

Psalm 136

Give Thanks to the Lord

The text for our consideration for Thanksgiving Eve is Psalm 136. The way the Psalm was written suggests that it was designed for responsive singing in Temple worship. With that in mind, I'll ask you to read the parts of the Psalm responsively with me as we come to each section.

We start with the introduction of the Psalm: verses 1-3. Please read responsively with me.

Psalm 136:1-3

Introduction

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

For his mercy endures forever.

²Give thanks to the God of Gods.

For his mercy endures forever.

³Give thanks to the Lord of Lords.

For his mercy endures forever.

Thanksgiving. Across our nation people stop to give thanks. Lots of people are thankful. Business people are thankful for profits. Wives and husbands are thankful for a happy and secure home. Children are thankful for parents who love them.

It's certainly good to give thanks for those things. God provides for us every day. In his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, Luther says that God preserves us "by richly and daily providing... all I need to keep my body and life." Each day we are alive, God does many things for us.

God planned all those blessings long in advance of today—long in advance of the day any of us were born. Let's read the next part of the Psalm.

Psalm 136:4-9

His Creating Love

⁴To him who alone does great wonders—

For his mercy endures forever.

⁵To him who by his understanding made the heavens—

For his mercy endures forever.

⁶To him who spread out the earth on the waters—

For his mercy endures forever.

⁷To him who made the great lights,

For his mercy endures forever.

⁸the sun to rule by day,

For his mercy endures forever.

⁹the moon and stars to rule by night—

For his mercy endures forever.

By using this Psalm in their temple worship, the people were remembering the great things God had done for them by creating this magnificent planet and setting the universe

into motion. To this day, and to the very end of time, human beings will continue to learn more and more about the universe. Those who understand by faith that God created all of it will marvel at each new discovery, realizing anew how wise and powerful our God is—a God who could foresee every conceivable intricacy and why it was necessary. A God who has given us so many and so varied blessings with the world he created for us to enjoy.

Join me in reading the next section.

Psalm 136:10-22

His Redeeming Love

- ¹⁰To him who struck Egypt by killing their firstborn,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹¹and brought Israel out from their midst,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹²with a mighty hand and outstretched arm—
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹³To him who cut the Red Sea in two,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹⁴and brought Israel through the middle of it,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹⁵but brushed off Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea—
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹⁶To him who made his people travel through the wilderness—
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹⁷To him who struck down great kings,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹⁸and killed mighty kings,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ¹⁹Sihon king of the Amorites,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ²⁰and Og king of Bashan,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ²¹and gave their land as a possession,
For his mercy endures forever.
- ²²a possession to his servant Israel.
For his mercy endures forever.

God displayed his redeeming love to Israel. He redeemed them—he bought them back—from the slavery they endured in the land of Egypt. He preserved their nation alive until he finally brought them to the land that he had promised to give to Abraham’s descendants.

But there is something even more important. God’s promise to Abraham included more than a land to live in, it included the fact that God would send a Savior through the line of Abraham. The Psalm remembers that in God’s redeeming love he kept the line of the Savior alive.

The Bible tells us “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, EHV). God’s love for us and the sacrifice he made for us of his only-begotten Son, Jesus, is priceless.

God was not obligated to provide a way of salvation for human beings. No one forced him to send his Son. God did it because he loved us. From the beginning of the world, God knew that on this day each one of us would meet here at this church to have a Thanksgiving service. He knew that, unless he sent a Savior into the world, every single one of us would be doomed to eternal death in hell.

Long before we were born God thought of us. Long before we were born, God took pity on us. In his mercy, when the time was right, God sent a Savior for us. A few shepherds were the first to hear all about it. An angel appeared to them and said: “Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people” (Luke 2:10, EHV).

And so it is. The good news for all people was that God, in his Redeeming Love, was beginning the final chapter in the history of his saving work for all people. It would take 33 years to bring to completion.

Jesus grew up on this earth much like children today grow up. He was thirsty, just like we are. He got hungry. He was tempted by Satan, just like we are, but he never once fell into sin the way we do. When people cursed him, he did not curse back. When others made him suffer, he did not retaliate. Even when he was dying on the cross, he asked for forgiveness for his enemies. God’s plan to redeem did not end with Jesus’ death. Three days later he rose from the dead.

It had been 33 years since the angels first gave the message to the shepherds in the field. Redemption was—and is—no longer a plan in the mind of God. When Jesus said “It is finished” from the cross, and when he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, salvation was an accomplished historical fact.

Read responsively with me the final section.

Psalm 136:23-26

His Continuing Love

²³Who remembered us in our low condition,

For his mercy endures forever.

²⁴and tore us out of the hands of our oppressors.

For his mercy endures forever.

²⁵He gives food to all living creatures.

For his mercy endures forever.

²⁶Give thanks to the God of the heavens.

For his mercy endures forever.

God did not stop doing things for his people, even after redemption was gained. The historical facts about what God has done for all people doesn’t mean anything if you don’t get to hear it.

God remembered us in our low condition. He preserved the means by which people could know about the great good news promised long ago to Abraham and his descendants; the news announced by angels to shepherds watching their flocks near Bethlehem.

God preserved his Word—the Bible—the Holy Scriptures for us through every natural and unnatural catastrophe you can possibly imagine. God has seen to it that the Bible has survived through earthquakes, fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and volcanoes. He preserved it through everything for one reason: because he loves you and me so much he

wants us to read and hear this message. It's a message so simple even a child can understand it: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

It's a message that is simple, yet it is profound. He remembered us in our low condition. We could not possibly have known what he did for us in Jesus unless he had remembered us and brought this message down to us through the centuries.

He tore us out of the hands of our oppressors. By nature each human being is born a sinner. By nature we are in the clutches of Satan. He oppresses us, making us believe that we couldn't possibly be loved by God—that God could want nothing to do with us.

God sent the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit you and I wouldn't have much interest in the contents of Scripture. By ourselves we would want nothing to do with God. The Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts that believes the message the angels brought to the Shepherds. The Savior is born. He brings joy for all people. We live in that joy because God loved us long before we were born.

God didn't stop even there. Remember that last verse? "Give thanks to the God of the heavens. For his mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:26, EHV).

Our God is the God of the heavens. The God who's mercy endures forever. At this very moment, he has prepared even greater things for us when we leave this world. Our life in heaven with him will be like nothing we have ever known before.

Lots of people have speculated about what heaven will be like. One thing we know for sure. John tells us in Revelation: "From the throne I heard a loud voice that said, 'Look! God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away'" (Revelation 21:3-4, EHV). Give thanks to the Lord. Heaven is the place we want to be.

Thanksgiving isn't just about one day. Remember to thank God every day. He has given us many blessings in this life: food and drink, clothing, money, government, good weather, peace, health, friends, and family. There are many, many things we could add to the list.

No matter how many things you could think of, don't let physical blessings so dominate your thoughts that you forget to thank God for the spiritual blessings he has given us in Christ Jesus. Only through Jesus do we receive eternal life. There is no greater gift than eternity in heaven with him.

Give thanks this Thanksgiving for Jesus. He is the One who has heaven waiting for us when we leave this world.

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. For his mercy endures forever." (Psalm 136:1, EHV). Amen.