

Unending Thanksgiving

Psalm 136:1-26

Matthew 26:30 says that “when they had sung a hymn they went out.” That is a reference to the eve of Jesus’s crucifixion just after they had eaten the Passover dinner. There are some scholars who believe that Psalm 136 is the Psalm that Jesus and the disciples sang following their meal. We don’t know that for sure, but it was often sung as worshippers entered the Temple. You will notice that it is thanksgiving in the present tense for God’s past blessings and future provisions.

The structure of the Psalm is done antiphonally. Think of a choir divided into two sections. One section of the choir begins by reciting something for which they are thankful and the second section repeats with what we would call a refrain. It is a familiar section in many of our hymns. A hymn may have several verses and after each verse or stanza the same refrain is repeated.

For example, look at Hymn #796.

A refrain could be sung by everyone or by a section who responds antiphonally or in alternation back and forth.

The Psalm in its entirety calls on the congregation coming together to worship God to give thanks to Him because of His steadfast love throughout its history. It begins with thanksgiving for creation in general and then narrows to thanksgiving for God’s provisions for them as a nation. As we see from this Psalm, it shows us that God is not some detached Creator who either has ignored His creation or in some way abandoned it. He is ever present and actively involved to bring about His purposes as we understand in Jesus’ model prayer when He instructs that we pray for God’s “will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

As I look at this Psalm I see four sections. We see

who we are to give thanks to, followed by the reasons we are to give thanks, ending once more with a reminder of who it is we give our thanks to. My outline will follow four points in our thanksgiving.

Give thanks because of God’s character
 Give thanks because of God’s creation
 Give thanks because of God’s conduct
 Give thanks because of God’s care

I. GIVE THANKS BECAUSE OF GOD’S CHARACTER – vs. 1-3

Now you may have noticed if you have a KJV Bible that the NIV leaves out a simple two letter word. It’s the word “Oh”. That may seem insignificant to you but I think it has meaning. I don’t know Hebrew to understand if it is implied in the original or if it was omitted by the translators of the NIV. It could be that it is implied given the context of the passage and so left out of NIV because it would be assumed.

So whether implied or not it gives meaning to what is stated. The great pulpeteer Charles Spurgeon stated that the word “Oh” is an exhortation that is intensely earnest. It is a plea to those worshipping God to offer Him their thanksgiving because He deserves it for everything He has done for us. Spurgeon continues by stating that thanksgiving is the least we can do and offer God.

I saw many of my friends post notes on Thanksgiving Day, many of them are not Christians.

Thankful for my family, parents, kids
 Thankful for our meal
 Thankful for this and that and the other
 But thankful to whom?

I suggest to you this morning that if we don’t know to whom our thanks should be directed, it is empty, perhaps even meaningless thanksgiving.

This is a reminder of our thanksgiving directed to the One who made it possible – to God.

When we consider character we think of a name.

A. Give Thanks Because of God's Name –
vs. 1-3

A name is not just something by which you are identified, but something that reveals your character, it's your reputation. Notice in verse 1 that He is good.

1. He is good – v. 1

Again, Spurgeon says that “essentially He (God) is goodness itself.”

It is not just good in quality, which in His case we know to be true, but also includes good in character. Everything about Him is perfect. He is described in Scripture as being holy – because He is. He is without sin.

We see that He is good especially in our time of need as He delivers us from those difficulties or as He gives us peace in those difficulties. Regardless of whether that trial remains He is good.

Psalm 34:1-8

We read in Genesis 1:1-31 that what He made was good and in the end of the creation week it was very good. Now I see that both in the fact that what He created could not be improved on. It could not have been made any differently to make it better and it was also made perfect not only in quality but also in character. Only after man's sin, did all of creation begin to groan under the curse that affected everything He had made.

He is good.

He is God of gods.

2. He is the God of gods – v. 2

There are some who take this verse to mean that the

Hebrews believed in many gods. But a careful reading of Deuteronomy 6:4 reveals the true nature of the God they believed in. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” What this verse means is this: if there were more than one god, this God whom we serve is the one who surpasses them all. He is the God above every god, but in reality, in truth, there is no other God but one because there is only one God.

Now for example, the Hindus believe in one universal god called Brahma, but that there are some 33 million gods of every size and shape, essentially a god for everything, a form of this universal god.

God revealed Himself as the one true God and there is no other god besides Him. In reality anything that claims to be god but is inferior in nature to another God is then really not a god at all.

Deuteronomy 10:17

He is good.

He is God.

He is Lord.

3. He is the Lord of lords – v. 3

By this we mean that He is supreme, He is sovereign. He rules over everything and everyone.

It is a name or term that further emphasizes His authority implying as well that He is Master of His creation. There is no thing and no one who will ever usurp who He is or what He can do.

He sets up rulers and takes down rulers.

No one can thwart His plans or purposes.

I Chronicles 29:11-12

Throughout the Old Testament He has revealed Himself in so many different ways.

For example:

He is the great provider

He is the great protector

He is the great peace giver

He is the great power

We are to give thanks because God's character is revealed in His names.

We are to give thanks because God's character is revealed in His nature.

B. Give Thanks Because of God's Nature –
vs. 1-3

This is what we see repeated 26 times in the Psalm.
"His love endures forever."

Depending on your translation you will see a word interchanged.

KJV – "mercy"

NASB – "lovingkindness"

NIV – "love"

The Amplified – "mercy and lovingkindness"

ESV – "steadfast love"

Which is it Pastor? The answer is that any of these is correct. They all mean the same thing.

There is significance in the repetition not just in the nature of the song to be sung, but to emphasize the important truth of His nature. It is a theme that isn't repeated once too often. As a matter of fact, it is not repeated enough. It would be like singing that section of Handel's "Messiah" where repeated perhaps dozens of times that simple but profound word "*HALLELUJAH*". In fact this Psalm is called the Great Hallelujah.

We need His enduring mercy and love.

We should take comfort and give joy for His enduring mercy and love.

It is the sweetest refrain we can sing.

Here the Psalmist is not asking for it, but rejoicing and giving God thanks because of it.

Imagine for a moment, even if it were possible, a supreme God who had no mercy or showed little love. We considered last week Psalm 103. Let me remind you again of the mercy and love that is revealed there.

"The Lord is compassionate and gracious

(merciful), slow to anger, abounding in love (mercy). He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him... But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love (mercy) is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children." (Psalm 103:8-13, 17)

Just let that sink in for a moment.

God does not treat us as our sins deserve.

Have you ever done anything that your parents found out about but instead of punishing you withheld what you thought was coming?

Or think about the times when you did get disciplined but knew you deserved more.

God has not dealt with us according as our sins deserve. He is loving and patient.

We, unfortunately live in a society that believes in entitlements. People believe they deserve certain things.

I deserve this or that.

We all deserve something far greater from God because of our sin, but in His great mercy and love He holds it back. He is compassionate and gracious.

We sometimes sing that great hymn "*At Calvary*". It's another one of those songs where the refrain is repeated after each stanza.

Mercy there was great and grace was free;

Pardon there was multiplied to me;

There my burdened soul found liberty, At Calvary.

We take for granted His love and mercy, but truth be told we should regularly give thanks to God that these are multiplied to me over and over.

I see five important truths about His love. They are

cause in themselves of our thanksgiving as they are a part of His nature.

1. His love is unconditional

A recurring theme throughout the Old Testament is summed up in the closing book of those sacred writings. From the very first verse God reveals Himself and throughout the generations from Adam to the prophet Malachi one thing has stood out that needs to be emphasized and repeated time and time again.

Malachi 3:6 “I am the Lord, I change not.”

How important that is for us to know in understanding the unconditional nature of His love toward us. His love is not altered one iota. It is the same throughout eternity. Because He does not change His love will not change.

He cannot love us any more and He will not love us any less. It is the same.

He does not love me more when my worship comes from a pure motive of love for Him and He will not love me less when I choose to disobey. He may be hurt and grieved by my sin but His love will not waiver.

His love is without condition and without hesitation or reservation. He does not withhold it until I change. His love is unconditional.

2. His love is unending

Not only will His love not change because it is unconditional, it will never cease. It began in eternity past and will continue throughout eternity.

From our reading the Old Testament it is no secret that Israel’s love for God ebbed and flowed. It’s seen in the many times they wandered from God when they disobeyed His commands. Yet in the midst of their rebellion, God would forgive them when they repented. Eventually because of their disobedient heart God removed them from the land through the dispersion of Babylon. In the middle of all this God reminded them through the prophet Jeremiah “I have loved you with an everlasting

love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”
(Jeremiah 31:3)

Now, that doesn’t give us the right to go out and continue to disobey God, just because we know He loves us. Yet, His love is unending.

3. His love is unlimited

His love is not only unconditional and unending it is unlimited. It has no limit to the number of people it reaches or to the depth by which it is offered. There are no exceptions. It is not limited to gender or age or era of time or those of certain socio/economic status.

4. His love is unsurpassed

His love is unequalled by anyone or anything. As I said a moment ago, He cannot love us any more than He already does.

Hymn #156 *The Love of God*

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star;
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.

O love of God, how rich and pure!

How measureless and strong!

It shall forever more endure –

The saints’ and angels’ song!

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down His life for his friends.”

That is the degree to which God's love is unsurpassed.

5. His love is unstoppable

Romans 8:38-39 makes this abundantly clear. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Hymn #707 He Giveth More Grace

One again in the refrain we repeat this important principle:

His love has no limit; His grace has no measure.
His power has no boundary known unto men.
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!

God's unconditional, unending, unlimited, unsurpassed, and unstoppable love so evident in Scripture is bathed in the richness of our hymns. Let's give God thanks that His love endures forever. If it didn't we have much to fear about our future. Give thanks because of God's character. That is the underlying reason we can move on and give thanks to God because of His creation.

II. GIVE THANKS BECAUSE OF GOD'S CREATION – vs. 4-9

The vastness of God's creation is beyond our comprehension. Verse 4 tells us to give thanks because of His creative wonder.

A. Give Thanks Because of His Creative Wonder – v. 4

The wonders He performs are truly amazing and remarkable. Nothing is too hard for God. Healing the deaf, the lame, the blind, and the sick
Raising the dead or calming storms
Making an entire army blind or using the stone from

a shepherds sling to slay a giant or feeding 5000. The Bible tells us that nothing is impossible with God.

His creative wonders never cease and for those we are to give thanks.

Then we see that we are to give thanks because of His created world.

B. Give Thanks Because of His Created World – vs. 5-9

New data continues to stream in from the Hubble telescope as it transmits images from outer space. I recently read from a science journal that scientists now estimate there to be between 100 and 200 billion, with a B, galaxies in the universe. But that's only a guess.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

The Bible tells us that from nothing everything was created (Hebrews 11:3). There was not some blob that existed building up pressure that in an instant in time billions of years ago exploded with such magnificent force that it made and flung galaxies with their stars throughout the universe and over billions of years there evolved from some primordial soup the complexities of every living thing we now see.

God formed it in His mind and framed it with His word when He spoke "Let there be..." and it was there "In the beginning".

Only He really knows how many galaxies there are because He made them all and more phenomenal a feat in my opinion is that in every galaxy with the trillions of stars contained in each, God not only hung them there, but He knows all their names. Yet in the vastness of space we are not lost to His ever watching eye. He knows all about us. He knows when a sparrow falls and counts the numbers of hairs on our head. He has the ability to heal any and all diseases with just a word or a thought. We are reminded from Psalm 139 that He has made each of us just the way we are – our size and shape

and color of skin and eyes and hair. He wove us together. And David invites us there as the Psalmist does here to ponder the complexities of God's creation and pause to give Him thanks.

We look at the creative wonder of nature and the diversity of kinds within the plant and animal kingdoms and yet within each kind there is great variety of species that is mind boggling that could only come from the hand of a Creator God who made all these things to declare His glory.

Every sunset and every sunrise and every cloud formation is just as unique as every fingerprint. No two are identical.

The flowers you grow in your garden from year to year may be of the same kind but will not be the same year after year.

Give God thanks because of His Creation.

III. GIVE THANKS TO GOD BECAUSE OF HIS CONDUCT – vs. 10-24

In verses 10-16 there is His deliverance from Egypt and in verses 17-24 there is His deliverance from enemies for which the Israelites were called to give thanks.

A. Give Thanks Because of His Deliverance From Egypt – vs. 10-16

The Psalmist now narrows down the focus from 30,000 feet to 1,000 feet. He reminds the Israelites of God's deliverance from Egypt through the plagues, the last one bringing death to the firstborn throughout the land who did not have blood sprinkled on the doorposts of their home.

Let me ask a quick question. By show of hands, how many firstborns are here this morning? Ponder this for a moment. If you had lived in Egypt and your family didn't put the blood on the doorpost you wouldn't be here right now.

That's quite sobering. I would be in that group.

The psalmist wants them to remember how God delivered them from Egypt. It was with His great power and stretched out arm.

But His deliverance didn't end at the borders of Egypt, it extended through the Red Sea as He parted the waters to allow them to walk across on dry land and then to destroy the entire Egyptian army when the waters crashed down and drowned them all. He provided manna to eat every day for 40 years. He provided water.

Their clothes and sandals did not wear out.

Time after time God provided deliverance, but it wasn't just from Egypt, there were other enemies that God delivered them. Give thanks to God for deliverance from them as well.

B. Give Thanks Because of His Deliverance From Enemies – vs. 17-24

Israel faced other nations in the wilderness – Sihon and Bashan. They were mighty nations, nations that sought to destroy them. Yet God brought a nation who had never trained for battle, but only making bricks from mud to defeat its enemies. It was a time to trust in God, a time to learn to depend on God that He would deliver them from all their enemies, that God would provide for all their needs. All they had to do was follow and obey.

David is right in saying that "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him; He saved him from all his troubles." (Psalm 34:6)

We are invited through this to pause and give thanks to God for the times in the past when He has delivered us and to remind us that the same holds true in the future as we trust Him and obey Him His Word.

There is one final thought to note.

Give thanks to God because of His character
Give thanks to God because of His creation

Give thanks to God because of His conduct

Give thanks to God because of His care

IV. GIVE THANKS TO GOD BECAUSE OF HIS CARE – vs. 25-26

We see here the universal nature of God’s care for all He has created. Colossians 1:16 reminds us that God sustains it all. He keeps all the laws of nature functioning so that nothing spins out of control. He provides the rains to water the ground of the saved and unsaved alike. He knows what we need to sustain us and supplies our daily bread.

I Peter 5:7 tells us that He cares about us, and asks us to bring our worries to Him so that He can carry them for us.

“No good thing will He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” (Psalm 84:11)

Then, as if coming full circle, He directs us once more to give careful attention to where our thanksgiving should go – it is to the Lord of heaven. Why? His love endures forever.

Praise God for who He is.

Praise God for what He is able to do.

Praise God for what He has done in creation.

Praise God for His rescue, His protection and provision.

Praise God for His grace in time of calamity.

Remember that He is God and worthy of all our thanksgiving.

We should never be heard repeating the words of King Nebuchadnezzar “look at this great kingdom I have built.”

What are you truly thankful for today?

We are invited to pause and tell Him and unending thanksgiving ever mindful that it’s because of His enduring love.