

Thanksgiving
November 24, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Psalm 136
His Love Endures Forever

Psalm 136 (NIV84)

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever. ² Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. ³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. ⁴ to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. ⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever. ⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever. ⁷ who made the great lights— His love endures forever. ⁸ the sun to govern the day, His love endures forever. ⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever. ¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt His love endures forever. ¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them His love endures forever. ¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever. ¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea asunder His love endures forever. ¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it, His love endures forever. ¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea; His love endures forever. ¹⁶ to him who led his people through the desert, His love endures forever. ¹⁷ who struck down great kings, His love endures forever. ¹⁸ and killed mighty kings— His love endures forever. ¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites His love endures forever. ²⁰ and Og king of Bashan— His love endures forever. ²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance, His love endures forever. ²² an inheritance to his servant Israel; His love endures forever. ²³ to the One who remembered us in our low estate His love endures forever. ²⁴ and freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever. ²⁵ and who gives food to every creature. His love endures forever. ²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I remember one particular night of bedtime prayers when I was a child. We would pray together as a family and my brother and I would get to thank God for something each night. On this particular night my younger brother thanked God for “everything”! I was so mad at him. I didn’t have anything left to thank God for. He took everything. I guess I thought of prayer time like a competition to see who could thank God for the best thing each night. With everything taken, I had nothing to say and lost the prayer competition. I might have been a bit competitive or sensitive or just didn’t understand that prayers of thanks are not for us to earn points with God but for us to actually thank God.

Thanking God for everything is a good idea. The author of Psalm 136 seems to do that as he goes on and on for 26 verses. But there is one focus of his thanks, one phrase repeated 26 times. His love endures forever. Tonight we thank God for everything but especially for his love that endures forever. We thank him that the only God is the God of enduring love. We thank him that in his love he created and sustains all things. We thank him especially that his enduring love moved him to be our Savior God. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever.

Give Thanks to the Only God

Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever.³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.

The peoples around Israel had their own gods and lords. Baal, Ashtoreh, Molech, Dagon and more. But these so called gods were not known as gods of love. These were gods who demanded gifts and sacrifice if they were to give any blessings. Some demanded child sacrifice. These were not gods of mercy, kindness, faithfulness or love. Think of the many gods made in the minds of humans. The Greek and Roman gods had weaknesses and fights. Sure, there are goddesses of love, but only romantic love. Never the pure unconditional love of the one and only true God and Lord. The gods invented by human minds always function as powerful but sinful humans. The God of the Bible is truly good and his love endures forever.

We may not think of thanking the Lord for being himself, but the author Psalm 136 begins with that very thought. Our God is the only God. Our Lord is the only Lord. There is only one God and he is good. His love endures forever.

Give Thanks to the Creator God

To him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever.⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever.⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever.⁷ who made the great lights— His love endures forever.⁸ the sun to govern the day, His love endures forever.⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever.

I did not get up early in the morning last week to see the lunar eclipse, but I saw some amazing photos by those who did. God's universe is amazing. The moon goes around the earth, the earth around the sun. Distant stars give their light. How could God make all these objects in the universe? God "by his understanding made the heavens." He put everything in place in the heavens above and set forth the rules by which they would move. God also set up everything on the earth. In the beginning the earth was covered with water and then God "spread out the earth upon the waters." Land appeared and then was covered with plants and trees. From those plants and trees comes the food for animals and for humans on this world. God continues to sustain these processes as he "gives food to every creature."

But why did God create all things? Why does he continue to preserve this world and its creatures? Think of what the human race has done to the world he gave us. We've stained the ground with the blood of our wars and violence. We've mismanaged the resources he provided for our good. In many places, people have starved, not due to lack of food in the world, but due to the greed and hatred of some who will not allow food to be delivered. We humans steal and hate and kill. Why would God still preserve this world and its people? In many places the sinful world has even successfully removed God from creation completely, saying there is no God who created and preserves this world. Why would God make the sun shine and the rain fall on a people who don't even want him or acknowledge him?

His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord for his creation. Give thanks whenever the sun shines and even when the snow falls. For in all of these acts of creation and preservation, we see the Lord's enduring love for people. His love for you and for all people endures forever.

Give Thanks to the Savior God

To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt His love endures forever. ¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them His love endures forever. ¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever. ¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea asunder His love endures forever. ¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it, His love endures forever. ¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea; His love endures forever. ¹⁶ to him who led his people through the desert, His love endures forever. ¹⁷ who struck down great kings, His love endures forever. ¹⁸ and killed mighty kings— His love endures forever. ¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites His love endures forever. ²⁰ and Og king of Bashan— His love endures forever. ²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance, His love endures forever. ²² an inheritance to his servant Israel; His love endures forever. ²³ to the One who remembered us in our low estate His love endures forever. ²⁴ and freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever.

The author of this psalm gets to the heart of the Lord's love in this section. The enduring love of the Lord moves him to rescue his people. The Lord rescued his people from centuries of slavery in Egypt. He used his mighty power to accomplish this rescue – the plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea. Every Israelite child would know the story of the Exodus. It was retold every year at Passover. The Lord promised to bring his people out of slavery and he did so in dramatic fashion. He promised Abraham that his descendants would one day possess the land upon which Abraham lived as a nomad. God kept his promise. No king of the Egyptians, Amorites or Bashan would stop the Lord from accomplished the rescue of his people.

Again we ask, why? Were the Israelites suddenly ready at that time to be rescued? Were the Israelites around 1500 B.C. somehow better than their ancestors? Did they deserve or earn this rescue? Of course, the answer is NO to all such questions. The answer to why God rescues his people is repeated 26 times in the refrain of our psalm. His love endures forever.

None of us deserves even a crumb that falls from God's table. We only deserve his wrath and punishment because of our sins. Yet, his love endures forever. Because of his great mercy, he saved us. By grace are we saved, not from slavery to an enemy nation, but from slavery to sin. Christ's love endure forever and in his love he took our punishment and the wrath of God upon the cross in our place. Christ's love freed you from slavery to the devil and from an eternity in hell. For this rescue from sin and eternal death we give thanks to the Lord. In God's enduring love, he continues to come to us, strengthen us through his means of grace and keep us in the true faith until eternal life. He loves us and will not let any worldly or spiritual power take us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To the One who remembered us in our low estate His love endures forever. and freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever.

I suppose my little brother was right all those years ago to thank the Lord for everything. I should have just responded with the refrain from Psalm 136. His love endures forever.

Amen.