conclusion: Everything is summed up in verse 26:

- **V. 26: Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever.**
- Thanks is due to His name.
 - Recount all that He has done.
 - Don't just be thankful but see that you actually give thanks to Him.
 - It is fitting because His steadfast love endures forever.