

The Portrait of the Fool

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[0:00] Let's read together now in Psalm 14. You'll find us on page 453.

The fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt. They do abominable deeds. There is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven and the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

They have all turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is none who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord?

There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge.

[1:24] Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people. Let Jacob rejoice. Let Israel be glad.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. As many of you know, I've taken up art as a hobby. They say that practice makes perfect. Therefore, for those of you who have seen my artwork, you'll realise I need an awful lot of practice. My landscapes are wobbly. My portraits are particularly poor.

I recently tried to paint a portrait of my wife. She's very patient with me. She said it's very good, even if I know it makes her look like Miss Piggy. To be fair, I'm probably better at describing things with words than watercolours.

[2:35] If you want to see a truly perfect portrait of a person, you need to look in the Bible. Because it's here in the pages of Holy Scripture, you'll see what a person really looks like, not just on the outside, but on the inside.

In Psalm 14, verse 1, God, the perfect artist, paints a word picture of the most foolish person in the world. He writes, The fool says in his heart, There is no God.

Never has a better portrait been painted of a man, not even by the greatest of human artists. Because with just ten words, God paints the most tragic of masterpieces, that a man made by God, in the image of God, and dearly loved by God, denies that there is a God.

Leonardo da Vinci painted his famous Mona Lisa, a Renaissance lady who has been dead for almost 500 years.

The tragedy of God's description of the fool in Psalm 14, 1, is that not only is he describing people in King David's day, but people in our day.

[3:54] The majority of people in the United Kingdom who call themselves atheists. Never have we lived in a generation more foolish than the one in which we live today, which for all its technical advancement and AI is more foolish than any which has gone before.

Art experts analyze every aspect of the portraits their testing. And this morning we want to examine God's portrait of the fool in three stages.

First of all, the fool imagines. Secondly, the fool acts. And thirdly, the fool regrets. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of this portrait in Psalm 14, 1 is that it could be describing someone here this morning.

It couldn't be, could it? First of all then, the fool imagines. The fool imagines. The fool says in his heart, there is no God.

If that's what King David says in Psalm 14, then truly we live in a very foolish society. The world around us wants to call us fools for believing in Christ and the power of His cross.

[5:14] But the world changes quicker than the seasons. The only thing that should matter to us is what the God in whom society insists it does not believe says.

Though 99.9% should say there is no God and that if God does exist, He is certainly not the God of the Bible, we're going to rest satisfied with God's opinion on this matter.

So let's deconstruct this verse and the inner workings of the fool as he says in his heart, there is no God in two stages. First of all, he does not think there is no God and secondly, he does not want there to be a God.

Even if you are a Christian today and you think this has got nothing to do with you, in your conversations with atheists or with anyone who does not believe in the God of the Bible, I hope you'll find the portrait of the fool here helpful because even if they won't admit it or aren't aware that they think this way, this is what's going on inside them.

So first of all, the atheist does not think there is no God. He does not think there is no God. You'll notice that the writer does not say, the fool says in his mind there is no God.

[6:33] He says, the fool says in his heart there is no God. The road to atheism does not begin in the mind, but in the heart, not in thinking, but in feeling.

Many who call themselves atheists do so because they think it is the intellectually superior option. They'll listen to the views of famous scientists and thinking that by aligning with their atheistic views, they're standing on the intellectual high ground while those who believe in the God of the Bible are naive.

We're not thinking. We're blind to the truth. I've met many intellectuals who are atheists, but I've also met many intellectuals who are Christians.

And the Bible wants to argue that one's intellect has nothing to do with one's belief in God. Psalm 14:1 insists that atheism is a matter of the heart, not of the mind.

Atheism doesn't come alone because often with it comes a tone of hostility toward any kind of faith, especially faith in the God of the Bible. And you want to ask the question, why do atheists hate the God they say does not exist?

[7:48] What clearly shows it's not a matter of the mind, but of the heart? The Christian faith is not blind. It is based upon strong rational evidence.

History, physics, sociology, cosmology, from every perspective, Christianity can hold its own and more in any debate.

The historical proof for the existence of Jesus, the reality of the cross, and the truth of the resurrection is beyond reasonable doubt. There is more evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ than there is for the existence of Julius Caesar.

So how then can people reject it out of hand? More often than not, they do so without even examining the evidence. Even when they feel confident about the non-existence of God, the God in whom they do not believe is the God we don't believe in either, the Christian God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

Now, I'm not in the business of belittling anyone, but what I do want to ask the atheist to do is to ask them to examine the evidence for the Christian faith.

[9:06] Frank Morrison was a famous American journalist who, from a position of atheism, came to faith in Christ because he set himself to disprove the resurrection of Jesus.

Having examined the evidence over a period of some months, a previously skeptical and atheistic Morrison came to faith in Christ. It is in the very nature of sinful human beings to be blind to the truth about God, but the very least we ask for is intellectual honesty.

We can hide our atheism behind seemingly intellectual arguments, but can we at least admit this? It is not primarily with our minds that we dismiss the existence of God.

It's with our hearts. And if we're in doubt about that, when we're speaking with a very aggressive atheist, ask them, why do you hate a God you do not believe exists?

Second thing which is true here is he does not want there to be a God. He does not want there to be a God. We're here thinking about the imagination of the fool and how it all begins in the heart.

[10:22] He does not want there to be a God. Psalm 14 reads in English, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. But if we translate this from the original language of Hebrew, it says, the fool says in his heart, no God.

There is is not in the original text. The fool is making a statement, no God. It's almost like he is expressing a wish that there was no God.

It's not a description of the way he thinks as much as a desire. I wish there was no God. I do not want there to be a God. The honest atheist will admit that examining the evidence for the God of the

Bible is something they don't want to do just in case, like Frank Morrison, they're convinced by it. There's a technique that many orators use. You'll know this. It's called the shout louder argument weak here technique. The reason some preachers shout is because they believe if they shout louder, their congregations are more likely to believe what they say even if their argument is weak at that point.

Why do atheists like to shout so loud in our media? Could it be that they know their arguments are weak? Now the heart in the Bible is the seat of desire.

[11:53] So for the heart to proclaim no God is to declare one's desire for there to be no God or to wish the God of the Bible did not exist.

But just because we don't want there to be a God does not mean that there isn't a God because what we want or don't want does not determine reality.

Reality is what it is whether we want it to be that way or not. In a moment we'll learn why people might wish the God of the Bible didn't exist but for many people because their atheism springs from the heart it's a sign that they don't want God to exist.

And it's amazing how we can argue ourselves into a position of God's non-existence if we start from this emotional presupposition that there is no God.

Let me give you a simple illustration to prove this point. A man went to a doctor convinced he was dead. The surprised doctor said to the man dead men don't bleed.

[13:00] So if you bleed when I prick you with this needle it's a sign that you are not dead but in fact you are alive. The doctor proceeded to take a pin from his desk and prick the man's finger.

Rather than being convinced when he saw his own blood running down his finger the man said to the doctor well what do you know dead men really do bleed after all. Nothing that doctor said to the man made a blind bit of difference because his mind was made up beforehand.

That's the way it is with most atheists I've met. Their minds are made up because before even they've begun to examine the evidence for the God of the Bible they don't use their minds to declare themselves atheists and they don't want the God of the Bible to exist.

And there's no argument you can use. I've tried every argument under the sun. There's no argument you can use to change their minds because their minds were not involved in the first place in their decision to be atheists.

They said it in their hearts in the seat of their desire rather than the seat of rational thought the mind. The God who knows us better than we know ourselves because he made us he knows our psychological makeup and that's why he says the fool says in his heart no God.

[14:31] So the fool imagines but second the fool acts the fool acts the opposite of foolishness is not intelligence but wisdom.

Many intelligent people are atheists and therefore in God's mind are foolish. Many people who are not intelligent are Christians and therefore in God's mind wise.

foolishness and intelligence actually have nothing to do with each other. Tell me who is the greater intellect? The atheist Richard Dawkins or the theist Christian C.S. Lewis?

As we've seen there's far more to an atheistic worldview than it first appears. The question is this therefore why do people when there is an abundance of evidence for the reality of the Christian God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ deny the existence of that God?

In Romans chapter 1 in his critique of a world at war with God Paul says that we suppress the truth in unrighteousness that the existence of God is unmistakably clear to every human being but we suppress it not because of our intelligence but because of unrighteousness.

[15:50] Every human being deep down believes in God we all contain the seed of divinity within us the semen divinitatis but we suppress it we hold it down in unrighteousness.

And what Paul's saying there is that our atheism does not spring from rationality but from morality. In other words we don't want God to exist because we cannot handle the moral implications of his existence.

See how the writer of the Psalms says the fool says in his heart there is no God they are corrupt they do abominable deeds there is no one who does good.

The reason a person does not want there to be a God whether he's aware of this whether he admit it to you or not is because he cannot cope with the reality that he is ultimately accountable to God for the bad things he's done.

He may not consciously think this way most atheists I speak to do not consciously think this way and I wouldn't attribute the motive of consciousness to them in this matter but what comes before the rationality of atheism is the morality of atheism.

[16 : 59] This text is not telling us that atheists are bad people. Most atheists I know are incredibly kind generous and caring and do things far more noble than I do.

They are no better or worse than the average person who calls themselves a Christian but the text is telling us that consciously or unconsciously what drives the dogma that the God of the Bible does not exist is discomfort at being ultimately accountable for one's actions to God.

Earlier in my ministry in St. Vincent Street so this is a long time ago 21 years maybe 22 years a professing Christian girl disappeared from our church.

When I met with her she told me that she no longer believed in God. I dug deeper and she admitted that she'd started a relationship with a non-Christian boy and she couldn't square her faith with her new relationship so rather than ditch the relationship she ditched God.

Her non-belief in God did not come from intellectual reasoning but from her pursuing a course of action which was not consistent with her Christian faith. Her atheism was not motivated by rationality but morality.

[18 : 21] and I've seen this many times I'm sure you have as well it's tragic but it's real it's a living proof of the truth of this psalm. Behind the atheism of those with whom we share the gospel will not lie intellectual objections but moral choices.

We need to dig a bit deeper if we want to understand why a person does not believe in God. But secondly not only is atheism motivated by a person's moral views it also tragically often produces bad results.

When a person stops believing in the God of the Bible he has no reason to be bound by the ethics of the Bible. The ethics of the Bible chief of which are the command to love God with all one's heart, soul, strength and mind and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

So for them not all of them but the more extreme variety of atheists to be human carries no more value than to be an insect. Human life is minimised degraded.

The further a society moves away from belief in the God of the Bible the more the morality of the Bible is dismissed. Because if we are no longer accountable for the way we live why should we restrain ourselves?

[19 : 43] Now the vast majority of atheists I know are inconsistent in this. They are morally upright people who would not hurt a fly who pay their taxes who keep the law who are generous kind and wonderful people but the logical conclusion of atheism is that we can do whatever we want to whoever we want whenever we want and it does not matter because no one will ultimately hold us accountable.

I can be as selfish as I like and it makes no difference. You see aware or unaware conscious or subconscious there's a reason people say in their hearts there's no God and it doesn't have an awful lot to do with knowledge or intellect.

Well thirdly and finally the full regrets the full regrets the remainder of this psalm is given over to a description of how those in David's day who did not believe in David's God persecuted him and the people who followed his God.

In verse 4 he says they eat up my people as they eat bread because to them God's people are like a stone in your shoe they're constantly reminding them of the deeper reality existence of the God in whom they refuse to believe.

They love the darkness not the light so they persecute they murder they kill they did it to Jesus they did it to the apostles they've been doing it ever since. In these days the greatest persecutors of Christians are those who insist upon the existence of God just not the God of the Bible.

[21 : 28] They insist upon the existence of other gods who are the opposite of everything Jesus was and everything Jesus taught. They're the ones who eat up Christians like bread.

but what's clear from this psalm is that God is looking down from heaven and keeping count. In verse 2 the Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men.

And then God is with his suffering people in verse 5 God is with the generation of the righteous.

God is supporting his people as David says in verse 6 of a follower of the God of the Bible the Lord is his refuge.

The key verse is verse 7 where David exclaims oh that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people let Jacob rejoice let Israel be glad.

David's praying here that God would save him and faithful followers from the oppression of their enemies. He prays it but he also knows it's going to happen.

[22 : 35] God is going to save his people he's going to turn their sorrow into joy and their gloom into gladness. It's going to be a bad day for those who refuse to believe in David's God.

The God whose existence they denied will meet them in judgment. What's important in verse 7 is the word salvation.

Oh that's salvation salvation. Because the word salvation is the root of the name Yeshua Jesus. In Psalm 14 verse 7 David is predicting that Jesus is God's answer to the problem of atheism.

Jesus is the atheist's nightmare because although they may dismiss the existence of God they don't want to talk about Jesus because try as hard as they may they cannot deny the reality the historical reality of his life death and resurrection.

And from there they struggle to deny the implications of it all. But a loving God they insist does not exist was stepping into the world he had made to save it for himself and from itself.

[23 : 54] Salvation and Jesus go hand in hand. Without Jesus no salvation. It is Jesus the atheist hates more than all but tries hard as they might they cannot deny the reality of his existence.

If Psalm 14 paints the perfect portrait of the atheist it paints the portrait of Jesus as the perfect God. The God who is righteous and loving just and merciful holy and gracious. And never do we see this portrait more clearly than on the cross on which Jesus died.

For there God's love and judgment met in perfect harmony even as Jesus died to take away our sin and our guilt our doubt and our unbelief our immorality and our atheism.

We are all accountable to God for our beliefs and actions. But in love Jesus bore the guilt of our sin on the cross.

[25 : 00] The very reason the atheist refuses to believe in God because he didn't want to be accountable to God is the very reason he should believe in God because it's through Jesus our accountability to God is cancelled.

The motive for atheism is destroyed once and all on the cross on which Jesus died. The cross is what makes atheism so very needless so very empty so very foolish.

But it's also the cross of Jesus which drives believers in other gods mad with rage because they hate the love and the wisdom the righteousness of the God of the Bible compared to the foolishness legalism and oppression of their own empty religions.

when I was in sixth year in school as a young Christian I had a friend who was a very aggressive atheist. She was far smarter than I was.

Far smarter. She still is. She could argue me into the ground. I knew it. She knew it. Now she was a lovely person. We got on great.

[26 : 15] She went on to study medicine and she became a doctor. She now teaches medicine at Cambridge University so she's pretty smart. I often wondered what happened to her until relatively recently she messaged me on Facebook with the rather quizzical message I'm now one of yours.

I'm now one of yours. She'd become a Christian. What had changed her mind I do not know because not only had she moved from an atheistic position to a position of believing in God but she'd moved from an aggressively atheistic position to believing in the God of the Bible and becoming a disciple and follower of Jesus.

Well I never once thought of messaging her back and saying I told you so rather I messaged her back and said praise God for his grace at work in your life my dear friend.

God's God's God's God's portrait of the may may of the Bible, he believes in them and he loves them. Christ died out, Christ died on the cross for atheists and for those who refuse to believe in him, crying out, Father forgive them, they do not know what they're doing. God's portrait of the atheist is unerringly accurate, but you know there's an even greater portrait we must look at always, that of Jesus dying on the cross, Jesus conquering death, rising to eternal life, living he loved me, dying he saved me.

Do you think it's at all possible that today there may be atheists you know, perhaps even among your family, your friends, who through your words, prayers and example may one day, like my school friend from Boner Bridge say to you, I'm now one of yours. I'm now one of yours.

[28 : 34] Let's pray. Lord, we want to thank you for your word which digs deep into our psychology as human beings. We want to pray that you would take away anything from us which is mocking or sneering of other people.

We want to pray, Lord, that you would work through us in the humility of those who know that often the atheists' arguments will crush us into the dust, to love them, to love them sincerely, and in any way we can, to point them to the Jesus who loved them and gave himself for them.

And we want to pray, Lord, that especially for members of our family and dear friends of ours who are dismissive of our faith in Christ and who perhaps even, though they love us and are so kind to us and really good friends and love us dearly, want nothing to do with you.

We want, oh Lord, to pray that one day they may say, like my friend did, I'm now one of yours. In a work of great power, Lord, we pray that you would work in them and through us.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.