



The Sermon

Psalm 136

"Because Forever is His Loyal Love"

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning, everyone. Let's read together Psalm 136. Before I do that, let me just say thank you to the leadership for having us out and to this wonderful church. This is a sweet, sweet fellowship. It's easy to go to a big church because you can slip in and slip out, and a church like this, everybody's got a row. Everybody's got to help. It's easy to see who's here. You feel a loss when someone's not here and there's just a sense of really what the church is supposed to be like.

And so you're all to be commended. Planting a church is not easy. It's not for the faint of heart and to see your commitment to each other and to God's work in Dallas is wonderful and commendable and it's been a joy the few times we've been out to be a part of it. And we're just really grateful. We had a great week. We did survive Dallas' heat. The Lord was merciful. It really wasn't that hot. There was overcast days, we're out at the lake. Kent was spraying me with a spray bottle the whole time and fanning me with a large feather so he took good care of me and our family. We had a great trip.

And it was a joy last Sunday. I don't get the credit for the baptism; that was Anna. She publicly professed her faith in Jesus. All teenage girls like to be mentioned in sermons so I'll stop now. But it was wonderful to hear her profession of her faith and her love for Jesus and I know it was a joy to her parents as well to hear that so just such a joy and a privilege to be with

you. So thank you for having us out. We look forward to returning someday maybe. I don't want to assume anything, you know.

Psalm 136 is our text for today. A brief technical note, I believe this song was originally composed to be read antiphonally, in other words the first line would be led by a priest or a leader in temple worship and the second would have been read by the congregation of the people. And so like I said, at a church plant everybody got to do work. So I'm gonna have you involved in this reading today. I'm asking even extra of you though because I'm gonna have you use the New International Austin T. Duncan Translation, NIATDT, something like that.

So there's a repeated line in Psalm 136. You can look at it here, but if you look at it when we're trying to do this it'll catch you up. So what I want you to say for that second line of the antiphonal song is because forever is His loyal love. And I'll convince you later that that's how it should read, but for now I just need you to kind of commit with me. So because forever is His loyal love, can you do that? Let's practice is one time. Because forever is His loyal love.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

One more practice run, okay? And I need everybody to put their back into it here. Because forever is His loyal love.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

And I pray that God will impress that on our hearts and minds as we read through this Psalm together, 26 verses, Psalm 136. Give thanks to Yahweh for He is good.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who does great wonders, He alone.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who makes the heavens with discernment.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who extends the earth upon the waters.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who makes the great lights.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

The sun for dominion by day.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

The moon and stars for dominion by night.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who struck down Egypt through their firstborn.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

And brought out Israel from among them.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

By a strong hand and an outstretched arm.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who cut the Red Sea in pieces.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

And brought Israel over in the middle of it.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

And shook off Pharaoh in his force into the Red Sea.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who brought His people through the desert.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

To Him who struck down great kings.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

And slew powerful kings.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Sihon King of the Amorites.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Og King of Bashan.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

And gave their land as an inheritance.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

An inheritance for Israel his servant.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Who in our lowliness remembered us.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Who tore us away from our adversaries.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

One who gives bread to all flesh.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Give thanks to the God of heaven because forever is His loyal love.

Audience: Because forever is His loyal love.

Amen. So reads the word of the living God. May He write it on our hearts. The most important part of preaching is to not miss the point of a passage. This one is unmissable, right? To know the message that God has for us, to hear that repeated refrain, just 6 syllables long in Hebrew, repeated 26 times ensures that we would begin to grasp the central message of Psalm 136. And it just so happens that the central message of Psalm 136 is the central message of the entire bible.

The Apostle John would say it this way, "God is love." And the message of Psalm 136 as it recounts God's work throughout creation and the history of Israel and then with a very personal conclusion, that final paragraph has this repeated refrain, because forever is His loyal love. And it's my hope this morning is that God would press on our hearts the significance of the love of God being a motivation in all that He does.

This is a motivation that I think can help us in many aspect of our lives, I think it can help us in trials to know that God's love is unchanging, unbreakable, eternal, invincible, can help you in every stage of your life, whether you're close to crossing that river of death or whether you're at the outset of your life, whether you're a single person or a married person, whether you're a child or a parent. Knowing and understanding the forever loyal love of God ought to impact us.

One such man it impacted greatly is maybe a man you haven't heard of. His name is Samuel Marinus Zwemer. Samuel Marinus Zwemer was called by the Christian historian, a famous Christian historian Lafayette the only one to ever deserve the title The Apostle to Islam. He was born April 12, 1867. He was born in Michigan in a Dutch family that emigrated from Europe to Michigan and one of these Dutch Reform churches. He had 16 brothers and sisters, obviously homeschoolers. And six of his sisters became schoolteachers, four of his brothers became ministers.

And even from an early age Samuel had a tenderness of heart towards lost people and had a desire to tell the nations this important message about the love of God, the power of the love of God and the hope that we have as sinners because God loves us. Zwemer went to Hope College in Michigan and his passion for missions was only fueled as he met some other friends who had become his colleagues in the mission field eventually and the desire to go to a place that had not been effectively reached for the gospel in centuries.

Back then it was called Arabia. We call it the Middle East. And mission boards largely were not sending anyone from the United States to that place because it was too hard, too dangerous and there was zero fruitfulness in their assessment. Zwemer couldn't stand for this and so after seminary, he and a group of his associates appealed to a mission board, the largest in the United States to send them to Arabia and they were immediately turned down.

So Zwemer did what any impassioned missionary would do, he started his own mission board. He said later in his life, "If a mission board turns you down, drill a hole through that board and go through the hole." So he was this passionate missionary statesman. He would spend five decades of his life in Arabia. He would travel extensively back and forth between the United States and other countries that were sending countries to try to motivate more missionaries to come and motivate others to give to the efforts there. It cost him greatly.

Samuel Zwemer was, when he first landed, a single man and had no hope of finding a wife in that culture. There was no other Christian women there until one day two women approached him from Australia who were sent as medical missionaries to Arabia and they asked him to teach them Arabic. They were not allowed to interact with men as part of their mission mandate from their sending agency, but the exception was their Arabic teacher, Samuel Zwemer. And of course Samuel Zwemer taught one of them how to say I love you in Arabic and they fell in love.

Her sending agency was irate actually because it cost them a lot of money to train and send a missionary so they insisted that Zwemer pay them her travel expenses, her training expenses and he gladly did so when they were married. This elevated Zwemer's esteem in front of the Arab men of the culture because a rumor started that Samuel bought a wife. They were very impressed. So all of this happened and the cost of the wife was the least that he would bear.

They had two beautiful daughters who both, before they were teenagers, languished and died of dysentery. And he buried them in Bahrain and on the gravestone he had inscribed, "Worthy is the lamb to receive riches." Samuel and his dear wife who would also die after some decades together gave everything they had because they wanted Muslim people to understand the love of God in Christ. He was 85-years-old, still working hard for the Lord, still traveling extensively. He was in New York City addressing a group of thousands of Intersarsity students, appealing to them and their generation to help him. This is a man who served for decades and decades, 85-years-old, saw maybe a dozen converts and appealed to these young people, 3 sermons in 1 day in the summer in New York City to give their lives to missions and invest their resources in missions.

And that evening after those three sermons he died and that heart that beat to tell others about the love of God beat no more. His writings are still useful to those who seek to reach Islamic people for Christ and one line that he said is, "I am convinced that the nearest way to the Muslim heart is the way of the love of God." And that's the message of this song, isn't it? The love of God being immeasurable, the love of God being the intentional and relentless focus of this song that's main point is unmissable because forever is His loyal love.

The practicality of this song I think will be seen as we unfold it in five movements. And we'll look at it in these five parts. We'll move quickly through it and if you'll give me grace, I'll spend a little bit more time on the first part because we have to cover one of the lines that reoccurs 26 times

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and I will not repeat myself after that. So we'll talk about that line and explain it during our first point.

Let's call the first movement of this song about the eternal love of God this. Number one, in praise of the everlasting love of God, in praise of the everlasting love of God versus 1 through 3. I think you can see why these verses are divided. They all begin with this imperative give thanks. Give thanks and give thanks. That's a phrase that, yes, speaks of Thanksgiving but also could be translated to confess or to speak of or to ascribe to. This makes sense when you look at the rest of this song, just glancing down at the verses to follow, notice that it has a directional emphasis on God Himself. "To Him," verse 4, "to Him," verse 5, "To Him, to Him, to Him," verse 10, "To Him" verse 13, "To Him," verse 16, "To Him," verse 17.

This song seeks to demonstrate that the object of our thanksgiving and the object of our confession and the object of our praise is God Himself, that God is the center of the universe, He's the center of our praise, He is worthy and so the song begins by saying, "Give thanks," ascribe to, confess of. And then in your bible in verse 1 it has those capitalized letters for Lord which is the covenant name of God Yahweh, the God who is, the God who is self-existent.

This is what the Jews called God. It was His personal name. Other gods had names in the ancient world, false gods, idols, Molech would be one, Bael or Baal that you're familiar with. The God of Israel also had a name and His name was given to His people to be a treasure to them because He was the god who self-revealed and that's what the name Yahweh means. It means I am. And so this psalm immediately identifies that God is the true God of Israel, the covenant God, the God who was faithful to stay and stick with His people, who called them out of paganism and darkness through the calling of the patriarch Abraham and brought them into his family. And so their thanks is personal, it's directed towards God by name, Yahweh.

And then it gives what I think is a very interesting line, "For He is good," for a psalm that says or a song, a hymn that says, "For or because forever is His loyal love," 26 times, it's interesting that there's an initial ground and foundation of motivation. Their praise and worship and thanksgiving to God is due to His goodness. It's this particular attribute of God that this song begins with and it's going to serve as a launching point for that repetitious motivation which is His forever loyal love.

Why does He begin with God's goodness? Well, if you think about theology proper you understand that goodness, though it seems like such a slender word to us in English, God is good, I mean that seems like a tepid word. If something is good we usually don't mean that it's great or that it's wonderful. I mean we don't say, "Pizza is good," we say, "We love pizza." So good to us seems like a mild adjective, but good is such an important word in the bible in talking about God. Though it is a basic word it's fundamental to thinking about who God is.

It means that God is not capricious, that God is not in any way malignant, that there is nothing evil in God. The bible begins by discussing goodness as a primary attribute of the good God who spoke this world into creation and then called it what? Good. So God makes things and calls them good because He is by nature good. To have a god who is a loving God but not a good God would be a massive problem. If he had some sort of capricious affection even for some of His creation but at heart if God was not fundamentally good then His love could not be trust. And so God is not just a God who is affectionate towards His creation and towards His covenant people.

God is a God who in His affection at the foundation of it is set up with this holy goodness, this moral perfection and that's why so often the bible puts together this word good and this word love. Psalm 107 verse 1 says the same exact thing, "For God is good or Yahweh is good and forever is His loving kindness." Repeatedly the Old Testament will put those things together. When God revealed Himself to Moses and showed Moses a portion of Himself and put Moses in the cleft of that rock, the two things

that were highlighted in God's revelation were His loving kindness and His goodness, both highlighted two times in Exodus 34.

So God's goodness is of foundational importance and the difference in that line I think is noteworthy and so give thanks to Yahweh for His good sets this song up. Verse 2 gives thanks to the God of gods. This is a way of describing God that I think is definitely related to the psalm that preceded it. If you look at Psalm 135 you'll notice it has many similar lines. Verse 8, for example, "He smote the firstborn of Egypt," is the same as verse 10 in Psalm 136, He even speaks specifically of those two trans Jordanian kings in Psalm 135, Sihon and Og in verse 11 and he speaks of them again in verse 19 and 20. These are almost identical songs but our song, Psalm 136 has a concentrated focus on the love of God. Psalm 135 has a concentrated focus on the uniqueness of God over idols.

And so as a continuing song with so many similar verses now emphasizing the love of God, it's carrying on this theme of God's godness, that idols are nothing. Verse 15 of Psalm 135, "The idols of the nations are but silver and gold, the work of man's hands. They have mouths but they do not speak, they have eyes but they do not see, they have ears but they do not hear. There is any breath at all in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, yes, everyone who trusts in them."

And so the focus of 135 is on idolatry, as is the focus of so much of the bible, a warning that is timely even for those modern sophisticated people having church in a coffee shop who do not carve idols. We understand that idolatry is a hard issue, that worshipping something or elevating something or esteeming something above your love for God is by nature and definition idolatry and that when you worship something, if it's money or success or prestige or even your family, you will become like that which you worship. It will shape you more than you will ever shape it.

If you love and desire things in this world more than you love and desire God, those things in this world will shape you and they will become like a

God to you. And so when verse 2 says, "Give thanks to the God of gods," He's not saying that idols or false gods are actually deities, he's saying that, just as Paul said in 1 Corinthian 8, these things are so-called Gods and they become functional gods in our lives. And by calling God the God of gods He reminds us that no god compares, no other worship, no other offering, no other temptation, nothing in this world has the draw, appeal, beauty, glory, goodness and love that the true God has. Truly He is the God of gods, all lower case gods bow down to the capital God.

Verse 3, "Give thanks to the Lord of lords." This now is a title, Lord of lords, one you're familiar with that occurs throughout the scriptures. It speaks of God's sovereignty, of His authority. He is a kingly God, He is in control of this world. That's why this song begins with these three verses. It sets up the theological basis of God's love by focusing on who this God is. I mean just in these three verses look what we've learned. We've learned that He's the covenant God who called His people in the name Yahweh, that He has a fundamental attribute of goodness, that He is worthy of our praise because He is the only true God, verse 2 and that He is completely sovereign, verse 3.

I mean that's a lot of theology, a lot of truth about God packed into three tiny verses and we haven't even looked at the main point of the song yet. So let's look at it. In the NAS bible it says, "For His loving kindness is everlasting." Maybe your bible says, "For His tender mercy is forever," or there's several variations. They're all very similar. I choose to translate it, "Because forever is His loyal love," because it reflects the order of those words in Hebrew. It begins with the word for or because.

It's so important to see that this song insists, repeatedly insists that because or for speaks of the motivation or what proceeds it. So whether we're talking about deliverance from Egypt or we're talking about the nature of God, there is something underneath all those things that is motivated and driven by the love of God. And so that word because is what sets this up. It reminds us that what God is doing, whatever He is doing, whether it is acts of creation or acts of deliverance or acts of sustenance and

providence, these things are always connected to the love of God, even the judgment of God as we'll see later in this song.

The love of God is the ground and motivation of all that He does. And if you're a cataclysm person that might cause some dissidence because you don't often think that way about the love of God. But we'll get to that later so just put that problem in your pocket. We'll bring it out in a minute. So if God's love is His motivation, at least for the things listed here which I think are all-encompassing, you'll note what he says about God's love.

The first thing we could look at here in looking at this repeated refrain is that word loyal love or loving kindness. It's the word hesed and you have to do that haa thing when you say it. They teach you that in seminary. It's a whole semester of just haa. So hesed, it's probably the most important word in the Old Testament.

Dan Block, Hebrew scholar, calls it a workhorse attribute of God. It's one of those attributes that's all over the bible, loving kindness. Really the way to understand it isn't just the word love. That's not a sufficient translation. And loving kindness is a good attempt as well. But in hesed in the Old Testament, there's always two ideas there. One is the central idea of love or affection, that God is a God who cares, who is compassionate, who is affectionate and loving, that He is for His people in a tenderhearted way.

But hesed always occurs in the context of covenantal thinking. In other words, covenantal thinking is that God has committed or made a covenant, an agreement, a decision, a commitment to His people and that's the basis of His love. And so it's this idea of affection and this idea of commitment that come together in the word hesed. It's why I like to translate that word as loyal love. I mean if God were exuberantly affectionate towards you but only towards Tuesdays, that would be a very different experience, wouldn't it?

But because His commitment is unbreakable and unshakeable, the loyal love of God endures forever. That's the idea behind this love is that the love is loyal, the love is unbreakable, it is full and affectionate and real and nothing can shatter it and nothing, as Paul says in Romans, can separate us from that loyal love. But there's one word left to consider and then we have half of this psalm done because it's repeated so many times. It's the word forever.

And as Mark prayed this morning, I appreciate your prayer, Mark, because you spoke of the eternality of God. And that's something that's hard, isn't it, to wrap our minds around? We are finite creatures. We are temporal creatures and evidence of that is our nostalgia. I look over at my kids who are still paying attention to a sermon that they have heard before and I remember when they were just newborns, right? You remember when your kids were so little and now I have a junior high daughter, what is God doing in this world?

And you're looking at me thinking, bub, you have no idea. Like it gets way worse than that, right? I mean they get old fast. Some of you went to bed last night, you were 20, now you're 72. So we see how fast our lives go by and you don't feel it when you're very young, but every passing year you feel the speed of life and the temporal nature, the vapor like quality of life, it's so enigmatic. It so quickly slips through your fingers.

All of that is evidence that we are not like God. He has no beginning and He has no end and so this word forever is a word that speaks of God's perspective on time, that is it is endless and it is without beginning, that there is an infinite kind of nature to this love and that there's never an expiration date on it where we grow old and die. God will never do that. He will always be and His love will always be.

I mean forever is so unthinkably difficult for us because we've never felt it. We've never seen it. We stand in line at the – do you guys have the DMV or the MVD?

Audience: DMV.

DMV, amen. I think California has the MVD which I think is just a wrong mix of letters. So the DMV, we stand in line at the DMV and how long does it take?

Audience: Forever.

It takes forever to get your driver's license, right? We got to figure this out. And so you get home, you say, "It took forever." I got a text a few months ago from my cellphone carrier, wretched, wretched cellphone carrier that it is. And it said that I've gone over on my data plan. I blame the association for that, the National Basketball Association. So I have to keep track, it's important for my preaching to retain its human texture.

So I think it was the third month in a row I'd gotten this text threatening me with \$15.00 surcharges or whatever 'cause of my data plan. And it was kind of mindboggling because I'm on a plan called unlimited. And so I hit the button to call the people and this sweet lady answered, she's probably Texan. And she's representing this evil company, but she's sweet and she says, "Oh, sir, it's just your data plan, you're on the wrong one." I said, "I thought I was on unlimited." She says, "You are, but, sir, what you need is another plan called Beyond Unlimited." Beyond unlimited.

And I didn't want to argue semantics with this lady so I just said, "Sign me up for beyond unlimited. I love it, I want to be a part of that, it'll be a sermon illustration so that's fine." So it's just a reminder that forever is not a long time. Forever is far beyond a long time. Forever is beyond unlimited and that's what the love of God is like. It is so far outside of our finite, quickly passing aging perception of life and things. There is no number of

sunsets. There is no measure of the edges of the galaxy that can contain the forever loyal love of God.

And this song seeks to wrap our minds around that in this first chorus that says, "That we called in praise of the everlasting love of God," and so we're told to give thanks for it. The second movement is verses 4 through 9 and it's a simple one. It's that creation is ordered by the everlasting love of God. Creation is ordered by the everlasting love of God. There's an umbrella statement in verse 4, one that seeks to set up the rest of this little section that focuses on God's act as creator. Verse 4, "To Him who does great wonders, He alone," or, "He alone does great wonders." The emphasis is on God being the only one who is at work creatively in the making of the universe.

And this is how the bible begins and it's an important point that so much of the scriptures hang upon. I mean God's sovereign authority over your life friend, the fact that God has claims on your life, that He makes demands on your life is grounded and rooted in the fact that He is the creator of all life. And so this isn't a usurper coming in on the scene telling you you need to worship Jesus. This is the God who made you, who invented the very idea of you, that you do not exist apart from Him is evident in creation.

This is the message of Psalm 19 that speaks of the great book of the law revealing God and then the great world that God has made revealing Him. Or this is the argument of Paul to the Romans when he says that creation itself testifies to God's eternal nature.

And so all around us with trees and lakes and catfish, just thinking of recent things, that surround us. In Los Angeles it's cement and pollution and cement and pollution and it's all the creation we have. Cement and pollution. Here there's catfish, beautiful things. And there's trees and there's lakes and there's stars in the sky and all of creation points and proclaims to the one who does great wonders. It's a word used in the Book of Exodus for miracles and creation is just that. Some people are looking

for a snap, crackle and pop, for God to do something amazing, something supernatural to prove His existence to them.

If we're supposed to believe in God, why wouldn't He send a lightning storm or why wouldn't He say something from heaven? But when this person looks at their own hands and sees the intricacy of all the bones that go into making human hands and look at the stars and the forecasts for the weather tomorrow and the expansive glow and the discoveries of astronomers about the size of the universe, they should marvel because we are without excuse because our God is the wonderworking God. He alone made all things.

Then he tells us, verse 5, 6, 7 with verbs that are in a present kind of tense, makes, extends, makes, does, it's a word that speaks of God's ongoing efforts in creation, describing it in a past tense but with present implications. He makes the heavens with discernment or discernment where I'm from. So He makes the heavens with discernment. It's a word for skill, artisanship. God's creativity extends to that because His loyal love was the motivation in His creativity. Verse 6, "He extends the earth upon the water." It's a word used in Leviticus of a goldsmith hammering gold onto something that he crafted and made. It's the same word that's used to extend the earth upon the waters and implication of the account of creation.

Verse 7 speaks of His making of the great lights, the fourth day of creation and then specifically the sun to rule over the day and the moon and stars to rule over the night in the fourth day of creation. All of this intending to show us that God's love motivated Him in making this world. It is not correct to think that God made this world because He was lonely or needy. It is also incorrect to think that God has a calculated indifference towards His creation.

God is not mechanical in the way that He would set the world into being and then walk away from it. Instead, God has this ongoing loving, crafting, artisan kind of approach to this world. If you're a person who loves

creativity, know that God is a God who is creative by nature and the evidence of that is all around. And if that's something that appeals to you, know that that's something that appeals to God. He is a God of aesthetic beauty. He is a God whose love insisted on making a world that was not grayscale but a world that was in full color.

This is evidence of His unbreakable love in simple things like a cactus plant, in complex and microscopic things like in amoeba or molecules and in massive things like black holes and galaxies and intimidating things like Bengal tigers and giant whales, all of them evidence of God's loyal love for His creatures. We should be repeatedly stunned by the beauty and intricacy and wideness and depth and size of the creation that God had made. He ordered it all by His everlasting, unbreakable and loyal love.

The largest section of this psalm is a very simple one as well. It's verses 10 through 22, it's deliverance accomplished by the everlasting love of God, deliverance accomplished by the everlasting love of God. And I think this is a fun section because it's a crash course in Israelite history. You know those books that they had them when I was in college, World War II for Dummies, you know, those kind of books? I read the textbook, I promise, but sometimes those were additional help to me. And this is sort of Israelite history for dummies, no offense. When I say that, you're supposed to say, "None taken."

So the idea here is, how do you sum up Abraham to the Promised Land? And he decides to do it this way. It's not the way I would have decided to do it, but it's the way he decided to do it and he was inspired by the spirit and so we have something to learn from how he does this. He begins in verse 10, again, I think the reason here is these action words. "To Him who struck down." It's a word for hit, hit. He hit Egypt through their firstborn because forever is His loyal love.

We don't usually associate the love of God with things like the slaughter of the Egyptian firstborn. This psalm is insistent that that's the case. It's way

easier to think about the clouds in the sky and the fish in the sea and say, "That's the love of God behind all that." It's probably more challenging to think about the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt in an act of God's judgment as also being motivated by His love. More on that as we see it unveiled here.

Verse 11 would couple that act of horrifying judgment that was an act of judgment for the Egyptians, an act of deliverance in the Passover for the people with a word of God's tenderness. Verse 11, "And brought out Israel from among them." It's a word that means to carry, like a mother would carry her infant child. God tenderly carried Israel out from Egypt. It took ten plagues to do so, but all of it was undergirded by His loyal love.

And then verse 12, as if alternating, shows God now in a warrior pose. It says, "By a strong hand and an outstretched arm." That's a word used in the war portions of the Old Testament for the stance of a warrior. God now has a strong hand and an outstretched arm because forever is His loyal love. He's protecting His people through their wilderness wanderings.

Verse 13 is that famous episode that Charlton Heston pictured for us so well, he cut the Red Sea in pieces. He cut the Red Sea. It's a word for chop because forever is His loyal love and again, brought Israel over in the middle of it. Verse 15, He shook off pharaoh and is forced into the Red Sea. It's a word for shaking out a blanket or a garment. That's what God did to the mightiest superpower of the day, that He took Egypt and He just shook off pharaoh and his great army.

This is the power of the love of God to protect His people, that there is no circumstance or enemy that can halt or circumvent or stop His loyal love from being demonstrated. Verse 16, to Him who brought the people through the desert, this too was an act of judgment. Now judgment focused on God's own people because of their complaining, bellyaching and unbelief, they would be cut off in the desert, scattered throughout the wilderness. Even this, an act of discipline for His own people, is an act of love. But we

know that love is always rooted in discipline and that discipline and love go together and so we see that even in this history lesson.

And then here's one of the most interesting portions I think, verses 17, 18, 19, it continues to show us that deliverance is accomplished by the eternal love of God, all the way through verse 22. He gives us specific examples. The heading is, "Great King Struck Down, Powerful Kings Slain." That's headlines Tel Aviv. And then it gives us specific examples. Sihon, King of the Amorites, this is – what are we doing, bible trivia here? This is a stumper. Does anyone know where Sihon is without looking in your MacArthur Study Bible? Of course you do.

Audience: In the earth.

You're right, on the earth, good. I'd give him credit for it, wouldn't you? More specifically than in the earth, Deuteronomy 3 is where we find it. It's the story of the people of Israel, the generation before of unbelief had passed away and in the Book of Deuteronomy they're entering into the Promise Land. Their toes are on the edge of the Jordan River and God brings these people with their leader Moses to a place of preparation to enter the Promise Land.

And that's where the famous stuff happens. Jericho falls down, Ai happens. The earth swallows up the rebellious ones. That's the Joshua judges Jericho, all that stuff is what's about to happen, but Deuteronomy is the prequel. Deuteronomy is trans Jordanian. It's where these kings, some of them gigantic kings, powerful kings, try to stop the people before they even get into the land. These serve as sort of practice battles for God's people, ways for God to demonstrate to His people that He will be able to accomplish everything He promised once they get into the Promise Land because that's when the fighting really starts.

And so these two kings in Deuteronomy 3 are said to stand in the way of Israel. Sihon is the first one and he is stopped by God. Og is the second one and in Deuteronomy there's this weird little textual note that comes seemingly out of nowhere that says Og was destroyed and if you'd like to see his bed, it is in Rabbah, it's so many cubits. You translate it to English it's 13 and a half feet long by 6 feet wide. And then the thing keeps going and your bible readers are scratching their head in their quiet time going, "Why in the world is that mentioned? Why are we supposed to know that in the Smithsonian of Israel in Rabbah there's a giant iron bed 13-feet long?"

Well, obviously this was a very large king, a large king that represented a gigantic people and a gigantic army that stood in the way of Israel and this God was able to show His people, this covenant God of Israel that there was no king, not even one that slept in a 14-footlong bed that something would ever be insurmountable for Him. If you've ever faced a gigantic trial or obstacle in your life, I would remind you of an iron bed in Rabbah. The king doesn't sleep there anymore 'cause he's dead and he's dead because he stood in the way of God's people.

And nothing can stand in the way of God's people. I'm not trying to say that Goliath is the same as the problems in your life, but there are problems in your life that are Og-sized. And when you're up against them, it's hard to think of how a loving God could even have you face such a thing. And so part of the reason we have two-thirds of our bible being the stories of God's people that went before us is so that we would benefit and learn from their faithful example of trusting God even in the face of what seems to be insurmountable odds.

And so Og and his iron bed are mentioned here in the middle of a song to remind us that nothing can stop or thwart or redirect or impose its will on the forever loyal love of God. The land that was occupied by these gigantic people, verse 22, became the inheritance of Israel, inheritance of Israel His servant. You see, deliverance was accomplished by the loyal love of God.

And God's love in your life will accomplish everything that God intends to accomplish. You can sleep on your bed at night and have a pillow of faith knowing that although your bed isn't 13-feet long, God can take care of you. He can deliver you. He can get you through. And so we come to this almost final section. It's providence experienced by the loyal love of God, verses 23 through 25. And you see the change of tone, don't you? Who. It's the first occurrence of the relative pronoun here. That's grammar nerd talk for it doesn't start with the word to, to, to, to, to.

So much of this song does, but now it says who. Who. We just went from two Transjordanian giant king warfare versus to this. "Who in our lowliness remembered us?" I love that line. "Who in our lowliness remembered us?" We have a God who cannot forget. He knows all things. He's omniscient. But it's helpful to us to know, especially because most of the people of God never saw the Red Sea cut in pieces.

Just one generation saw that. Another generation saw the wilderness. Another generation saw the Promise Land. A few generations saw the prophet Ezekiel. A few generations saw a miraculous intervention of God, but most of the people of God, the vast majority of the people of God never saw any of the things that we've just read about in this song. They never saw the plagues of Egypt. They never saw God in a burning bush. They never saw this moment of redemptive history unfold that was described in the bible.

There was just a small group there at Pentecost. The early church was contained to a very small geographic place in this world. Most of Christian history and most of salvific history from redemption to revelation will be ordinary. It will be times like this, times where you do not hear the voice of God, times where you do not see a miraculous intervention, but you live your life in this inscrutable, temporal kind of world, in a fallen world. And you pray to God and you trust God and you live by faith and this verse is for you.

If you never met Og, if you've never seen God's redemption in a massive global scale, will you remember that in our lowliness He remembered us? That even in those moments of redemptive history that we are small or feeling insignificant or wondering what God is up to. There is no lowdown displace. There is no humble circumstance where God does not have a mindfulness towards his people? For the God who can't forget to say that he remembers, not something but someone, remembered us because forever is His loyal love. The tenderness and compassion of verse 23 is helpful to me.

Verse 24 reminds us that this same tender, affectionate, remembering God still is able to rescue and save us personally and providentially, verse 24, "Who tore us away," is what the Hebrew says. It's a word used in Genesis, lamentations and psalms of someone being snatched away from the mouth of a creature. Like a lion's got somebody and somebody rips them away.

The idea here is that we were captured. We were caught. We were in the mouth of an advisory and God's the one who ripped us out of there. I don't know if you've ever been attacked by a lion, but I was once. It was in South African on a game reserve, a lion park they called it, and a lion about the age of four months old viciously attacked me as I was holding it. It was a baby lion and by viciously attack me, I mean it was really smelly and it had sharp claws and I put it down on the ground and walked away. So I survived.

But that smelly little lion, if I would have given him a few more years, I wouldn't have been able to handle his bad behavior. He was just kind of a naughty toddler lion. I was supposed to be petting it. The story got weird. So the idea behind it, if that lion was ten years past that age and I was in the mouth of that lion and he was just about to enjoy an Austin T. Duncan Chick-fil-A biscuit and the lion tamers that were there at this game reserve, had to let's say break my arm to get me away from the lion.

I would not say, "No, no, no, I don't want you to do that. I'm a tender person, don't break my arm. It's not worth it." I would say, "Break both my arms, get me out of the lion's mouth." That's what this word is, it's being torn away from the mouth of the adversary. In other words, God will do everything necessary to get his people away from their enemies. The most ordinary and extraordinary example of this is every testimony of every believing Christian in this room, whether your faith is 1-year-old or 50-years-old, your testimony is that you were in the mouth of an adversary, you belong to sin and you belong to Satan.

And God did everything necessary to tear you away from that and to pull you into His family. That's the testimony of every believer that we've been torn away from our adversaries and the motivation for it, just as it says in Titus 3 is the Lord of God in Jesus. Look at verse 25, "One who gives breath to all flesh, bread, not breath, bread to all flesh or food to all people." The idea here is that God's love has an omni benevolence to it.

That doesn't mean that God loves every single person in the same way, but it does remind us that if anyone ever wondered about the love of God for creation, they could either read John 3:16 or they could taste a morsel of food. Because every breath and every bite is a reminder that our God is a loving God, a God who in common grace explains His love for humanity by letting us breathe His air and by providing for us food. It says bread to all flesh. The electing love of God does not preclude a warm, love and affection that God has for all of His creation made in His likeness and image.

I'm as Calvinist as Samuel Zwemer or somebody and I have no qualms looking at a person on the street today and saying, "Do you understand that God loves you? God loves you. He made you. He provides for you and He sent His son to die in your place. Would you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" I still affirm the doctrine of election and I still affirm that God has a special love for His people. And I don't think that makes God any less praiseworthy.

In fact, I think we all believe in covenantal love. I have a special love for Merilly that I do not have for all the ladies in my church. I should be run out if that was the case. There is a special electing kind of love in God, but there's also a common grace, general kind of love that we need to be reminded of in verses like 25, "Who gives bread to all flesh because forever is His loyal love."

The final part of this song is a chiasm. It ends the way it started. The fifth movement is in praise of the everlasting love of God. It closes the way it started. Verse 26 simply says, "Give thanks to the God of heaven," a unique title in the Old Testament, speaking of God's high and lofty position because forever is His loyal love. What do you do with this song? Well, 1, wonder of wonders, we made it through all 26 verses, but 2, I never know what a sermon is for ultimately.

I preached Psalm 136 a few months ago on a Sunday night at Gray's. I think it was like Mother's Day or something. There was less than this many people there and so I went through it. Psalm 136, I benefitted from it. Everyone left afterwards and I didn't really know what it was for or how God was gonna use it. Usually you don't.

But the next week two things happened, a lady came up to me the next week and said, "The Monday after you preached that, I was there, and I had a doctor's appointment the next day and I got diagnosed with ovarian cancer." And she said, "Pastor, I've never slept better than I slept Monday night because that diagnosis hit me hard but it was immediately followed by that refrain, "Because forever is His loyal love." Cancer, "Because forever is His loyal love."

That same week I spent some time with a friend who his precious wife died. She was in her late 20s, they'd been married for 3 years, 2 and a half of them were suffering from cancer. A 30-year-old widower. He and I had read Psalm 136 together and as we drove in the car, we're doing a little road trip

together, he looked at me and said, "I don't know all the reasons why this happened to me and to my precious wife," he loved her so much.

And he knew she was in heaven and he knew God's purposes were uncountable, 10,000 things going on that God's doing at any given time using all things for His glory, right? But he said he had every confidence that he went through this trial because forever is God's loyal love. You see, we were taught since we were little kids that God does everything He does for His glory and that's absolutely right.

God makes this world to give Him glory. God sent His son to give Him glory, but that does not mean that there is a conflicting purpose in the all-wise God because the ultimate end is God's glory. But that does not mean it is His complete motivation. Friend, never pit the glory of God against the love of God. God does what He does in sending His son for His glory, equally and just as true, God does what He does in sending His son to be crucified on a bloody cross to be raised three days later from the grave to ascend to His right hand because forever is His loyal love.

In creation, in redemption, in deliverance, in inheritance, in sweet moments of providence, in the lowliest times of church history, God is at work bringing glory to Himself, bringing glory to His son and showing us that all that He does is because His loyal love is forever. So remind yourself this week when you walk through this world that God made and when you page through the scriptures that tell the story of what God has done, that all of it, even in those tight corners in your life, even in those hard trials that you face, in an ordinary day where things are going your way, remind yourself because forever is His loyal love.

[Prayer] Father, thank you for your love. It's matchless and we see it on the cross of Jesus. Surely, God, you are good to us, to send your son to die in our place, to remind us of the tender affection that you have for us in the gospel. May we live in light of that reality. May we never question or doubt that you love us. Thank you, God, for calling us to follow Jesus as Lord of

our life and for showing us that no greater love is this that a man lays down his life for his friends. Thank you for the sacrificial death of Jesus, the ultimate demonstration of your loyal love.