

Can You Feel the Love Tonight? [Psalm 136]

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1. Today we hone in on the topic of love, which might appear to be slightly mistimed.
 - a. Our most common thought is love in the amorous sense, which grossly limits its meaning
 - 1) Perhaps the most popular discussion of this is C.S. Lewis' Four Loves
 - 2) It's a book that examines the four Greek words (storge, philia, eros, and agape)
 - b. Fortunately, even the Old Testament instructs us on the definition of love.
2. Psalm 136 is known as The Great Hallel
 - a. Many of the psalms were intended for corporate worship; this one is perfect example
 - b. Like the Chris Tomlin song "Forever" we sang, this one has a continued refrain
 - 1) This is a responsive reading: leader gives first statement, response in unison
 - c. So as was done 3,000 years ago, tonight, we will recite this Psalm together.

VERSES 1-9

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever.

⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever.

⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever.

⁷ who made the great lights— His love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to govern the day, His love endures forever.

⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever.

1. God is the origin of love
 - a. **1 John 4:7** "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."
 - b. This is an important distinction as it counteracts the way we often view love.
 - 1) One of the points of this psalm and all of Scriptures: your life isn't yours alone!
 - 2) We have freedom, but it isn't unfettered. There are confines.
 - 3) THE POPULAR MODERN ADAGE: I can love whomever/whenever/however, is false.
 - 4) If we accept certain Scriptural precepts, we must look at them within context
2. VS 2-4: God of gods, Lord of lords, to him WHO ALONE does great wonders.
 - a. Confrontation against the polytheism of the Ancient Near East.
 - 1) In many ways, polytheism was/is beneficial belief system
 - 2) The overlap of Gods facilitated ambiguity of HOW we are required to live.
 - 3) Jews and Christians were open to persecution BUT had clearer understanding
3. How do we observe God's love? First, throughout creation
 - a. We are absolutely spoiled when it comes to weather prediction today
 - 1) I can get a fairly accurate view of a week out
 - 2) As such, I think we under appreciate the world in which we live.
 - b. The earth is the only inhabitable place we have ever discovered.
 - c. **Genesis 1:1** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*

VERSES 10-15

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt His love endures forever.

¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them His love endures forever.

¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever.

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea asunder His love endures forever.

¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it, His love endures forever.

¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea; His love endures forever

1. The power of the Exodus story is unquestioned.
 - a. It is the narrative that applies to all aspects of the Scriptures
 - b. It has been owned by many a political movement over the centuries (ex: Civil Rights)
 - c. For the worshipper in this Psalm, it would have had a special place.
2. THE KEY: the hero of the Exodus is God himself.
 - a. Important illustration: Mighty hand and outstretched arm
 - b. From **Exodus 6:6** 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.
 - c. Implication: God will show both the Israelites and the nations of the world, his power and the futility of fighting it.
3. Remembering our victorious history brings back sweet, sweet memories.
 - a. In Cincinnati, it's the Big Red Machine.
 - b. For the Israelites, it was the emancipation from the Egyptians
 - 1) Thousands of years later, the signs of the power of Egypt endure.
 - c. Retelling of the history would remind them to love the Lord all the more.

VERSES 16-22

¹⁶ to him who led his people **through the wilderness**; His love endures forever.

¹⁷ to him who struck down great kings, His love endures forever.

¹⁸ and killed mighty kings—His love endures forever.

¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites His love endures forever.

²⁰ and Og king of Bashan— His love endures forever.

²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance, His love endures forever.

²² an inheritance to his servant Israel. His love endures forever

1. Through the Wilderness
 - a. A peculiar mention of the enduring love.
 - b. It was designed as a punishment to them from not trusting.
 - c. Critical lesson for all us, especially surrounding children: love is seen through punishment
 - 1) God didn't forget them in the wilderness.
2. Combat of the type Israel was engaged in was limited to powerful empires
 - a. A transient people would have been incapable of succeeding in such combat
 - b. The defeats of Sihon and Og are listed in the Torah
 - 1) They merely wanted safe passage through the territories, but the kings were intent on annihilating the Israelites
 - 2) Through miraculous means, they were victorious.
3. Receiving the land: the most important thing to God's people.
 - a. Still today, we keep this ancient view that landownership equals wealth
 - b. It gave the people of God a legitimacy they had never known.
4. The love of God is evident throughout the history of His people.

VERSES 23-26

²³ He remembered us in our low estate His love endures forever.

²⁴ and freed us from our enemies. His love endures forever.

²⁵ He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever.

²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever

1. The completion of the Psalm is a summation of what he accomplished.
 - a. He is liberator, He is creator, He is sustainer.
2. But taking some time to discuss the reply of the Psalm: HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER
 - a. "**Hesed**," No exact word in English language, "loving-kindness
 - 1) Word was created in English specifically, but it is synonymous with grace.

- 2) An action that takes place between unequal sides
- b. Hesed refers to love that has been promised and is owed—covenantal love
- c. Etymology: the ancient Hebrew word for WHITE STORK called hasida
 - 1) Although not monogamous, returns to same nest
 - d. Hesed is an ENDURING LOVE, not a mere emotive expression c
- 3. Thus, Chesed is the purpose for this entire psalm
 - a. The point of Psalm 136: WORSHIP THE LORD
 - b. HOW should we worship the Lord: sing of his HESED
 - c. WHY: he's due all glory because of his HESED.

CONCLUSION

1. As you came in to worship, you were handed a piece of paper
2. You'll see it's Psalm 136, but has some blanks; I want you to fill it in.
 - a. Rewrite this psalm as your own thanksgiving prayer, from you to God.
 - b. What are the great things has He done for you lately?
 - c. How has he loved you?
 - d. How must you, then, share this love with others?
3. His love is a love that endures forever.