

# The Steadfast Love of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Can I start this afternoon by asking the question, I want to start by telling you the story of how the famous 19th century evangelist D.L. Moody learned of the greatness of God's steadfast love.

If you don't know who D.L. Moody is, he was the Billy Graham of his day. And if you don't know who Billy Graham was, go on YouTube and trust me, you'll be blessed. Well, Moody once traveled to England early on in his ministry, and he met a young English preacher named Henry Morehouse, who would later on pioneer social service work in the poorest areas of London.

Well, one day, Moody spoke to Morehouse, and Morehouse said to him, I'm thinking of going to America. Well, Moody said, well, if you ever get as far as Chicago, come to my church, and I'll give you the chance to preach.

Now, I only think Moody was being polite because he'd never heard Morehouse preach before. But he put the matter to the back of his mind, thinking that Morehouse will indeed reach America, but he probably won't get as far as Chicago.

Well, sometime after, Moody got back to America, and he received a telegram or a text in his day. And the text said this, have arrived in New York, will be in Chicago Sunday.

[ 1 : 49 ] Now, Moody didn't know what to do, especially since he was scheduled to be away that weekend. Finally, Moody told his church leaders, I think you should let this Englishman preach once.

But if he's any good, put him on again. Moody was gone for the following week, and he arrived back that Sunday. And when he got back, he spoke to his wife, and he asked her, how did our young English preacher do?

He's a better preacher than you are, she said. He's telling sinners that God loves them. That's not right, Moody replied.

God doesn't love sinners. Now, you need to remember, Moody had not yet learned much about the love of God in this time of his life. Well, if you don't think so, go and hear him.

What? said Moody. Do you mean to tell me he's still here and he's still speaking? Yes. He's been preaching all week, and he's only had one verse for a text.

[ 2 : 52 ] John 3, 16. Moody went to the meeting, and Moorhouse began by saying, I've been hunting for a text all day, and I've not been able to find one better than John 3, 16.

So I think I'll just speak about it one more time. Moorhouse began to preach, and afterward, Moody testified that it was on that night he received his first clear understanding of the gospel of grace and the greatness of God's love.

For some of us, we cannot remember the day when we were first amazed by the grace of God, as in the day when we first trusted in Jesus.

So maybe I need to rephrase my question. When was the last time you were blown away by the grace of God?

See, we should never get to a place where we ceased to be amazed by the grace of God in our lives. We should be a people who are characterized by joy and thanksgiving, that we who were once God-haters, enemies of God, have been redeemed, forgiven, and reconciled to God, who is good, holy, and just.

[ 4 : 15 ] We are no longer enemies of God, but we are friends of God, children of God, and we can say with the children of Israel, he is our God, and we are his people.

This afternoon, we're studying Psalm 118, and we're going to be hanging our thoughts under three hooks. If you'd like to take notes, my three hooks are this. Hook number one, the steadfast love of God.

Hook number two, the love of God always delivers. And hook number three, the love of God fulfilled. Now, I think it's important by way of context to state this, that we do not know the author of this psalm.

You just look at your Bibles, and you'll see that our psalm doesn't have one of those little wee super subscripts or titles that would say a psalm of Asaph, or a psalm of the sons of Korah, or a psalm of the music director himself, King David.

However, there is reason to believe that this is indeed a psalm of King David. In Ezra chapter three, it suggests that Psalm 118 was sung at the founding of the second temple.

[ 5 : 26 ] And when God's people sang it, they attributed it to King David. Now, although we cannot conclusively say that this is a psalm of David, one thing that we can say is that this is a heartfelt expression of gratitude to God for his intervention in the author's life and in the life of the nation of Israel.

Psalm 118 is the climax of a sequence of psalms. Psalm 113 to Psalm 118. This little wee short book of psalms is known as the Hallel Psalms.

Hallel is just short for the word hallelujah, which means praise the Lord. The psalm appears to narrate a story of crisis faced by a Davidic king where the nation Israel is under siege by surrounding nations.

Now, amid this turmoil, the king cried out to the Lord who responded by delivering him from his distress, which prompted the psalmist to cut for a call of thanksgiving and praise for all the people of Israel.

Now, this sets the stage of our first focus, the steadfast love of God. The first question we need to be asking ourselves is why does the psalmist exhort the people of God to give thanks?

[ 6 : 43 ] Well, let's read the first line. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever. Firstly, it's the Lord's goodness that leads the psalmist to exhort his fellow worshippers to give thanks to the Lord.

But what is the Lord's goodness? Well, according to one theologian, Kevin de Young, God's goodness refers to the overflowing bounty of God, wherein because of who he is in and of himself, he communicates blessing to his creatures and to all of his creation.

So to experience God's goodness is to enjoy his sweetness, his friendliness, the benevolence, or in other words, the generosity of God. And that's what the psalmist begins praising God for.

It's because of God's goodness the psalmist. The psalmist is redirecting the attention of the people from themselves, from their circumstances, and he's making them fix their attention on the sovereign Lord God who is good in and of himself.

As people who belong to God, we should always be praising him for who he is, for he is God. We should always be praising God in the good times and in the not-so-good times, for he is worthy of all of our praise.

[ 8 : 08 ] But the psalmist just doesn't stop at the goodness of God. He homes into another attribute of God, which is his love. Or as the psalmist describes it, his love endures forever.

If you're reading the ESV, it renders it, his steadfast love endures forever. The word that's used to describe steadfast love of God is almost untranslatable.

It's a rich Hebrew word, a word called *hesed*. You pronounce it *hesed*. Just be careful not to spit on the people in front of you. Some have translated it as loving kindness.

Some of your Bibles will translate it as mercy. The word evokes God's covenant love, his loyal love, his unfailing love, or the steadfast love of God, which is immovable.

Here the psalmist is celebrating the testimony of God's enduring love in the life of the nation of Israel. In spite of Israel's wanderings, in spite of her failings and stumblings, God's love for his chosen people, did it endure for a moment?

[ 9 : 21 ] Did God give up on them when they made a mistake? No, what the psalmist is telling us, that the love of God is so self-evident because it endures forever in the life of his people.

In other words, God was faithful to his promises even when his people weren't. God's testimony of his enduring grace was very evident for the nation of Israel.

Hence why the psalmist exhorts them in verse 2, let the nation of Israel say his love endures forever. Remember, in verse 3, he exhorts the house of Aaron that they ought to give thanks for the privilege of serving in the sanctuary.

Remember, Aaron was from the household of Levi and the Levitical priests had the privilege of serving at the altar of God. And in verse 4, the psalmist calls for those who fear the Lord. That's those who are foreigners. You remember from the story of Exodus when Moses led out the children of Israel from Egypt. Moses records for us that many Egyptians went with them out to Sinai to worship God.

[10:23] You remember the story of the Israelites in front of Jericho and Rahab, the prostitute, in her delivering the spies, became a member of the household of Israel.

Or you remember the story of Ruth, the Moabite text, who said to her Hebrew mother-in-law Naomi, your God will be my God and your people will be my people. As she sought refuge under the wings of the God of Israel.

Well, these foreigners, these Gentiles, people like you and me are called by the psalmist to join emphatic chorus. His love endures forever.

Some commentators suggest that this section was a call and response where the three different sections of the congregation would respond to the psalmist call. If you're used to the Scottish psalm singing tradition in the Western Isles, a presenter would sing one line and the congregation would sing that line back.

That's what's going on here. But brothers and sisters, this afternoon, we're being invited by the psalmist to give thanks to the Lord for he is good and has unfailing love towards us, his people.

[11:35] In Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 3, God said through the prophet, I have loved you with an everlasting love.

Brothers and sisters, do you and I rejoice at this fact that God loves you and he loves me with an eternal love?

Reflecting on Jeremiah 31, the great Dutch theologian Gerhardus Voss famously wrote, the reason God will never stop loving you is that he never began.

Can I ask you the question, if God's love for his people in Christ is truly an everlasting love, a love that has no beginning, as the Voss quote states, and a love that has no end, do we sufficiently allow that astonishing truth to impact our minds, to amaze our hearts, and to transform our lives?

Living as a Christian is like a roller coaster with its ups and its downs, with its twists and its turns. Our indwelling sin can get us down.

[12:55] Circumstances can seem to be conspiring against us at times. We can have disappointments which seem to threaten or even overwhelm us. Then again, we can have those mountaintop experiences.

But in all of our Christian lives, we need to stop and to recall to our minds God's goodness and his never-ending, unfailing, unstoppable love.

love. Our greatest need as believers as we go through tough times, it's not an explanation of why is this happening to me, but rather we need the assurance that come what may, nothing, and I mean nothing, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

Amen? So this afternoon, I'm going to call upon you to participate. I'm going to say, let Christ Church Glasgow say, and I want you to respond, his love endures forever.

Can we do that? Let Christ Church Glasgow say, his love endures forever. That makes us move on to point number two, the love of God always delivers.

[14:04] In the next section, verses five to 21, the psalmist who's just been praising God for his goodness and his covenant love now begins to bear personal testimony of how he experienced it.

As stated at the beginning, the king describes an experience where he suffered anguish or as he describes it in verse five, where he was hard pressed. From his description in verses 10 to 12, we're told what kind of trouble the king faced.

Verse 10, all the nations surrounded me. It appears to be a military situation where the nation was besieged by opposing armies. The use of the phrase all nations is hyperbolic.

The psalmist does not mean in every single nation in the world surrounded him, but rather the surrounding enemies of Israel were pressing in. Verse 11, he says, they surrounded me on every side.

Verse 12, they swarmed around me like bees. In short, he was saying he was between a rock and a hard place. The nation of Israel was hard pressed on every side.

[15:09] There seemed to be no way out. The question we need to be asking, what does the anointed king do in a time of anguish?

Does he put his trust in the might of his army or in the skill and strategies of his generals? Does he seek help from a foreign empire by trusting in other princes?

Verse 9, Well, the answer is no. He turns to the God who is good and in verse 5 where he says, when hard pressed, I cried to the Lord.

God answered the prayers of the afflicted king and he testifies that God delivered him or set him free. As he says himself, he brought me into a spacious place.

In verses 6 and 7, he declares twice, the Lord is with me. John Calvin, an old reformer, says, it's as if he is saying, with God's help, I can defy the world.

[16:12] For a comparison to God, the powers within this universe are as nothing. Here's some application for you and I. What do you do when times get hard?

What do you do when you feel that you're between a rock and a hard place? What do you do when you get the news from the doctor that the diagnosis isn't good?

What do you do when your job security looks uncertain, especially when our fuel bills are increasing and you seem to get those endless payments or letters chasing you up for payment?

What do you do when you're struggling to cope with the pressure of raising children when your spouse is battling ill health? What do you do when you're trying to raise kids on your own as a single parent where you have to be mum and dad and all things to all people?

Where do you place your trust? Well, the psalmist is explicit. We must take refuge in the Lord, verses 8 and 9.

[17:23] That is, we are not to put our ultimate, I mean ultimate, trust in man or in princes. After all, they will just let us down for they are not powerful or faithful like our God.

Our God is mighty to save. He is the ultimate deliverer who leads us into open spaces, verse 5. He is the God who provides ultimate comfort for He is our refuge, verses 8 and 9.

And He is the God who sustains us for He is our helper, verse 7. I'm reminded of best friends of ours, a husband and wife who in the last five years of it went through so much, but in particular, three years ago, where they lost their second child, a baby girl who died after five days coming into this world.

I'll never forget attending the funeral as I watched my friend carry his daughter in a little white coffin between his hands. I was moved to tears during the eulogy as I heard my friend testify that both he and his wife knew the goodness of the Lord, that God had been and is their helper.

I'll never forget walking out that crematorium as they played a song of praise over the speakers. It's a modern praise song. It's called Raise a Hallelujah. It's from Bethel Music.

[18:56] I do not condone Bethel Church. They're off the wall, but the song is good. The lyrics go like this. I raise a hallelujah in the presence of my enemies.

I raise a hallelujah louder than the unbelief. I raise a hallelujah my weapon as a melody. I raise a hallelujah heaven comes to fight for me.

I'm going to sing in the middle of a storm. Louder and louder you're going to hear my praises roar. Up from the ashes hope will arise.

Death is defeated. Indeed, the king is alive. Hallelujah. Now let's move on to our third point. The love of God fulfilled.

As we've said at the start, this is a hallel psalm. A hallelujah psalm. A praise the Lord psalm. And as we've said, these psalms focus on God's faithfulness and his great love for his people Israel.

[19:58] Now we know from Matthew 26, verse 30 and Mark chapter 14, verse 26, two parallel texts tell us that Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples at the conclusion of the Lord's Supper which took place at Passover.

Have you ever wondered what our Lord and his disciples sang that evening? The hymn they sang that evening was that little short set of hymns.

Psalm 113, 114, 115, 116, and that toti wee psalm, Psalm 117, and this psalm, Psalm 118.

These are the very words that Jesus sung on the eve of his death. As we draw to a close, I want us to meditate on how this psalm was fulfilled in the life of our promised king, King Jesus.

Look at verses 25 and 26. Lord, save us. Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[21:06] From the house of the Lord, we bless you. Can you recall the occasion when Jesus heard these words? That was on Palm Sunday.

Following the resurrection of Lazarus, the enthusiastic Christ who heard the miracle of Lazarus as recorded in John 12 escorted Jesus into the royal city of David, Jerusalem, where they shouted as John records, Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. You'll see that there's a slight change in the word choice at the triumphant entry to what's recorded in Psalm 118, which says, Lord, save us.

The gospel writers always use the word, the Hebrew word, Hosanna, which literally translates, save us now. Did the people fully comprehend what Jesus was going to accomplish?

When they cried out, save us now, well, that's what Jesus came to do. He came to save a people for his own. When Jesus entered that great city of Jerusalem, Psalm 118 was very much in the Saviour's ears and eyes as Holy Week began.

[ 22 : 24 ] And that's fitting, is it not? That as the Passover celebrations were being made, as the people of Israel went to Jerusalem and as the nations, those who represented the nations, descended upon Jerusalem, Psalm 118 was on his mind.

As the people were going to the temple and as Jesus would have heard the bustling of sheep and lambs crying out and the stench and as he saw the people purchasing a lamb at the temple, a lamb without spot, blemish or defect, Psalm 118 was upon his mind.

Yet the celebrations of welcoming the son of David were short-lived. Soon Jesus saw another outworking of Psalm 118 when he saw the murderous machinations of the Jewish leaders who the psalmist describes as the builders.

Now we know the Jewish leaders are the builders by Jesus' use of Psalm 118 when he went toe-to-toe with the religious leaders. But I just want to look at the Apostle Peter's use of Psalm 118. in Acts 4 verse 8.

Luke records that when Peter stood before the Sanhedrin he said this, then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them, rulers and elders of the people. And Peter interprets Psalm 118 in verse 11 of Acts 4.

[ 23 : 48 ] Jesus is the stone you builders rejected which has become the cornerstone. Verse 12, salvation is found in no one else for there's no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Yet Psalm 118 reminds us that Christ being rejected, crucified and buried as verse 23 tells us was marvelous in our eyes.

For Christ being condemned in our place is good news for guilty sinners like you and me. In verse 27 we hear the familiar refrain of the arionic blessing.

The Lord is God and he has made his light to shine upon us. These words give all of us such hope as believers knowing that God is pleased to shine his countenance, to shine his face upon us, his children.

But how do you think Jesus felt when he sang these words on the night before his death? When he knew for those three dark hours as the sky went black and as he hung on that rugged cross he would lose the sense of his father's countenance when he cried Eli, Eli, Elam, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[ 25 : 16 ] The second half of verse 27 must have been very poignant for our saviour with bows in hand joining the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. I think the ESV renders it that a wee bit better when it says bind the festal sacrifice with cords up to the horns of the altar.

When Jesus was singing this to his father, he was saying something like this, Lord, I am your festal sacrifice. As Isaac was bound, I am going to be bound but there's going to be no one to spare me. There's going to be no ram, no substitute for me. Jesus sang this psalm knowing full well that he was going to be our substitute, that he was going to provide the perfect once and for all offering where we would be cleansed of all of our guilt and all of our shame.

But the cross of Calvary was not the end. Psalm 118 would have brought assurance to our Savior as he sang of the great hope of the resurrection. Let's read verses 15 and 17.

I told you at the beginning of this psalm that Martin Luther's favorite psalm is Psalm 118 but his favorite verse of the entire Bible is verse 17. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous.

[ 26 : 34 ] Jesus the Lord's right hand has done mighty things. The Lord's right hand is lifted high. The Lord's right hand has done mighty things. I will not die but live and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

Focus your minds to that first Easter morning when the ground shook and the stone rolled away and our king rose victorious from the grave. Jesus experienced the mighty hand of God as he was delivered up from death.

Jesus did live and does live. In Luke chapter 24 when Jesus stood in the midst of his disciples in that upper room post resurrection he did proclaim what the Lord has done.

Luke records this. Then he opened up their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them this is what is written the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.

Beginning at Jerusalem you are witnesses of these things. This afternoon our loving heavenly father is still demonstrating his unfailing love for his people as we live in the days of grace where the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins is still being preached in his name.

[ 27 : 59 ] if you're someone that doesn't know Jesus, someone that's not put their faith or their trust in Jesus and experienced the forgiveness of your sins who's not in a right relationship with him, this afternoon I urge you to repent.

That is to turn away from your lifestyle and turn to God. Look at Christ on the cross and look what he achieved for you.

When he said it is finished, it is finished indeed. Receive the forgiveness of sins and experience the steadfast love of God that endures forever.

But if you're a Christian, maybe you're here tonight and you're dieting how much God loves you. Can I exhort you to look at the cross of Calvary?

It's there that Paul says in Philippians that he who did not see equality with God something to be grasped, Lord himself humbled himself to become a human.

[ 29 : 10 ] That is, Jesus who made the stars, stepped across them, was born a virgin. He lived a life like you and I, but he never sinned. He lived the perfect life that you and I could not live and he died the death that you and I deserve.

Look at the cross. If you're asking yourself how much he loves you, he loved you this much. Look at his empty grave and see that the grave clothes remain there because he is alive and he is risen.

One day, if and when you die, your body too will remain in a grave. But the promise of the gospel is this, that he is coming back and he is one day going to reunite your soul and your body that you're going to live in a new heaven and a new earth forever more.

That is how much he loves you because it's guaranteed for he sits at the right hand of the throne of God. Brothers and sisters, let's end the way this psalm began.

give thanks to the Lord for he is good. Join in with me. His love endures forever. Let's pray. Thank you.