

- The Grace and Mercy of God (Psalm 136)

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Please open your Bibles to the Prophecy of the Psalms, **Psalm 136:1** (2X). In the wake of Thanksgiving Day, this past Thursday, it would be good to unfold this Psalm and see where it leads us to. There are a few verses in here which catch the eye. For example, in verse 10 we thank the Lord for killing all the firstborn in Egypt, and in verse 15 we thank the Lord for killing Pharaoh and his entire army in the Red Sea. That is a lot of killing, and we thank God for all that killing? And what have all these actions of God to do with “His mercy endureth forever?” How can we see the mercy of God in all these actions which actually cause death and destruction among the Egyptians? Let us look at that in Psalm 136, beginning in verse 1.

- 1 ¶ O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 2 O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 4 To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 5 To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 6 To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 7 To him that made great lights: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 8 The sun to rule by day: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 9 The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 10 ¶ To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 11 And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 12 With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 13 To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 14 And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 16 To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 17 To him which smote great kings: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 18 And slew famous kings: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 19 Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 20 And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 21 And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 22 Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 23 ¶ Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy *endureth* for ever:
- 24 And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 25 Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
- 26 O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

- **The Grace and Mercy of God** (Psalm 136)

You noticed that this entire historical Psalm is related to the mercy of God, enduring forever. What is the mercy of God? Let us review the concepts of grace and mercy. What is the difference between grace and mercy? Grace is an action of God for the purpose of giving us salvation. And thus grace is something God is giving us what we do not deserve. During this life we receive many things from God freely, all directed to the salvation He wants to bestow on us. But especially in the next life, in the life hereafter, God has a very great gift in store for us, which is called “eternal life with Christ. We do not deserve eternal life with Christ in the New Heaven and the New Earth, but if we are children of God, God is giving it to us even though we do not deserve it.

Grace is a gift we do not deserve. On the other hand, **mercy** is God withholding from us what we do deserve. We do deserve to go to Hell for our sins, but God is withholding Hell from us. That is the great mercy of God. But God is a righteous Judge. He cannot capriciously remove from us what is rightfully ours. And what is it that is rightfully ours? It is a penalty that we have earned. It is a debt that we have to pay. But it is a debt so great that we cannot ever pay it back by ourselves as easily as we have earned it. For example, if you go to a casino and you gamble, you can easily rack up a debt so great that you can never earn enough money to pay it back, and then you go to jail and be subject to hard labor until you have it all paid back down to the last penny. If God is your Father, He will help you out, and He will send someone who can pay this debt for you. This someone is the Lord Jesus Christ who will be merciful and pay your debt completely, in full, regardless how much it costs.

Thus far I have talked only in terms of this material life that we can understand easily. Now we have to switch gears, for God is a Spirit. Instead of material debts we now have to talk about spiritual debts, which are called sins. Sins are transgressions of the law of God. Each sin is an insult against Almighty God. And the payment for sins is required at the end of this life. There are great sins and smaller sins. But the debt of each sin is so great that the payment of each sin requires an eternity in Hell. What did the Lord Jesus Christ have to do to pay for all the sins that I have accumulated? He had to suffer for them the equivalent of an eternity in Hell while He was hanging on the cross in AD 33. That is called “Atonement.” He atoned for my sins on Friday, April 3, in the year AD 33, and He completed my atonement two days later on Sunday, April 5, in the year AD 33 when He was raised from the grave. I am saying this because the cross and the resurrection of Christ must be taken as one redemptive act of God; not two but one redemptive act of God. His atonement was not completed until He was raised from the grave. If God is your Father, He will send the Lord Jesus Christ to pay for your sins. It means then that we do not have to go to Hell because Christ has already paid the debt. That is **mercy**. God is withholding from us what we do deserve. And so, what has the mercy of God accomplished for us?

The mercy of God has delivered us from the clutches of Satan. What has Satan to do with all of this? How did he get in on the action? Satan is our Accuser before the Judgment throne of God. Each sin is a violation of the law of God. Satan demands that we are the unfaithful wife of God, and we must be stoned to death and be cast into hell, as the law of God demands. And thus without the mercy of God we are still in the clutches of Satan. But all of this revolves around the condition "If God is your Father." What does the Bible say about this condition? Is the mercy of God available for all mankind? The Bible says "NO." God is sovereign. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

#1. The Sovereignty of God (Eph 1:3-7, Luke 19:14, Psalm 136:10, Ex 12:29)

Please turn in your Bibles to the First Epistle to the Ephesians, **Eph 1:3** (2X). Here is a passage that speaks of the beginning of creation. When we want to learn about the beginning of creation we do not start with **Gen 1:1**, but we begin here in **Eph 1:3-7** for this is truly the beginning.

Eph 1:3 ¶ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

Eph 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Eph 1:5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Eph 1:6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. **Eph 1:7** In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Before the foundation of the world God chose a group of people whom He called His Elect, and He predestinated them to become adopted sons of God by having them redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ. This was God's plan according to the good pleasure of His will before He created the first speck of dust. These were the people whom God wanted to redeem through Christ crucified. Not one shall be forgotten and not one shall be added, for these alone were the people who would want to receive the grace of God to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. No one else wants to have Christ as King reigning over them. They shouted, "We will not have this man to reign over us," (**Luke 19:14**) for they came into the world totally depraved, and they remained that way until they died. The natural man is proud by nature, and does not want to believe that they are sinners on the way to Hell. They do not need a Savior. The sovereignty of God is manifested in this that there are some who receive God as their Father, because God predestined them to become saved and God gives them faith, and there are others who shout "We will not have this man to reign over us." And thus the mercy of God is given only to those whom God chose to be His children before the foundation of the world; not to those who hated Him. God is omniscient. He knows who the ones are who hate Him. But now we

would like to see how **Psalm 136** fits into our understanding of the mercy of God. We read in **Psalm 136:10** “Him that smote Egypt in their firstborn.” What has this to do with the mercy of God? And why does His mercy endure forever?

Psalm 136:10 ¶ To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy *endureth* forever:

We know that verse 10 has to do with the first Passover, and with the exodus of the Children of Israel out of Egypt. God painted for us a gigantic picture of salvation. Please turn in your Bibles to the Prophecy of Isaiah, **Isa 43:1** (2X), and here God shows us how this killing of all the firstborn in Egypt was pointing to the deliverance of all the elect of God. Historically, the children of Israel were severely oppressed by the Egyptians. They were slaves in Egypt, and they were severely humiliated. How did the Egyptians distinguish between slaves and free people? All the slaves walked naked; men, women, and children walked naked. This is how they knew who were the slaves and who were the freemen. I was in Egypt a few years ago and I saw in the museums the statues and in the papyrus rolls what I have already seen and read in books, that the slaves walked naked.

And how were the proud Egyptians humiliated for their oppression of Israel? God killed all the firstborn in Egypt, including all the firstborn of cattle, and including all the firstborn of the captives in the dungeon (**Ex 12:29**), and that means including all the firstborn of the slaves who were essentially in prison. But now we have to realize that all the firstborn of the Israelites were ransomed by the Passover lambs that every family had to kill. The principle that we see in action here at the first Passover was this: “The blood of the Lamb shall make you free.” On the night of the Passover, this principle was applied to the firstborn of Israel as a synecdoche, where a fraction of the nation of Israel represented the whole, as well as the next day when the whole nation of Israel was set free, because all the firstborn of the Egyptians as a synecdoche representing the whole nation of Egypt were killed. God was merciful. Instead of killing the entire nation of Egypt He killed only all the firstborn of the Egyptians. And here we see the mercy of God in the statement from **Isa 43:3**, “I gave Egypt for thy ransom.” It was the ransom to set Israel free from their bondage.

- **A Ransom For Deliverance** (Isa 43:1-4)

We read in **Isa 43:1-4**,

Isa 43:1 ¶ But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

Isa 43:2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

Isa 43:3 For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.

Isa 43:4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

Notice the words of verse 3, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom", and the words of verse 4, "therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." God is willing to give up certain people for the sake of paying a ransom for other people who belong to His elect.

What is a ransom? A ransom is the payment to buy back a certain item that was lost before, but now the original owner wants to buy it back. What was lost? The souls of men were lost at the time when Adam sinned and the entire human race fell into the hands of Satan. And how does God buy them back? God bought them back by paying a ransom for their souls. The ransom is the equivalent of an eternity in hell. The ultimate example of paying a ransom for their souls is manifested by Christ dying on the cross in AD 33. He paid the ransom for all the souls He came to save. But the passage in Isa 43 does not refer to the cross in AD 33. **Isa 43:3** begins with the word "For," which means that we must tie this verse to the previous two verses which speak of the sovereignty of God. In other words, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom," does not refer to the cross but to some other event in history. And so, what is that other event? Isaiah was martyred before 680 BC, before the Babylonian captivity. And thus the passage in Isa 43 refers to an event of the past, most likely the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt in 1447 BC. And how do we make sense of the passage in Isa 43? Paraphrased God says in **Isa 43:1-2**, "I am God. I have created you for My glory. I own everything I have made. I own the cattle on a thousand hills. You are presently under the yoke of an evil king. You expect from Me that I will protect you, and that is true. I will deliver you from this evil king like I have done in the past in 1447 BC. I will pay the ransom and set you free. The ransom is that I will give up Egypt and all its inhabitants, and I will also give up Ethiopia and Seba at the same time. The deliverer was Moses. I will do this again in 457 BC when I shall deliver you from the oppressive Babylonian Empire and I will set you free. The ransom was the Babylonian Empire. The deliverer was Cyrus. And I will do it again in AD 33 when I will deliver you from the evil Roman Empire. The ransom was the Roman Empire. The deliverer was the Lord Jesus Christ. In every case the countries with which I will pay the ransom will be ruined for the evil that they have done to My people. By this you shall know that "My mercy endureth forever." When I gave up Egypt, that was the beginning of My act of mercy for you, Israel.

There is only one catch and that is: All these events of deliverance of the nation of Israel from an evil empire are only pictures or analogies to show God's love for God's elect. It is not the entire nation of Israel which was delivered from their sins, but only a remnant among them. For example, most of the nation of Israel died in the wilderness in unbelief. The Bible says unbelievers go to hell. God does not love unbelievers. And thus the blessings that the nation of Israel experienced were only external blessings which they enjoyed because the remnant was living among them. And that is a lesson we

should apply today. The enemies of God are all those who remain in unbelief. As the number of the remnant in these United States continues to decline, so will also the grace of God decline for this country, and evil will multiply. This is a promise from God stated many times in the Old Testament, and it is a promise which He has never rescinded.

#2. The Enemies of God (Psalm 136:13-15, Job)

And so, where is the mercy of God when He parted the Red Sea? We should remember that the drowning of the army of Pharaoh was not the penalty for their sin of oppressing Israel. No, the penalty for sin will be meted out after people die and they stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Their earthly death is only a shadow of the second death that they will experience after Christ has judged them. Their earthly death has the function of bringing them closer to Judgment Day. But it is the second death which is really the horrible penalty for sin. And likewise, the calamities that people experience in this life are not the judgments from God for all their sins. God wrote a long epistle about this to correct this misunderstanding. It is titled, "**Job.**" In this epistle God clearly showed that the sufferings of Job were not the result of sins that Job had committed. But people do not understand this because they do not read the Old Testament Scriptures. And so, we must clearly understand God's plans for mankind. Calamities in this life are not penalties for sins, but are related to God's testing programs for mankind. The penalties for sins come in the life hereafter. Hell is earned by people by their sins in this life. On the other side, heaven is not earned by doing good works in this life. Heaven is a totally free gift from Christ because He chose to pay for all our sins. That is why heaven is a totally free gift, whereas hell is fully earned and deserved. That is why there are no different levels of blessings in heaven, whereas there are different levels of torment in hell.

Where is the mercy of God when He parted the Red Sea? We read in **Psalm 136:13-15**,

Psalm 136:13 To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever:

Psalm 136:14 And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:

Psalm 136:15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Where is the mercy of God in this awesome act of destroying Pharaoh's army? It is an example of how God deals with His enemies. It is a manifestation of the wrath of God on all His enemies. It is also an example to us that we should fear God, for His judgments are very hard and severe. These days we can look out into the world, and we see that there is almost no fear of God anywhere. Married people are engaging in adultery, and they are not concerned about what God says about it. People get divorced and remarried without any concern about what God says about it. This is also how they raise their children. Girls are raised with the idea that sex is OK as long as you do not get pregnant. But what does God say about that? God looks down and witnesses that sexual immorality is at an all-time high, because parents and children are not concerned about what God considers sin.

And so, can you see what is going on? Most people are more concerned about this earthly life than about the life hereafter. The fear of God is gradually fading out. Why is this so? It is because they are not saved. Someone who is saved always thinks about the life hereafter. Someone who is not saved always thinks about this earthly life. Someone who is saved has peace with God. Someone who is not saved has actually no peace at all. His mind is always concerned about making more money, for he is always worried that his money will run out before he expires. This is the life of the enemies of God, the unsaved. Their own lifestyle will do themselves in.

- **The Mercy of God** (Psalm 136:21, Ex 20:2, Col 1:13-14, Mat 24:37-39, Rev 22:11)

Let us now look at the other half of mankind, those who have been transformed from sinners into saints. How does the life of a saint reflect the presence of the mercy of God? First of all, God gave them faith, and that is not the faith that we conjure up, but it is a God-given faith. It is a faith that is different from the faith that we conjure up. The faith that we conjure up is a faith that puts our trust in a god of our own liking; a god who is like us; a god who responds to the whims of man, a god who is very kind, and who is more merciful than the God of the Bible. Such a god does not exist. Such a god is called an idol, and if we believe that the true God is like that we are engaging in idolatry. Idolatry is the sin that God hates most. But the faith that God gives us is a faith in the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible says, paraphrased, "I am the only God there is. You must worship Me alone, and you shall have no other gods beside Me," (**Ex 20:2**) It is the mercy of God that He made Himself known to us who are His children. It is the mercy of God that He gave us the wisdom to find Him.

Ex 20:2, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

What has God done? God has delivered us out of the house of bondage, which is a symbol for the kingdom of Satan. We read in **Col 1:13-14**,

Col 1:13, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:"

And how has God redeemed us? He redeemed us through Christ crucified as stated in verse 14:

Col 1:14, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"

The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ was the payment for the sins on our souls. That is mercy. And since we were in Christ from before the foundation of the world (**Eph 1:3-7**), we have been crucified with Christ when He was crucified, we died with Christ when He died, we were buried with Christ when He was buried, we were raised with Christ when He was raised from the dead, we ascended with Christ when He ascended, and we were glorified with Christ when He was glorified and was seated on the right hand of the Father. Now all our sins have been paid in full. And since we already endured the equivalent of an eternity in hell with Christ when Christ suffered on the cross,

God will never send us to hell, because we have already been there. Christ paid the full price, which means He redeemed us; He delivered us from the kingdom of Satan, never to return there any more. The devil has no more hold on us; the devil cannot even read our thoughts any more, for we have been delivered out of the kingdom of the power of darkness, and God has translated us into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then He led us through the wilderness of this world. By His mercy we will be overcomers of all the obstacles we find in this wilderness. O yes, we still live in a sinful body, but the sins we commit in this sinful body have already been paid by Christ on the cross. Remember, when Christ suffered and died for my sins in AD 33, all my sins were still future sins. This is the pinnacle of mercy. There is no greater mercy than this. All my sins have been forgiven, and I am assured of reaching my final destination, because God has ordained it from before the foundation of the world. But is this forgiveness of sins available to all mankind? The obvious answer is NO!

For example, in the flood of Noah's days how many people were declared righteous and were saved? The answer is **Eight**. Those eight persons were Noah and his wife, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. The mercy of God was extended only to these eight people. Out of the world of that day only these eight persons were saved, everyone else was killed by the waters of the flood. They died unsaved. No, that was not the end of the millions of people who died unsaved. On the Last Day they will be resurrected and will stand before the Judgment throne of Christ, they will be found guilty and will be cast into the lake of fire to suffer the torment of hell forever and ever. That is the destiny of people who die unsaved.

Let us not stop there, for the Lord Jesus Christ will come again and then the entire scenario of Noah's days will be repeated all over again. The Lord Jesus Christ said in **Mat 24:37-39**,

Mat 24:37, But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Mat 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

Mat 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

So, in like manner, shall also the coming of the Son of man be. The majority of the world's population will remain unsaved. Like in the days of Noah only a small fraction will be saved. God will rapture them up to be with Christ forever. Everyone else will die unsaved, like in the days of Noah, and they will be resurrected a short time after and stand before the Judgment throne of Christ, they will be found guilty and will be cast into the lake of fire to suffer the torment of hell forever and ever.

I have said this for the past few years, but very few are listening. What does God have to say about the complacency of listeners all over the world? Paraphrased God says, "Let it be. They will not listen. They have made their choice. The life they want is to be ignoring God." We read in Rev 22:11,

Rev 22:11, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

How does the life of a saint reflect the presence of the mercy of God? The mercy of God will instill in him a faith that is in full agreement with the sovereignty of God. Anything less is an insult to the God who loves to hear people speak of His sovereignty in all His works. Turn back to **Ps 136:23**

#3. God Our Protector and Our Defender (Psalm 136:23-24, 1John 4:1, Mat 24:24, Luke 22:31-32)

Ps 136:23 ¶, Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:

Ps 136:24 And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.

After we have been saved, which means after we have been born again, God returns us to walk in the wilderness of this world. But now there is a change. We are no longer leaning on our own wisdom. God’s Holy Spirit is with us. He guides us in all our thinking and in every step that we take. This is not a friendly world. We are besieged from all sides to abandon the conservative faith that we hold. We must be very careful not to believe every spirit that comes along which challenges our faith. Remember that the Lord has warned us in **1John 4:1**, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” Especially now that we are in the last days the Lord Jesus has warned us that many false prophets have gone out into the world to deceive many. We read in **Mat 24:24**,

Mat 24:24, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

What is our protection? Psalm **136:24** comes to the rescue. Christ has redeemed us from our enemies. The elect shall not be deceived. It is not that we have become so smart that we can immediately recognize who the deceivers are. O No! It is the spirit of Christ which leads us all the way. We must recognize the intercession of Christ in these matters, especially for people who are in a position of authority who can influence many, like pastors, and Elders, and Bible teachers. The Apostle Peter, often a spokesman for the twelve disciples was in such a position when he needed the intercession of the Lord Jesus to keep him faithful. Then the Lord Jesus said in **Luke 22:31-32**,

Luke 22:31, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

Luke 22:32, But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:”

What do we learn from this? We learn that if we are God’s elect children the Lord Jesus prays for us all the time, even today, and His prayer is that we may remain faithful. It is not easy to understand, for here we see that Christ, who is God the Son, prays to God the Father for something that He could fulfill just as well. But from this example we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ, who is equal to Almighty God, prays for those who are His children. And His prayer will certainly be heard. Do we now realize

how great our protection is and that our protection is very secure, for Almighty God desires it? Christ is our Protector and our Defender against the strongest of our enemies. Let us be grateful to God for such a strong shield. **Psalm 136:23**, He remembers our low estate, for His mercy endureth forever. We do not have the strength to fight our enemies. They are too strong and too numerous. But Christ will fight for us, and He shall be victorious in all His battles.

AMEN. Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.