

## GIVE THANKS

Psalm 136 begins with the words, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His loving kindness is everlasting." After two more verses exhorting us to give thanks, the writer gives an overview of God's acts of loving kindness toward Israel. These include His acts of creation, redemption from slavery in Egypt, rescue of His people from the armies of Pharaoh, guidance through the wilderness, defeat of mighty kings on their behalf, endowing them with a land of their own, and remembering us in our low estate. Remembering God's gracious acts on our behalf is always a good way to spur us to give thanks.

When God finished his work of creation, He looked at all He had made and said it was "very good" (see Genesis 1:31). In spite of war, injustice, prejudice, and pollution, this old world is still a very beautiful, nurturing place. And God made it just for us. Thank Him for making the blue sky, the green grass, the sunshine to warm us, and the rain to water the earth. Thank Him for the picture of new life every spring, the abundance of harvest in the summer, the dazzling brilliance of the fall foliage, and the serenity of new-fallen snow.

God's redemption of the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt foreshadows the redemption of God's people from slavery to sin, which was accomplished at the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. In Romans 6, the Apostle Paul tells us we have been released from the grip of sin's control. "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be made powerless, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin . . . for sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:6,14). How grateful I am for God's amazing grace that provided a way for my escape from the bondage of sin.

Just as Pharaoh's armies pursued the Israelites, so the evils of our culture pursue us daily and seek to recapture us. But the truth of God is that Jesus' sacrifice was adequate not only to redeem us, but also to rescue us ongoing. Galatians 1:4 says, "the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age." Thank God that His activity in our lives does not end with our salvation, but continues as He sanctifies us and preserves us in the midst of a perverse generation.

And as we make our way through this life, which at times can seem very much like a wilderness, we can have confidence that God is leading us. In Psalm 23:3, David says of the Lord, his Shepherd, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." And Isaiah the prophet assures God's people that, "He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you . . . Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left." Thank you, Lord, that you have not left us alone, without direction, but You lead us by your indwelling Holy Spirit.

While we may not experience human authorities opposing us, the Scripture tells us that we do war against rulers in the unseen realm. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). And the good news is that the war has already been won. Jesus Christ's death on the cross won complete victory over sin, death, and Satan and his forces. Col.2:15 sums it up succinctly: "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through [the cross]." Are you weary and wounded from the battle? Take heart, and give thanks to God that Jesus has won the victory!

God gave the people of Israel a land to be their home. It was a land "flowing with milk and honey" (see Exodus 3:8), a good place to live. God made the earth for us, and life here is pretty good. But on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3). We can't begin to imagine the wonders of the new heaven and new earth. Or will we even care what our surroundings look like in comparison to being in the presence of Jesus? Thank you, Lord, that though we live now in these fallen, mortal bodies on a beautiful, but imperfect world, we can know that "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). We will have an eternal home far beyond anything we could imagine.

Just as God saw the suffering of His people in Egypt and took action to rescue them, so He sees our broken and helpless condition. King David wrote in Psalm 103:13, "For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." When Jesus was criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners, He said, "it is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). One of the greatest gifts God can give to anyone is to see himself as he truly is – fallen, broken, and desperately in need of a Savior. Then we can truly give thanks for "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

Think back over your own personal history. Remember how God saved you from the things that held you captive. Remember how He has delivered you from the temptations of this age. Remember the finality of Christ's work and the totality of His victory. Remember that you have a place that Jesus is preparing just for you, in heaven, in His presence. Remember how He has met you in your weakness and trials. Remember, and give thanks.

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