

Remembering God's Steadfast Love

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Scriptural Text: Psalm 136, ESV

This psalm, as we read it, is written with a view there would be a back-and-forth between the leader and the congregation. It was sung antiphonally, where the leaders would sing one part and the congregation would sing another.

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁵ to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁶ to him who spread out the earth above the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁷ to him who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁸ the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁹ the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹² with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea in two,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁴ and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁵ but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁶ to him who led his people through the wilderness,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁷ to him who struck down great kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁸ and killed mighty kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁹ Sihon, king of the Amorites,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

²⁰ and Og, king of Bashan,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

²¹ and gave their land as a heritage,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

²² a heritage to Israel his servant,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

²³ It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

²⁴ and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

²⁵ he who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, God tells us,

¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Giving thanks to God is the secret to life. Two people may experience same trials, same benefits, same pains and problems and disappointments, yet they will respond to them so differently the outcome of their life is as different as light and darkness, day and night. One person lives a life of dark discouragement while another lives the life of bright joy. One person lives miserably and the other lives happily.

The differences in our lives does not have to do so much with what we experience as it does how we respond to what we experience. Giving thanks strengthens our faith so we can seem more clearly what is real, what is true, and what is eternal. Giving thanks moves us closer to the God who is our life and He is altogether good. Psalm 136 issues a call to us to give God thanks.

Why must we give thanks? What is our motivation to give thanks? Notice, the psalmist does not say, “Give thanks to the Lord because you ought to give thanks because that is what responsible, respectable people do. Give thanks to the Lord because God commands it.” No, this is not what we are told. In Verse 1, we read, “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good and His steadfast love endures forever.” It is God’s goodness and His steadfast love which provides the fuel for the fire of thanksgiving.

Our giving thanks is not motivated by an internal, subjective sense of responsibility, but our giving thanks is motivated by the external, objective goodness of God. The heart of thanksgiving grows as we draw near to this God who is all together good. It does not go in us simply because we chide our self into giving thanks. It grows as God becomes sweeter to us because God is so very good. No one can experience Him truly without enjoying the sweetness of His goodness.

Charles Spurgeon, a great preacher of old, writes, “God is good beyond all others; indeed, He alone is good in the highest sense; He is the source of good, the good of all good, the sustainer of good, the perfecter of good, the rewarder of good. For this, He deserves the constant gratitude of His people. It is this divine goodness that has been showered upon us.” Have you experienced His goodness? Have you experienced it personally?

The central idea in Psalm 136 is simply this: Give thanks to the Lord always because the Lord always loves you. Too often we tell our self, “Give thanks to the Lord because I ought to.” We chide our self, “You are just a big ingrate if I do not,” and we do not want to be an ingrate so we give thanks. Indeed, we need to speak God’s truth in our life and we need to speak Gospel truth. The Gospel truth is this: Give thanks to the Lord who is good and His love for you endures forever and ever. Our thanksgiving must be driven by God’s deep, abiding love or it will become artificial and false.

Giving thanks always possesses four essential parts. **The first essential part is finding joy in a gift that has been given to us.** This command is presented to us three times in the very beginning of this psalm and then a fourth time at the end. This command is given to us as a bookend, “Give thanks to the Lord.”

Understand, this Book, the Bible, is central to understanding God’s will for us. We have no other reliable voice to understand who God is, what He has done for us, and how we are to live. This Book is God’s very word and is it not exciting to open it day-by-day? Psalm 119 tells us,

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

¹³⁰ The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

Is that not so simple? Is that not awesome? This Book is so very, very key to understanding life, direction, our motivations, purpose and priorities. One key to sound Bible study is the careful observation of the words in Scripture. Each word is inspired, breathed out, by God Himself. If we are to understand the meaning of Scripture and the meaning of the Bible, we must take care to observe what is written.

As we look closely to see what is here, we are right to avoid seeing what is not in Scripture. Our failure to understand who God is and what He desires for us often flows from a habit of failing to see what is there and then actually seeing what is not there. We want to be very careful.

What do we observe when we read Psalm 136? Most of us observe this “give thanks” is prominent in the first three verses. It is very significant God would repeat Himself three times at the beginning of this worship song He gives to His people to use in worship. God does not repeat Himself for the sake of exercise. God repeats key words and phrases because He knows we are forgetful creatures and we need repetition in order to help to keep us focused on needful things, necessary truths and important words. So God says, “Give thanks. Give thanks. Give thanks.” And at the end He says, “Give thanks.”

God knows we are children who need to be reminded over and over to brush our teeth. We need to be reminded over and over to give thanks because we are so forgetful. We fail in these habits which bring help to our soul. Giving thanks is one of those habits of the soul and it is very healthy for us. It infuses life and joy. God is communicating to us giving thanks is a key component of worship and of all of life.

What does it mean for us to “give thanks”? The command is given once, twice, thrice, and, yes, a fourth time. I believe giving thanks possesses four essential components. The first component is finding joy in the gift that has been given to us. The second component is grasping that we did not deserve the gift in the first place. The third component is treasuring the person who gave us the gift. And, the fourth component is communicating our joy to the giver.

Giving thanks means that we find joy in the gifts given to us. It is possible for us to offer outward expressions of gratitude without finding any real joy in the gift and that becomes an artificial thanksgiving. I remember, when I was in middle school, at Christmas time there were occasions when we went to family Christmases and I received things like socks and underwear. One can imagine a ten-year old boy receiving a gift and opening it all excited and it is socks. I smiled, said, “Thank you,” and I wrote a note of thanksgiving for that, but there was not a lot of joy in my heart over those gifts. They were okay and they did not bother me, but I was hoping for something a bit more exciting. I wrote a thank you note nonetheless because that is what one is supposed to do, but that was not real thanksgiving.

We often fail to give thanks to God because this joy in God and in His gifts is missing and vacant. When we do not enter into the joy of our salvation, the joy of God’s provision, the joy of God’s goodness we really cannot give thanks. We cannot give thanks until we truly find joy in the gifts God offers. That is why faith is something more than an affirmation of a doctrinal statement. It is entering personally into the joy of the gift God has given to us. No one can give thanks to the Lord until they, first, find deep joy in the gifts He gives to us. The first gift is the gift of salvation and new life in Christ. Before we think about giving thanks to God, have we found joy in the Gospel, joy in the gift God offers through His Son Jesus?

Satan loves to blind us from the goodness of God. He loves to blind us from the incredible magnificence and beauty and glory of the gifts God offers to us. That is why a psalm like Psalm 136 is so very helpful. This psalm reminds us each believer has been given amazingly, glorious, and wonderful blessings from God. No one in bankrupt in the blessing department. A spirit of ingratitude often blinds us to these blessings and the blindness keeps us in a state of ingratitude. It is a vicious cycle.

Faith, then, sees God is altogether good and His gifts are wonderful, awesome, and measurably good. Giving thanks means we find joy in the gifts God gives to us. That is why a true reception of the Gospel is essential to giving thanks to God in worship.

Second, giving thanks also means we grasp that we did not deserve the gift. If we fail to grasp our unworthiness of the gift we will not truly give thanks. We do not give thanks for a gift we thought we deserved in the first place, as a result of our hard work, as a result of our loyalty. Indeed, it is possible to take great joy in that gift, but not really to give thanks for it if we do not understand we did not deserve it at all.

For instance, if we are employed, and we thank God for employment and the jobs we go to, we likely receive a paycheck which is, either, deposited into our account or it comes to us in the form of an actual check. When we receive that deposit or check, we likely find joy in receiving that as compensation. There is joy in that and we are thankful we have a job, but let me ask, how many of us send thank you notes to our employer after receiving the compensation? We take joy in that and we would have a lack of joy if we did not receive it, but why don’t we send a thank you note? It is because it is compensation. We give the company an amount of energy and skill and work and the company gives to us compensation. It is a trade off and not a gift. We earned it and we deserve it.

We think differently about a check we receive from our employer than we do about a check we receive from an aunt at Christmastime. It is likely the check from the aunt at Christmastime is likely very much smaller than the check we receive from the company we work for, yet we have this gratitude and we send a note and express joy in it. We know we did not deserve this at all. It came solely because this person loves us. John Piper writes this on the subject, “...the emotion of gratitude generally rises in direct proportion to how undeserved a gift is. Where work and pay are commensurate, we do not feel pay as an undeserved kindness, but as our due, and therefore the feeling of gratitude is

not very intense...” John Piper is simply saying if we do not understand we do not deserve the gift we are not going to have this rise of a grateful heart.

I love Ephesians 2. It is such a blessed chapter and we can see this sense. Even though the word “giving thanks” is not present there, it is throughout the explanation the Apostle Paul makes of his own testimony and the testimony of every person,

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins... ^{3b} and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

Paul wants us to understand how unworthy we are to receive this awesome gift God gives to us. It is there we understand the condition that we have not bartered with God through our good works in order to receive His blessing, kindness, forgiveness, and entrance into Heaven. No, we have nothing of value and we were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were children of wrath deserving of God’s condemnation, yet God, in His love, looked down upon us while we were still rebels and He smiled upon us and He gave us this gift of eternal life. Giving thanks means we understand how much we do not deserve the gift in the first place.

The third component of giving thanks means we treasure the person who gave us the gift. It is possible to receive a gift which brings great joy and to grasp we did not deserve to receive the gift in the first place, yet we fall short of truly giving thanks. Giving thanks requires we acknowledge the giver’s part in our joy and we take delight in the giver as well as the gift. We turn our joy in the gift over to the person who gave us this gift out of love, out of grace, out of mercy. The ultimate source of every gift we ever receive which causes a single smile to crease our face is God Himself. This is James point,

^{1:17a} Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...

Think about that. There is nothing we would ever experience from the moment of consciousness to the end of our life that would ever cause a smile on our face were it not for God’s goodness, that God did not give that to us. A recognition from where our gifts come causes us to treasure the person who gave us the gift. When we fail to acknowledge God as the giver of every good thing we experience, we act as depraved souls. That is Paul’s point in Romans 1, when describing what an unbeliever’s heart is like and what it means to have depravity and darkness in the soul,

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth... ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

A depraved person looks like a person who does not thank God for the gifts He has given.

The fourth component of giving thanks means we communicate our joy to the given. It is not enough for us just to treasure the giver in our heart, but it means we communicate. We find joy in the gift. We recognize our unworthiness. We treasure the person who give it, but then we communicate that joy to the person so that person has an expression from us that he or she is an awesome giver.

Let us recall the story, in Luke 17, where Jesus healed the ten lepers. Only one came back to give thanks to Jesus and Jesus, in hearing this and taking great delight in this person who communicated because it took some labor and some action on his part, and He looked at the one who came back,

¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, “*Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?*” ¹⁸ *Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”* ¹⁹ And he said to him, “*Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.*”

This “foreigner” was the least likely to come back. An expression of thanks and gratitude to God is an expression of faith. Jesus told this man his faith made him well both physically and in his whole person.

What motivates us to give thanks?

^{1a} Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good... ^{2a} Give thanks to the God of gods... ^{3a} Give thanks to the Lord of lords...

The word “Lord”, in all capital letters in most translations in Verse 1 refers to “YAHWEH”.¹ The word “God” in Verse 2 refers to “Elohim”.² The word “Lord” in little “o”, little “r”, and little “d” is a translation of the word “Adonai”.³ Why are there three different names for God in these three verses? I believe the psalmist is saturated with Scripture and I believe he is meditating on Deuteronomy 10,

^{17a} For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords...

“Your Lord, YAHWEH, is your Elohim of elohims and He is the Adonai of all adonais. He is the great and mighty and awesome God.” God is teaching us, in Psalm 136, giving thanks focuses upon His glorious, holy person. There is none like Him. It is not just His gifts which are amazing, but it is His wonderful person and being. He is not like all the other false gods and all the unreal gods who have no power, no sovereign authority, no ability to succeed. He is the One, True and Mighty God. He is YAHWEH, the God who makes Himself relational and who makes that relationship sealed with a Covenant with His people. He is the covenant-keeping God. He is the God who gives and gives and gives for the joy of His people and for the glory of His name. He is the Lord of lords and the God of gods. He alone is worthy of worship and praise and thanksgiving. He says, “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good.”

The primary motivation for us to give thanks to the Lord is simply the Lord. The fact is He is good, awesome, and mighty and He loves us with a steadfast love. We cannot read this psalm without making the observation of the phrase, “His steadfast love endures forever,” is repeated over and over twenty six times.

Some today complain modern worship music is filled with what is called “7/11 songs”. These are songs of seven words sung eleven times over. Psalm 136 is a “6/26” psalm; six words sung twenty-six times. It is the only one so I do not believe we need to make this one the pattern for all of our worship. I understand worship songs can become very trite and turn the mind off, but there is nothing wrong with repeating one six-word phrase twenty six times. In fact, we are told to do that. That phrase is powerful when we allow it to enter deeply into our soul.

The word “steadfast love” in the Hebrew is a very precious Hebrew word, “*hesed*”. It references God’s Covenantal love in that God took a sinful people and He did not just say, “I am going to love you and be kind to you,” but He brought them into a Covenant, an agreement. The closest thing we understand in our modern culture today of covenants is the covenant of marriage. This is where a groom gets up in front of a whole bunch of people and says to the bride, “I promise to love you regardless of what happens, for better or for worse. I am in this,” and the bride says the same to her husband. That is what God does. He makes a Covenant with His people and He says, “You may fail me, but I will never, ever fail you. I am setting my love upon you and it is a steadfast, permanent, committed, unflinching love. It is a love which will never fail.”

The motivation that drives a thankful heart is a realization that God’s steadfast love endures forever. When we establish in our heart the truth that God loves us eternally and infinitely, we become a grateful people. That is the reason why, if we want to have a heart that gives thanks, it is not chiding our self, “I should give thanks more and I will remember to do that tomorrow,” but it is entering into the Gospel and into the love of God for us. Then we give thanks out of an expression of our joy to the God who loves us so.

¹ A name for God assumed by modern scholars to be a rendering of the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, “YHWH”. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, New College Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1976.

² The Hebrew name for God most frequently encountered in the Old Testament. Ibid.

³ *Hebrew*. Used in Judaism as a spoken substitute for the ineffable name of God. Ibid.

Paul exults in this glorious truth of God's love in Romans 8, a powerful passage of Scripture,

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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.⁴

The Devil hates God so he tempts us to believe the lie that God does not love us. That is the reason why God says, in 1 Peter 5:7, "cast all your cares upon Him, because He cares for you." If we keep all of our cares to ourselves, Satan uses all of these cares of ours to say, "God does not love you because if He loved you He would not have put all of these cares in your lap." Peter tells us, "Listen, take those cares and cast them upon the Lord because the Lord does care for you." Peter goes on to say,

^{8b} Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

He will use those cares to devour us and to change us from a person who joyfully gives thanks to a person who is miserable, grumpy, and complaining. If Satan can get us to forget the goodness of the Lord, to doubt whether or not God loves us, he is able to devour us and destroy our faith.

I know this from God's Word and I know this from experience. I know my weakest moments, spiritually, have been when I begin to question God's goodness to me and look at all of those cares I am holding onto in my hands. I wonder, "Lord, where are you?" The motivation this psalm presents for giving thanks is the steadfast love of God. How do we really know if God loves us? That is where this psalm is so very helpful.

This psalmist reviews four different errors of biblical, redemptive history to prove to us God loves us on the basis of real history. First, God displays His love in creating this world. This is an amazing thing,

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever...

By understanding, He made the heavens; He spread out the earth above the waters; He made the great lights; He created the sun to rule over the day and the moon and the stars to rule over the night. After each refrain, the psalmist writes, "for His steadfast love endures forever." We need to think back to Genesis 1 and 2 and recognize how much God must have loved us to create this place in the beginning. If we begin to doubt God's goodness and love we need only to take a walk through a park and observe God's creation. Let us begin there. Why did He create it? He created it out of love, for His glory, and out of a love for His creatures.

How does creation display God's love? I believe there are two ways. First, God's world is created good so its Creator must also be good. If we see any goodness in creation it must tell us something about the Person who created it. Psalm 19 tells us,

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.

We have a constant source of revelation from God who says, "I am good! I am good!" God encourages us, as creatures living in His good creation, to slow down, take a breath, and look deeply at the world He created and understand He is a good, powerful, infinite being. Jesus makes the same point when He speaks, in Matthew 6,

^{26a} "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them..."²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

⁴ The Holy Bible, New International Version, (NIV), Zondervan, 1996

If God cares for that bird and God cares for that flower, how much more does He care for us? What does that bird and what does that flower communicate to us about God and His nature?

I have some bird feeders and flowers in my back yard and I love them. There are gold finches and cardinals and birds which I do not even know what they are and they are all these different colors. I find myself fascinated by these and I like looking out the window and looking at these. I am excited every time I see them. And, I love thinking about God painting the brush strokes with vibrant yellow. It is the same with cardinals and the humming birds which are amazing little creatures. I look at the flowers with bright reds, blues, white, pink, and all different colors and I just marvel at this. God says, “Good. That is what you are supposed to do. Don’t walk past this. This shows you I care for you if I cared enough to paint these brilliant colors. It tells you I created you and I care for you far more.”

God created this world so we could enjoy its goodness. In Genesis 2, God says,

⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

This is the story of creation. It would have been sufficient if God, in creating this world, to create nutrition that did not look very good and did not taste very good, but it would feed us. That would have been wonderful, but He created trees that look awesome. He could have created trees that look gnarly and ugly, that we would not have wanted to look at, but He created beautiful trees. Is it not wonderful to walk through an orchard and observe what is there? Then He created food that was not only pleasant to the eyes, but it was good to eat. God is good and Creation proclaims that truth. And, He created this world in such a way that we would enjoy it. That is how good He is.

Second, God displays His love in redeeming His people from slavery. This is what Verses 10 through 16 are all about. This biblical history is all about the exodus where the people of Israel were in bondage to the Egyptians. God appoints Moses and tells him he will lead the people out of slavery. Moses is to go to pharaoh and ultimately the ten plagues occur. In the tenth plague, referenced in Verse 10, the first born male child of every Egyptian family dies. Israel comes out of Egypt and, in Verse 13, the Red Sea is in front of them and the army is chasing them. God miraculously divides the sea and Israel passes through the sea, which is a miracle. This is what God does! Pharaoh and his armies pursue Israel into the sea and God has the sea close. Then, He leads His people through the wilderness in Verse 16.⁵

In all of this, God is reminding us of His goodness and His love in redeeming His people out of slavery. It is interesting to me that God chose one of the most painful chapters in Israel’s history to argue for His love. Those people said, “God does not love us.” Many of them did grumble and complain, but God said, “No, it is in the midst of the hardest thing in this world, because this world is broken by sin, in your pain and in your misery is where I am going to display My loving kindness to you.” That is what God does; He takes our brokenness and He makes us whole.

God displays His love for His people as He redeems them out of slavery and while that is a glorious truth for the psalmist to look back upon, how much more glorious is it for us who live in this age, when this picture of redemption God presented in the Old Testament with Israel, when it was fully realized in Christ, so that we are redeemed, not just out of Egypt, out of the eternal kingdom of darkness that would hold us forever and ever and we are purchased so that our sins are removed from us and we never have to experience any condemnation or judgment or penalty as a result of our own sin for we are redeemed.

In Galatians 3, the Apostle Paul exults in this,

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

The truth is: we need rescued. The curse is set upon us and we are going to experience this curse now and forever and ever. God, in love, at great cost to Himself, sent His Son and His Son suffered underneath the justice of Almighty God so we could be free. God loves you. While you were a sinner Christ died in your place and He paid the price.

⁵ Exodus 6 – 14.

Fanny Crosby was a woman who became blind as a child and she gave thanks to God because she was constantly meditating upon God's great love for her, particularly in full display of His redemption. She writes the hymn, "Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It",

"Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed through His infinite mercy,
His child and forever I am.

"I think of my blessed Redeemer,
I think of Him all the day long;
I sing, for I cannot be silent;
His love is the theme of my song.

Refrain

"Redeemed, redeemed,
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed, redeemed,
His child and forever I am."

That is an expression of a Gospel-saturated woman, giving thanks even though she has been blinded as a child by someone who applied a salve to her eyes that should not have been applied. All she thinks about all day long is about her blessed Redeemer. This is motivated by the love of God and displayed in redemption.

Third, God displays His love by giving His people an inheritance, found in Verses 17 through 22. Notice the words "heritage" used in Verses 21 and 22. He wants us to know His love in on display through the inheritance He has secured for us. The people are out of bondage, but they are wondering and they do not have a place. What good is that? God tells them He wants them to know He display His love for them when He gave them an inheritance, their land.

A mother or father leaving an inheritance to their children is a gift of love. It is not something earned or deserved. It is given as a result of a relationship. This people has a relationship with God because God set His love upon this people. While they are wondering, they are wondering, "Why did You take us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? You have not given to us an inheritance." God tells them, "No, I took you out of Egypt so that you could enjoy this inheritance. Believe Me."

What is our inheritance in New Testament times? If they took great joy to give thanks to the Lord because of the inheritance was there's of this piece of land, how much more can we take great joy? What is our inheritance? It is Heaven. How Heaven must fill our heart if we are to give thanks. If Heaven begins to fill our heart so that we become heavenly-minded people, it does not mean we vacate this world without any interest in it. It means we recognize this world is not our home and we are only journeying through here for a short time and God has an inheritance for us, secured by the blood of Christ, a destination which we are moving toward and which one day will be fully ours. David understood this. That is why, at the end of Psalm 23, he writes,

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

That is where all of us are going as our inheritance. This is why as Jesus was leaving His disciples He said, in John 14,

² *"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"*

If we are wondering, "How can I give thanks," the psalmist tells us to think about Heaven and our inheritance. We are to think about how much God loves us to prepare a place for us, an inheritance as a result of Jesus dying upon the

cross, being buried, raising the third day, and ascending into Heaven to prepare a special place for us. We have an inheritance through God's Son.

The fourth display of God's love, in Psalm 136, is that God displays His love in providing for His people. The psalmist has taken us through Creation, the Exodus and the entrance into the land. Now he summarizes the rest of the biblical story,

²³ It is he who remembered us in our low estate...²⁴ and rescued us from our foes...²⁵ he who gives food to all flesh...

What happened to the people is they were blessed by God and in their blessing they became complacent and they began to sin and commit idolatry. God's judgment and discipline fell upon them and they entered into this "lowest state". God could have rightly and justly said, at any one of those moments, because this happened over and over, "I am through with these folks. They have abused My goodness for the last time. I am not going to remember them anymore." But, the psalmist tells us, "Do you know how I know God loves me? He remembers us in our lowest estate, a low estate we deserved and was ours because of our rebellion against God, yet he continues to rescue us from our foes and He continues to give us food and supply our daily needs."

Over and over and over God supplies. Over and over and over He defends. Over and over and over He remains faithful.

John Milton was only fifteen years old when he wrote a hymn based upon this psalm, "Let Us With A Gladsome Mind,"

Let us, with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for He is kind.

Let us blaze His Name abroad,
For of gods He is the God.

He with all commanding might
Filled the new made world with light.

All things living He doth feed,
His full hand supplies their need.

Let us, with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for He is kind.

Refrain
For His mercies aye endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.

"Give thanks to the Lord of Heaven," is how this psalm concludes, "for His steadfast love endures forever." Always give thanks to the Lord because the Lord always loves you.

Have you received the love of God in Jesus Christ through faith? If not, you will not be able to give thanks because you will not be able to take joy in the gift of God secured for you by Christ upon the cross. You will not have the joy of the Lord apart from His salvation and if you do not have the joy of the Lord, you cannot give thanks. You will not be able to truly and genuinely worship. Beloved, I want you to know the invitation of God has come, "Receive, receive My love and do not be shut out forever and ever from My love. Receive it and enjoy it and enter in."

Believer, I want to emphasize one more time this aspect of joy and our motivation for giving thanks. It is cheerfulness in worship that makes our worship pleasing. God loves a cheerful giver. The call to give thanks is not a call for us to give thanks whether we feel like it or not. That kind of thanksgiving holds no value.

Imagine for a moment two brothers ages eight and ten. They are excited about playing video games with their friends on Saturday morning. Dad announces on Friday night he is going to take the family on an adventure to the lake and they will be gone all day Saturday. The boys groan because they had plans with their friends playing video games. They complain about the plans they had and they did not like the lake after all. Mom becomes a bit angry, "Boys, you are so ungrateful. Daddy works hard all week and he has planned this great day for you and you are complaining. You should be ashamed. Stop your complaining and tell your dad, "Thank you," for the plans he has worked out for us. The boys are ashamed and they come up to their dad and say, "Thanks, dad." How much joy does that dad have in his children's giving thanks? I will tell you, a father's heart does not take any thanksgiving at all in that because he knows his boys do not have any joy in something he wanted to give to them which would give them joy. They do not treasure the gift and they do not recognize they deserve such a sweet gift. They do not move toward the person who gives the gift and they do not communicate it. It is just a cold expression.

I wonder, how often do we, when we give thanks to God, say, "Thanks, God." The psalmist tells us our life would be so much better than that and so much richer if we would give thanks to the Lord for He is good and His love endures forever.