

## **STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER**

Psalm 136: 1-26 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

A couple years ago on May 8, 2014, Oklahoma City Thunder star, Kevin Durant won the NBA's Most Valuable Player Award, receiving 119 first-place votes. During his acceptance speech, he saved his last thank you for his mother, saying, “We weren’t supposed to be here. You made us believe. You kept us off the street. You put clothes on our backs, food on the table. When you didn’t eat, you made sure we ate. You went to sleep hungry. You sacrificed for us. You’re the real MVP.” You could hear in Kevin Durant’s words, and see in his mother’s face, a tiny glimpse or a miniscule portrait of the steadfast love of the Lord for us.

This word for “steadfast love” is impossible to fully translate. There is no one English word to describe this Hebrew word—**Hesed**. It means lovingkindness, mercy, kindness, divine favor, faithfulness, devotion, loyal generosity, steadfastness, fidelity, strong truthfulness, reliability, relational commitment, steadfast love, covenant love and it even means beautiful goodness. It refers to God’s loyal love; His commitment to His people based on His covenant promises. God made covenant promises with Israel through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Jeremiah. God will forever stay committed to His promises. We can count on the Lord. When we in our actions, extend to others what God extends to us in His **hesed**, hesed refers to our commitment and obligation to the community around us. This community includes our relatives, our Christian brothers and sisters, friends, guests, employers, employees, masters and servants. Each relationship is to be one of loyalty, faithfulness, and extending to other people--our response is to God’s faithfulness, kindness, and grace to us.

Two of the most-often-used words in the Old Testament are **hesed** and **racham**. Both words are often translated as ‘mercy’ but the roots of each of these two related words are not often apparent. The Hebrew word **racham** means to be compassionate and to show mercy as a mother shows mercy to a child. **Racham** derives its root from the word womb. Both **racham** and **hesed** suggest a tenderness aroused by an encounter with someone who is weak, hurting, and in need of help. When the Israelites entered into a covenant with God, they recognized that all God’s mercy and deliverance came to them through God’s initiative and without any merit on their part. God treated them as a mother treats her helpless baby – moved by divine love, affection and compassion for those who are helpless. The Hebrew word **hesed** means ‘mercy, kindness, or pity.’ **Hesed** derives from the Hebrew word **chasad**, which means ‘to bow,’ or ‘to stoop in kindness.’ **Hesed** connotes fidelity and loyalty. Both **hesed**—mercy or steadfast love and **racham**, which is motherly compassion, are both often translated mercy in English.

God's mercy is love which motivates our response to those in need – the poor, the broken, and those who repent. As this is the week of the Inside Connection SWPRC Banquet, it was fascinating to see how the root meaning of **racham**, this Old Testament twin with **hesed** used in scripture—mercy and compassion,— how it's root meaning is "protection from harm". Over the past 6000 years or so, the mother's womb used to be the safest place for a pre-born child to be, the place of protection from harm, inside a mother who has true compassion and mercy. This was God's design from the beginning. However, since 1973, in the past 43 years, a mother's womb has become the most dangerous place for a child to grow in America. Between 58-60 million pre-born babies have been aborted since 1973.

As we come to this great antiphonal psalm with its 26 echoing words, “for His mercy endureth forever”—“for His steadfast love endures forever,” I see a mighty parallel. As sojourners in life, from birth to new birth in Jesus and on until our death or the rapture of the church, when we go Home to be with the Lord, we have come to live in a very hostile, terroristic environment. Yet, one constant remains for us no matter what we face in family problems, marital problems, financial problems, health problems, political problems, work-related problems and spiritual problems. God's **hesed** and **racham**, His mercy and compassion, His steadfast love and compassion remain constant—for His steadfast love endures forever.

Psalms 135 and 136 were all about praise and blessing God. Psalm 135, known to the Jews as “The Great Hallel” is all about thanking God, for His steadfast love endures forever. This Hebrew word for thanks is different from **hallel jah**—the Hebrew word for praise the Lord or hallelujah. It is different from bless—**barak** which means to kneel to adore the Lord. This Hebrew word for thank is **yadah**. Yadah means with an open extended hand or with hands held out, to revere and worship God, to give Him thanks, to confess His goodness, and to laud and magnify His Name. It literally means to “throw one's hands” and to give a public confession about God's goodness and worthiness. Why must we give God thanks? That's what our message is all about. Why must we give thanks?

### **WE GIVE THANKS BECAUSE GOD IS GOOD AND BECAUSE OF WHO**

**HE IS.** (I.) Notice verses 1-3. “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for His steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His steadfast love endures forever.” It is crucial to our faith that God is, in fact, good. Our definition of “good” often means everything always goes our way. We never get hurt, we never suffer loss, and we never have any needs. That's not what God's goodness is. This word “goodness” means His goodness in its widest form, as the Hebrew word **towb** means best, right, lovely and pleasing. Yet we as believers sometimes say,

“How can a good God do or allow this to happen? When we start talking like this, we impose our own definition of ‘good’ on God. Our definition of “good” means everything goes our way. We never get hurt, we never suffer loss, we never are sick, we never are penniless, and we never have any needs. We forget that Adam and Eve had God’s pure goodness without pain or suffering in the Garden of Eden. Yet, what did they choose to do? They questioned God’s goodness by disobeying Him. As a result, we all suffer from sin and its effects, including our world that suffers from those same effects. In our broken world, we can all believe that God can be trusted. Why? Because His steadfast love endures forever. That’s why God devised a plan for our salvation by sending His Son to die for us.

In thanking God for His goodness, this unknown psalmist calls God good because of who He is. In verses 1-3, we read “Give thanks to the Lord, to the God of gods and to the Lord of lords.” These three different names for God are significant. LORD refers to His Name Jehovah, Yahweh, the great “I AM” which speaks of His self-existence forever—including **His omnipresence**. God is the name Elohim which refers to His strength and power, **His omnipotence**. “God of gods” doesn’t mean that He is the highest in a group of pagan gods. No, it means He is the Only God—He is unique. Lord is the name Adonai and speaks of His rule. He’s Lord, He’s the ruler. He’s the Lord of all lords, which speaks of **His omniscience**. Everyone answers to the Lord and will someday stand before Him. Commentators believe this psalm, the Great Hallel, is the hymn Jesus and the disciples sang before He left the upper room and the Passover meal to go first to Gethsemane and then on to Calvary to die for us all. Three times the psalmist says, Yadah, yadah, yadah. It’s not what the world means. It means 3X-Give thanks! Why? Secondly,

### **WE GIVE THANKS BECAUSE GOD IS OUR CREATOR AND HE**

**ORDERS HIS CREATED WORLD.** (II.) Notice the first phrase of verses 4-9, “to Him who alone does great wonders, to Him who by understanding made the heavens, to Him who spread out the earth above the waters, to Him who made the great lights, the sun to rule over the day, the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Notice the contrast of the psalmist. Our Lord, the God of gods and Lord of lords is the Only God who created and orders our world in its orbit. God alone created the world. Sweetwater County is not the product of evolution or “the Big Bang”. This world didn’t evolve over billions of years. Genesis 1 tells us He created the world in six days. He “alone” did it. He ‘spread out the earth above the waters’ like I spread out bread dough to make cinnamon rolls. God knew the calculations, the trigonometry and geometry—He had the understanding, skill and knowledge to make the heavens, the sun, moon and stars. In the complexity of all the galaxies that we marvel at, He made our world and gave us the sun, moon and stars to govern our world by day and He did all this in an ordered way with the sun, moon and stars governing and ruling our

world by day and night. With all of our scientific knowledge, God's laws of nature are such that all of us are subject under their rule. How small we all are! Do you ever watch in awe as the sun and the moon take their turns every day, every 24 hours to govern us all? Did you see that harvest moon early this past week? God each day, morning by morning orders new mercies for us. Nothing goes flying out of control, though at times we sense it might. God is on the throne, and His creation is under His control. Why? It's all because His steadfast love endures forever. Thirdly, why must we give thanks?

**WE GIVE THANKS BECAUSE GOD IS OUR DELIVERER FROM OUR BONDAGE AT A GREAT COST.** (III.) Notice again the first phrases of verses 10-20. "To Him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, and brought Israel out from among them, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, to Him who divided the Red Sea in two, and made Israel pass through the midst of it, but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, to Him who led His people through the wilderness, to Him who struck down great kings, and killed mighty kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, for His steadfast love endures forever." The psalmist here is a great theologian as he moves us from God, Yahweh, Elohim, and Adonai, the Creator, to God, our Savior. He moves us from creation, vs. 4-9 to salvation and deliverance, v. 10-20, from God, the Creator, to God, our Redeemer, who created the world, the galaxies and our universe, who created you and me. Our infinite God used no "big bang" to create the world or to knit us in our mother's womb. He made us in His own image to reflect His glory to the world. This same God promised Abram, the father of faith, that He would make from him a great nation and give them a land of their own. The Israelites wound up as slaves in Egypt for 400 years. God was still being good, for He had a good purpose to reveal to the Egyptians how good He was—and that He was God alone. God showed Egypt that their Pharaoh was not God. So what did God do?

God delivered Israel, but you remember, it was at great cost—in loss of life. Do you remember the last, the tenth plague—the death of the firstborn in Egypt-v.10 Israel's deliverance came with a cost just as our deliverance from sin came with the costliest cost at Calvary. We need to thank God for delivering Israel from among the Egyptians. The answer, as for us all, as on the cross, was blood—the blood of a spotless lamb had to be spread over the lintels and doorposts of the Israeli homes. When the death angel passed over their homes, it was because the blood was applied over their doors. At what a cost, Israel was delivered from bondage. You and I are also delivered from the bondage of sin if we believe that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is how we are delivered from the penalty of sin as we were separated from God forever. Our deliverance from sin came with a terrible price, the death of Jesus. who died in our place because we all are sinners separated from God. Only by a sinless human

sacrifice, from the God-Man—Jesus,—the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary appeased God the Father, for your sins and mine. We who believe by faith in Jesus alone for salvation, we who have the spotless Lamb’s blood applied in our life, we will never be separated from God. When we physically die, the blood of Jesus that covered our sins when we were saved, will cover us for all eternity. And how does God do it—how does He bring us out of bondage? With a strong hand and an outstretched arm, v. 12, He divides the waters, He makes a way in our wilderness, helping us pass through the sea away from Pharaoh’s clutches and his beatings and cruelty. He overthrows our enemies. He leads us through the wilderness—Psalm 23. He strikes down the kings and kingdoms that once ruled our lives—our Sins and Ours—our King Pride, Pornography, Bitterness, Anger, Adultery, Fornication, Covetousness, Gossip, Disobedience and so many other kings. Why? Why? Why? It’s because His steadfast love endures forever. Fourthly,

**WE GIVE THANKS BECAUSE GOD HAS GRANTED US A GRAND INHERITANCE WE NEVER COULD HAVE BOUGHT OURSELVES. (IV.)**

Notice verses 21-22. “And (He) gave their land as a heritage, for His steadfast love endures forever; a heritage to Israel His servant, for His steadfast love endures forever. Oh yes, Israel had to be in the wilderness a long while and fight many battles. But Israel did not earn her promised land and neither do we. An inheritance is a grant, a will, a gift given to you and me because someone has died. A couple years ago, Jinny and I updated our will. Our will leaves an equal inheritance to each of our 7 children. But they receive none of it until God takes us Home to Him.

No one can buy our inheritance which we are granting in our will. Notice, this heritage is to Israel God’s servant. The Hebrew word for servant in verse 22 is **ebed**. It means a bondservant who serves his master. Do you serve your Lord and Master as a bond-slave? God’s will and new testament to us has similar language. We have been granted a spiritual inheritance from God that can’t be earned or bought or bartered for. We are saved through faith, not by ourselves. It is a free gift from God - not by our own works so none of us can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). Are you prepared for eternity? If God were to ask you today, “Why should I let you into My inheritance, into My heaven?” Then what would you say? Would you say, “I’ve tried hard to live for Jesus. I’ve done much for Him.? There is no inheritance for you. God’s heir and joint-heirs with Christ have no list of good deeds that rack up an eternal inheritance. Never! Do you want this spiritual inheritance of spending all eternity with the Lord? Admit you cannot save yourself by your good works. God in His goodness as Creator and Redeemer made salvation possible for you and me through the Lord Jesus Christ, if we believe Jesus paid it all at Calvary for us. Then we will receive this inheritance from God when we die or at the Rapture of Christ’s church. Listen to God’s word in I Peter 1: 3-5: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, (for His steadfast

love endures forever) He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Wow! What a mighty deliverance from bondage in sin and what a glorious inheritance we have as born again believers. Fifthly, lastly, why do we give thanks to the Lord?

**WE GIVE THANKS BECAUSE GOD REMEMBERS US, RESCUES US, AND SUSTAINS US, BECAUSE HE IS THE GOD OF HEAVEN.** (V.) Notice the final verses of v. 23-26. It is He who remembered us in our low estate, and rescued us from our foes, He who gives food to all flesh. Give thanks to the God of heaven, for His steadfast love endures forever.” How well do we know our own history? Are we filled with yadah—giving thanks to God. One day a Post Office worker found an unstamped, poorly hand-written envelope, addressed to God. He opened it and discovered it was from an elderly lady, distressed because all her savings of \$200 had been stolen. She told God she would cold and hungry this Christmas. The postal clerk rallied the postal workers, who dug deep and came up with \$180 to donate. The postal worker got the money to her by special courier the same morning. A week later, he recognized the same handwriting on another envelope and opened it: It read, “Dear God, Thank you for the \$180 for Christmas, which would have been so bleak otherwise. P.S. It was \$20 short, but that was probably those thieving workers at the Post Office.” How truly thankful are we?

How many of us decide what should happen in the future, how it should happen, who should be the main players, where we will be in the mix, and then we often ask God to bless our manipulative plan? Beloved, God isn't looking to do things my way or yours. He already has a plan. This God of heaven is not merely the God of the past. His continuing presence is with us, and His inheritance for us all is on the way in the future. How many times has He remembered us in our humble estate? This past week, I had lots of things to carry into my office after a long 17-hour long counseling session up in Idaho. Without remembering, I placed my phone on top of the Suburu as I loaded my arms. I went home later that night and realized I couldn't find my phone until the next day. Do you know where I found it? Where I left it. God remembered me in my low estate—miraculously sparing my phone. One of the pastors in Idaho sent two boxes of apples home with me. Another family sent home 2 dozen farm fresh eggs. Let me paraphrase v. 23-26—phone-foes-food. Make up your paraphrase—What has God done for you—What is He going to do for you this week? What are you facing? Is it bills? Is it illness? Is it surgery? Is it opposition? Is it discouragement? Is it unkind words? Is it someone's desire to replace you? Is God trying to get your attention? Prepare yourself by giving thanks now. Vs 1,2,3, 26.