

A Year in Perspective 2024
Ps 136

Brothers and sisters, Psalm 136 is our biblical encouragement to take some time and review the significant and important events of the past year so that... we can identify them as examples of God's everlasting covenant faithfulness to us - in Jesus Christ.

And what better time to do this than on the last Sunday of the year. It's fitting and appropriate to give God thanks and praise for His faithfulness as we close out 2024, And... it also helps us start 2025 off on the right foot.

As God has been faithful to us in the past, we show our gratitude and thankfulness not only by saying thanks and offering praise to God, but through resolving - with the help of the Holy Spirit – to be faithful to God and participate in obedience with what He is doing in the coming year.

And reflecting on the past, considering what God has done – is an important part of anticipating and discerning what He will do in the future.

You will notice that Psalm 136 isn't just a random collection of historical events, but it moves along chronologically according to who God is, what God has done in Creation, the ways in which God fulfilled His promise to Abraham in delivering Israel from Egypt, how God brought them through the wilderness, defeating their enemies along the way, and giving them land and food.

And so biblical view on the passage of time, of moving from one year to the next, is not celebrated by seeing the new year as a blank slate where you can have a fresh start, but in terms of looking for the indicators that God is moving things along in an orderly fashion, according to His timeline, towards fulfilling His promises, the things that He said He would do.

That is why after each statement in Psalm 136 there is the refrain proclaiming it to be an example of God's *everlasting*

covenant faithfulness. It would be difficult, or actually impossible to say this about God... if each new year meant that God would hit the reset button on His plans and purposes to make a fresh new start – as we like to do to celebrate the new year.

So the first thing we can give thanks to God for is His everlasting, enduring faithfulness in being an almighty good God who has created a marvelous and beautiful world, and that He is always faithful to His Word by which He created everything so that it continues to exist. Year to year that does not change...

Secondly, we can give thanks to God that there is a purpose and a plan to this world and to our lives. Whatever else this past year has been.... it has not been a meaningless three-hundred- and sixty-five-day trip on a chunk of rock orbiting around a giant burning ball of gas just floating in space.

As scripture teaches us in Rom 8:28 that *“in ALL things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been*

called according to his purpose.” And as it reminds us in Phil 1:6 we are to be *“confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

So, whatever has happened in this past year, we can be confident that it has moved everything one year closer to the completion of God’s purposes and plans for His creation and for our lives.

And to start 2025 off on the right foot, make a resolution – and ask the Holy Spirit to help you with it – to look for all the ways in which you can co-operate with what God is doing to work out His purposes, that good work, in your life and in the lives of your family and friends and especially in your church.

And when you celebrate the completion of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, let your New Year’s greetings and blessings reflect this. Avoid the false optimism and desperate expectations inherent in celebrations, and resolutions that anticipate a blank slate and a new start. Reject the well-

intentioned but hollow wishes for having *“the bestest, most-happiest, prosperous year ever, filled with new dreams and new adventures and so on...”*

Instead bless your family and friends at New Years speaking God’s enduring covenant faithfulness in Jesus Christ over them! Wish them a year of God’s purposes coming to fulfilment in their lives, that they will know greater peace in Christ, be filled more and more with the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that it will be a year where they become more and more like Christ.

We just finished a whole series on how to sing the Carols at Christmas time - like we mean it right? So, let’s speak our New Year’s wishes with truth and bless people with what we really believe.

Now before we start to pick out some of the specific, significant and important things from this past year – let’s remember that the everyday mundane things are pretty significant and important too.

As Psalm 136:8-9 reminds us that God created the sun and moon and stars, to govern the day and night. Thus, as part of God’s everlasting covenant faithfulness we continue to have the sun and moon, rising and setting, daytime and night time for three hundred and sixty-five cycles...

So, whatever was significant and important in 2024 was able to occur because each day came and went as it was supposed to, 24 – 7, every week, every month, for a whole year.

And, whatever we experienced this past year – we experienced it with God’s gift of life beating in our hearts, filling our lungs, illuminating our eyes, keeping us alive – with all of our thoughts, feelings and actions. All these blessings from God, more evidence of His everlasting covenant faithfulness – to each one of us...

So, with this groundwork of God’s goodness and faithfulness in place – we can review some of the significant and important events that happened in 2024, prompted in part by some of

the statements in Psalm 136, like vs. 3 which states that Yahweh is the Lord of Lords.

And that is reassuring to be reminded of, as we look back on a year that has been marked by a great deal of political turmoil, more than usual it seems to me.

I don't want to get into all the details but as you know there's the war in Ukraine, there's war in the Middle East, there's been antisemitic protests with violence and riots with little to no response from our own leaders. There was the U.S. presidential race and election and what's turning out to be a tumultuous transition for the incoming administration.

In Canada the Prime Minister is mired in crisis, the calls for him to resign and call an election grow louder by the day. In Alberta, our Premier faced a leadership review within her party, the NDP chose former Calgary Mayor Nenshi to be their new leader, and our current mayor is the least popular mayor in our city ever.

So - political turmoil, wherever you turn, wherever you look. It is very much like Psalm 2:1 describes, the nations are raging, their leaders are conspiring, plotting political agendas and implementing policies that do not reflect God's ways or His laws. You could make a strong case that this is the defining characteristic of 2024.

Which might have us wondering how is this evidence of God's everlasting covenant faithfulness?

Well brothers and sisters, let us be reminded of what scripture teaches us about political leaders in Daniel 2:21. God's Word says that *"He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others."* And in Prov 21:1 *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever he will."* So, God is in control, in spite of the turmoil we see.

This is part of what we can expect in this stage of history as we wait for God to complete His plan for Christ return to bring in the New Creation. Jesus forewarned us in Matt 24:6-8 *"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are*

not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”

So, this political turmoil is actually the evidence that God is continuing to move His plan forward and that He is bringing us closer and closer, year by year to the coming Kingdom of Heaven. And if these means by which God is moving His plan forward makes you anxious and worried, well brothers and sisters hear this word from God for 2025 – Psalm 46:10 *“Be still... Be still and know, that I am God!”*

Political turmoil exposes the futility of putting our faith and trust in our earthly leaders and our governments, as Psalm 20:7 states *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”* And because we trust God brothers and sisters, as we move into 2025 let us resolve – with the help of the Holy Spirit – to pray to the one we trust, in obedience to what scripture commands of us in 1 Timothy

2:1-2 to intercede *“for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”*

If God answers this prayer in 2025 then we give thanks for a foretaste of the new Creation in the peace and godliness and holiness we experience. If the political turmoil continues then we give thanks that God is continuing to hasten the day of Christ’s return and increasing our longing and anticipation of that day. Come Lord Jesus!

Either way – 2025 will be another year of seeing God’s everlasting covenant faithfulness on display, may we have the eyes of faith to see it, and the works of faith to respond to it!

Because another significant and important event in 2024 – resulting from the political turmoil – has been the cost-of-living crisis – especially the ridiculous increase in the cost of groceries. We hear reports that record numbers of people are having trouble affording to put food on their table and that more and more are being driven to turn to the food banks –

and the food banks themselves are not able to keep up with the demand.

And yet in Psalm 136:25 we read *“God gives food to every creature...”* and this is another example of His everlasting covenant faithfulness.

Certainly for us here at Valleyview brothers and sisters – we have experienced that provision of God in 2024, in spite of rising food prices... I am not aware that any of us have gone hungry, and when we celebrated our Christmas party with a potluck dinner there was an abundance of food for everyone to share. We are a blessed community brothers and sisters, and God deserves our thanks and praise for that, and no doubt we can have trust and faith that God will continue to be our provider in 2025 – amen?

But I think that we need to be reminded that others will experience God’s everlasting covenant faithfulness providing food in their lives, as WE live out our calling to be the hands and feet of Jesus to those in need. If God is providing for us, how can we not provide for others who are in need?

James 2:15-16 reprimands us *“Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”*

So, let us resolve then – with the help of the Holy Spirit – that for 2025, as long as we continue to deal with costly groceries, as long as the food banks are needing help, as long as the Lord is ensuring none of us are going without food – that we will rally in the spirit of Christian charity and make sure that we are giving generously... abundantly... regularly - every month in support of the Calgary food bank. We have far more available to us than five loaves and two fishes, and we all know what the Lord was able to do with that!

Let us be the means by which many other people might experience the truth that God provides food, because His covenant faithfulness endures forever. Amen?

So, what other events in 2024 are significant and important for us? Well, for us here at Valleyview the decision to follow the Lord and take a step of faith and begin the process of leaving the Presbyterian Church in Canada a significant and important decision, and it's the everlasting nature of God's covenant faithfulness that is behind this decision. Let me explain.

Psalm 136:4-9 highlights some of the details of God bringing the creation into existence, creating the heavens, spreading the earth out upon the waters, making the sun and moon and stars and so on, but the key point is that these creation acts are seen as covenant acts.

Now, if you've been around Valleyview for a little while you know that we do a lot of teaching on God's Covenant – and especially how it starts with God's act of Creation, wherein God made the heavens and the earth and all that was in them, AND He created human beings... in His image – male and female, and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and to rule over it.

And as Psalm 136 informs us, this aspect of God's covenant faithfulness endures **forever**... not for a few years, not for a few centuries, not for a few millennia... not even until Jesus arrives... Forever means forever, unchanging – faithful.

Of course, Jesus knows this – Jesus is God in the flesh, and thus Jesus teaches us about men and women and marriage in Matthew 19:4-6 saying *“Haven't you read, that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

Brothers and sisters, we must be obedient to God's everlasting creational covenant with its designs and intentions, as scripture and Jesus teach us. So as the denomination we currently belong to twists scripture and Jesus' teachings to not only justify but promote and celebrate

that which is sinful and offensive to the Creator, we must stay faithful to Christ and God's truth.

And thus Christ has called us to step out in faith, to leave the denomination, and find another church home that will support us and hold us accountable to faithfulness to Christ, who can help to nurture the new thing that the Holy Spirit has been preparing to birth here among us in Valleyview.

So, in 2025, brothers and sisters, let us resolve – with the help of the Holy Spirit – to seek the Lord's guidance and wisdom and favor in fervent prayer as we follow Him in faith. Not so much because we don't know where this is leading, but because we want to be certain that the decisions we make as we go through this process are that which God is calling us to make and not our own.

So pray – pray for myself and the elders, pray for those who are interceding in prayer, pray for the Lord's provision for the cost involved in this, pray for the Lord to do something powerful and amazing that would be a faith touchpoint for us

– like Psalm 136:13 recalling God parting the Red Sea, and vs. 21 where God gives Israel the land of the enemy for their inheritance...

Pray because Phil 4:6 exhorts us *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

And because of what we know to be true about God and who He is and what He does – His covenant faithfulness – or covenant lovingkindness as it can also be translated – as Psalm 136 describes it for us, we can pray as Phil 4:6 instructs us to – not just for Valleyview's needs, but also for our own needs.

You see brothers and sisters, that which was significant and important for each of us in 2024 is going to vary greatly from person to person. For some of us its going to be a health issue, for others there was a big relationship change – like getting engaged, getting married. Some of us have gone through very difficult circumstances in our families, or at work. Some of us have advanced at work, some of us are looking for

work, some of us are retiring from work... There's been deaths, there's been births, there have been hopes and dreams accomplished as well as expectations that have gone unfulfilled – its all here in our little congregation.

So brothers and sisters, whatever the significant event was for you in 2024 - I pray that this mornings message has helped you to place it on the bedrock of God's covenant faithfulness, and to have the assurance that God will use it, work through it, or even in spite of it – to accomplish good work that He has started in you and to have you fully sanctified and ready for your resurrection body and eternal life in the New Creation when Christ returns.

And you can be sure and confident that God will continue this in 2025 – and given how God can work through ALL things as He did in 2024, maybe that makes you a bit anxious. Be at peace brothers and sisters – this is why we resolve to pray as Phil 4:6 instructs us to. About anything and everything, for resolution of problems, for resources and provision, for wisdom and guidance and for patience and endurance.

Trust in God's covenant faithfulness, it is everlasting and He has brought us this far, and He will continue to lead us faithfully in 2025 and beyond.

So, as we wrap up this year in review brothers and sisters – instead of wishing you a Happy and prosperous New Year, I'd like to practice what I preach and speak some applied truth of scripture to you as the body of Christ here at Valleyview. It comes from Proverbs 30:7-8... and I think its something we need to pay heed to in the coming year, so here goes...

There are two things that I pray for us brothers and sisters, two things I pray the Lord will do for us. That He will keep falsehood and lies far from us... and that He gives us neither poverty – nor extravagance, but only what he has determined for to steward faithfully.

For in our poverty, we will become bitter and resentful and angry and we will feel entitled to what others have, and

justified in taking what we think we are owed - and so we will dishonor your name.

Or, our success, our busy lives and responsibilities, our possessions and all the opportunities may prove too much and we will put these things first and say *"I'm just too busy for His church."*

Brothers and sisters, may the Lord in His enduring covenant faithfulness keep us faithful in the coming year – to His glory and for His purposes. Amen?