

UNCEASING PRAISE FOR INEXHAUSTIBLE MERCIES

Psalm 136

Intro: Psalm 136 is a psalm of praise from beginning to end. There is nothing but praise here. In reading the Psalms it is always wise to look for the refrain. There is no problem in finding the refrain in this Psalm because it appears in every verse: “For His mercy endureth for ever.” Spurgeon mentioned that most hymns “with a solid, simple chorus become favorites with congregations.” And there is little doubt but that this psalm was a favorite with the people of Israel, as well as with its leaders. It has been suggested by many expositors that this Psalm was sung in an antiphonal manner, one choir singing the first line of each verse, and another choir singing the refrain.

It seems that this Psalm was sung at the dedication of Solomon’s temple, an event which prompted all of the people to praise the Lord. We read about this in 2 Chron. 7:1-6:

1 Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house.

2 And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.

3 And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshiped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

5 And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

6 And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood.

This Psalm was evidently also one of the psalms which the singers of Israel sang as they led the army to battle against the Moabites, and the Ammonites, and the people of mount Seir. We read about this in 2 Chron. 20:21. Referring to Jehoshaphat, the king, we read in this verse,

And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever (2 Chron. 20:21).

And you remember the outcome. Judah's enemies began to destroy each other, and the Lord gave a most amazing victory to His people. None of the enemy survived, and the people of God were three days gathering the spoil from their enemies.

So it is quite obvious that praise is pleasing to the Lord – very pleasing. It is sad that we spend so little time in praising the Lord for what He has done in the past, knowing that His power and wisdom and faithfulness are the same as we look ahead to the future.

The Psalm is very easy to outline because the divisions are very clear as we read through the Psalm.

- 1) Praise to the Lord in vv. 1-3. Many see in this praise for the Three Persons of the Trinity.
- 2) Praise for the God of creation, vv. 4-9.
- 3) Praise for the work of the Lord in delivering the people from Egypt, and then bringing them into the Promised Land, vv. 10-22.
- 4) Praise for personal blessings, vv. 23-26.
- 5) The Psalm ends as it began with a call for the people to praise the Lord, v. 26.

It is evident from the Psalm that the goodness of the Lord, and His mercy, are evident in all that He is, and in all that He does. And it is equally clear that we are under an obligation to be aware of His mercy, and to be aware of His goodness, and then offer our praise to Him continuously. And we learn from this Psalm also that, although we have praised the Lord for certain blessings in the past, it is proper for us to praise Him over and over for the same blessings. It would be impossible to determine how many times this Psalm has been sung by the Jews in the past, but it is also very likely that such praise has not been on the lips and in the hearts of the people of Israel in recent days. Quoting Spurgeon again, he said of this Psalm, "It is tuned to rapture, and can only be fully enjoyed by a devoutly grateful heart" (Vol. III, Section 2, p. 204).

Now let us look briefly at each of the five sections of this Psalm. We need to learn from this Psalm how to praise the Lord.

I. A CALL TO GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD (Psa. 136:1-3).

The emphasis here is upon the Person of the Lord, or, as has been suggested, upon the Three Persons of the Godhead, which seems to be a very reasonable thought.

There are many things that we cannot do, and there is much that we cannot give. But one thing every child of God can do is to give thanks to the Lord. And it is one thing that every child of God should do. And so before rehearsing for us what the Lord has done, the Psalmist, probably David, focuses attention on Who the Lord is. He is good. And He is ever merciful. And these facts are emphasized by the Psalmist us of His Name, Jehovah. He is the living God. He is an unchanging God. And so what He has been, He still is, and always will be. As I said this morning, the Bible needs no revision because it is eternally true, and that fact can always be declared about the Lord.

He is good. In fact, the word “good” derives its definition from God. And He only is truly “good.”

But we need to realize that His goodness is displayed by the exercise of His mercy. And throughout the Word of God, OT and NT, we see continual evidence of both of these attributes of God. And He is supreme in the exercise of His goodness and His mercy. If there are those who can be called “gods,” He is over them. And we know that there are many “lords” in the earth, but He is sovereign over them. The people were reminded as they sang this Psalm that the Lord is greater than all who in any way exercise authority over others. In verse 2 the Psalmist called Him Elohim, and in verse 3 the Psalmist speaks of Him as Adonai. The use of all of these three names of God may be a further indication that all Three Persons of the Godhead are the objects of worship and praise in this Psalm.

So much can be said about these verses, but let us not overlook the great appeal that is made. The Psalmist really pleads with all of us to give thanks to the Godhead because in Them we find untarnished goodness, and inexhaustible mercy. If God should ever cease to be what He is, then we are released from this obligation. But God will never cease to be what He always has been, and so we are under a divine obligation to give ourselves to thanksgiving and praise.

But let us go on to the second point.

II. PRAISE TO THE GOD OF CREATION (Psa. 136:4-9).

God is our Creator. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, and all that is in them. And He not only is the Creator of the universe, but He is the One Who sustains the universe. He keeps it all going. Here we see God's power (v. 4), and here we see God's wisdom (v. 5). He separated the dry land from the waters that covered the earth. And He is the One Who placed those light-giving bodies in the heavens.

But the point is that all of creation is evidence of the goodness of the Lord, and of His mercy. Theologians talk about common grace, that is, blessings that come upon the just and the unjust. And all of this is evident in the operation of the universe. The same sun, moon, and stars that shone down upon the Garden of Eden, are still shining in the heavens today, by day and night, and they all testify to the inexhaustible mercy of God. How often God would have been justified in shutting down the universe, and consigning all of us to hell itself, but the continuation of these blessings is a marvelous testimony to the mercy of God.

What is the third point?

III. GOD'S MERCY TO HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL (Psa. 136:10-22).

This is the longest section of the Psalm. It is the story of how the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, and then into the Promised Land. The books of Exodus through Joshua are one extended testimony to the goodness and mercy of God. But here also we see God's power. None of Israel's enemies were able to hinder God in the fulfillment of the promise that He made to Abraham. The Psalmist does not mention everything that He could, but we have a general survey of the mercy and goodness of God.

Time and time again God would have been justified in turning Israel over to her enemies, but again and again His mercy was extended to them. And remember that God gives mercy to relieve man in his misery, even when man is responsible for bringing his own miserable conditions upon himself. God's people, and even their leaders, may fail the Lord, but the Lord never fails. And no one, nor any nation, can possibly stand in God's way to keep Him from carrying out His purposes.

(Read these verses, and comment on them.)

And where does the Psalm take us next?

IV. PRAISE FOR PERSONAL BLESSINGS (Psa. 136:23-25).

There many blessings that we experience as a group of the Lord's people. This was true of Israel as a nation, and this is true today of the Church, the body of Christ. We all enjoy the blessings of creation. All Israel was the recipient of the deliverance from Egypt and the blessings of the Promised Land. Paul in Ephesians tells us that we in the Church have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. *But then there comes the time in our praises when we have to think of those special blessings that the Lord bestows upon us individually.*

We can all praise the Lord for salvation, but that blessing has come to us under a wide variety of circumstances. Salvation is always the same, but God's way of bringing us to Himself has been unique with each one of us.

We can all say that the Lord "remembered us in our low estate." Some of us may have gone lower in our sins than others, but we were all in a "low estate." But in chorus we can sing that He "remembered us." Even making it more personal I can say, "He remembered me," and your can say that He remembered you. He loved us ere we knew Him, as the hymn goes.

And He has redeemed us from far greater enemies than we read about when we read of Israel's enemies in the OT. He has redeemed us from our sins. He has redeemed us from the power of Satan. He has redeemed us from our own fleshly natures. We have been set free to love Him and to live for Him and to serve Him. He has freed us, and He keeps us from ever going back under that bondage we were living in when we were in our sins.

And finally, from a personal standpoint, He is the One Who provides our food for us, and for "all flesh." God not only meets our spiritual needs, but He meets our material and physical needs. He meets all of our needs. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. And He does this not only for the people who know Him, but for those who don't know Him. I shudder when I hear Democrats or Republicans or anyone else taking the credit for the flourishing economy which we are enjoying. The Lord can take all of it away in a moment. Recently we have studied the book of the Revelation, and I am reading it through right now. Just the day before yesterday I read again about the downfall of Babylon, and three times in Rev. 18 we read this:

1) In verse 10: "For in one hour your judgment has come."

2) In verse 17: "For in one hour such great riches came to nothing."

3) In verse 19: "For in one hour she is made desolate."

Babylon in the last days will feel that she is invincible, and the kings of the earth will feel the same way. But in "one hour" it will all be gone and over, finished.

God is jealous for His own glory, and He will not give His glory to anyone else. He is going to show the world that all of this talk about evolution and Mother Nature is but the expression of spiritual insanity. This world belongs to God. He made it, and He sustains it, and when He gets ready to do it, He will destroy it. Let us give thanks to the Lord, and to Him alone, for the bread on our tables, and for the way He so graciously meets our needs every day. He is good, and He is merciful.

And this brings me to the last point.

V. A FINAL CALL FOR ALL OF US TO GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD (Psa. 136:26).

After surveying all that we know about the Lord, and then all that the Bible teaches us about His work in creation, and then how faithful He has been in dealing with Israel as a nation, and with His people individually, this is the only conclusion that we can come to:

"O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for His mercy endureth for ever."

Concl: What a tragedy it would be for us to spend this evening going through this great Psalm, and then for us to leave and go back to the same way we have been living, not giving the Lord the glory and the praise for His goodness to us, and for the bountiful supply of His mercies.

Let me close with words given to us by one of the greatest prophets of the OT who would rather die than have failed the Lord. This is what He said about the mercies of the Lord:

22 It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed,
because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

24 The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I
hope in him.

25 The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul
that seeketh him.

26 It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for
the salvation of the LORD (Lam. 3:22-26).

Psalm 136 (7)

How blessed we are to be the people of God. Let us make sure that we are not only faithful in prayer, but that a major part of our praying is spent in praising the Lord for what is, good, and merciful, and powerful, and wise, and then to thank Him daily for saving us, and for the wonderful way He has provided for us day by day even though we don't deserve anything that He has done for us.