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Psalm 136
“Oh, Give Thanks!”

Introduction: It seems that less and less these days people are giving thanks. Not long ago when you would pull up to the drive thru window, the employee would hand you your food and say thank you. Today you are among the few if you even get a napkin and a straw. Just a short time has passed since the clerk in the grocery store checked you out and said, “thank you, have a nice day,” but lately it seems they are too busy flirting with the bag boy to give their appreciation for you shopping with them

I did get a thank you the other day from a man opening the door for Sandra and me, but then I realized that he is paid to say thank you – it was really his primary responsibility. The waitress at a local restaurant thanked us for coming, but I was suspicious as to whether she was really thankful for our presence there or if she was anticipating a nice tip.

The Psalmist knew the importance of praise. When David was being hunted down like a wild animal he did not seek to retaliate against those seeking his life, he thanked God. Psalm 136 was probably composed by David and given to the Levites, the caretakers of the temple. No doubt the Levites were to sing this Psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord everyday.

The 136th Psalm is a praise chorus that instructs us to thank God in times of great despair, thank Him in days of seemingly endless bondage, thank Him in seasons rejoicing for in every situation of life His mercy endures forever. After each stanza of the Psalm the singers in antiquity would unite their voices and together proclaim His mercy endures forever.

There are many precious promises detailed in the nature of God, but few are as precious as His mercy. We are born tainted with the sin that has been passed down thru all generations since Adam fell. We stand before the seer of our hearts with no defense. How do you plead He asks, and our only response can be guilty before you oh holy God. What do we cry for? We can only cry for mercy. That He will hold back His wrath from us that His judgment of death for our sin will be withheld, but on what ground we ask.

We have done no good to deserve to be set free, we stand in shame, in the filth of our sin before the One whom sin has not tainted. Our only cry is for mercy. So David sits with writing instrument in hand and twenty six times weaves within his description of the nature of God that His mercy endures forever. It was the song of worshippers of God 1000's of years ago and it must be our song today.

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Why does God allow the world to continue in such disgusting sins? Why does God not break open the sky and tell His Son to go get my people? Why would a Holy, perfect God permit the shameful degradation of His name by some of His people? It is all because He is merciful and desires that all come to repentance.

On Thanksgiving day several years ago Sandra and I were driving through the mountains and decided we would ride up to Montreat Anderson College outside of Asheville. The reason we decided to go there is because it was in those hills, in the summer of 1988 that I realized how merciful God was to me. For 6 years I had been the prodigal son, running from God, rebelling against God's plan for my life. July 13, 1988 I sat on the side of the Mountain, just me and God. The sins of my life played like a movie in my mind. I could not bargain with God, I could not give God 10 reasons why it was good for me to have gone thru rebellious days, I could not pass the blame off on anyone, all I could do was thank God for His mercy.

It was God's mercy that kept me alive through 5 horrendous car accidents. It was God's mercy that allowed me to shame His name, and it was God's mercy that said welcome home We have been waiting for you. Thank God that He is merciful and that His mercy endures forever!

In our text we are given four qualities of God for which we can be thankful. Each of these qualities is not only woven into God's mercy, but comes under the call in verse 1. The Psalmist calls the people to give thanks to God and proceeds to tell them for what to thank Him.

I. GIVE THANKS for He is Merciful and Superior (vs 1-3)

EXPLAIN: Last week we saw with the Disciples that when sin creeps in there is a desire for superiority. The disciples asked, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of God?" They had a desire to be superior. This week we learn who is truly the one that is superior.

(SEE TEXT)

ILLUSTRATION: All across the world we see people trying to take the place of God. Last week and estimated 15.6 million households watched 60 minutes in order to witness Jack Kevorkian take Thomas Youk's life. Kevorkian acknowledges helping about 120 people take their own lives. He defends his actions from the standpoint of the quality of life. In his opinion, if the quality of life is no longer suitable or beneficial to society then that life needs to be ended.

So, Kevorkian injected a drug into Youk's right arm to put him asleep. Then he injected a muscle relaxant to stop Youk's breathing, and then a shot of potassium chloride to stop Youk's heart. It took 83 seconds to end Youk's life. Jack Kevorkian is playing God by determining

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whose life should end and whose should not. Folks, our lives are on God's timetable, He is the creator of time and the sustainer of life.

APPLICATION: No man is qualified to say when a life should end. How many men and women have the doctors given up on and said let's just make them comfortable. But the supreme God raised them up from what had already been pronounced their death bed. He is the God of all who call themselves God. He is the supreme Lord of all who call themselves Lord.

Give thanks to God for He is superior. I don't know about you but it is a great comfort for me to know that there is none greater, none mightier, none higher than the one who is my Lord. Paul wrote, "How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out," The Psalmist said, "Blessed be the Lord who made heaven and earth. He alone is supreme, He alone is worthy of our praise He is God."

II. GIVE THANKS for He is Merciful and Skillful (vs 4-9)

ILLUSTRATION: Ten members of a missing Colorado doomsday cult are in Israel, where the cult's leader has predicted he will die next year. Monte Kim Miller has said he will die in Jerusalem in 1999 and be resurrected 3 days later. Many of Miller's followers sold their belongings and left the U.S. before October 10, which was the day Miller predicted Denver would be destroyed by an earthquake marking the beginning of the apocalypse.

We have seen so many cult leaders. All of them are skillful orators and administrators who promise many things. They say listen to my word. The difference between them and God is that His word always comes to pass. Whatever he says he will do, He does.

APPLICATION: With His word he spoke the world into order, with His word He skillfully placed the mountains and the sea and the stars in the sky. It was His word that came and dwelt among us, it was His word that died on the cross and truly rose again the 3rd day. There have been those who have tried to imitate and become Him, but there is none who match His power, none who can match the skillfulness of His hand.

There are some of you here today that are so discouraged, so riddled with problems and trials that you feel like the weight of the world is resting on you. Friend, you can stop bending low and you can stand tall for the God that created the world, the one that made the heavens, the sun to rule by day and the stars by night is still doing great wonders.

The one who skillfully laid out the earth above the waters. His eye is even on the sparrow and you can know that he watches you; the one who knows the numbers of all stars,

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knows the number of hairs on your head; the one who sees from North to South and East to West without turning His head sees your heartache; the one who causes the tides of every body of water to roll in and go out He holds you in His hand.

Surely the God that made all that can solve your problem; surely the one whose skill designed this complex universe can lead you to higher ground. Thank God for His mercy and skillfulness, for in His mercy He skillfully designed a plan, by which His creation could be reborn. Thank God for His mercy and skill for He has designed a plan for fallen mankind to leave this world and enter His kingdom, where we shall forever sing *Oh What a Savior*.

II. GIVE THANKS for He is Merciful and Sovereign (vs 10-22)

ILLUSTRATION: Last week at one of the busy airports in America a disaster was barely avoided. The radar system which keeps track of all planes landing and taking off at Dulles International Airport outside Washington, D.C. failed for 31 minutes. Although the Federal Aviation Administration said the flying public was in no danger. Air traffic controllers said that without the radar they had no information on altitude, air speed, or identification of about a dozen planes circling the airport.

Paul Rinaldi, a controller at Dulles said, "It was sheer terror, everything we rely on was gone." How awful it must have been for the pilots of those aircraft to realize that their controllers had no control.

APPLICATION: We are surrounded by uncertainty. Everything around us can change at any given moment. A family can quickly be torn apart inside by death or disease; a couple can be thrust into turmoil by downsizing. Experts continue to warn us to prepare for the year 2000 computer problem – telling us to stock up on food, fuel, and ammunition. If a tenth of what they predict takes place the entire world will be thrust in to chaos with wars, violence, famine and poverty.

If the Psalmist were writing today he may have said give thanks, your controllers radar never goes out. Friend, there will never be a time when God is not in control of all that happens. Many of our own church family has been shaken up by death, downsizing and disease. Everything in your life has been altered and everything you thought your life was about has changed.

Friend, this is a time where you need not rely on feelings but the Word of God. God's word tells us He is Sovereign, He is in control. Surely if He can part a great sea, overthrow a

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Pharaoh and strike down the great kings of this world. He can also lead you through your trial, overthrow the enemies in your life, and strike down those things which constantly oppress you.

Give thanks for He is merciful and sovereign. There is a song out that says, "When you can't trace His hand, trust His heart." Friend, you may not see God working but He is. You may not feel Him holding you but He promised that He will never let us go. When chaos seems to prevail, praise the One who you know is in control.

IV. GIVE THANKS for He is Merciful and Satisfying (vs 23-26)

ILLUSTRATION: In Wantaugh, NY a woman scratched the message "I have no life" into the hood of her car and jumped from a highway overpass with her 6 year old daughter in her arms. The mother and child suffered head injuries in the 20 foot fall Monday afternoon. Police say 24 year old Patricia Ramirez parked her car on the shoulder of the Wantaugh State Parkway and walked to the top of the overpass with her daughter Briana, stood there for a few moments, then sought to end her life.

Patricia Ramirez is one of the millions of people who attempt suicide every year. They are people who are hurting, empty, unsatisfied.

APPLICATION: We are surrounded everyday by the people who have that same emptiness inside; they are lost, lonely and searching for something satisfying in life. Many of them turn to drugs, deviant sexual behavior, alcohol, gambling and pornography. They have a void and every time they think they have filled it with something of this world they discover it has only pushed them lower.

But thank God today that He sees us in our lowly state, He reaches down for we cannot reach up and He rescues us from the position in life we ourselves could never find freedom from. He satisfied that emptiness, He satisfied that loneliness, He fills the void that all the things of this world never could. Friend, quit shopping for satisfaction and spending your life trying to find it, when the Lord Jesus is willingly laying it at your feet as a free gift. Oh give thanks to the God of Heaven for the one that is Superior, Skillful, and Sovereign also Satisfies the deepest needs of our soul!