

Psalm 136

Harvest thanksgiving is one of the more important festivals of the church year, because it teaches us thankfulness. We're primarily giving thanks to God for the harvest this year. And that's important, because sometimes harvests fail. Why does God allow that? There are many reasons. Maybe it's because of the sins of the people. Maybe it's God trying to wake us up to return to Him:

Amos 4:6

"And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD."

我使你们在一切城中牙齿干净，在你们各处粮食缺乏，你们仍不归向我。这是耶和華说的。

Or maybe it's God teaching us to be dependent on one another. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, the church at Jerusalem was in great need. The church in Macedonia heard about it and responded generously. The whole point being:

2 Corinthians 8:14

"that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality."

就是要你们的富余，现在可以补他们的不足，使他们的富余，将来也可以补你们的不足，这就均平了。

So we should never take a good harvest for granted. But we've never been in want for so long now, that people today don't even think there's a God to be thankful to. They think everything just makes itself. The world was made suddenly out of a big bang. We all evolved from a blob that one day crawled out of some slime. Dirt just becomes food. We've conditioned ourselves to think these things just happen. We never consider that all around us is proof there must be a Creator God who provides for us. But we'd rather believe anything than be accountable to Him.

Romans 1:20,21

*"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, **neither were thankful**; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."*

自从造天地以来，神的永能和神性是明明可知的，虽是眼不能见，但借着所造之物，就可以晓得，叫人无可推诿。因为他们虽然知道神，却不当作神荣耀他，也不感谢他。他们的思念变为虚妄，无知的心就昏暗了。

These people are condemned, amongst other things, for their unthankfulness. So we should be thankful. I want to examine this in more detail by looking at Psalm 136. There's so much more to be thankful for than just the harvest.

136:1 O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

你们要称谢耶和华，因他本为善；他的慈爱永远长存。

This psalm is the easiest passage in the Bible to know what the main subject is, because it tells us in every verse: *“For His mercy endureth for ever.”* That's the greatest thing we have to be thankful for, God's mercy. But, before we can understand about how God is merciful to us, we need to understand more of who God is. And the first thing to note is that He is good. Aren't you glad?

Societies throughout history have invented their own gods: The Greek gods, the Roman gods, the Hindu gods. They're all beings more powerful than us, but at the same time they're all too much like us. They fight, they get jealous, they have emotions, they get angry. And many people think that God is like that as well:

Psalm 50:21

“thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself”

你想我恰和你一样。

But the true God is good. Isn't that a great relief to know? He's not capricious, doing what He fancies at the time, sometimes this, sometimes that, so you never know what He's going to do next. He's good. He's consistently good. He's always good, and never evil. Which means He's perfectly just. What a wonderful thought that is. So we give thanks firstly because the Lord is good.

2 O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.

你们要称谢万神之神，因他的慈爱永远长存。

3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.

你们要称谢万主之主，因他的慈爱永远长存。

And we're to give thanks to the God of gods and Lord of lords. That doesn't mean He's the greatest of many. Other gods don't really exist, they're figments of men's imagination. And, whoever we can call “lord” in this world is nothing compared to the one true living God. I don't think we really understand how big God is.

God is all-powerful, all-knowing and in control of all things, so there must only be one of Him. If there's just one thing controlled by some other being, He can't be

God. But we don't want a God like that. A God like that frightens us. The Old Testament is the history of the Israelites, whom God made to be an example of what we're all like. If God had chosen the English, we'd have done exactly the same. Time and again, they rebelled against the true God and went after idols.

You may say you don't bow down to an idol. No, we don't do that in the West, but nearly every house in China and south east Asia has a little shrine somewhere, with a little wood or tin god, and incense burning beside it. To them it's real. They worship their little gods. We don't do that here, but we make idols in other ways. We make idols of celebrities. And we make an idol out of science. These things aren't gods, they're idols, and the second Commandment tells us not to idolise anything. *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image."* There's only one God, He's good, and He's in control of everything. Isn't that wonderful?

4 To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.

称谢那独行大奇事的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

God alone doeth great wonders. In the Bible there are *"signs and wonders,"* real miracles, things beyond and above the natural order of things. Many churches today see miracles around every corner, but actually, there aren't all that many in the Bible at all. Miracles are noticeable because most of the time they don't happen. When Christ came, men were surprised at His miracles:

John 9:32

"Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind."

从创世以来，未曾听见有人把生来是瞎子的眼睛开了。

But there are two great *"wonders,"* different from these *"miracles,"* that come from God and are part of our everyday experience. The wonders of creation and providence. God created all things out of nothing. And in His providence, He upholds and controls everything that comes to pass, to His greatest glory.

Matthew 10:29,30

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

两个麻雀，不是卖一分银子吗？若是你们的父不许，一个也不能掉在地上。就是你们的头发，也都被数过了。

5 To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.

称谢那用智慧造天的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

He made the heavens by His **wisdom**. This world isn't just randomly assembled, wound up and just let to run down, like a watch. Every little thing has been created and is controlled by God's wisdom. God is all-wise. He knows exactly what He's doing. It might not seem like it at the time, but He does.

In Genesis 1, we see that God created the heavens and the earth in six days. Heaven was created on the second day. Now we don't know much about these things, but we know there are at least three heavens, because the apostle Paul said once that he was caught up to the third heaven, whatever that is.

On the third day, God gathered the waters together, so the land appeared:

6 To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.

称谢那铺地在水以上的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

And on the fourth day He made the sun moon and stars:

7 To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever:

称谢那造成大光的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

8 The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever:

他造日头管白昼，因他的慈爱永远长存。

9 The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.

他造月亮星宿管黑夜，因他的慈爱永远长存。

We're told in Genesis 1 that the sun, moon and stars were "*for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.*" They don't just give light. They give us the seasons, chronology, and we can even navigate by them. All this is God's mercy, to help us, because He cares about us. So we must be thankful for all this.

Why is it important that we believe God created the world in the way He did? Why, for example, did God create light on the first day, but didn't create the sun and moon until the fourth day? It's a physical pattern of a spiritual reality. God does this all the time. We can't see spiritual things, so God gives us physical patterns that we can see, to explain what we can't see. To understand the spiritual reality that Creation points to, we need to understand what it is to become a Christian. If we read a bit further on in Genesis, by the time we get to chapter three, it's all gone wrong. Adam ate of a fruit that God told him not to eat of, and:

"All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and

curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.”

That’s the situation we’re in today. We’re all born with a sinful, selfish nature. But God didn’t leave us like that. In His mercy He provided a Saviour. He sent Jesus Christ into this world, to live a sinless life, and die a death He didn’t deserve, whose death would be in place of His people. We deserve to die for our sins, but if we put our trust in Him, we can be freed from the punishment we deserve. That’s Christianity, and it’s mirrored here in the creation account:

Genesis 1:2,3

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.”

地是空虚混沌。渊面黑暗。神的灵运行在水面上。神说，要有光，就有了光。

We’re born *“without form and void.”* Darkness is upon the face of our hearts. We’re born living for ourselves, living empty, formless, void lives. But when the Spirit of God moves, God says, *“Let there be light, and there is light.”*

When we become a Christian, that’s the first thing God does within us. He says “let there be spiritual light” in our hearts, and there is. It’s like a light being switched on inside us. Suddenly the Bible, which was a dead book to us before, comes alive. We now see what we couldn’t see before. We become altogether different from what we were. That’s the most wonderful thing that could ever happen. God coming into a soul, and saying, *“Let there be light.”*

Once we have light, God can then start to order our lives. Bringing order out of chaos, just as in days 2 to 6 of creation. The rest of our lives, God changes us to make something useful. And then, just as in the 7th day when God “rested,” so when we die, we receive the heavenly rest, the heavenly Sabbath, and we go to be with Christ in eternal sinless glory for evermore. Creation is a pattern of the spiritual reality. That’s why it’s important we understand the pattern.

So, not only should we be thankful that God is good, He created the universe, and that He’s in control of everything. But we should also be thankful for His plan to redeem a people for Himself. A plan successfully carried out by Jesus Christ.

And then we’ve got, on the face of it, a rather strange verse:

10 To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever:

称谢那击杀埃及人之长子的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

What's merciful about killing Egypt's firstborn? Well, we need to understand the story of the Exodus. Again, it's another physical pattern of a spiritual reality.

The Israelites were in slavery in Egypt for 430 years. God raised up Moses to set them free. By a series of plagues, God ruined Egypt, the final plague being the destruction of the firstborn. From the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of cattle, they all died. But God gave the Israelites advanced warning, and told them if they killed a lamb and smeared the blood on the doorposts, He'd pass over them. So the firstborn of the Israelites were saved, the Egyptians weren't.

That's the pattern. All those who put themselves under the blood of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be saved from the punishment they deserve for their sins. But those who don't, will be destroyed for their own sins. Israel is an example of the believer being freed from the slavery of sin in his heart.

11 And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever:

他领以色列人从他们中间出来，因他的慈爱永远长存。

12 With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever.

他施展大能的手和伸出来的膀臂，因他的慈爱永远长存。

The killing of the Egyptian firstborn is mercy, not to the Egyptians, but to the Israelites, in bondage for 430 years but now set free, by God, with a strong hand and a stretched out arm. So we see, in this world Christians will have enemies:

John 16:33

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

在世上你们有苦难。但你们可以放心，我已经胜了世界。

We've got three enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. That's not a phrase in the Bible, but it's a very good description of our enemies. We've got the world that doesn't understand us, and so persecutes us. We've got the devil:

1 Peter 5:8

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

务要谨守，儆醒。因为你们的仇敌魔鬼，如同吼叫的狮子，遍地游行，寻找可吞吃的人。

But our greatest enemy of all is ourselves, the flesh. We're our own worst enemy.

The apostle Paul expressed this spiritual battle within him. He said:

Romans 7:22-25

“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

因为按着我里面的意思。我是喜欢神的律。但我觉得肢体中另有个律，和我心中的律交战，把我掳去叫我附从那肢体中犯罪的律。我真是苦阿，谁能救我脱离这取死的身体呢？感谢神，靠着我们的主耶稣基督就能脱离了这样看来，我以内心顺服神的律。

After the Israelites left Egypt, the Egyptians followed them. With the Egyptians behind them and the Red Sea in front of them, they had no way of escape. What could they do? What can we do, when we face a situation in life where there seems to be no way out? They cried to the Lord. And the Lord delivered them:

13 To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever:

称谢那分裂红海的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

14 And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:

他领以色列从其中经过，因他的慈爱永远长存；

15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.

却把法老和他的军兵推翻在红海里，因他的慈爱永远长存。

God parted the Red Sea. The Israelites escaped to the other side, and the Egyptians were drowned. The Egyptians received the punishment they deserved. But the Israelites received mercy. God's good. He's perfectly just. He saves His people from their enemies, and judges everybody else with His perfect justice.

There's another phrase in the Bible that says, “*God is love,*” which He is. But that doesn't mean He's got a fuzzy feeling about us all, and is going to forgive everybody everything unconditionally all the time, because He loves us all so much. That's a wrong idea about God altogether, because it doesn't take into account that God is good, He's just. The love of a good God is shown in saving them from evil, wherever it's found, in the world, the flesh or the devil. That's the

true love of a good God. And He's saving His people from evil every day.

God cares about His people all the time. He keeps us and He protects us. After we've come to Him, the rest of our lives are spent under His care:

16 To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.

称谢那引导自己的民行走旷野的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

God led Israel through the wilderness for 40 years. They became pilgrims, passing through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. And we're pilgrims travelling through this world, until, at the end of our days, we reach the true Promised Land of heaven. That's always been the lot of true believers:

Hebrews 11:13

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

这些人都是存着信心死的，并没有得着所应许的，却从远处望见，且欢喜迎接，又承认自己在世上是客旅，是寄居的。

This world isn't our home, so we should set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth:

Matthew 6:19-21

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

不要为自己积攒财宝在地上，地上有虫子咬，能锈坏，也有贼挖窟窿来偷。只要积攒财宝在天上，天上没有虫子咬，不能锈坏，也没有贼挖窟窿来偷。因为你的财宝在哪里，你的心也在哪里

And then we read about two kings, Sihon and Og:

17 To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:

称谢那击杀大君王的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

18 And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:

他杀戮有名的君王，因他的慈爱永远长存；

19 Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever:

就是杀戮亚摩利王西宏，因他的慈爱永远长存；

20 And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever:

又杀巴珊王噩，因他的慈爱永远长存。

21 And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever:

他们将他们的地赐他的百姓为业，因他的慈爱永远长存；

22 Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever.

就是赐他的仆人以色列为业，因他的慈爱永远长存。

Towards the end of the forty years in the wilderness, the Israelites passed peaceably by the nations of Edom, Moab and Ammon, and they tried to use the same diplomatic means to pass by the land of the Amorites as well:

Deuteronomy 2:30-33

“But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land. Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Jahaz. And the LORD our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people.”

但希实本王西宏不容我们从他那里经过。因为耶和华你的神使他心中刚硬，性情顽梗，为要将他交在你手中，像今日一样。耶和华对我说，从此起首，我要将西宏和他的地交给你。你要得他的地为业。那时，西宏和他的众民出来攻击我们，在雅杂与我们交战。耶和华我们的神将他交给我们，我们就把他和他的儿子，并他的众民，都击杀了。

Sihon and Og, rather than being peaceable, both came out to fight. The Lord defeated them both, and the Israelites acquired their land. It wasn't yet the Promised Land, it was still east of the Jordan river, but it was land. And the Lord has given us some land in this world. It's not the real Promised Land in the next world, but it's a foretaste. He's given us the church. A place where true believers can be refreshed, find help, support and encouragement from fellow pilgrims, on

our way to the real Promised Land in the next world.

Now, I know the church can be a depressing place at times, especially when people who fancy themselves too much have taken over. True believers can get very frustrated with things. I know quite a few people who know the Lord, but they've given up going to church altogether, and that's very sad. No matter how bad the situation, nothing should ever stop us meeting together:

Hebrews 10:24,25

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

又要彼此相顾，激发爱心，勉励行善。你们不可停止聚会，好像那些停止惯了的人，倒要彼此劝勉。既知道（原文作看见）那日子临近，就更当如此。

But there's also the opposite extreme. Of the tribes of Israel: Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh quite liked the land they'd acquired from Sihon and Og. So much so, that they decided to settle there and not go into the promised land on the other side of Jordan at all. They helped the others go in, but they wouldn't go in themselves. And there are so many people who love their church in this world so much, they don't want to leave it. They'd be lost without it. They're not making themselves ready for the next world. The church is not the Promised Land. We shouldn't put our trust in it, but keep our eyes on Christ.

23 Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:

他顾念我们在卑微的地步，因他的慈爱永远长存。

From their bondage in Egypt, through all their wilderness journeying, and even after entering the promised land, Israel was always in a low estate. In fact,

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

“The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

耶和华专爱你们，拣选你们，并非因你们的人数多於别民，原来你们的人数在万民中是最少的。只因耶和华爱你们，又因要守他向你们列祖所起的誓，就用大能的手领你们出来，从为奴之家救赎你们脱离埃及王法老的手。

And it's the same with us. We might have some status in this world, and many possessions, but every one of us is really in a low estate. Do we feel that? Mary, the mother of our Lord, had such a tremendous privilege. She was to carry the Son of God in human flesh. But she didn't puff herself up with pride about it. She saw herself for what she really was:

Luke 1:46-48

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

马利亚说，我心尊主为大，我灵以神我的救主为乐。因为他顾念他使女的卑微。从今以后，万代要称我有福。

We should always keep this attitude of Mary. We're nothing. We're simple people. But that's exactly the type of people the Lord looks for to do His work:

1 Corinthians 1:26,27,29

"Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; That no flesh should glory in his presence."

弟兄们哪，可见你们蒙召的，按着肉体有智慧的不多，有能力的也不多，有尊贵的也不多。神却拣选了世上愚拙的，叫有智慧的羞愧。....使一切有血气的，在神面前一个也不能自夸。

We can't do anything. Everything we do and are is of the Lord's mercy. As we grow in the faith, we come to realise this. We need the Lord for everything.

24 And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.

他救援我们脱离敌人，因他的慈爱永远长存。

We can't defeat the world, the flesh and the devil. They're far too powerful for us. But the Lord can redeem us from all our enemies. And in His mercy, He helps His people. Everything we have and are is of the Lord's mercy. Consequently, the only thing that should fill our hearts is thankfulness, nothing else. And finally:

25 Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever.

他赐粮食给凡有血气的，因他的慈爱永远长存。

That's what we're thinking of tonight, as we give thanks for the harvest. He feeds all flesh. All His creatures are dependent on Him. None of us deserves anything in this world. The harvest is the Lord's mercy to everyone:

Psalm 145:9

“The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.”

耶和华善待万民，他的慈悲，覆庇他一切所造的。

Now, I said earlier God didn't show mercy to the Egyptians, only to Israel. But while they were alive in this world, God showed them tremendous mercy. They had a very prosperous society, they had leeks and garlicks and watermelons. That was God's mercy to them. But they attributed it to gods of their own imagination. And year after year they'd never be thankful to the true Creator God at all. Then one day, God's mercy was no longer there. They all drowned in the Red Sea.

We could just sit here year after year living our own self-centred lives, not being thankful for anything. But one day we'll find God's mercy will no longer be there. And we won't have any excuse because God has been merciful to us for so long.

The Israelites had also been shown God's mercy. They'd been freed from bondage in Egypt. They'd become pilgrims in the wilderness, so they didn't have a home here, but God provided for them every day with manna in the morning and quails in the evening. They didn't have to work for it, they just received it. Their life was a lot simpler than in Egypt. And many Israelites didn't like that and wanted to go back to the garlicks and leeks and rich food of Egypt, even though it meant going back to slavery. But those who persevered, finally entered into the promised land.

The mercy God shows to everybody who puts their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't just for this world. The Egyptians only received mercy in this world. When their time in this world was over, it ended. Let's not be like them. True believers have something far greater to be thankful for – the forgiveness of sins. It's a wonderful thing to know we won't be condemned with the world. That's true mercy. And it continues even beyond death. Only when we know our sins forgiven, can we know what thankfulness really is.

26 O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth [not just for this world, but] *for ever.*

你们要称谢天上的神，因他的慈爱永远长存。