

PSALM 136

The scope of this psalm is the same with that of the foregoing psalm, but there is something very singular in the composition of it; for the latter half of each verse is the same, repeated throughout the psalm, “for his mercy endureth for ever,” and yet no vain repetition. It is allowed that such burdens, or “keepings,” as we call them, add very much to the beauty of a song, and help to make it moving and affecting; nor can any verse contain more weighty matter, or more worthy to be thus repeated, than this, that God's mercy endureth for ever; and the repetition of it here twenty-six times intimates,

1. That God's mercies to his people are thus repeated and drawn, as it were, with a continuando from the beginning to the end, with a progress and advance in infinitum.
2. That in every particular favour we ought to take notice of the mercy of God, and to take notice of it as enduring still, the same now that it has been, and enduring for ever, the same always that it is.
3. That the everlasting continuance of the mercy of God is very much his honour and that which he glories in, and very much the saints' comfort and that which they glory in. It is that which therefore our hearts should be full of and greatly affected with, so that the most frequent mention of it, instead of cloying us, should raise us the more, because it will be the subject of our praise to all eternity. This most excellent sentence, that God's mercy endureth for ever, is magnified above all the truths concerning God, not only by the repetition of it here, but by the signal tokens of divine acceptance with which God owned the singing of it, both in Solomon's time (⁴⁰¹2 Chronicles 5:13, when they sang these words, “for his mercy endureth for ever,” the house was filled with a cloud) and in Jehoshaphat's time (when they sang these words, God gave them victory, ⁴⁰¹2 Chronicles 20:21, 22), which should make us love to sing, “His mercies sure do still endure, eternally.” We must praise God,

I. As great and good in himself (v. 1-3).

II. As the Creator of the world (v. 5-9).

III. As Israel's God and Saviour (v. 10-22).

IV. As our Redeemer (v. 23, 24).

V. As the great benefactor of the whole creation, and God over all, blessed for evermore (v. 25, 26).

~~106~~ PSALM 136:1-9

DIVINE MERCY CELEBRATED

The duty we are here again and again called to is to *give thanks*, to *offer the sacrifice of praise continually*, not the fruits of our ground or cattle, but *the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name*, ~~835~~ Hebrews 13:15. We are never so earnestly called upon to pray and repent as to *give thanks*; for it is the will of God that we should abound most in the most pleasant exercises of religion, in that which is the work of heaven. Now here observe,

1. Whom we must give thanks to — to him that we receive all good from, *to the Lord, Jehovah, Israel's God* (v. 1), *the God of gods*, the God whom angels adore, from whom magistrates derive their power, and by whom all pretended deities are and shall be conquered (v. 2), *to the Lord of lords*, the Sovereign of all sovereigns, the stay and supporter of all supports; v. 3. In all our adorations we must have an eye to God's excellency as transcendent, and to his power and dominion as incontestably and uncontrollably supreme.

2. What we must give thanks for, not as the Pharisee that made all his thanksgivings terminate in his own praise (*God, I thank thee*, that I am so and so), but directing them all to God's glory.

(1.) We must give thanks to God for his goodness and mercy (v. 1): *Give thanks to the Lord*, not only because he does good, but because he is good (all the streams must be traced up to the fountain), not only because he is merciful to us, but because his mercy endures for ever, and will be drawn out to those that shall come after us. We must give thanks to God, not only for that mercy which is now handed out to us here on earth, but for that which shall endure for ever in the glories and joys of heaven.

(2.) We must give God thanks for the instances of his power and wisdom. In general (v. 4), he *along does great wonders*. The contrivance is wonderful, the design being laid by infinite wisdom; the performance is wonderful, being put in execution by infinite power. He alone does marvellous things; none besides can do such things, and he does them without the assistance or advice of any other. More particularly,

[1.] He made the heavens, and stretched them out, and in them we not only see his wisdom and power, but we taste his mercy in their benign influences; as long as the heavens endure the mercy of God endures in them, v. 5.

[2.] He raised the earth out of the waters when he caused the dry land to appear, that it might be fit to be a habitation for man, and therein also his mercy to man still endures (v. 6); for *the earth hath he given to the children of men*, and all its products.

[3.] Having made both heaven and earth, he settled a correspondence between them, notwithstanding their distance, by making the sun, moon, and stars, which he placed in the firmament of heaven, to shed their light and influences upon this earth, v. 7-9. These are called the *great lights* because they appear so to us, for otherwise astronomers could tell us that the moon is less than many of the stars, but, being nearer to the earth, it seems much greater. They are said to *rule*, not only because they govern the seasons of the year, but because they are useful to the world, and benefactors are the best rulers, ~~Q225~~ Luke 22:25. But the empire is divided, one *rules by day*, the *other by night* (at least, *the stars*), and yet all are subject to God's direction and disposal. Those rulers, therefore, which the Gentiles idolized, are the world's servants and God's subjects. *Sun, stand thou still, and thou moon.*

~~BKD~~ PSALM 136:10-22

DIVINE MERCY CELEBRATED

The great things God for Israel, when he first formed them into a people, and set up his kingdom among them, are here mentioned, as often elsewhere in the psalms, as instances both of the power of God and of the particular kindness he had for Israel. See ~~Q225~~ Psalm 135:8, etc.

1. He brought them out of Egypt, v. 10-12. That was a mercy which endured long to them, and our redemption by Christ, which was typified by that, does indeed endure for ever, for it is an eternal redemption. Of all the plagues of Egypt, none is mentioned but the death of the first-born, because that was the conquering plague; by that God, who in all the plagues distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians, brought them at last from among them, not by a wile, but with a strong hand and an arm stretched out to reach far and do great things. These miracles of mercy, as they proved Moses's commission to give law to Israel, so they laid Israel under lasting obligations to obey that law, ^{Q212}Exodus 20:2.

2. He forced them a way through the Red Sea, which obstructed them at their first setting out. By the power he has to control the common course of nature he *divided the sea into two parts*, between which he opened a path, and made Israel to pass between the parts, now that they were to enter into covenant with him; see ^{Q213}Jeremiah 34:18. He not only divided the sea, but gave his people courage to go through it when it was divided, which was an instance of God's power over men's hearts, as the former of his power over the waters. And, to make it a miracle of justice as well as mercy, the same Red Sea that was a lane to the Israelites was a grave to their pursuers. There he shook off Pharaoh and his host.

3. He conducted them through a vast howling wilderness (v. 16); there he led them and fed them. Their camp was victualled and fortified by a constant series of miracles for forty years; though they loitered and wandered there, they were not lost. And in this the mercy of God, and the constancy of that mercy, were the more observable because they often provoked him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert.

4. He destroyed kings before them, to make room for them (v. 17, 18), not deposed and banished them, but smote and slew them, in which appeared his wrath against them, but his mercy, his never-failing mercy, to Israel. And that which magnified it was that they were *great kings* and *famous kings*, yet God subdued them as easily as if they had been the least, and weakest, and meanest, of the children of men. They were wicked kings, and then their grandeur and lustre would not secure them from the justice of God. The more great and famous they were the more did God's mercy to Israel appear in giving such kings for them. Sihon and Og are particularly mentioned, because they were the first two that were conquered on the other side Jordan, v. 19, 20. It is good to enter into the

detail of God's favours and not to view them in the gross, and in each instance to observe, and own, that God's *mercy endureth for ever*.

5. He put them in possession of a good land, v. 21, 22. He whose the earth is, and the fulness thereof, the world and those that dwell therein, took land from one people and gave it to another, as pleased him. The *iniquity of the Amorites was now full*, and therefore it was taken from them. *Israel* was his *servant*, and, though they had been provoking in the wilderness, yet he intended to have some service out of them, for *to them pertained the service of God*. As he said to the Egyptians, *Let my people go*, so to the Canaanites, *Let my people in*, that they may serve me. In this *God's mercy to them endureth for ever*, because it was a figure of the heavenly Canaan, the *mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*.

⌄ PSALM 136:23-26

DIVINE MERCY CELEBRATED

God's everlasting mercy is here celebrated,

1. In the redemption of his church, v. 23, 24. In the many redemptions wrought for the Jewish church out of the hands of their oppressors (when, in the years of their servitude, their estate was very low, God remembered them, and raised them up saviours, the judges, and David, at length, by whom God gave them rest from all their enemies), but especially in the great redemption of the universal church, of which these were types, we have a great deal of reason to say, "*He remembered us, the children of men, in our low estate, in our lost estate, for his mercy endureth for ever; he sent his Son to redeem us from sin, and death, and hell, and all our spiritual enemies, for his mercy endureth for ever; he was sent to redeem us, and not the angels that sinned, for his mercy endureth for ever.*"

2. In the provision he makes for all the creatures (v. 25): *He gives food to all flesh*. It is an instance of the mercy of God's providence that wherever he has given life he gives food agreeable and sufficient; and he is a good housekeeper that provides for so large a family.

3. In all his glories, and all his gifts (v. 26): *Give thanks to the God of heaven*. This denotes him to be a glorious God, and the glory of his mercy is to be taken notice of in our praises. The *riches of his glory* are displayed

in the *vessels of his mercy*, ~~4123~~ Romans 9:23. It also denotes him to be the great benefactor, *for every good and perfect gift is from above*, from the Father of lights, the *God of heaven*; and we should trace every stream to the fountain. This and that particular mercy may perhaps endure but a while, but the mercy that is in God *endures for ever*; it is an inexhaustible fountain.