

Psalm 36

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the psalm that we read, Psalm 36 in the Book of Psalms. Psalm 36 in the Book of Psalms. I want us just to look at this psalm really as a whole.

And as you can see, it's a psalm of immense contrasts, because at the beginning, it's a psalm of David to the choir master of David, the servant of the Lord. The beginning, it says, transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes.

And then the psalmist changes in verse 5, where he says, your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds, your righteousness is like the mountains of God, your judgments are like the great deep man and beast you save, O Lord, and so on.

Now, as I said, this is really quite an amazing psalm, because it's the first focus that we have here is on the wickedness of the wicked. And then the psalmist turns to focus upon the faithfulness, the steadfast love, and the mercy of God. It's a psalm where we see, on the one hand, the wickedness of the wicked, and on the other hand, we see divine goodness shown to us in its many-sided fullness. And we see here, as it were, like David is on the one hand, he is distressed, and he is disturbed by wickedness, by what he is discovering around him, about him, and even discovering within himself. And yet, on the other hand, David is overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness. And we've always got to remember that David, of course, was a man after God's own heart.

David, as we come to whatever we find in the Bible, we've always got to remember it's spirit-breathed, and that this is the voice of God. God, of course, was speaking and using men and their, of course, their own personalities, their own distinctives, and all these things are married into it, but this is God's Word. This is what God is saying to us. And that's what makes the Bible so unique, because, of course, psychiatrists, psychologists, and people who study the human mind and its makeup, they come to many conclusions, and many of these conclusions are correct and right, and we're fascinated often by these studies and the way that, the way the mind works, and it's a, it's an extraordinary thing. But the Word of God alone delves right down into what we are, reaches aspects and areas of our life that no human, whether it is by mind or whether it is by scientific study, is able to grapple with and able to discover. And that is why we need the revelation of God, because God is revealing to us just what the human heart is really, really like.

[3 : 21] And we find here at the beginning that transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart, literally, an oracle, that's what it's saying, an oracle of transgression. Now, normally in the Bible, an oracle was an authority to pronouncement from God. It was a pronouncement of authority from the living and through God. That's what we often find as a biblical oracle. But here it is, it's like the voice of sin with an authority speaking to the sinner. Now, often we find in the Bible the sinner speaking to himself. For instance, if you go to Psalm 10 or Psalm 14, the fool, say, Psalm 14, the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. That's what, that's what the person, he's talking to himself, and he's saying, there is no God, and that person is a fool. That's what the Bible, we use the word atheist for somebody who says there is no God. The Bible has a different definition. Bible calls that person a fool. The fool hath said in his heart, there is no

God, because there is no more foolish passion than the passion who in the face of all the evidence is saying there is no God. But here we find that sin, sin is speaking to the sinner, and this is deep in the heart. And so, sin, you see, is unbelievably deceptive, and sin flatters, and sin says to you, it's all right, everything is going to be all right. Sin is a wonderful way of reassuring a person within their sin, that they're on the right course. And here is somebody who is saying, who has, the fear of God is not before his eyes. And you know, that is, that is really the most dangerous place to be, is somebody who doesn't have the fear of God within their own eye, and is listening to their own heart. You know, a lot of people will say to you, you know, what you've got to do in life is listen to your own heart. Go with your heart. You'll hear people say that. What should I do in life? Just go with your heart. Well, I would say to you, no. The Bible, what does the Bible tell us about our own heart? That is what we're talking about, our inner being, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. So, are we going to trust something that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? And that's why it is so dangerous just to say, well, I'm going to go with my own heart, because, and particularly for somebody that has the fear, that the fear of God is not within his heart. Because if somebody does not have the fear of God within their heart, then God is not the one who is ruling and directing that person's life. And so, that's the world's philosophy. Go, just go with your heart. And so, we find here that, for here is somebody, and he's building his life, building his life, going in the opposite direction to God. And let me say this, if we build our life, if we build our life, and God is not the focus of our life, if we build our life with a closed Bible, with a fear of God not in our heart, if we build our life purely upon what we want to do and push God out of the picture, it doesn't matter how successful a person may be for a few short years. At the end, it will collapse. It has to. We cannot build what will last on anything but upon the Lord. Jesus himself says that, tells about that, the building of the house on the sand and the house on the rock. So, here is this person, and the fear of God is not before his eyes. And what we've got to remember with the fear of God, there are two different aspects to the fear of God. The believer has a fear of God, where he sees God with a sense of reverence and with a sense of awe. It's a sense of incredible respect, where you do not want to offend, where you do not want to hurt, because you love.

It's a fear that's born out of love. It's not the kind of fear that's terrified, because there is no fear in love. That kind of fear, the fear of terror, is removed in the life of the believer. That's what it says, there is no fear in love. So, when you come to love the Lord, that fear is pushed aside. But there is another fear, and that is a fear that comes into a patient's heart and into a patient's soul when they realize that they are sinners before God, and they see God as a consuming fire, and they see God as a God who is going to be the judge of all the earth. And there is a fear within their heart, a fear that is brought about by the law, a fear that recognizes that unless I get right with God, I am undone, I am lost. So, here is a person who's living their life, and the fear of God is just not there. That's how they're going on. And then we see that here is somebody who flatters himself in his own eyes. And you see, this is an incredibly dangerous way to live, because, see, when you go through life, it's so important to have a point of reference, a point of a true, something that is true and focused in life, where you can, where there is a point of reference in your life, because otherwise your life's going to be all over the place. We need this point of reference.

And when our point of reference is the living and true God, then it gives us a direction, it gives us a focus, it gives us a stability, it gives us a peace, it gives us a foundation, it enables us to go forward knowing where we're going and what we're doing. If we don't have that, we're all over the place.

And that's what we find here. Now, it shows us, it goes on then, how he flatters himself in his own eyes, that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. In other words, no sense of responsibility.

[10 : 31] And, you know, a lot of people live like that. They have no sense of respect before any form of authority. Many people in our land live like that. Authority, no respect, because they have no sense of responsibility. They live without any sense of accountability. It's their life, and they're going to do what they want. They don't care. And that's the outworking of sin. It's just, it's anarchy.

That's what sin really is. Sin is anarchy. And it's often camouflaged within people's lives, because there's this outward veneer and exterior, but inwardly, sin is anarchy. And that's why we need, we need God to deal with it within our own heart and life. And then in verses 3 and 4, we see, the words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. He has ceased to act wisely and to do good. He plots trouble while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not reject evil.

Basically, what is happening here is, this is the outworking of what's in the heart. When the heart is all wrong, it will begin to manifest itself in the life, so that the tongue is all wrong. The life is all wrong. And here is somebody, their speech is wrong. They like to deceive people. Their life is a life of deceit. You know, here are people, and basically, they are out for themselves.

And whatever they do, wherever they are in life, they're quite happy to deceive people as long as it's going to work for them. Doesn't matter who gets hurt. Doesn't matter who's deceived. Doesn't matter who's tricked. As long as I prosper, as long as I get on. I, and people, it's an awful way to go through life. Just lying your way, saying whatever suits yourself in order that you'll get on. And it doesn't matter whether it's true or untrue. Or even if you can, all the better if you can cover the lie with a wee kind of grain of truth. That makes it a wee bitty better. No, it doesn't. A half-truth is still a lie. And so, this is the outworking of a heart that is wrong before God. It is the whole speech is wrong. The whole lifestyle is wrong. And the worst thing about this person is he has ceased to act wisely and do good. In other words, there was a day when he was doing some good. That's the obvious deduction we can take from that. If he has ceased to act wisely, it means that there was a time when he did act wisely and do some good. So, this is not somebody who had no chance in life.

This is somebody who knew the difference between right and wrong, who knew that there were two paths, two courses. Here was somebody who actually seemed to have been living a decent kind of life, but yet because they chose to go the way of sin, because they pushed God out of the equation, then the downward spiral began. See, there's no neutrality. You can't just sort of hope to drift along and everything sort itself out. No, it's one way or the other. And so, this is the kind of passion that we have here.

[14 : 17] Sin, my friend, is, while it may be attractive at certain levels, and while there is a sense, while there is, the Bible says it, the pleasures of sin, there is pleasure in sin, but remember, it's only for a time.

Remember that sin is destructive in its nature. It will destroy, and sin always leads to hell.

But we find that the psalmist, who has this extraordinary insight into what sin is like, he doesn't try to deal with things as a philosopher, because, you know, you can tie yourself in knots.

If you just start thinking and thinking and trying to work through things, you can tie yourself into all kinds of knots. David tells us, you know the best way of dealing with it? Let's worship God.

Let's stop trying to delve down and down and down and sort things out. This is a mess. No, he just turns away, and it's like, it's just like a total turnaround, and it's like he's saying, oh, enough of that. Oh, that's heavy. I know where I've got to go. I've got to go and worship God. I've got to focus upon the Lord, and that's what he does. And that's the answer, my friend, to all the pains and the problems of our life, is let's get a proper focus of who God is. It's vital. Otherwise, if we have a distorted view of God, we have a distorted view of life, because he is the heartbeat. He is the one who has given us life. Remember, we have been made in the image of God, even although the fall brought that into a, where it was shattered and broken and all that to the image of God.

[16 : 05] But David says here, he sees God's steadfast love or God's mercy, and he sees it encircled with God's faithfulness and his righteousness and his judgment. Now, there's a lot here, but just very briefly, and he says here, your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. And if you just think of that for a moment, you say to yourself, well, it doesn't matter. It wouldn't matter where I go in the universe. It doesn't matter. Supposing I'm up in a plane. God's steadfast love is still there.

Supposing I go up in a spaceship, supposing I go up into space in a rocket. God's steadfast love is there. God's steadfast love governs this universe. Take, for instance, God's steadfast love is involved in the whole setup of the planetary system of the sun. Just take, for instance, think of the sun, where God has set the sun. He is the one who has set the sun where it's at. Closer to this world, and we would burn. Further away from this world, and we would freeze. He said it in just the right place. And a steadfast love and as messy is such that despite the fall, despite the fact that we've run away from God, it would be very easy for God to have said, oh, well, because of that, I'm going to change the pattern of everything. I'm going to allow the world, I'm going to move the world closer to the sun, burn everybody and everything up. But he hasn't. His steadfast love, his faithfulness, it's unchanging. This is what is so amazing. But I think really what the psalmist is getting at here is that just like the oceans are inexhaustible and the heavens are unsearchable, he's really saying that's what God's love is like. You try and explore to the very furthest corners of this universe, and we go beyond where we can even begin to understand.

And he says, that's what God's steadfast love is like. All the oceans of this world, let's trawl through them right down to all the seabeds, discover what everything that's saying.

You say, oh, how on earth can we do that? And it's the same with regard to his righteousness, righteousness, to his faithfulness, to his judgments. It's extraordinary. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God. Now, as we know, one of the things that a mountain, mountains are always, they're always there, they're always the same. Anytime I drive through Skye, I spent a lot of my early years there, and I loved the coolings. You just spend a lot of time in them. And the mountain, in the Koolan Range, the Skurnegelan and these peaks, they're always the same, always since I can remember. And the first photos that I've ever seen going right back, the earliest photos that I've ever seen going way back, they looked exactly the same. Same if you go through Kintail or to the Cairngorams or down by Glencoe. Anyway, these mountain ranges, they're the same over the generations.

And that's a picture that we have here of the stability, the never-changingness of God. Your judgments are like the great deep. Now, again, there are many things that you could say here, but I think one of the things that it is saying here is that in many ways, when you look, if you're in a boat and you're looking down, and there are times you say to yourself, I would love to be able to go down and see, really see deep down underwater just the world that is there.

[20 : 18] Something I would love to be able to do. But it is inexhaustible because there's no end to what is saying. And you know what I, part of what I think here when it's talking about God's judgments, what it is saying here is, God's judgments are as deep as that. They are so deep they're past our understanding.

And God is really saying, I am not answerable to you for all that I do. See, we live in an age where we require an answer for everything. We make assessments before we do anything. We make reports after we do something. Everything is sort of governed. God says, I do my thing. And my ways and my actions are so far higher, you will often not understand them. Because you are governed in time. You are finite.

And in fact, if I were to try to explain to you just now, you wouldn't be able to understand. But the thing is, God knows. He has a purpose. And I'm saying that to some people here whose hearts are crushed through the mystery of God's providence, through things you do not understand.

God knows. Nothing ever happens by chance. Nothing has ever happened and God didn't know.

He tells us even that the sparrow, not a sparrow falls to the ground without his knowledge. It doesn't say a sparrow never falls to the ground, but it says a sparrow doesn't fall to the ground without him knowing. And you see, this is where we have to sometimes submit. And we need the faith. We need the grace. We need to say, Lord, help me. Help me to understand. Help me to understand you more. And the more we come to understand him, the more we will begin to understand a wee bit more of ourselves. And then he says, times move, how precious is your steadfast love, O Lord, verse 7, the children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. Again, just was it last week or so, we're looking at just that very picture there, the shadow of the wings. Like the mother hen, the eagle spreading the wings round, keeping protecting, safeguarding, keeping close. It's the idea of fellowship and warmth. Remember in the book of Ruth, Ruth who had lost so much, Ruth who threw in her lot with the people of God, at a great cost to herself. And Boaz found her in the field, and these wonderful words of Boaz, where he said, the Lord repay you for what you have done, and reward you. And may the

[23 : 26] God, the Lord God of Israel, whose wings you have come to take refuge, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, may he bless you. That's what Ruth had done. She had come in under the covenant, keeping wings of God. She had, not like her sister-in-law, remember, she had gone back to her old ways, to her old God, to all these things. But Ruth, she stuck with Naomi, through thick and thin, through the dark providences, through the losses, through the pains. But she stayed.

And this is the idea under, it's this beautiful picture. She was not going to be the loser, for it. And I hope, my friend, that you have come to take shelter under the wings. Again, I think with that very picture, you have an idea of the, there of the, the mercy seat, and the holy of holies, and the, the cherubim, and the wings spread over, symbolizing the presence of God, and symbolizing the place where God was dealing with sin. And you know, my friend, there is nowhere in all this universe that we can be dealt with but in and through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus was saying to the city of Jerusalem, oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I just want to gather you to myself. I want to take you into my embrace. I want to keep you. But you won't come. My friend, I hope there's nobody out there today.

And you're remaining outside, and you're saying, no, Lord, I won't come. I can't come. So many things here, just moving very quickly. Somebody once said of the, the, the God's shadow offers us better protection than all the world's armies. And then it says, they feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. You see, the Lord feeds his people. They feast on the abundance. The Lord gives us spiritual food to eat. That's what we're doing when we come here today. This is one of the things, is to come for spiritual nourishment.

And I would ask you, as I must ask myself, see, whenever you come to church, ask the Lord to give you a spiritual hunger, and ask the Lord to satisfy you with his bread. And what's his bread?

The word. The bread of life. The word of life. And as you come under the word every day, and as you come into the public meeting like this, ask the Lord to feed you. It's so important that you come to church. Don't, don't come to church prayerless. Don't come to church and just, when you're halfway through, say, well, I suppose I better start tuning in here. I better. You've come, yes, to worship God, but you've come to meet with God, to hear what he's got to say to you, and he gives you life.

[26 : 41] There's a huge responsibility in somebody like myself, or any person who goes preaching the word. And it would be very easy for me to become completely overwhelmed and inhibited by it, same as with any person who at any stage preaches a word. Because I would say to myself, I'm not sufficient for this. I do not have the ability. How can I reach all the different people here? Different age groups with different needs, different, that everybody's at a different point.

Some people here with crushed hearts. Some people here with enthusiastic hearts. Some people that are at so many different stages of development in life. I can't reach everybody. Ah, but it's not up to me.

See, this is the beauty of it. You know, you remember when Jesus fed the thousands. What did he have? He had five loaves and a couple of fish. And he took them. He broke them up, and he gave them to the disciples. And the disciples took. There wasn't very much. But the disciples went out with it. And they went out with it. And they went out with it. And the thousands were fed. And everybody was satisfied.

And there was some left over. You know, that's what the Lord does with his word. So that where a preacher is oblivious, really, to what is happening. If we are faithful to the word, the word will go out. Your responsibility and mine when I'm under the word is, open your mouth wide. And the Lord says, I will fill it. So that when we come to his house, that's how we are to come, with our mouths open that we may be filled. Verse 9, for you, for with you is the fountain of life. Oh no, verse 8, and you give them drinks from the river of your delights. Now, there's something here. A lot of people see an echo of Eden here, because the word delights and the word Eden come from the same root, the Hebrew root.

And there was this picture of Eden, where the river's running through it. It was a place of fertility and a place of life and a place of joy. But we know what happened. Man and woman sinned, and they were thrown out. Thrown away, thrown out from the place of delights.

[29 : 21] But Jesus, God has sent his son Jesus into this world to restore Eden, to restore the delights.

And while we are in this world, right, let us remember this. You know, we so often forget it. In comparison to eternity, this world is just a blip. And because this world went wrong, and because the human race went wrong at the beginning, God says, this world is only going to be for a wee while. I am not going to lose what I had intended.

Satan struck his blow. Man fell. But I'm going to prepare what is even greater. And from all the foundations of this world, he had had this in mind. If we could see the great glory that the Lord has prepared for his people. And Jesus has done that through his death.

And once again, this is a place of delight. And when you go to Revelation, that's one of the things that you read. It's like Eden all over again, with a river of life running through the center of the city. See, the Lord is in the business of restoring. Whatever is broken, he will heal. He will renew. He is going to make greater in the end. For with you is a fountain of life. In your light do we see light. Light and life go together. And of course, the light, I think in the very context, speaks of joy, but it also speaks of truth and of purity and so on. And light and life are inseparable because they both find their source in the Lord. As time has gone, can I ask you, when you look at this psalm, where are you today? Are you somebody who is resting under the shadow of his wings? Who is feasting in his house? Who is discovering delight from the river, the water of life? Who is sheltering under the shadow of his wings? Or is it possible that you are somebody that the fear of God is not before your eyes? It's an awful place to be. I don't think that there is anybody in here who would say, I have no fear of God of any shape or form, whatever. I don't think you'd be in here at all. I think any person who has come in here has some awareness of God. And I would like to think that every person in here would one day, even if today you have not yet come to that place, that you would like to think that you would like to be in here. If you eat with the Lord here, if you delight in him, you will eat with him and delight with him throughout an endless eternity.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, how amazing are your works. How fearful are your works. Help us, Lord, to bow before your sovereignty, power, and might. And may we realize that as we journey through this world, that while we are fragile and weak and vulnerable, that there is one who is mighty.

[33 : 23] May we lay hold upon his strength. Take us through all our challenges, we pray. Guide us, each one. Bless us and bless the cause of Christ to the ends of this earth. Be with those who work in dangerous and difficult places to share the work of the gospel, to live the life of the gospel.

Have mercy upon us and forgive us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen.