
ADVENT

THE STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter

December 4, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The Psalms sing of God's love throughout. Psalms 107, 109, and 118 all repeat the loving refrain, but none compares with the steady rhythm of Psalm 136. In 26 verses, the "steadfast love" of God is emphatically proclaimed 26 times. The steadfast love of God is what this Psalm is all about, and it reminds us of the substance of such love. God's love is no flippant thing; He loves purposefully, profoundly, and powerfully. We shall explore the steadfast love of God from this Psalm with a special focus on the season of Advent. God's love is most notable in the coming of Christ.

PSALM 136:1-26

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.

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY:

God's love, which He has consummately displayed in Christ, is real and active. Therefore, we should be supremely grateful.

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

- (1) GOD'S LOVE IS REAL LOVE (WHICH CANNOT BE OTHER THAN STEADFAST)
- (2) GOD'S LOVE IS DEMONSTRATED IN BOTH PROTECTION AND PROVISION
- (3) GOD'S LOVE IS SUPREMEY FOUND IN THE GOSPEL
- (4) OUR FUNDAMENTAL RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE SHOULD BE GRATITUDE

MESSAGE

(1) GOD'S LOVE IS REAL LOVE (WHICH CANNOT BE OTHER THAN STEADFAST)

- The **26 times** in 26 verses that God's Love is proclaimed, it is repeatedly articulated in the same way – **STEADFAST LOVE**
 - “Steadfast Love” is one word – *hesed* (or *chesed*):
 - a faithful kindness
 - inclined towards another with kind or favorable intent
 - a constant and abiding favor
- We have a skewed idea about “love”
 - We hear of this one *falling* in or out of *love* with that one...
 - We *love* cake, or fishing, or that color green...
 - My wife and I constantly argue about whether *animals* can *love*...
- The Greek language may help us gain a better grasp here.
 - I am aware of **3 words for “love”** in Greek:
 - *eros* – erotic “love” (erotic – affectionate)
 - *phileo* – brotherly “love” (Philadelphia – city of brotherly love)
 - *agape* – decided commitment
- In Psalm 136, God's love is *agape* – it is *steadfast* and *enduring*
 - *“his steadfast love endures forever”*
 - **Major Point:** God's love, which He has consummately displayed in Christ, **is real...**

(2) GOD'S LOVE IS DEMONSTRATED IN BOTH PROTECTION AND PROVISION

- Let's break down the psalm in order to see the flow of thought.
 - "Give thanks... Give thanks... Give thanks..." (v1-3)
 - To whom?
 - To the covenant making/keeping God "*LORD*" (v1)
 - To the God who is "*good*" (v1)
 - To the "*God of gods*" (v2)
 - To the "*Lord of lords*" (v3)
 - How do we know that Yahweh is "LORD," "good," "God of gods," and "Lord of lords"?
 - He is "*God of gods*" because He is the **Provider of all Creation**:
 - He "alone does great wonders" (v4)
 - He "by understanding made the heavens" (v5)
 - He "spread out the earth above the waters" (v6)
 - He "made the great lights," "the sun to rule over the day" and "the moon and stars to rule over the night" (v7-9)
 - **Therefore, Elohim** (the one who created and provides all things), **He alone is God!**
 - He is "*LORD*" and "*good*" because He **Protects His people**:
 - He "struck down the firstborn of Egypt" (v10), but He "brought Israel out from among them" (v11), protecting Israel from His judgment "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm" (v12)
 - He "divided the Red Sea in two" (v13), protecting "Israel" as they passed "through the midst of it" (v14), but He "overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea" (v15)
 - He "led his people through the wilderness" (v16), protecting them from the elements, animals, and earthly powers
 - **Therefore, Yahweh** (the covenant making/keeping God, who graciously protects His people), **He alone is God!**

- He is “*Lord of lords*” because He ***Protects His people from earthly kings and Provides for His people over-against earthly power:***
 - He “struck down great kings” (v17) and “killed mighty kings” (v18), protecting His people from these earthly kings or “lords”
 - He stuck down and killed these specific kings “Sihon” (v19) and “Og” (v20)
 - He “gave their land as a heritage,” “a heritage to Israel his servant” (v21-22), thus providing for His people over-against earthly “lords”
 - ***Therefore, Adonai*** (the sovereign Ruler above all others), ***He alone is God!***
- And, once again, He is “*LORD*” and “*good*” because He ***Protects and Provides for His people:***
 - He “remembered us in our low estate” (v23)
 - He “rescued us from our foes” (v24)
 - He “gives food to all flesh” (v25)
 - Therefore, “Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever” (v26)
 - God’s love is understood in terms of His Protection and Provision for His people – the ones He loves.
 - This is a psalm that focuses more than any other on the love of God, and the evidence the author gives in support of God’s love is: “He protects...” “He provides...” “He is graciously good...”
- **Major Point:** God’s love, which He has consummately displayed in Christ, is real and active.
 - God ***actively*** protects and provides, therefore, we know He loves

(3) GOD'S LOVE IS SUPREMEY FOUND IN THE GOSPEL

- The Bible tells us that God the Son is the one through whom all things were created (Col. 1:16), therefore He is Creator and Provider – “**God of gods.**”
- The Bible tells us that God the Son is above all “thrones,” “dominions,” and “rulers” (Col. 1:16), therefore He is Protector and Sovereign – “**Lord of lords.**”
- The Bible tells us that God the Son is the one through whom sinners are reconciled to God, therefore He is the covenant keeping “**LORD**”
- Therefore, Jesus Christ (God the Son in human form) is the embodiment of God's love.
 - *“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him...”*
 - *“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (or atoning sacrifice) for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:9-10).*
- How do we know that God loves you?
 - We know this because of the person and work of Christ
 - Just consider the great love of God we find here!
 - God's love for His children is greater than His love for unbelievers.
 - Will God not spare His children from His wrath? And will He not deliver it in full to those who remain in their sin?
 - Do we not understand that the love of God, which has come to all those who are born again unto a new life and new family, is effectively greater towards those He calls His own?
 - God's children are not to find pride or self-congratulations here. No! God's love comes to sinners and makes them saints, it comes to slaves and makes them sons; it is not motivated by anything in the slavish sinner.
 - God's love for His children is greater than His love for angels.
 - Do we not see that God's wrath was immediately poured out on disobedient angels?

- Angels are the servants of God, but believers are God's children – adopted into His own family through the person and work of Christ.
- God's love for His children is greater than His love for the heavens.
 - When God the Son considered the estate of sinful humanity, did He not leave the comfort and glory of heaven (that serene and holy abode) and enter the pain and ruin of earth?
- God's love for His children is greater than His love for Himself.
 - Oh, Christian... Think on this for a moment longer than you are naturally inclined to do. Think on this for as long as your feeble and sinful mind can bear to remain attentive!
 - If God loved Himself more than He loved you... If He decided to demonstrate kindness and favor towards Himself one bit greater than the kindness and favor He showed for you, then He would have avoided the cross altogether.
 - Did Christ Himself not cry out to His Father, "If there be any other way, let this cup pass!" Oh, Christian, there was another way. There was a way of self-service rather than selfless sacrifice! Christ was not obligated to you for a single moment. He has never been obligated to you. And yet, the cup did not pass!
 - For what reason did Christ drink this abominable cup?! Why did He continue, even after He agonizingly pleaded for reprieve?! Can there be any doubt that love compelled Him?!
 - But what kind of love? Not a silly or circumstantial love... No! This would not suffice to keep anyone's feet treading upon the suffering road. Was it an emotional whim that steeled Christ's resolve? No! The moment the impulsive feeling took flight, then Christ's resolve would have gone with it. The love of God in Christ is a Steadfast Love! It is an eternal, committed, unflinching, inexhaustible, incomparable, determined love!
- **Major Point:** God's love, which He has consummately displayed in Christ, is real and active. Therefore, we should be supremely grateful.

(4) OUR FUNDAMENTAL RESPONSE TO GOD’S LOVE SHOULD BE GRATITUDE

- Our necessary, our basic, our essential, our central response should be gratitude.
- Let me work backwards from broad to narrow, general to specific.
- “*Give thanks to the **God of heaven***” (v26)
 - *El* – the almighty one over all peoples
 - God reveals Himself, not as a local mascot deity, but as the universal God.
 - There is no one exempt from owing Him gratitude and allegiance.
- “*Give thanks to the **God of gods***” (v2) and “*to the **Lord of lords***” (v3)
 - *Elohim* – the powerfully creating God
 - *Adonai* – the sovereignly ruling God
 - This is a reality for all people everywhere. God is God, and He is Lord.
 - This is the very basic truth we all know, and yet sinful humanity naturally denies (Rom. 1:18-21).
 - We must give thanks, for God is our Creator and our Sovereign.
- “*Give thanks to the **LORD***” (v1)
 - *Yahweh* – the covenant making, covenant keeping God
 - We should be supremely grateful to the God who has promised to save us, who has condescended to do so, and who has done all of this out of *sheer grace* and because of *steadfast love*!
 - This is a kind of gratitude that only Christians can have, and every Christian must have.
- **Major Point:** God’s love, which He has consummately displayed in Christ, is real and active. **Therefore, we should be supremely grateful.**

APPLICATION

For the unbeliever or ungrateful:

- Consider the weight of this psalm's argument!
 - God is your God; He is your Lord; God is creator and sovereign over all. How can you possibly justify withholding gratitude from Him?
- Consider the unparalleled love of God, demonstrated for you in Christ!
 - Have you ever experienced love like this?
 - Is there anything close to this kind of profound, faithful, and overwhelming love?
 - Taste and see that this LORD is good!

For the believer (who may also have less gratitude than we should):

- You have every reason to be grateful – to give thanks to the “God of heaven” and the “LORD” of your salvation.
 - Are you?
 - Do you give time and effort to demonstrating gratitude for such a love as this?
 - Do you give time and effort to considering the love of God?
- May the love of God overwhelm us all, and may we be unable to foolishly withhold our gratitude towards Him.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

The Love of God by A.W. Tozer

http://www.heavendwellers.com/hdt_chapter_20_koh.htm

The God of Love by Octavius Winslow

<http://www.gracegems.org/WINSLOW/og01.htm>

God in Christ, a God of Love by Ebenezer Erskine

<http://www.puritansermons.com/erskine/eerskin06.htm>