

## (8) The year of the fool

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[ 0 : 01 ] The first reading this morning is Psalm 14, which can be found on page 543 in the Church Bibles. The fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

The Lord looks down from heaven on 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. 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. Our second reading is taken from Romans, chapter 3, verses 9 to 20, and it's page 1133 of the Bibles.

[ 1 : 26 ] So it's Romans, chapter 3, beginning at verse 9. What then? Are we Jews any better off?

No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written. None is righteous.

No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless.

No one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips.

Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.

[ 2 : 36 ] There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Well, please keep Psalm 14 open, because that's what we're going to be studying tonight. Not tonight. The day has not gone quite as far as that, I'm thankful, sir.

My memory dropped out of my head a couple of years ago. That's why I don't get those things straight. Psalm 14.1 Magnificent and striking beginning.

The fool says in his heart, there is no God. I ought to say right at the beginning what a joy it is to be here at your mission station in Dulwich.

[ 3 : 45 ] I've been enormously looking forward to being here, meeting lots of old friends, of course, and I hope making new ones. But more of that when we meet over coffee and a little time.

They never trust speakers when they say a little time. Now, I'm taking a psalm with you this morning, and I do that quite a bit now when I visit churches for a one-off.

Since my retirement, which is ten years ago in 1998, in order to keep my mind in gear, I study a psalm regularly. I do other things as well, like trying to solve the crossword and code words and so on.

But the psalm is my main attempt to keep my mind on reality and also to nourish my own soul. And one of the most striking things that I've discovered about the psalms, which are, of course, the Old Testament hymn book, and therefore the hymn book of the Christian church as well, even though we don't use them very much today.

They're very difficult to sing, but in cathedrals where they still make the attempt, of course, they do all the psalms every month. One of the things that has struck me very much about these songs,

these hymns, is that they're full of teaching.

[ 4 : 59 ] That's not always true of some of the new songs that you sing today. It certainly was true of the great 18th century hymn writers like Charles Wesley, and I think it's true of the best hymns and songs today.

And if there's lurking in church today somebody who's going to be a great songwriter, they may be in Sunday school at the moment, so you must tell them this. Will they please see that there is content in the songs that they write?

Obviously, the psalms are meant to be a response as well, and if you find that you don't have words to say that are big enough to talk to God and pray and praise, well then I'm sure it's good to fall back on the psalms.

I often do, in order to know that your response is something that is pleasing to God. But I'm wanting to strike the note today that they are actually full of doctrine and teaching, just as the rest of the Bible is.

And this psalm, the theme of this psalm is atheism. Now, who would ever think of writing a hymn on atheism? Can you think of one? I can't think of one.

[ 6 : 08 ] I said this a Sunday or two ago when I spoke on Psalm 14, and somebody came up with a suggestion, but I haven't been convinced as yet that any great hymn writer wrote a song with atheism at its heart.

Now, of course, when God gives us a song to sing and a hymn about atheism, it is in order to tell us what he has to say about it, what his thoughts are.

And so I thought it would be good here to look at Psalm 14, which I've been studying now for about six months. I don't do psalms chronologically. I don't know why I put off Psalm 14 so long, but I really only came across it to study about six months ago.

And I found it rather a striking time to meet it. Because, of course, 2007, that year, last year, you might have called the year of the fool.

Because we were besieged on every hand, were we not, by atheists writing books, speaking on television, and making themselves known in no uncertain terms.

[ 7 : 13 ] 2007 was the year of Dawkins. You couldn't get away from his books on every bookstore. Of Hitchens, who is a highly intelligent man. I see he was on the cover of a magazine that I picked up to read on the train earlier this week.

He's not a bad chap. He looks awful there, but he's not a bad chap. But he is an atheist, of course, and a very eloquent one. There is Smug Starkey, who you've seen on your television, I'm sure. When I call him Smug, I'm not being rude, because that's how he describes himself. And he is indeed incapable of appearing. He always appears on television like a bumptious sixth former who knows all the answers when his form master doesn't.

And I'm sure he knows more about Henry VIII's wives than Henry VIII ever did. He's a very, very confirmed atheist. He annoyed a friend of mine at a public meeting recently, which was not on the subject of God, by standing up at the beginning of his lecture and saying, I'm an atheist, with a great smile across his face, as much as to say, that makes me a sensible man.

And, of course, Philip Pullman, writing his children's stories to inculc unbelief, just as C.S. Lewis wrote his children's stories to bring us belief in God.

[ 8 : 26 ] Now, these men have been speaking out loud and clear, and their message, as far as I can see, I've only read one of their books, is don't believe in God. And if you do, you're a fool. So that if one of them was speaking this morning, it is you who they regard as a fool, and, of course, notably me, speaking about God.

And I presume that the books that they have written, and the articles they have written, and the things they say on television, have had an effect in our country.

I take it that atheism is growing in the United Kingdom, just as it is in the United States of America, where the number now is that there are 9% of declared atheists in America, which is a bit of a surprise to us, because we see the states as a place where people still, strangely, go to church. Well, no more by way of introduction. Let's get to work then, and I hope you will keep Psalm 14 open in front of you, because we're not going to hear my point of view on atheists. I do actually have a point of view.

I was lucky enough when I was a naval cadet at Oxford to be tutored by C.S. Lewis for six months. I therefore hold him in very high regard, and I am angry that anybody should use the same method

as he used in order to inculcate atheism amongst small children.

[ 9 : 47 ] I could say a great deal about that, but we're not here to listen to what I have to say about atheism. I want you to listen to what God has to say. And it seems to me that Psalm 14, the very brief, contains a remarkable amount of information of the divine verdict.

What God's view, looking down from heaven upon our world and seeing here so many who deny that he even exists, I want to know what does God have to say about that.

First then, in Psalm 14, we are told about these men's ignorance. Now, of course, I would not dare to say that, because these are clever men.

And it might seem a little bit unnecessarily rude for me to start by saying that Mrs. Dawkins and Hitchens and Pullman and all the rest are ignorant people.

But I want you to look at the Psalm, and you can make up your own mind. Verse 1, The fool says in his heart, There is no God. Verse 2, The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of men to see if there are any who understand.

[ 10 : 56 ] Isn't that striking? Who seek after God. Notice, those who seek after God are those who understand. Those who do not, do not understand. Look at verse 4.

Have they no knowledge? As in the old version, do they never learn? Have they never learned? All the evildoers who eat up my people as they do bread.

Yes, this is what God says. And they're fools. Though we know, and I repeat, that they are clever men, successful men. And if they were to debate in question time after this, I'm sure they would be polished and persuasive and probably knock me down completely.

I was stimulated, actually, by an article by this fellow, Hitchens. He's not as bad as he looks, actually. And he says in this article a number of very sensible things about the present political situation.

So when we say that God says he's a fool, it's with regard to one particular aspect of life. Though that, of course, is the most important aspect. Whether there is a God who created us and will judge us.

[ 12 : 03 ] So although we would not dare to say that they are fools, because indeed they are clever and intelligent men, yet in God's estimate they are fools. And the question is, what kind?

Now, the scholars are in two minds about this, and you must make up your mind about it. I'll put before you the two possibilities. You see in verse 1 that it says, the fool says in his heart.

Now, one set of scholars says, this is not your fool like Dawkins who writes books. This is your average person in Dulwich or anywhere else who in their heart has come to the conclusion that God has no place in their lives.

Therefore, that Bible on the shelf is never read. Apart from marriages and an occasional funeral, they don't go to church. There's no sense that God is of any relevance or importance for them. And so day by day he has no place in their lives. I had a brother, my late brother John, was exactly like that. He had no interest in the things of God from the moment he was born until about a year or two before he died when, thankfully, he did begin to show a new sense of responsibility about his own end, his own responsibility, and God.

[ 13 : 22 ] Now, if that is what Psalm 1 means, then we're talking about a very large number of people. We're talking about a vast multitude in our own country who, as far as practical things are concerned, think about God not at all.

Well, that's one interpretation of verse 1. Because they say it in their heart, not openly on television or anything of that sort, some scholars believe it means a non-aggressive type who simply has no time for the things of the Lord.

The other interpretation is to look at the Hebrew word here, forful, which is the word Nabal. And you may remember Nabal, who was the aggressive wife of Abigail.

I always feel very sorry for her. And he was famous for being churlish, aggressive, senseless in his antagonism to King David, and actually lost his life as a result of his folly.

For myself, the fact that this word is used here in the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are very careful with the words they use, means that we are thinking in verse 1 of the aggressive fool of the Nabal type.

[ 14 : 36 ] In other words, the people that I'm talking about today, the Storkies, the Dawkinses, and the Philip Pullmans. They're not saying it in their heart and keeping it to themselves.

They want the whole world to know that there is no God, and they want to give reasons for their unbelief. Now this leads to an element of corruption, as you can see in your psalm.

And I want to mention two or three types of corruption that we see in our social life in this country today. First of all, it leads to an intellectual corruption. And keeping a finger in Psalm 14, I'd like you to turn, if you will, to Romans 1, verse 18.

We're not actually going to look at Romans 3 this morning, as too much to do, but we'll look at Romans 1, a very famous and remarkable passage, in which Paul describes the result of God's anger against this kind of folly.

For the sake of time, I must come into the middle of an argument, verse 19. Verse 19, bottom of the second column of Romans 1.

[15:43] For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, this is God, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

Well, in springtime, that's particularly obvious, isn't it? So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became...

Now notice the words here, because there are three of them. Look at them. They became futile in their thinking. Their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, which the gentlemen that I have mentioned certainly do, claiming to be wise, they became fools and went into idolatry. Idolatry actually is the most common religion in the world. It spreads the whole world today as it did in the ancient world. So men suppressing the knowledge of God refusing to acknowledge him, become futile in their thinking and turn to idolatry and are therefore not to be trusted.

[16:55] I don't know if you have read Paul Johnson's book on intellectuals. To me, it's a must book in which he looks through the life of quite a number of atheists and unbelievers who were what we call today intellectuals.

And at the end of it, he has a remarkable paragraph in which he says that he feels if you want common sense some of the things of today, eight people that you meet in the street are likely to be more sensible than eight intellectuals.

And I think there's a great deal of truth in that. I often say to students that you learn that intellectuals don't necessarily have any common sense by your second year at university. That is, I remember looking out of my room at university and seeing a man who was certainly one of the great intellectuals of Cambridge.

He used to get up at about five in the afternoon and never get out of his pajamas. His life was a mess. He had no idea how to handle himself or his family. And I think that by your second year at university, you begin to realize that your tutors may know more about some subject than anybody else in the world.

But that doesn't mean that they're wise, know how to live, or actually have a mind that works on ordinary things. So there is something that I'm going to call here intellectual corruption.

[18:12] And the Bible says a great deal about it. That if we refuse the knowledge of God, we become intellectually increasingly corrupt. Now look at verse two.

The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand. Why is there so little understanding of God in people everywhere?

It is remarkable, isn't it? Again, you talk to perfectly ordinary, sensible people about God and find that they know nothing. They know less than a Sunday school child of 12. You have these supper parties that you've been talking about and you have a discussion.

And find that somebody who's come to your supper party, who you know to be an intelligent man, has no idea of the simplest truths of the Christian gospel. They usually have it completely upside down.

Now the reason for this is given us in verse two that they have not sought God. Why not? Well here I'd like you to turn to the New Testament because we need to check these great Old Testament truths and see how they've been developed in the New Testament.

[19:16] And I'd like you to turn to John chapter three. I see that your pastor here is kind enough to give you the page numbers. I never do that now. John three is page 3,225.

If you're going to be a church that grows up and makes an impact on Dulwich, the sooner you know where John's gospel is, the better. I was talking to students recently on Genesis and I said if they couldn't find that, there was no hope for them.

And the same goes for you if you can't find John three. But for the sake of those who are particularly dumb this morning, because you spent a ton of time late at night watching the cup final, whatever it was, whatever foolishness was going on yesterday, it's page 1071.

It's only foolishness because my team is not on the cup final. John three, 19. It's a remarkable statement here about God's verdict again.

This is the verdict, the judgment, the decisive word. The light has come into the world. That, of course, is Jesus Christ. And people, the generality, love the darkness rather than the light.

[ 20 : 26 ] Because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come into the light, lest their deeds should be exposed.

Isn't that a remarkable statement? You know, I'm very tired of people telling me that they can't believe in Christ because it would have a leap in the dark. My only reply to them can possibly be what this is, that you are in the dark already, becoming a Christian.

It's coming to the light. And all of us, and I'm no different from you, all of us find it frightening to come into that light and be exposed in the sight of God for what we are.

Now, what verse 2 is saying, verse 14, back to verse 14, is that God is looking for those who understand, but that they have turned aside.

And they've turned aside because they prefer evil or darkness to light. I seem to be talking about biographies tonight, but one of my favorite autobiographies is that of Kenneth Clark.

[ 21 : 26 ] Some of you will remember his amazing series on civilization on the telly. Kenneth Clark was not, I think, a Christian, but he tells of being in a church in Italy.

He was, as you know, an expert on Italian art and so on, looking at some of these magnificent frescoes. It's a very moving passage in his autobiography.

He says that he was suddenly aware of the presence of God and that his heart was filled with joy, which he calls the joy of the saints, and that this remarkable joy was with him for about a week, and that during that week, he felt as though God was challenging him and speaking to him.

And then in the autobiography, he comes right down to earth and he says, but I realized I would have to reform. I realized I would have to reform. Now he was, as everybody knows, a serial womanizer.

One of the reasons why his wife lived such a miserable life, actually. And he simply couldn't keep his hands off other women. And it's a very striking little straightforward comment in his autobiography, I realized I would have to reform.

[ 22 : 42 ] And I decided I couldn't change at my time of life. And all the light joy disappeared. I think that's a really remarkable case of God having mercy upon someone, speaking to them in a rather unusual way.

And I call that a kind of spiritual or moral corruption. Summary then, so far.

Point one is, as we look at this psalm, and I think you'll agree with me, the language is not complex. It's not what we think of, a theological doctrine, written in language that we can't understand.

In fact, the language is very simple. We're told that these men who say there is no God are in fact ignorant of the most vital things in our universe.

Ignorant of the really big issues in life. And if the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, as the Scriptures say, then perhaps that explains why they have so little wisdom when they write their books about God.

[ 23 : 51 ] Clever, but without wisdom, without understanding. We're told first then in this psalm about the atheist's ignorance.

Secondly, we're told in Psalm 14 about their intolerance. And I want you to look at verse 4. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord?

It's very striking language, this, I think, about eating up God's people. But before we look at that language, it is quite nice, isn't it, for a moment in the middle of all this corruption.

And Psalm 14 is a little depressing on that subject. It is rather a relief to meet the people of God. There they are in verse 4. Verse 4, my people.

There they are in verse 5, the generation of the righteous. There they are probably in verse 6, the poor. The poor in the Old Testament nearly always mean the pious, believing poor.

[ 25 : 06 ] So in this desert of corruption and unbelief, we find there are the people of God, God's people, the company of the righteous.

What then is the attitude of the atheist to this company? We know that the atheist is ignorant of God and hostile to the idea of God.

Therefore, we know that they will be hostile to God's people. Hostility is too bland a word, and even the ESV doesn't altogether satisfy me with verse 4, eat up my people.

I think I prefer the NIV, which simply uses the word devour. It's a strong word, isn't it? You devour a meal when you're hungry. It's a very vivid way of saying what the atheist wants to do with the people of God in this world.

He wants to devour them, to eat them up, to consume them, to eliminate them. That is their aim.

Now, for a moment, I want you to put aside what the Bible is saying here.

[ 26 : 15 ] I want you, in a sense, to put aside Bible thinking. I simply want you to reconsider in your own experience recent history, especially if you're older in this congregation this morning, this gathering.

It's much easier for olders like me to do this, but most of you would be able to say from your own observation and your knowledge of the last 50 years and more, what has happened when the unbeliever has taken charge?

What is the testimony of history? What are actually the facts? For we, in our generation, and the generation just before us, have witnessed something which, as far as I know, is entirely unique in the story of mankind.

Atheists, of this aggressive kind, didn't exist in the classical world. We have seen whole countries like Russia under Lenin and China under Mao, just for two, where the rulers have actually said that they are atheists, that is, their ruling belief or unbelief, and that their supreme aim was to eradicate the churches of Jesus Christ.

quite apart from what the Bible says, we have seen atheism in the saddle with all power and no restraint, able to do exactly what they wanted.

[ 27 : 48 ] And what they wanted was the eradication of religion, and in particular, Christianity. if they did not succeed, and it is extraordinary that they did not, after all, Lenin and Stalin had many years to do this, the only explanation can be what is given us in Psalm 14.

That is, that Jesus, that God, is with the generation of the righteous, verse 5, and that he is the refuge of the poor, in verse 6.

I can see no other explanation. The Chinese church, as you know, just as a side, is probably the fastest growing church in the world today.

I wonder if you shall get even a glimpse of that in the television of the Olympics. I wonder even if a hint of that will come across. I doubt it, but that is the fact of the matter.

Towards these churches under Lenin and Stalin, I don't need to tell you this because this is something which is common knowledge and cannot be again said. And towards the Christians and the churches in China, the cruelty was so savage, and in China often remains so, so inhuman, so unspeakable, thousands butchered, that one can't even want to read it.

[ 29 : 12 ] I say people leave things behind in your home as they leave behind in mine, but one visitor left behind in the spare room the book on, well, I can't remember its name, and I just picked it up, popped it in a bookshelf, but opened it and began to read before I did, and I found that I didn't want to read it.

The same goes for Simon Sebag Montefiore's two books on Stalin. I don't know if you've read them. I very much doubt if many people who begin either of those two books actually finish them. They are so horrible.

You know, Stalin sitting down to lunch, deciding that such and such should be dispatched then and there, and these are people who have been part of his inner council, and then going to a movie and thinking nothing of it.

Standards such as you might think even a pagan would have, they did not have. So awful are these facts, and many people, of course, are in denial that they ever happened. That's why I say these men are intolerant.

Now, you simply must decide that for yourself. But as our nation becomes more secular, there's something probably that you need to decide. Are we willing to put in the hands of people leadership if they don't believe in God?

[ 30 : 38 ] In a country like ours, of course, all this is easily covered up. But it's probably time that we wake up, because unbelief is utterly intolerant of belief.

We who believe, we who are Christians, are called, of course, to be tolerant of unbelief, and to allow them to have their say, and indeed we do. And of course, it's one of the wonders of our own country that Dawkins can publish his book and everybody can read it, and no special police remove it.

But will there come a day in our country when in a school like this, Christian books would be removed as by order? I don't know. But those of you who have children and grandchildren must ask yourself these questions.

If unbelievers take the reins of power as a matter of fact and have the ability to do what they want, they show total intolerance to God's word, his son, and his standards, and his people.

That's one of the messages of Psalm 14. So we look at this little psalm that at first seems to be quite ordinary, and we find first of all that it focuses on the ignorance of these men, and secondly on their intolerance.

[ 31 : 57 ] And I think that is the worst thing it says about them. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread? Thirdly, as we look at this psalm, we're told not only about their ignorance and their intolerance, two very dangerous things, by the way, put together, lethal, but we're told of the atheist's illusions.

Now, the atheist has many illusions. Of course, they think that we have illusions just because we meet yesterday and sing these songs and read this book and believe what we do.

but they have their illusions too. I'm only going to mention two of them and talk about one. The first illusion they have is that they can build a civilized society without belief in God.

That they can build a society where there is truth, justice, happiness, freedom without belief in God. As we used to say in the Navy, tell that to the Marines.

I was given this at Christmas. I can't say I've got through it yet. These blockbusters that are produced.

[ 33 : 12 ] I just thought the title on the front was a striking one. One of the admirable things about this book is that it blows sky high the idea that Lenin was an idealist.

He was a monster from the beginning. Then in Stalin, Hitler, and then it's underneath that, this book by Robert Galatley, the age of social catastrophe.

Isn't that a remarkable subheading? The age of social catastrophe. These are the people who think that following the same way as those men, though maybe not with the same cruelty, we mustn't say that.

we hope that they're very different people, but following the way of unbelief, they can build a social consensus and a social civilization. Whereas all history shows, if you're interested in what's going around in the world, and take it you are, all history shows social catastrophe, millions brutally murdered.

But it's the illusion that comes out in the psalm in verse seven. It has particularly struck me in my study of it. The illusion that the church of Christ is done for. Now I'm sure this is an illusion that many of these unbelievers have in Britain.

[ 34 : 37 ] And you can't altogether blame them, can you? Because what we've seen in my lifetime is the graph of the older denominations in the West coming steeply down.

time. You know? And that's all that the media can see. And this summer we're going to see some unhappy things as the Anglo-communion, for example, tears itself apart.

Because it is so weak and so leaderless. And I suppose these clever men looking at that feel, well, it's the dying moments of these great ancient institutions.

What they don't see is the graph that is going up, and I'm sure you're beginning to see it. I'm sure many of you have seen it for a long time, but because I travel quite a bit as a Christian and speaking, it is a very great encouragement to see this graph that is coming up the other way.

And the media are just beginning to see it and they don't like it. It may be, of course, that men like Dawkins and Hitchens have already seen it. You never know some of their own children haven't been converted.

[ 35 : 45 ] You know, God has many delightful surprises, doesn't he? And it may be the reason they're shouting so loud is because they've seen that. But again and again in the history of the Christian church, people have pronounced its dying epitaphs, and again and again they've been wrong, and why?

Well, look at verse 7. It's a wonderful ending to Psalm 14. And if this was set in some kind of liturgy or to sing, you can imagine the praise and the outburst of song, can't you, at verse 7, as the Christian or the believing congregation cry out to God to do what he's always done before, to restore the fortunes of his people.

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.

Notice there is no doubt about it. They know from history, and we know from history. The situation, if you've ever read Bishop Ryle's church leaders in the 18th century, you'll know that the situation there was far worse than it is today in our country, and yet God brought to Wesley and many like him a most remarkable spiritual renewal to this country.

The results, of course, still going on today. Is God restoring his people? Well, let me just mention a few things that in my lifetime I have seen.

[ 37 : 25 ] Let me list them quickly. Amazing growth of student witness. There are now I think 150 campuses in this country where student witness is strong.

You'll notice that the student unions and the authorities are not altogether pleased with this. You may even notice one or two court cases in which the Christians are not allowed to use the student union buildings.

Can you imagine that in this country, when we're supposed to have been known for freedom of speech? Can you imagine it? A small group of rather inoffensive students not allowed to use the buildings because of what they say?

Must mean that they are a potent threat, mustn't it? Books. When I was a graduate student, there were only two books that the now called UCCF IVP could produce for students to help them hold on to their faith.

Today there are so many books that a book on your church bookstall is unlikely to be able to exist there for more than six months without being pushed off by new publications. But not just books for children and books for churches, but scholarly books now because in every university there will be Christian scholars and they will be writing books which are helping Christians of course to understand the faith more deeply.

[ 38 : 45 ] In my day at Cambridge there was only one senior faculty member in the whole university who would stand with the Christian Union when it had a mission. One. Compare today where the thing is totally different.

Evangelistic efforts, Christian Explored, Alpha Course, wherever you go in the world you'll find the Alpha Course and look at the church plants that are another expression of our evangelistic concern. If we lose that by the way we lose everything. Training schemes for young people in Christian work they are gathering enormous pace in this country.

Theological colleges, it is a delight isn't it to see, I was at Oak Hill only recently, to see it packed with students, a first class faculty and so on and this kind of thing growing in our country.

Conferences, New Word Alive, some of you no doubt have been to New Word Alive, conferences like this that were booked up almost within weeks.

[ 39 : 55 ] Songs, well new songs of praise are always a sign of spiritual revival, that was said in the 18th century and it's true in the 20th century. They may not always be to your taste and they're not always to my taste, but the bad songs, don't worry, will sink to the bottom, they did in the 18th century too, there was a lot of rubbish then as well, but the good stuff will stay and there are some geniuses appearing on the horizon, aren't there like Siotanian, whose songs will be sung for the next hundred years or more?

The renewal of expository preaching, a fresh and wonderful thing I think in this country, and so I could go on. It is an illusion of Dawkins and Hitchens and Ilk to think that the church is dying, because God is in the midst of his people.

Well, there are many other things I could show you from this lovely psalm, but let me finish with just a few comments. First, don't be a fool. I don't know if there is anybody sitting in this hall this morning who is an unbeliever and an atheist.

I don't imagine there is, but should there be somebody, I don't want to embarrass you, but I do want to say to you, don't be a fool. Secondly, don't be surprised if an increasingly secular government is more antagonistic than apathetic.

You know, we used to meet apathy, didn't we? Now we're meeting antagonism. Third, don't be shocked at a growing corruption in our country and the inability of the authorities to deal with it.

[ 41 : 33 ] Corruption in many areas of life, sport, politics, you name it. And don't be afraid. Don't despair.

You remember old Elijah sitting there despairing? Great man that he was. It's easy to despair. And then God said to him, there are 7,000 who haven't bowed the knee to bear.

Well, there are many more than 7,000 in this country who have not bowed the knee to bear. More like 700,000. More like 7 million maybe. Who knows? Don't despair.

The fool has said in his heart, there's no God. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, we seek to hear your verdict, a verdict which for many will be a terrifying one on the last day.

[ 42 : 33 ] And as we know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we pray that in our country more and more people may fear you and gain that wisdom without which we cannot live or die.

We ask it through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.