

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

PSALM 36 MARCH 20, 2016

Will you please join me in turning to Psalm 36. It's a beautiful text with wonderful insights for us. It begins this way:

Psalm 36

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David the Servant of the Lord.

- 1 An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked:
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
- 2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes,
When he finds out his iniquity and when he hates.
- 3 The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit;
He has ceased to be wise and to do good.
- 4 He devises wickedness on his bed;
He sets himself in a way that is not good;
He does not abhor evil.
- 5 Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens;
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
- 6 Your righteousness is like the great mountains;
Your judgments are a great deep;
O Lord, You preserve man and beast.
- 7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.
- 8 They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.
- 9 For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.
- 10 Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You,
And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.
- 11 Let not the foot of pride come against me,
And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- 12 There the workers of iniquity have fallen;
They have been cast down and are not able to rise.

If you're looking for a new hobby, some might suggest *people watching*. I was surprised to find that a simple Google search will bring up a variety of articles that teach you *how* to people watch. One gave 9 steps with example images. Another gave 6 areas to focus your attention on. Another (which was titled: *Hobbies For Outcasts - People Watching*) gave a list of the top 15 places to go for optimal viewing. And of course, there were some helpful tips on what to do when you're *caught* observing other people, such as: "Simply smile, shrug, and look away," or "Just look down and don't look up again until they've gone."

We might say that David was a people watcher. He no doubt picked up his skills over the thousands of hours watching his father's sheep, carefully keeping his gaze simultaneously on each little lamb while also wary of the horizon for any thieves or predators who might be approaching.

But David did more than *watch*, he also spent a great amount of time *considering*. He would reflect on deep truths, looking within into the heart of man and looking down the road to consider the end of man. And we should be people who consider as well.

Proverbs 14 says: "The simple believes every word, but the *prudent* considers well his steps." Here in Psalm 36 we have one of the many considerations of David. In it we have a very straightforward look at two paths: One which leads to death and one which leads not only to life, but a *tremendous* and *abundant* life. The first thing that David considers (in verses 1 through 4) is the sinfulness of sin. And then (in verses 5 through 9) he considers the Godliness of God.

There are four attributes of sin we can draw out this morning from David's prayer. For anyone here who has not been born again, this is a description of the road you're *currently* walking on and we'll see, in the end, what will be *your* end. Now, for the Christians here today, we shouldn't tune these first four verses out. Because we remember within each of us there is still a heart of flesh, an old nature, bent toward transgression and rebellion. Thus, we have within ourselves the same potential for sin and our goal is to know that enemy that we might overcome him in the power of God.

The first attribute, found in verse 1, is that sin lacks the **fear** of God.

Psalm 36:1 - ¹An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: *There is no fear of God before his eyes.*

These two opening verses present a bit of a challenge to translators. It seems the language can be interpreted to either mean what we read, "An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked," or, it *may* perhaps mean, "Thus saith transgression (within the heart of the wicked)," or, "That which God saith concerning transgression." Either way, it's clear that we're being given an explanation of the origin, the overflow and the ultimate outcome of living in sin. The Bible is definitively declaring that we can come to conclusions about right and wrong, about how God desires we live and how He desires we *not* live. And it all begins with the fear of God.

Now this reference is not the usual word for the 'fear of the Lord' that we read so often in the Bible. This word is a word that translates as 'dread.' The wicked have no *dread* of God, meaning they have no fear or belief that God is going to eventually judge their lives and decide their eternities.

So, who are 'the wicked'? We hear that word and usually it conjures up images of perversion and intense evil. And, of course, the word 'wicked' includes those things, but at its basic level it means those who are ungodly and guilty. Because they are ungodly, because they do not choose to own Jesus as King, they are guilty and under the wrath of God. And the reason given here as to why they are in that position is because they lack the fear of the Lord in their lives.

What we must realize is that God is almighty. God is the Judge of all things. God has all the power and all the dominion and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And if we want to *know* Him, we first must *fear* Him. The fear of God is not something that we should avoid or remove from our lives. The Bible explains that the fear of God is altogether

essential for us. It is a director and a protector and producer for us. It brings us *closer* to God, not farther from Him. And so it makes sense that when sin is ruling in a heart, it will lack the fear of God.

But secondly, we learn about sin that in place of **fear** there is **flattery**.

Psalm 36:2 - ²For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity *and* when he hates.

Again, this is a hard set of words to translate. A clearer rendering might be: “In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin. (NIV)”

Rather than set the fear of God before his eyes, this man makes himself the object of his passion. He flatters himself, meaning he’s not looking for real truth, he’s only looking for personal thrills. He’s not a man of humility and reflection like God’s servant David, instead he disguises himself and rationalizes his evil in order to ignore the conviction within his heart. Notice there it says, “When he finds out his iniquity.” God brings mankind face to face with their guilt and their lostness, but a heart ruled by sin lies to itself in order to stay lost and stay out of the loving grip of God. And as that heart flatters itself and disguises itself and lies to itself, it hardens and sinks deeper into the depths of sin.

Matthew Henry wrote: “Satan could not deceive [a person] if they did not deceive themselves.”

So not only does sin lack a **fear** of God and put **flattery** in its place, but third in verse 3 we see that this man’s words and actions are **full** of corruption.

Psalm 36:3 - ³The words of his mouth *are* wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good.

When people are described in the Bible, we are trees, not towers. Meaning that we continue to grow and develop day in and day out, rather than being built at one point then fixed in that position forever. The attitudes we cultivate lead to choices we make which lead to progression in one way or another. If we’re fueled by sin, we will be propelled in one direction and if we’re fueled by Godliness we’ll go in a *different* direction. Here in the Psalm we see a progression: Eyes to heart, heart to words, words to actions and the actions eventually defining a life and setting a person on their course. The man here in Psalm 36 looked down the path toward God and didn’t find it interesting. So he set his eyes another way and he started walking. By verse 3, he’s deep in the dark, not only far from God, but inevitably far from wisdom and goodness itself.

Sometimes people who don’t believe in Christ will say, “Well, I’m a good person.” Maybe by *your* definition, but not by the Bible’s. There is none truly good but God alone. Apart from Him a person cannot find true goodness or wisdom. Instead they will sink deeper into self-deception and iniquity. They’ll not find themselves on the royal route to heaven, but the awful avenue to hell.

Fourth, not only have we seen that sin lacks the **fear** of God, puts **flattery** in its place, is **full** of corruption, but results in a even more wicked **future**.

Psalm 36:4 - ⁴He devises wickedness on his bed; He sets himself in a way *that is* not good; He does not abhor evil.

This is quite a progression, or we might say an erosion. This is the inclination of every human heart apart from the intervention of Jesus Christ in our lives. When we yield to sin, this is the fruit and the future. There the verse can be translated to say, “He was *near* every way that is not good.” And rather than reject evil, he becomes a willing participant and designer of wicked enterprises.

Maybe today you’re not that interested in spiritual things. With David I would suggest that you take an honest look down to the end of the path you’re on and consider the destination you’re traveling toward. And for those of us who are Christians, let us take a survey to make sure we haven’t surrendered some cul-de-sac or precinct of our lives to the transgressor within. Instead, we should do what David does next: Take an about face to consider the Godliness of God and how we might not only regard it, but revel in it.

We can pull out 5 attributes in the next set of verses. And I appreciate how David here gives us *more* to think about concerning God and His greatness than the bleakness of sin.

First, we see that God is the **antidote** for evil.

Psalm 36:5 - ⁵Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

All this consideration of willful sin led to this moment where David suddenly declares the wonderful mercy of God. This faithful mercy is not on a quota system. It’s not an occasional philanthropy. It’s *expansive* and *immeasurable*, like the sky surrounding the whole earth. David here describes not only how *great* this mercy is but where it can be *found*: In heaven! The antidote for our sin and our guilt is found by going to the Father of mercies who dwells not in Temples or on earth, but in heaven and who is *rich* in mercy and *shows* that mercy to those who fear Him (Luke 1:50).

A person might think, “I’ll do good things to be made right and earn my way into heaven,” but you won’t find mercy that way. You can’t find forgiveness or salvation that way. The cure for the poison of sin can only be found by receiving the mercy in Jesus Christ. Jude said that if we want to find mercy unto eternal life we *must* go to the GodMan, Jesus Christ, Savior of the World. But the good news is that He has enough mercy to go around. The depths of our depravity do not surpass the depths of God’s mercy. As we’re reading here, it is deeper than oceans, higher than mountains, stretching out to anyone and everyone who will come to Him. He is the **antidote** to sin.

Second, we see the incredible **administration** of God’s Godliness.

Psalm 36:6 - ⁶Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast.

The fact that God is faithful and merciful does not mean He has no standards. He is also a God of righteousness and justice. God is the Judge all must stand before. Now, as Judge, His desire is to rescue us. We sometimes talk about judges *legislating* from the bench. Well our God *loves* from the bench. He wants to save and preserve, but He cannot sacrifice His righteousness in order to do so. But He has made a way to remove the guilt of any man or woman throughout all of human history, if they will accept His righteousness. The greatness of this **administration** cannot be fathomed. It’s higher than any mountain peak and deeper than any ocean trench.

Third, we see this attribute: The **affection** that God has for His people.

Psalm 36:7 - ⁷How precious *is* Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.

What a wonderful verse. We could spend many sermons looking just at this. Not only does it illustrate the splendor of God's love, but it shows us how to access it and all it includes. David says that God has multiplied His mercy and made it available to anyone who would believe in the Lord and put their trust in Him. When I go to God for refuge, then that lovingkindness is for *me*. And it is the love and mercy of God that *gives* me life and *saves* me from death.

Albert Barnes once wrote:

"It is not in his justice that we can take refuge, for we are sinners, but the foundation of all our hope is his mercy. A holy creature could fly to a holy Creator for refuge and defence, but the refuge of a sinner...is only his mercy;"

We do not work to merit salvation. There's nothing we could do to earn it. There's no way for us to work off our debt. Or clean off our sin. As we learn what God has revealed about Himself, we discover that His active, faithful, merciful lovingkindness is already operating and that all we must do is respond and receive by trusting in Him and putting ourselves under His covering. He is not a cold and spiteful God, but a God defined by love, who wants to bring each person underneath His mercy like a mother hen covering her chicks with her wings. We are to respond to God because of what He has *already* done, not the other way around. We love Him because He *first* loved us. But there is a requirement here, and it's that we *put* our trust in the Lord. That's an action word. It's a word that demands a choice and a decision. We will come under the Lord not only for shelter, but for His administration of our lives? We will recognize Him as Father and acknowledge Jesus as King?

Fourth, we've seen God as the **antidote** for evil, we've seen His **administration** and His **affection** for His people. Now we see the **abundance** that Godliness brings.

Psalm 36:8 - ⁸They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.

The idea that the Christian life is defined by leanness and disappointment is not from the Bible, it's from the Devil. Godliness is presented here as a life of great satisfaction and spiritual pleasures, life *more* abundantly. It's not *just* about being cleansed from guilt, but also about being contented & full.

We remember that God is not only Judge, but He is Sovereign over a Kingdom and the Ruler of a great house. And He invites everyone to come to His table and enjoy the delights of a Godly life. We are to find our filling and our satisfaction in the Lord and in His house and in the Living Water. And the amazing thing is that not only does God grant us access to this incredible fountain, but as His people He makes us *channels* of it as well. Jesus said in John 7:38, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

God's plan is to fill us so full that we overflow with satisfaction and spiritual pleasure, not just a little but to the degree that enough is coming out of us that others might also be filled. We spend so much time looking for satisfaction from human sources, while all the time the Lord has a limitless reservoir that's He ready to connect to our hearts.

Fifth, we learn this about God: He is the **author** of life and truth.

Psalm 36:9 - ⁹For with You *is* the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

People don't seem to care much anymore about the meaning of life, but they should! The meaning of life is to discover God and receive what He has for us. He is the source and the spring for everything eternal. He is the source and author of light. "In Your light we see light." I love that. To gain true understanding and real wisdom, we've got to go to the same place where we find mercy and refuge and satisfaction and that's to the Lord. He not only shines light into our past to clean out the sin, He not only shines into the future to give us a glorious hope, but He shines in the present that we might know and understand as we walk with Him. He gives us light and then He gives us *more* light!

Now here's a moment of application for us as a group of Christians. The Church at large often falls victim to the thinking that, "if we do *this* program, we'll see God." *This* method or *this* amount and then we'll discover what God has hidden. But in the Bible God is not presented as hidden, He's present as *revealed!* If we want more of Him, we're welcome to go to the source. Let's drink in more of what He has already supplied. Later today, if we find ourselves thinking, "I'm thirsty." The answer isn't to set out a bunch of empty cups on the table, the answer is to go to the faucet and turn it on. The supply is already there. The city where you live has gone through quite a bit of work to get that water right to where you are.

"With You," David says, is the fountain and the light. If we go to the Lord, we will find ourselves at the fountain and in the light.

The Psalm closes as many Psalms do, with a petition to God.

Psalm 36:10-12 - ¹⁰Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart. ¹¹Let not the foot of pride come against me, And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away. ¹²There the workers of iniquity have fallen; They have been cast down and are not able to rise.

Knowing what we now know about the sinfulness of sin and the Godliness of God, the choice becomes clear. We must trust the Lord and attach ourselves to Him, not only because of the benefits of being His people, but because of the inevitable downfall for those who refuse to be saved. The Bible says that there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. If we do not allow God to rescue us, not only will we be unable to rise out of our slide into sin, but we'll ultimately be unable to rise to everlasting life. But for those who will know Him and love Him and obey Him, God will stretch out His lovingkindness to them, not just for the hope of heaven, but also as a shield and provider in this life.

That's something that we require, because being on God's side puts us at odds with the wicked world we live in. Sin goes down swinging and wants to take anyone within reach with it. Here in verse 11 we see the 'foot of pride' and the 'hand of the wicked'. It puts a picture of pursuit in our minds, as if David is being hunted down. We rightly recognize the Christian life as a *race*, but often times it is also a *chase*. As we pursue God, we too are pursued by enemies within and without. But in Christ we find not only mercy, but *might*. He is *mighty* to save. He is *mighty* to keep us secure in His house and by His river and on His path. As we shelter under the loving coverage of Jesus Christ His mercy and Godliness takes action within us and around us that we might experience the supernatural life that only God can give. A life that lifts the fallen and raises up the people of God that we might live this life on a higher plane, thinking with the mind of Christ and speaking the words of Christ and able to do things inexplicable and full of glory.

And so David would have each of us consider the end of these two paths: The sinfulness of sin and the Godliness of God. And he would have us consider the potential within each of us to either sink into the darkness and ultimate destruction of sin, or to rise in the gracious glory of God, made possible for us by the work of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose again that we might receive the mercy of God.

James Montgomery Boice wrote:

“What distinguishes the righteous from the wicked are not the good deeds of the godly (though they inevitably express their right relationship to God by good deeds), but rather that they, in distinction from the wicked, have taken refuge under the shadow of God’s wings.”

Have you taken refuge? Are you growing in Godliness? That’s what God wants for us. We can have it and all that comes with it as we consider what Christ has done and consider our steps, as we know God and trust Him and as filled with His matchless mercy.