

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

To the best of my knowledge, these words first show up, at least in this exact form, in I Chronicles 16:8-34 in the final line of a song of thanks written by David to be sung to the Lord during the triumphal procession of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. David overflowed with rejoicing as he recounted all that the Lord had done. He wanted the people of Israel to remember God's goodness made manifest in his steadfast love for his people. As he remembered all the mighty deeds of God toward his people, he couldn't contain his praising for the Lord.

In the Psalms, we see this or similar phrases repeated in several places, but perhaps most strikingly in Psalm 136, where the psalmist begins in verse one by stating the same words first penned by David,

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

He goes on in each of the next 25 verses recounting the mighty deeds of the Lord for his people. And in each line he repeats, "for his steadfast love endures forever". As a result, it is not very difficult to miss the point of the Psalm – the Lord is steadfast in his love for his people.

Perhaps other scriptures come to your mind that repeat this sentiment, but my guess is that Jeremiah 33:11 is not one of them. In chapter 33, Jeremiah is recording the words from the Lord stated in the final year before the collapse of the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the scattering of God's people from the land of promise. It was a time of dread and woe for the people of God, particularly to the faithful remnant. What little remained of possessions and standing would fall into the hands of the Chaldeans and King Nebuchadnezzar. Yet the Lord makes this declaration,

"Thus says the Lord: In this place of which you say, 'It is a waste without man or beast,' in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord:

"Give thanks to the Lord of hosts,
for the Lord is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!"

For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord."

Though much could be said about this passage and the surrounding text, one thing is clear – the Lord wanted his people to know that he was good, that his steadfast love for them remained, even when things didn't make sense or when circumstances were severe. It was a forward looking promise and a reminder of what was to come, but it was also a promise that looked back to the words of David and his reflections on God's past and present steadfast love.

It has been a real blessing to me this past week to see this sentiment of thanksgiving among Bereans. You might think that the fact that many of us will be gathering together for the first time in months to worship would be the center of that thanksgiving, yet it has not...and this has been the particular blessing of it. The thanksgiving I have been hearing has been based upon the love of God poured out in the midst of these difficult times!

Two examples come to mind. The first is a small devotion that was shared by Denise Jones to the women of Berean this past Memorial Day. The heart of her encouragement was to remember all that the Lord has done for us (and the ultimately the gift of Christ dying for our sins). At the end of her devotion, she gave at least 5 examples of his lovingkindness (another word for steadfast love) toward her in the midst of this pandemic, including the gift of being able to sit with her Mom on Sunday mornings to watch Berean's live streamed services and to discuss the gospel with her! The story of how this all came to be is God's hand at work through truly difficult circumstances.

The second example was the result of texting with a friend that has been suffering through a long lasting battle with cancer. This individual has gone through many ups and downs and this past week was confronted with some difficult news. In our short interaction we reflected on our God who hears the pleas of his people, the one who comforts and preserves those who wait on the Lord and take refuge in Him...that his love would not fail. It was such a blessing to receive word yesterday from this same dear friend who was praising the Lord for his loving kindness while trusting in his goodness for the days ahead.

Brothers and sisters, God is always good and his steadfast love endures forever!

In Jeremiah 33:14-16a, Jeremiah records these words, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'"

This righteous Branch was the foundation of the restoration that was promised; we know that this promise was ultimately fulfilled in Christ who is our righteousness. And we know that he will come again to restore all that is broken, to make all things right.

So rejoice in the Lord and praise him for what he has done, is doing and will do...for the Lord is good, for steadfast love endures forever!

Pastor Brad