

Psalm 136

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Preacher: Barry Davies

[0 : 00] and they sing, or whatever it is they do, and then at the end of it, if the people or the judges are honest, they then tell them what it's like.

And you say what you like about Simon Cowell, but if it sounds like a cat that's been stabbed, and he says that, he's usually being quite honest. And yet sometimes these people react violently, as if something had gone wrong with the judges hearing, that they were actually singing this wonderful song, and it was just castigated by the judges.

And you feel that sometimes they're actually going to attack them. They seem to have a warped sense of what they're doing. Now, I say that because, in this case, we're looking at a psalm where, potentially, we have that sort of situation, or we could have.

But before I start, let me just ask you a leading question. This will show something about your age, and about your musical background. In 1979, Ian Drury and the Blockheads sang a song.

Now, you'll know one song by him, but that maybe is not the one I'm thinking of. But has anybody had any vaguest idea of what that song might be? Yeah, well, it's not that one.

[1 : 27] Right. Reasons to be Cheerful, Part 3. I never heard Parts 1 and 2. I'm not sure there were any Parts 1 and 2. But that song was called Reasons to be Cheerful, Part 3.

I've entitled my sermon this evening in a slightly different way, Reasons to be Grateful in Three Parts. Because this psalm that we're looking at is a psalm of gratitude to God.

The first thing to say is that many theologians, particularly from the liberal side of the market, as it were, they always criticise the fact that the Bible, which we feel is the inspired and infallible word of God, must be wrong, they say, because if you look at the Old Testament, you find a God of judgment.

But if you look at the New Testament, you find a God of love. Now, that must be wrong. If you only looked at this one psalm, you'd realise that since this is in the Old Testament, look at what it says. That refrain runs all the way through it. Talking about the Lord, talking about God, His love endures forever. And it's such a strong thing that the psalmist is writing, that if you are counting, it repeats it 26 times.

[2 : 51] Once every verse. 26 times. 27 times. I remember one preacher, I think it was Eric Aldrich, but if it wasn't, I apologise to him in advance, who was preaching for several weeks on, you must be born again.

Do you remember that? And somebody asked him, why do you keep on preaching on, you must be born again? And what was his answer, do you remember? Because you must be born again.

And it seems to me that this psalmist was saying the similar sort of thing. That the God that he serves, the God that he's thanking here, he's saying his love endures forever.

Why? Because his love endures forever. And I want us to think this evening of what that means for us.

Because this psalm, I read a few verses from Psalm 135, and the reason is Psalm 135 and 136 are connected. They've very much got the same theme, other than the fact that we've got this refrain which occurs in Psalm 136.

[4 : 09] And it was thought that when this psalm was actually delivered, it was sung, and the people in the congregation would sing that refrain as the words of the psalm were read.

In other words, it's the first part of every verse which is the psalm, and the refrain was put in there as a sort of background to what was being said.

And it had a really prominent place in Jewish worship. It was called the great Hallel, from which we get the word Hallelujah. It's as if the psalmist is saying, this is a time, a place, where as we meet together, as we think about this psalm, we think of what the Lord has done for us, we can literally

proclaim Hallelujah, because of everything that he's done for us, and his goodness. Because it proclaims the omnipotence of God, as does Psalm 135. It talks about the greatness of God.

It reviews all the things that God has done for his people up to that time. And I want us to remember that as we look at these words, although we're looking at the Old Testament and thousands of years ago, when he talks about the people of Israel, the people of God, obviously much of this carries forward to this day, and so we can learn from it.

[5 : 37] We know that men and women come to faith in Christ, but not until they're convinced by God of their inability to save themselves because of their own sinfulness.

But this psalm tells us that there are three issues about which men and women can do absolutely nothing, although they might believe that they can.

The first thing is, it says here in that first verse, thanks to the Lord for he is good. Now good isn't actually the best way to describe it, other than the fact that when we think of good, we automatically think there might be something better.

If something's good, what is better than that, or what is the best? But this good is literally the good that when the Lord created the heavens and the earth, and when it was all done, he said he looked on what he created, and it was good.

There is nothing better. There's nothing greater. There's nothing at a higher level than this goodness of God. And the first thing, of course, that people can't do is they cannot make themselves good.

[6 : 57] You know, if there's a single person here who really thinks that they can make themselves good by their own effort and self-will, I'd be very, very surprised. Because we only need to consider our own lives, our own hearts, our own thoughts, to realise that we're far away from good.

We know that in the Bible, in Luke chapter 18, it says, no one is good except God alone. And that was Jesus responding to this rich young ruler who'd come to him and he said to him, good teacher. And Jesus said, why do you call me good? only God is good. So, whatever we apply to other people, really, good, in this sense, should be reserved for God.

Because this is perfect goodness. This is goodness without any fault. This is the absence of sin, simple goodness.

goodness. But there's another verse, isn't there, in Romans chapter 3, verse 23, which says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[8 : 14] So, even if we were believing for a short time that we might be capable of being good, we've got that verse and many others which tell us that we continually sin.

But we don't need the verses, do they? Because we know that we do. We know that day by day we will fall. We won't be able to keep up the standard that is set for us by the Lord himself.

The second thing is this refrain that comes up says, his love endures forever. His love. God's love. And there's something else that men and women can do nothing about. There is no way that we can make God love us. Again, we could turn to countless examples in the Bible where that point is, as it were, time and time again reinforced.

Nothing that we can do can please God. There is nothing in us that would please him. Rather, the opposite. He says, if God looks on us as sinful people, is unable to bear that sinfulness.

[9 : 35] And that's why, eventually, when the Lord was sent, it was precisely for that reason. God couldn't have that relationship restored with us because of our sin, because there was nothing that would make us right with God.

God. And yet, so many people try and try and try, as it were, to be better. There's nothing worse than trying when you continually fail.

And yet, we know that that's exactly what happens. love The third thing which this verse tells us, he says, his love endures forever.

Something else which we can't do is, even if we think for one moment that we could be good, for a day, for an hour, for a minute, for a second, we know that in this world, love doesn't last.

You can see it all around the world, because people who are married, they separate. They have other partners. People who are friends break up because somebody does something wrong.

[10 : 53] We know that in reality, mortals cannot love continually. Their love can't endure. And even if it could endure for a lifetime, this isn't saying it's for a lifetime, this is saying it's forever.

What good would it be, Paul intimates this in one of his letters, doesn't he, he said, what good would it be if we were serving a God who couldn't do all these things, if this saviour that we're serving was actually not a saviour at all.

He said it would make our worship worthless, if it was only for this life, he says. So even if we could imagine that people could love for this life, that's as long as that love would endure.

But here it says God's love, his love, endures forever. Now if you think about it, for anybody reading this Bible, maybe for the first time, you might skip through those words without thinking, but why does he keep repeating it?

Because surely it means if God's love, for who, for his people, for you and I, it endures forever, what's the implication of that?

[12:27] That life doesn't end when our physical bodies die, but they go on into eternity. It goes into forever, as it were, and the Lord has a love for his people which endures forever, into eternity.

Death doesn't end God's love for his people because we know that after that physical death, then we will have a resurrected body at some point because of what Christ has done on the cross.

So there are three things there that people are unable to do. They can't do for themselves. It has to be something that God takes the initiative with.

And then he goes on in the psalm which is split up really into three portions to talk about three different aspects of the outworking of this fact.

That we are to thank God for his good and that his love endures forever. And he gives examples.

First of all, if you look in the first few verses following those introductory three, you'll see it talks about how God created this world doing great wonders.

[13:57] This is God as creator. What I want us to understand tonight is when we read this psalm, although it's talking about that particular time, and although it's talking about things that they would understand, there's a very real application for us in our day.

because the model, the pattern, is still exactly the same. Who can worship God? Well, if God hadn't created the world, there would have been nobody to worship him.

the creation had to come first. Let me read you a verse that sort of points that out.

2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17, it says this, about those people who become Christians. It says, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

A new creation. The Lord is loving his creation. The bit that was good, the bit that had fallen into sin because of Adam's sin and what followed, and the Lord is trying to restore his people to himself, those he created.

[15:32] And because the sin is so inherent in them, they need to be recreated anew. This new creation that happens when people become Christians.

That means that when these people are created, the second thing that he goes on to talk about in this psalm is how he got the people out of Egypt, and we've been thinking about that in the morning service in Exodus, thinking about Moses bringing the people out of Egypt.

And that surely is a picture of what the Lord is doing with his people when he sort of brings them out of the world and they become Christians.

So when he's describing this situation, this Exodus coming out of Egypt, then really what he's describing is what happens when people are, as it were, pulled out of the world by the Lord and set in a different place.

Here's how it's described in that very famous verse in John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[16:48] Egypt. Because out of his love for us, this love that's talked about here that endures forever, the sign of that love was that he was willing to send his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross so that whoever believes in him wouldn't perish but would have eternal life.

love. And the third thing that it covers in this psalm is what happened when they came out of Egypt. So having described how they came out of Egypt, it then goes on to say how they conquered this land that the Lord had promised to them.

Look what it says in verse 21. When all these kings had been defeated, it says he gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to his servant Israel. This was the land that was promised to his people.

The Lord said you will inherit the land. But what about our inheritance? Well surely that must be to be with the Lord himself in heaven, a child in his family, eternal life, literally the promised land, the

land where it says in my house there are many rooms and I go to prepare one for you. So this picture is really describing that journey as it were into faith. And of course it's not just the fact that his love endures, all of the promises of God endure.

[18 : 27] And one of them was which he left with the disciples when he went into heaven at the end of the gospel stories. I'm reading the one from Matthew says, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

Again, that is not just when we come to the end of our life on this earth, not even perhaps to the end of this world, but literally to the end of time.

So there's a pattern which runs through here and there are things that we need to learn from this particular psalm, things which will enable us to benefit from these words and from these promises that God has made to his people.

Notice that it says at the start the Lord is referred to in three different ways. First of all it says, give thanks to the Lord for he is good. That word that's used there is the term for God himself, Yahweh. Then it goes on to say, give thanks to the God of gods. This is the recognition that the God that we serve is greater than every other God that might exist or that people might have invented in this world.

[19 : 50] And then finally, in the very last verse of this psalm, it says, give thanks to the God of heaven. Our God isn't just a God of this world, our God is a God of heaven, a God who is so far above all of the gods and all of the lords and all of the kings that his realm is in heaven, heaven itself.

And that's also reflected in Psalm 135 in a similar way. This is the God that we serve. well, it would be nice to think that all of these things were true of us now.

And the reality is that our Christian lives are working all the time to that time when we'll know God personally, when we'll be in that family.

We're as it were a work in progress while we're in this world. But what's been spoken about here is really the kingdom that is going to come. And just for a moment I want to hand back to something else that's been happening in the morning.

In talking to the children and being looking at the Lord's prayer. Just think about how it starts. In one of the first lines it talks about God's kingdom.

[21 : 13] It says that's what we're thinking about this morning. But then your kingdom come. God's kingdom is coming. God's kingdom will come.

We will be in his kingdom. It also says later on in that prayer when we're asked to pray for ourselves that he should forgive us our sins.

In order to be in this kingdom that God has we need our sins forgiven. And as we know and what this psalm has already said we can't accomplish that for ourselves.

only God can forgive us our sins. Fortunately the gospel message is that the Lord Jesus Christ says that he will stand for us.

Those who trust in him and his robe of righteousness will cover all of our sins if we repent and trust in him. And also we have this inheritance which is promised for us that one day we will be with him.

[22 : 28] And in that prayer it says thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. You know I was saying this morning on the way in I heard a few other people say what a glorious morning.

God's creation is wonderful. But it's marred. Just imagine what heaven will be like. The kingdom that God's prepared for us.

whatever we see in this world, however beautiful it might appear, whether it's talking about a view or whether it's talking about somebody's personality or somebody's talent or ability, whatever it is, it's just a very, very, very pale imitation of what heaven will be like and we have that inheritance planned for us.

Well, what is this psalm telling us? I believe it's telling us three things that we need to remember. First of all, like the psalmist, we're to be a grateful people because we need to thank the Lord for everything that he's done for us.

Continually, God is continually helping us in our lives. The second thing is that we're to be a fearless people. people. We're to speak boldly because he says the Lord is constantly with us.

[23 : 56] Perhaps you're like me, that sometimes you've potentially got the ability to have a conversation with somebody and it could easily turn to something which is of a spiritual content where you might be able to witness to that person and we draw back because we're afraid of what

might happen.

But look at this God that we're serving. This is an omnipotent God, a God who loves his people and he will be with us all through our lives.

There's not a single moment when God won't be there helping us as we get through our lives. And so we can be fearless. Not stupid but fearless.

And the last thing which surely this psalm gives to everyone who's got as it were the Holy Spirit working with them, you must say when you read this psalm surely that this is a psalm of tremendous hope.

We should be a hopeful people. Not a hope that the world believes in that you know I hope I might win the jackpot on the lotto tomorrow or the lottery. But the fact that it's a certain hope that this inheritance that the Lord talks about will be given to us one day and we'll be able to trust in him.

[25 : 22] That's really what we're looking forward to. And of course these are wonderful things which this psalmist has said. There's lots of people who've made various quotes on this which I won't bore you with tonight but if you get that book that John Blanchard produced *Gathered Gold* and you just look up in there some of the things that are said about those three things about being grateful.

The first is if you've got a really grateful spirit with gratitude towards God what is the most natural thing that follows from that?

and of course it's prayer. We've been thinking about prayer this last week. A grateful people he says is a praying people.

People who get down and pray to God. The second thing is the fearless bit. There's another quote which says that the worst thing about fear is that you become afraid.

And it's like change which hold you back. Whereas when you're fearless you can go forward you can move forward. That injunction given to Joshua when he was just taking charge of the people of Israel you remember was be strong and courageous knowing that the Lord is with you.

[26 : 57] And of course that hope that's held up before us that one day we'll be with the Lord in heaven. What a wonderful thing to have in front of us.

If you look around the world there's so much hopelessness so many people trapped in all sorts of situations which on the surface seem hopeless and yet God has given us this hope that one day we'll be with him in glory.

it's one of my favourite psalms it's a wonderful psalm but notice it's only wonderful if you're one of those people who's accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour it's only wonderful if you're one of those people who put your trust in him and in him alone it's only wonderful if day by day we have the strength of God as it were walking side by side with us that we have access to all his power all his authority through his Holy Spirit who works within us it's only wonderful if when we look forward to the future we've got that living hope which the Bible says is only given to those who trust in Christ it would seem to me there's nothing which is more calculated to drag people down in this world and to be encumbered by all the toils and all the cares of everything in this world than those who literally have no hope for the future not for this life but for this life that will endure forever because for the Christian we're reminded that God's love and all his works for us will also endure forever doesn't it make you just want to shout out to God in thanks give thanks to the Lord for he is good his love endures forever I can almost imagine the people singing this and the tune raising louder and louder as they praise God remembering as this sound does all the wonderful things that they had already done for his people you know the thing which amazes me thinking about Moses that he had been thinking about in the morning is that if you think about all of the things that Moses experienced in his life all the blessings his royal upbringing when he could easily have been killed the fact that he escaped punishment from killing that man who was mistreating the slaves the fact that the seas parted at his command the fact that all the other things that were happening in the journey the manna from heaven the quail and all the other things 101 things happened the 10 commandments being given miraculously to him and yet what we were hearing this morning he was still saying but why me

I can't do these things if we're those Christians who believe the words of this psalm then we'll be grateful and we'll pray to God and continue to ask him to help us day by day we'll be a fearless people we'll be able to speak boldly about what we believe and finally we'll be a people of great hope as we look to the future and look to the salvation that the Lord Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for on our behalf I don't know what sort of view we have of God maybe we look on Christ

and as the Bible says when we look on him we see the Lord but as somebody else once said you know sometimes our picture of God and our vision of him is too small what is it the children sing my God is so great so strong and so mighty and that's true isn't it let's trust in the [31 : 17] Lord let's be strong let's be grateful and let's trust him to be with us day by day because we're not designed for this world we're designed for eternity and that's why God's love has to and will endure forever you