

Sermon Podcast 1117.MP3

0:11

Today, we're gonna begin a new series for 2 weeks where we're looking at how do we live with a posture of gratitude and generosity. And the way we begin all of our time in teaching together is we read from the scripture because this is the story of God and God's people. And so, if you've got your Bibles, I wanna invite you to turn to Psalm 136. If you don't, no worries, the words are gonna be on the screen. And I'll read to us.

0:35

It's 26 verses long, one of the most famous Psalms. If you grew up in church, you're familiar with this from, the 19 nineties contemporary song, give thanks to the lord for he is good. You know it. Right? Okay.

0:47

You want me to lead worship next week? No? Okay. Listen, we won't do that. Alright.

0:51

Here we go. Psalm 136, a word from god to us today. Give thanks to the lord for he's good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the god of gods.

1:04

His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, his love endures forever. To him who alone does great wonders, his love endures forever. Who by his understanding made the heavens, his love endures forever. Who spread out the earth upon the waters, his love endures forever.

1:24

Who made the great lights, his love endures forever. The sun to govern the day, his love endures forever. The moon and stars to govern the night, His love endures forever. To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, His love endures forever. And brought Israel out from among them, His love endures forever.

1:46

With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, His love endures forever. To him who divided the Red Sea asunder, his love endures forever. And brought Israel through the midst of it, his love endures forever. But swept pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea, his love endures forever. To him who led the people through the wilderness, his love endures forever.

2:11

To him who struck down great kings, his love endures forever And killed mighty kings, his love endures forever. Shihon, king of the Amorites, his love endures forever. And Og, king of Bashan, his love endures forever. And gave their land as an inheritance, his love endures forever. An inheritance to his servant Israel, for his love endures forever.

2:37

He remembered us in our lowest state. His love endures forever. And freed us from our enemies. His love endures forever. He gives food to every creature.

2:47

His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven because his love endures forever. So y'all, I wanna begin with a question this morning, and it's a question that is very, very serious. It's near and dear to my heart, and and this is it. Is Thanksgiving a season independent and needing to stand on its own?

3:09

Is Thanksgiving a season, or is Thanksgiving just a preamble into Christmas? Right? Seriously, think about it for a second. Is Christmas or is Thanksgiving a season that deserves to stand on its own, or is Thanksgiving just kind of an entry point into the Christmas season? And you don't have to answer that question aloud because I'm gonna tell you how you can already know the answer to that question, and here's how you will know.

3:34

How many of you have decorated for Christmas in your house already? Okay. We did too. And so, Christmas y'all is the thing, and Thanksgiving for many people is just an entry point into

Christmas. That's what Thanksgiving is.

3:46

But I gotta tell y'all, I actually Sarah is gonna disagree with me, but she's not here, and so I can say whatever I want to this morning. Right? She thinks that Thanksgiving is just a preamble, but I wanna focus on Thanksgiving. I love the season of Thanksgiving. Right?

4:00

The Macy's Day Christmas per or Thanksgiving parade, anybody? The okay. Come on, y'all. Come on. Get at me.

4:06

So yeah. You gotta watch that every single year. You you've gotta watch it. Watching NFL football games on Thanksgiving Day, sitting down and eating meals with all of your favorite family members and talking about our favorite topics like politics and religion around the table. Right?

4:21

Don't we love doing that? No? No? Okay. I love Thanksgiving.

4:25

I love Thanksgiving for all of those reasons, but there's one reason in particular is that it really is one moment in our year where we stop and we talk consistently, at least I do in my home with my children, about how do we live with gratitude? How do we live with a sense of thanksgiving? And every day around our table we ask the question, what are you thankful for today? It's that one season of the year where we pause and we intentionally talk about living with thankful and generous hearts. The New Oxford English Dictionary defines Thanksgiving as this, an expression of gratitude.

5:01

An expression of gratitude, and in particular, interesting to me, the dictionary still include the second part, especially towards God. Thanksgiving is a season where we are called to express our gratitude for all of the gifts that we experience in our life. And so while some of you already have your blow ups up in the front yard for Christmas, I wanna invite you this Thanksgiving to sit and to

pause for just a few minutes and to think deeply about all of the things that you are thankful for in your life because that's what Thanksgiving is all about. And I actually wanna take it one step further than that. Because Thanksgiving, if we understand, it's an expression of gratitude particularly towards God.

5:43

If that's what it means to live with Thanksgiving, then as followers of Jesus, we understand that Thanksgiving goes one step further. That it isn't just a season on the American calendar, but thanksgiving, if we take our faith seriously, is called to be the defining posture of our lives. It's called to be the defining posture of our existence. Right? Sometimes, we forget this as followers of Jesus.

6:10

But at one of the central claims of the Christian faith is that when God created the world, what did he say? It is good. And when he finished creation, not only did he say that it was good, he said that it was very good. And we, as followers of Jesus, are called we're actually, let's take it even further. We're invited to live our lives with a posture of openness so that we might experience life as it is, which is truly a good and generous gift that is given to us by God.

6:46

That is true in times where things are going well, but also it is true that we're called to live with thanksgiving even when things are not going well. The apostle Paul was one of the earliest followers of Jesus, wrote 13 letters to the New Testament. We spend a lot of time talking about Paul here at First Baptist. And one of the letters he wrote was a letter to the church at Thessalonica. Interestingly, y'all, he wrote this letter when he was in prison.

7:09

He wrote the letter when he was in prison, and things were not going well in his life, and yet what he continually does throughout the letter is invites the church then and now, despite your circumstances, to live with a posture of gratitude. And one of the last things he says in 1st Thessalonians 5, his parting words to

the church, here's what he says, rejoice always. Pray continually. And here we go. Give thanks to God in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

7:44

Give thanks to God in all circumstances. He's writing this from a prison cell, not knowing when his life is going to be over, and yet he says, every single day we wake up and get out of bed. Every single day we're able to breathe the breath of life into our lungs, we are called to express our gratitude and give thanks to God. And so what I want us to do for the next 2 weeks as we approach the Thanksgiving holiday is to think deeply and to ask the question, how do we live with thanksgiving not just in one season of our life, but how do we live with gratitude? How do we live with thanksgiving in every single day of our lives?

8:28

And I know that might seem like a stretch, but I wanna tell you this morning that if we properly understand the nature of God, if we properly understand who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us, then we are invited to live with a posture of openness, generosity, and thankfulness. That's what I love about the Psalms. The Psalms are invitations to live that sort of way in the world. Right? We're gonna nerd out for just a few minutes.

8:56

Because Psalm 136, it is part of a larger set of Psalms. They're called the Psalms of Ascent. Psalm 120 through Psalm 136. They're Psalms of Ascent. And here's what they are.

9:08

You gotta remember, the Psalms, those 150 Psalms, they are actually the ancient songbook of Israel. They were the songs that the Israelites sang when they came to worship. And the Psalms of Ascent 120 to 136 was a particular set of Psalms. They were written by a variety of authors, and here's what they were intended to do. They were the songs that you would sing if you were an Israelite on your way to the temple in Jerusalem.

9:35

3 times a year. Three times a year, good faithful Jews would have

made a pilgrimage from wherever they lived in Israel to go to Jerusalem, to go to the temple where heaven and earth met so that they could worship God. And the Psalms of ascent were the songs that they would sing on their way to Jerusalem. Reminding them who God is and what God has done. You saw the repetition in that Psalm.

10:04

Give thanks to the Lord for he's good. His love endures forever. I actually think you guys, if we can dig in and think like the 1st century Israelite would have done with the ancient Israelite, how they would have thought we can unlock the key to how we can live with gratitude and generosity. So that's what I want us to talk about this morning, Psalm 136. And here's the thing that I think it teaches us, which is fundamental to living with a posture of gratitude.

10:33

It teaches us about the essence of who God is. It teaches us about the heart of the God who created each one of us in His image. Give thanks to God for He is what? Good. Give thanks to God for he is good.

10:53

Here's what I want us to understand this morning. That how you see God will ultimately shape how you see everything else. How you see God will ultimately shape how you see everything else. And Psalm 136, along with and most importantly, the life of Jesus teaches us that God is fundamentally good. And how we think about God will shape how we see everything else.

11:23

Listen, I'm telling you, I've seen it over and over and over again in my life. If you think that god is an angry, vengeful, wrathful deity that is waiting to strike down vengeance on us, then you will live that sort of way in your relationships with other people. However, if you live with an openness of generosity, god loves me in spite of my shortcomings, then you will be in a position to give that sort of grace and generosity to other people. So the psalm consistently over and over and over again says give thanks to God. Why?

12:02

Because he's good. That is the fundamental nature of God. And far too many of us have grown up in circumstances and in churches where we were taught quite the opposite. And I want you to understand this morning that the central key to living well is to understand who God is and what God has done. And we're gonna come back to this in just a few minutes, but the Israelites go through their history.

12:28

God's beautiful, wonderful, generous acts in creation all the way up into the present moment. And they are indicators of how good God is. We're gonna come back to that. But how you see God will shape how you see everything else. And Psalm 136 says, give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

12:51

If that's who God is, then that's how we're invited to live. And the next question that we have to think about for just a few minutes is why? Why is God good? Why is it that God is good? And this y'all, I think is my favorite part of this entire Psalm.

13:06

The goodness of God is made known to us. Why is it that God is good? And the translation that I read to you this morning, it simply says, his what? His love endures forever. I said it 26 times.

13:19

I actually think in the 11 o'clock, I'm gonna have him say it with me. Would you that would have been nice, For y'all to say, his love endures forever. But I want you to understand this morning that that translation doesn't really get at the heart of what is happening. That the word that is used here is the word. Right?

13:39

Yeah. It's like guttural. If you're trying to do Hebrew, we're just gonna call it hesed because that's easier and not as gross, and I don't spit on Emily and Michael in the front row. Right? Hesed.

13:48

The word that is translated for love in this translation is the

Hebrew word hesed. And what you have to understand, you guys, is that that word is used 246 times in the old testament. 246 times in the Hebrew Bible. The overwhelming majority of those uses are are are descriptions of God. What is the fundamental attribute of God?

14:13

And the word, 246 times, the word used is hesed. And what we have to know this morning is that there is no one translation. Right? This is where, interpretation and translation, it always fails us. Because in the English language, there is no one word that sums up what the scriptures are telling us about God when the word hesed is used.

14:37

Depending on the era that you're living in, sometimes hesed is described as mercy. Sometimes it's described as kindness. We read it as love, other translations call it lovingkindness, but there is listen, there is no word, there is no one word that describes what this actually is. Why is God good? Because God is love, and his love endures forever.

15:07

If I could if I could, just for a moment, try and describe to you what hesed actually is. Here's what most scholars would say, that hesed is a completely undeserved kindness. It is a completely undeserved kindness and generosity, Always done by one who is in a position of power. Hesed is a completely undeserved kindness. We've done nothing to deserve your love, and yet you have given it to us.

15:41

We've done nothing to deserve your kindness, and yet you, God, have given it to us. You are the one who created the cosmos, and yet, God, your love has been given freely to us. Right? At the center of the Israelite understanding of God is that God is hesed. That God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis chapter 15.

16:07

Look up at the stars of the sky. Your people will will be as numerous as that. And through you and your people, the world

want me to sing it now too? Okay. And it goes through the whole song, right? It carries the entire thing from start to finish.

18:31

God's hesed is the base note. It's the thing that carries the tune from beginning to end, from life to death. His lovingkindness and His faithfulness endures for a 1000 generations. And if you wanna live with generosity, if you wanna live with thanksgiving, then we have to right, then our hearts will be open so that we can live with generous, joyful, and thankful hearts. There's this beautiful story in the book of Exodus, the formation story of the people of Israel when God calls Moses to go to pharaoh and tell him, let my people go.

19:18

And I'm going to go past that real quick. Because Moses and the Israelites, they leave Egypt, they cross the Red Sea, and they are freed from slavery. They're on their way to the promised land, and they have to wander through the wilderness for a number of years. And there's this moment in the book of Exodus where Moses is just so frustrated because the people keep getting it wrong. And the Israelites keep failing.

19:41

And they worship idols. And they wish they could go back to Egypt because at least we had food to eat there. And Moses is just about done with his time. And he looks to God in a moment in Exodus chapter 34, and he says, god, I'm tired. I'm so tired of these stiff necked people, and I'm just done.

20:04

If I'm gonna keep going on this road, I need you to show me your glory. I need you to show me your glory because you keep telling me that you're gonna be with us, but right now, god, all I feel is alone. And in Exodus chapter 33, god says to Moses, okay, okay, Moses, I'm gonna show you my glory. And you're gonna go up on the mountain and I'm gonna put you in the cleft of a rock, and I'm gonna pass by. The presence of Yahweh is going to pass by you, but you can't see my face because no human being can see my glory and live.

20:39

But I'll show you my backside. And so Moses goes up on the mountain. And in Exodus chapter 34, the story says that the glory of God goes by Moses. And as Moses experiences the glory of God, here's what it says. That the Lord came down in a cloud, and he stood with Moses, and he proclaimed his name Yahweh.

21:04

And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, the lord the lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, in hesed, forgiving 1,000, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. The glory of God passed by Moses, and when it did, the way God decided to describe himself is abounding in love, forgiving sin in iniquity, the one who is filled with steadfast love for a 1000 generations. At the heart of God, according to this story, is what? Hesed. And the glory passes by Moses.

21:59

And y'all, I love what happens next because he experiences the loving kindness of God, maybe for the first time in his life. And in Exodus 34, what does it say? That Moses fell down on his knees and he worshiped. Do you understand how central under, how central knowing the fundamental characteristic of God is? Do you understand that when we encounter the truth of who God is filled with loving kindness that extends to a 1000 generations, something begins to happen inside of us.

22:38

Right? Moses experienced, and here's what he did. He fell down on his knees, and he worshiped. He fell down on his knees, and he said, thank you, God. Because we didn't deserve your forgiveness and you gave it to us.

22:58

We didn't deserve your love and yet here it is. Give thanks to the lord because he's good and is hesed. His lovingkindness, his steadfast love and goodness, it endures forever. Moses experienced it and his heart said, worship. And my deepest prayer for every single one of us is that we could do exactly the same sort of thing.

23:32

To live with a posture of thanksgiving because we know just how good God really is. Think about it for just a moment. When I read to you that Psalm, 26 verses, it starts at the beginning. Give thanks to God because he created all things. Right?

23:48

Verses 5 through 7 talks about the glory of God in creation. Verses 6 through 8, it talks about how God led them from slavery in Egypt to to freedom on the other side. Verses 16 through 20 talks about how God journeyed with them in the wilderness even when things weren't going the way we thought they would. God, you were with us. And then verses 23, 24.

24:14

God, you're with us even right now. But I think my favorite verse of all in this one is verse 25, where the psalmist says, give thanks to the Lord for he's good. He gives us the daily bread that we need. Do you understand what the psalmist is doing? From the creation of the cosmos itself.

24:42

From the creation of the cosmos all the way down to the pop tart that you ate this morning. We have the ability to experience the kindness and the goodness and the generosity of God. Every single second, if we are willing to pay attention, is an opportunity for heseid to come into our lives and radiate out into the world. From the creation of the cosmos to the food on your plate. That's the goodness of God that we are invited to experience right here and right now.

25:24

Now there's a guy in the church, Nick, who's one of my best friends. And Nick and I probably talk 2 or 3 times a week, and and I'll call Nick or I'll see Nick in person. And one of the things that I love is that Nick, every time I call him, he answers the phone, he says, well, hello, doctor Dyer, which is still weird to me. Just call me Will. That stuff is very strange.

25:42

But he says, hello, doctor Dyer. And I say, well, hey, Nick. And

then I'll say this, how are you? How are you? And every single time I talk to my friend, without fail, do you know what he says?

25:59

I'm better than I deserve. I'm better than I deserve. Think about that for just a few moments. How easy would it be to write that off as a cliché? Just an entry point into a deeper conversation.

26:17

But don't do that. Don't do that y'all. How are you? I'm better than I deserve. The hesed of God.

26:27

The undeserved kindness that is extended out to you. The generosity that you did not deserve that is given to you by a gracious and loving God. This is the fundamental key to living well. How are you? Man, I'm better than I deserve.

26:47

From the creation of the cosmos to the food on my plate. Ultimately, you guys, I don't want this to be an exercise in academia where I teach you Hebrew words and give you context about worship in ancient Israel. Ultimately, this is designed to impact your own life. And if understanding the faithfulness and the goodness of God is the key to living and living well, if understanding that his loving kindness is not just a verb that is in the past, but it is an active proponent in your life, then you need to ask this one question this morning. And here's what I want us to think about, how have you, where have you experienced the loving kindness of God in your own life?

27:33

I'm serious. Where have you experienced the hesed of God in your own life? Man, last night Yeah, I'm wearing my Georgia shirt today. But last night I didn't watch the game and God doesn't care if Georgia wins. Don't kill me for that y'all.

27:54

But I came home and I was ready to watch the game and my girl said, dad, can we skip the football game tonight? And I almost said, like, no. What are you crazy? But I said, yeah. What do you wanna do?

28:05

They said, dad, can we watch Home Alone? I said, yes. Let me pop some popcorn, y'all. And and we sat on the couch, and we watched Home Alone. And there's the moment where Kevin stands ready at the door.

28:22

This is it. Don't get scared now. And all the bedlam breaks loose after that. Right? And I just sat there, and I'm not even watching the movie anymore.

28:31

All I'm doing is watching Naomi, and watching Evie and Miriam just laugh and smile. And all I could think about was how good this life really is. It's the hesed of God through things as simple as watching a movie. It's the hesed of God in the daily moments where you wake up and you breathe it in and realize that today is a gift. Where have you experienced the hesed of God?

29:16

And maybe a deeper question that I want you to wrestle with as you go throughout your week is this, can you give thanks to the Lord? Can you give thanks to God? Do you trust that He is good? Do you trust that He is a good and loving Father who wants better for you than you could ever ask or imagine? Because, yes, Psalm 136 tells us all the ways that God is good.

29:44

But, friends, there's a deeper story at play. And that ultimately, we know that God is good through something so much bigger, through something so much more grand. We know it through Jesus. And we sang that song just a few moments ago that on the cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied. That on the cross as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified.

30:16

See, ultimately, friends, we can trust in the loving kindness of God because of Jesus. Not only what he taught us, but ultimately what he did. While we were yet sinners, Paul says, Christ died for you. The wages of sin is death, and yet through the goodness and the hesed that we find in Jesus Christ, we are invited to live

and live well. What I want us to understand this morning is that the key to living a generous life, a thankful life.

30:52

Yes. It is understanding that the cosmos were created by God. Yes. It is understanding that the food on our plate is a gift. But even more than that, the greatest expression of God's hesed, it is found in the cross.

31:09

That the restoration of all things is at hand because of what Jesus did. For God so what? Loved the world. Have you experienced the hesed of God in your life? And my prayer for you is that you have.

31:29

But if you haven't, maybe today is the day. Maybe maybe today is the day where you would recognize that Christ, while you are a sinner, he died for you. That while you didn't deserve it, he extended his grace to you. Maybe today is the day where you recognize that your chains are gone, and through Jesus, you can be set free. The greatest expression of God's love is the cross of Christ.

31:57

So may we live with thanksgiving. Not just on one day of the year, but every day of our lives. Because of who Jesus is and what he has done. Can you live with Thanksgiving? Join me now, friends, and let's pray together.

32:17

God, we're grateful. We're grateful for this morning. And God, my prayer for each person who is here in the room, my prayer for each person who's watching online, is that we would be able to affirm, God, that you are good. That we would be able to give thanks, God. That we would be able to express our gratitude for all of the things that you have given us, Lord, because you are good.

32:44

Some of us are here right now, God, this morning, and and we're struggling to trust in your goodness. Some of us are here this

morning, and we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But, God, help us to fear no evil because Jesus has gone there before us. Now the greatest expression of your hesed is the cross of Christ. May we know your goodness through him.

33:07

May we experience your grace through the greatest act of forgiveness that the world has ever known. God, may we trust in your goodness. Lord, show us your glory on this day so that we might live with thankful hearts. Be with us now as we continue to worship you. Lord, this is our prayer, and we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

33:33

Amen.