

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

Psalm 136:1-26

Key Verse 1, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

Psalm 136 is a beautiful, poetic, musical song of thanksgiving. I want to ask one question as P. Mark does. Do you know what endures forever? There is a commercial that says, “Diamond is forever.” Is it true?

The psalmist teaches about God’s love in the creation and throughout Israel’s history. This Psalm describes the characteristic or act of God. Each verse repeats a refrain, *“for his steadfast love endures forever.”* Through this study, let’s think about God and his steadfast love.

First, God is the Creator (1-9)

Look at verse 1. “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” To give thanks to God is not an option or choice, but a basic command. God’s children are obligated to give thanks to God, for he is good. God is always good. Men are sometimes good, sometimes not good. But God is always good. God is good even in times of our adversity, because it will eventually turn out into God’s victory. In God, there is no misfortune, no tragedy, nor failure, for he is good.

When David wrote this psalm, he was in the darkest time. He was kicked out of the palace because of his son’s rebellion. And all his close friends also rebelled against him and turned out to be his enemies. In such adverse situation, he must have been very bitter or vengeful. But instead, he wrote 150 songs of praises.

We also give thanks to God, for his steadfast love endures forever. This refrain is repeated 26 times. Here steadfast means faithful, committed and unfailing. There are no ups and downs, and it is not reactionary. His “steadfast” love is the central theme of the Old Testament. It is rooted in God’s covenant with his people. Even though the Israelites were unfaithful, God remained faithful and steadfast. He kept his covenant relationship with his people.

God’s love is also enduring. We all agree that it is not easy to endure someone else’s shortcomings. We want to blow up in anger or give up in despair. But his enduring love is permanent and unchanging. In the New Testament, this enduring love is fully manifested through his Son Jesus Christ. We studied the Book of Acts for the past one and half years. The Risen Jesus changed one murderer into the light for the Gentiles: “his steadfast love endures forever.”

The Psalmist declares that God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords. It means that our God is the unique Creator, the true and supreme God. These days there are many fake gods and idols. Do you know some of them? Sin ultimately makes man self-seeking. We hear many people

saying, "I am my own god. Leave me alone." But Daniel worshipped God, refusing to bow down even in the fire. Eventually King Nebuchadnezzar appreciated God's supreme kingship, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords and a revealer of mysteries."

Look at verse 5. "To him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever." This verse declares that our God is the Creator. He created the lights in the heavens. God made the great burning sun to rule over the day. He made the romantic moonlight to rule over the night and comfort all lonely people. And the countless stars twinkled all over the night sky. In our ministry, we also have the sun, moon, and star. We see Dr. Grace Sun, the Biblical counsellor, Elder Luke Moon, the romantic musician, and Pablo Star Oh, the silver missionary to Costa Rica. You should sing the praise song when you see the burning sun instead of going to the beach and applying sun screen lotion or enjoying sun tang. Let's give praises to our Creator God: "...then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee, How great Thou art! How great Thou art!" "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"

Thanksgiving has the power to heal any kind of disease. One cancer patient visited the Botanic Garden every morning for many years, and praised the Creator for his beautiful trees and flowers. Then her cancer was miraculously healed. God blessed her to be one of cancer survivors, revealing that his steadfast love endures forever.

Second, the God of history (10-22)

In verses 10-17, the Psalmist remembers the history of Exodus. The Israelites suffered unbearably under the cruel slavery in Egypt for 430 years. God commanded Moses to slaughter one year old lamb without blemish, and sprinkle its blood on the door frames. The angel of death passed over the firstborn of Israel, but struck down the firstborn of Egypt, including that of Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh finally surrendered and let the Israelites leave.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they expected everything to go smoothly. But God drove them into an impossible situation. God not only delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but he also trained them. They were trapped between the Red Sea in front and the Egyptian army in the back. It was a dilemma. They had two options. One was to be captured and return to Egypt. The other was to move forward, get drowned and become sea monsters.

Look at verse 13. "...to him who divided the Red Sea in two, for his steadfast love endures forever." But by Moses' faith, they all crossed the Red Sea as on dry land while their enemies were drowned. Through crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites experienced his steadfast love. God endured all their bitter complaints to the end until they all crossed the Red Sea. Here we learn that to cross the Red Sea by faith is the first step of God's training course. What is your Red Sea to cross in your life?

When I came to America, I did not want to become a medical doctor. Although I graduated from SNU medical school, I did not know how to measure blood pressure. One day I visited Dr. Lee's office and told him, "I want to be UBF fulltime staff shepherd." Then he asked me, "When you came to America, did you make a contract with someone to support your family?" I answered, "No." Then he rebuked me, "You are an irresponsible man. Who will support your family? I will give you 10 days. You may decide to be an American physician or go back to Korea."

Later, miraculously I was accepted to the residency in NY. During my first night on-call, 9 cardiac arrests occurred. I did not know how to resuscitate cardiac arrest, although the nursing team helped me. At the end of the year, I received an "inefficient" rating and I was put on probation. However, by the grace of God, I graduated from the residency training. As a medical professional for the past 22 years, I passed through many hardships, failures and impossible situations. But by faith, I finished all my medical training successfully until I received two American boards in internal medicine and endocrinology. When I retired from the hospital, one word came into my mind, "By faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land." Thank God who did not give up on me but endured to the end. This testimony is not to brag about myself, but to pass down this faith for the next generation also to cross their own Red Seas.

In verse 16, we see how God led his people through the wilderness for forty years, feeding them with manna and teaching them through the Ten Commandments. Nobody likes wilderness training. But God gave them the wilderness training with the hope of God to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex 19:6) The Israelites were full of slave mentality. Whenever they faced some difficulties, they cried to Moses go back to Egypt. They really missed Egyptian Sam-Kyup-Sal (beef steak). God endured them to the end and transformed them into a holy priestly nation. Amazing! God put on his hope for such slave people to be changed into a glorious priestly nation.

Finally, God struck down great kings, and killed mighty kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan and gave their land as a heritage to his people. God blessed them to defeat many strong and powerful enemy nations until they possessed the promised land flowing with milk and honey as their inheritance.

Third, God remembers our low estate (23-26)

Look at verse 23, "It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever." Whenever the Israelites groaned, God heard their cries. God remembered his holy covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here 'low estate' refers to hardship, distress or oppression. It refers to our spiritual condition in sin. When God saw his people suffering, he remembered to be merciful. Let's thank God who remembers us in our miserable conditions.

Look at verse 24, "and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever." From the beginning, God promised that he would crush the head of Satan to rescue us from our enemies. God declared a war for his rescue mission. God fulfilled this promise through his Son. The greatest event in our lives is to celebrate the birth of Jesus wholeheartedly. The best expression of his steadfast love is the birth of Jesus in a manger. The Christmas season is to praise God for his steadfast love that endures forever.

Look at verse 25. "...he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever." This psalm ends with God's provision of food to all flesh. The Psalmist gives thanks to God who takes care of man's security problem. Fallen men suffer from sweat and toils throughout lifetime with security problems. But in God there is no security problem because God provides to those who seek first his kingdom and righteousness.

This year we find many thanksgiving topics. Especially, we completed Acts Bible Study. If we summarize it in one word, it is Paul's one-to-one ministry in prison in Rome. Paul taught the Bible to one person, preaching the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. His 1-to-1 seems to be ineffective, but it changed Rome, Europe, America, Korea, and changed the world. Paul's 1 to 1 changed the course of world history!

Through today's passage, God helped us to see his steadfast love displayed in God's creation and his redemptive history. May God fill our hearts with the spirit of thanks, "for his steadfast love endures forever."