

Psalm 14
2018

"Man on Trial"

January 21,

I was talking to a guy this week about the Bible and how I discovered that the middle verse of the Bible is in Psalm 103, verse 1, and it says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; all that is within me, bless His holy name!" And don't forget all of his benefits towards you. So that's the middle verse of the Bible. Pretty important this book that we have, isn't it? Written by 40 authors, 66 books over several thousand years, almost three-quarters of a million words I guess. I read a couple weeks ago there are 3,268 prophecies of the Bible that already have been fulfilled. There are 3,140 waiting to be fulfilled when the Lord returns. So we're halfway home.

The longest verse in the Bible, Ezra chapter 9, I think it's verse 8, has 78 words in it. The longest name in the Bible is in Isaiah 8:1. Don't look now, but it has 19 letters or something. All of that to say, the Bible is unique. God has given to us these books to study together to learn from. It's His word. The authorship I don't think is in question. And yet there are very few portions of scriptures that are repeated word-for-word. Concepts are, even principles, theology is, but this Psalm is unique because except for a very slight variation in verse 5 and 6, this is the exact same Psalm as Psalm 53. And we find it in the book twice, word-for-word. It is the argument that when Paul writes to the Romans his great theological statement on the depravity of man and the need for a savior, that he brings this Psalm forward in chapter 1. He goes and gets it again in chapter 3 when he makes his second point, and he builds his case around this Psalm.

Now, you should always listen when God speaks. When He says something twice, maybe pay particular attention. But now it shows up four times and it's repeated word-for-word in the Psalms themselves. And the subject is always the same: It is the corruption of the human race. It is the need that we have of God's deliverance. And David presents it here in Psalm 14 almost as a trial in court, where God's indictment against man. Man is asked to testify for himself, and then God testifies of him, and then He gives His judgment. And were it not for verse

7, it would be a horrible Psalm, but unfortunately -- I shouldn't say unfortunately -- fortunately God suspends the sentence through His gracious Savior in verse 7.

So I thought we'd just take a look at this short but important Psalm that God puts in here a lot so that we might pay attention to it. I think it will help your theological outlook. It's kind of doctrinal in approach, not so much touchy-feely, but something I think that you need to know, especially as you go out to share your faith with others.

Verse 1 says this: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt. They have done abominable work, and there is none who does good."

In most cases the prosecutor works with what the accused has done and what the accused has said. God here is the prosecutor as an extra element that only He is able to add. He declares what man thinks to himself, or what man thinks about himself. In fact, He begins by revealing to us what the fool says to himself when no one but him is listening. To him, God doesn't exist. The word "there is" should be in italics in your Bible, because those are inferred, but they aren't there. It literally reads "no God." The fool says in his heart no God. No God for me. Practically, theoretically, he doesn't believe in God and he lives according to that conviction. That's the way that he approaches life. That's the way that he makes his decisions. No God. I don't need an overseer. I don't need to be responsible to anyone. I don't need to answer for anything that I do. No wonder God calls him a fool.

But why is it foolish to deny God? Why couldn't it just simply be he's mistaken or he's uninformed? Why the epithet? Why fool? Paul answers that question in his thesis on atheism, if you will, in Romans chapter 1, because he says man is a fool because he could know there is a God and he chooses rather to deny him.

If a person knew there was no God and said so, he'd be wise. Courageous even. He'd to have fight public opinion. Most people believe that there's a God in some form or another. But if you knew that there was no God, you would be a wise, courageous individual to say so. If you didn't know that there was a God, then you might be really an honest skeptic. It isn't that I don't know, I just don't know. If he was absolutely convinced there was no God and there was no evidence to support otherwise, then he would simply be mistaken. But if he knew

there was a God and then he decided to set Him aside, then he's a fool. If he has the evidence, if he has the proof, if he has the assurance, but he chooses not to follow it, that's the fool that is being talked about here.

When Paul wrote in Romans beginning in chapter 1, verse 18, he said that the wrath of God was revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and an unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness, because what could be known of God has been made manifest to them. God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly known, understood by those that are made -- those things that are made, even God's eternal power and his Godhead, so that men are without excuse. For when they knew God, they just didn't glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful. Instead their foolish thoughts became hardened and their hearts became dark. In other words, God has given to man plenty of information to know that He exists.

I would be the first to agree with you that creation does no longer communicate to man the love of God, nor even the mercy of God. You'll need to discover that at the Cross. You'll need to find that out when you come to the Bible. But there is no way to deny that there is a God. In all that has been made and all that we see around us and the thought of intelligent design, it is designed by God to bring to you an understanding of a being, of a person, of a power that exists far greater than you and I, and illicit from us a search to know Him better or a seeking to understand Him in a better way. And God's promise says if you seek Me with all of your heart, you'll find Me. Because God isn't interested in hiding Himself, He's interested that you know Him. If he wanted to hide Himself, good luck finding Him. Count to ten, close your eyes, you'll never find Him, ever. But He wants to be known.

And Paul's point is that man knows the truth, but he suppresses it. He pushes it down, if you will. He seeks to cover it, because he's godless and he's wicked. He wants nothing to do with God, who is good and holy and righteous and so unlike man. And the result is that we become fools. We seek to ignore or deny who He is, but that isn't going to change your appointment. You're still going to have to answer to Him one day for your life.

The fool says in his heart there's no God. The Hebrew word for fool is "nabal." It means senseless, and it is most often used in terms of moral senselessness. The wisest man in the world,

the intellectually brilliant can still be senseless when it comes to understanding who God is. Now, David isn't saying you're not smart enough to know God, because no one is. He's saying you won't respond to the evidence that you've been given that will lead both child and adult to come to the conclusion there's a God. And if you won't do that, you're a fool. You're senseless. You've set aside what God has shown you.

There was a fellow named Nabal in the Bible. He was a rich guy. He had a business in Carmel. He had lots of flocks and herds and all. He was the husband of a woman named Abigail in the days of David. And then as David was fighting the enemies of Israel, he protected Nabal's flocks time and again, risked his own life and that of his men to see that his property was sustained. And so when David's men at one point needed to eat because they were in the fields, it was Nabal who told them to take a hike. Very ungrateful. And David heard about it and said, I'm going to kill that guy. And he would have had not Abigail, his wife, come running and got in the way and she said, oh, please, lord, don't regard this scoundrel husband of mine, senseless. That's his name. For he is as his name. Nabal is his name. Folly is with him. Please don't kill him. And David said fine, because you interceded, I'll let him go. And word got back to Nabal that David was coming with his men to kill him, and Nabal had a heart attack and died.

Man is guilty of harboring his incorrect opinion about God in the face of the revelation that God has given to men about Himself. We have sufficient evidence to come to the right conclusion. That's what Romans 1 tells us.

Years ago, we were in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome at a time when there must have been 5,000 people in line on their knees crawling in penance to kiss the feet of the saint. And I remember looking and thinking, you should know better. I mean, read 80 pages of your Bible and you'll quickly understand that the God who made us hates idolatry, how He feels about graven images or us praying to them.

But here's a man -- and notice this is the man's testimony in court. No God for me. He has his own religion, but his religion is no God for me. And the Lord says they're corrupt. Corrupt, it's a word that means ruined. You find it, I think, four different times used in Genesis 6 when the Lord looked down upon the earth and He saw how ruined it had become because of sin. Even though the ruin of man's heart was hidden sometimes, and obviously so, behind good works and good manners, yet God

declares and applies to each of us that we are fools.

Now, lest you just think that's somebody else He's talking about, He's not. Every man is a fool until he meets the Lord. Notice verse 1, there is none who does good. Verse 2, there is none that understands. Verse 3, they've all turned away, they're all corrupt. There is none who does good. No, not one. Lest you go well, that's not me. No, it's you, and me and the guy sitting right next to you. That fellow asleep at the end of your pew, that guy too. All, all, none, any, no one; that's the extent. The atheist is but just one example of man's general problem with God. So the testimony of man is no God for me, and the Lord says, but you're corrupt. Your works are abominable. There's none of you that can measure up.

And then the Lord steps forwards to tell us His testimony of man. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any who would understand, who would seek after God, but they had all turned aside. They had altogether become corrupt and there was none who did good, no not one. The Lord looked down from heaven. Literally God bent over at the waist to get a closer look. It wasn't that He was confused standing up straight. But the implication is God is interested in what we do, and so He leans forward. He gets down there where you are. He wants to hear what you have to say and what's going on. He pays particular attention. You can read that same language in Genesis Chapter 6, verse 5, when the Lord came down to see why the flood had to happen. He looked around to see if there was any good, and man was just evil continuously. You find it in Genesis Chapter 11, verse 5, when at the Tower of Babel, the Lord leaned down, saw the plans of men, how they'd organized against God, and decided to confuse their languages and eventually separate them so they couldn't accomplish their sinfulness that quickly. He slowed down their wickedness. God says of it in man here.

So here's man's testimony in verse 1, but then the Lord takes the stand. All eyes are upon the Lord. He speaks infallibly. He has at His disposal every characteristic trait that we know God has. He's all knowing. He sees everything. His memory is perfect. His understanding is without limits. His assessment is spot on. We're fools. He can't be mistaken, He doesn't lie, won't be intimidated. He knows every man and every woman and every child. He knows every thought of your heart, every motive, every intent, every action, or one that was planned. He knows the place, He knows the time. He can even tell you the impact and the influence that you will have. There's never been a witness like Him. And He bends over at the waist to see if

there's any good.

Hebrews chapter 4, verse 13 says, "There is no creature that is hidden from His sight. We all stand before Him open and naked in front of the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account." And the Lord testifies of man. He looks for anyone who shows any interest. One person willing to seek Him on his own. His observation, His conclusion, verse 3, there's none. Without God's help, none of us are running for the Lord because we're fools and sin has made us so. If God had not come looking for us, we'd never find Him, ever. Oh, I came to my senses and went to the Lord -- wrong. I was lost, but I found myself -- wrong. You got no luck, no such luck. If it isn't for the goodness of God, you aren't here this morning. But God's goodness brought you, saved you, found you.

No defense for man, verse 3, is possible. He's guilty and the judge has to give his verdict. He can't find one that's seeking God. And God's conclusion about His creation is pretty clear. Whether we forgot Him or just sought to forget Him, rest assured He hasn't forgotten about you. His eyes are constantly going to and fro. He's bent at the waist. His assessment is pretty clear: we've all turned aside. We did it collectively, we do it individually. We turn from God's word. We turn away.

When Isaiah began to write to the children of Israel at a time when the nation had forsaken the Lord, he started in chapter 1 with the words, This is a sinful nation and a people that are laden down with iniquity and they're a brood of evildoers and their children are corrupt and they've forsaken the Lord, and He provoked him to anger and they've turned away backward and they revolt more and more and their head is sick and their heart is faint. There's no soundness from the head to the foot. They're just in sin. They're overwhelmed. The Lord says that here, we've all turned aside.

The depravity of man, if you will call it that, is clearly taught in the Bible. If the Lord did not turn on a light, you'd never see one. If He didn't come to speak to you, you'd never hear from Him; nor would you care. That's why we are told in Ephesians that it is by grace we are saved through faith, but that grace is not of ourselves, and neither is that faith. God stirs the heart. Oh, you have a part to play. You have to respond. But understand this: salvation begins with Him. It's good to know. It's good to know, because that means you didn't just wander in here and you shouldn't have got saved, but you did. No, God went looking for you and here you are.

Man is totally depraved. The natural man, Paul will write to the Corinthians, doesn't receive the things of God's spirit. They are foolishness to him. Isn't that what it says? Nor can they know them. They are spiritually understood or discerned.

Any hope of salvation has to start with the Lord, which is why you get to verse 7 and you read, "Oh, that the salvation of God might come out of Zion! Oh, that God would come and find us. Because man's testimony of himself was no God for me, and the Lord's testimony of man is nobody seeks Him, not even one.

In fact, he writes here in verse 3 they've all become corrupt, but this word is different from the word "ruin" in verse 1. This is the word for tainted. It talks about influence. Sin has corrupted from within. I don't know if you've ever accidentally gone on vacation, but left a bottle of milk in your refrigerator and you come back two weeks later and you go, oh. It's pretty much tainted. You open the refrigerator and all of life changes right before your eyes. That's what this word means. It's been influenced.

No one does good, no, not one. You maybe have heard people say -- I know I have -- well, I'm doing the best that I can, and if that's not good enough for God, then He's not fair. Wrong. Your good enough is not good enough. We are totally depraved. The only one good enough was Jesus. You and I, swing and a miss.

And it is almost with shock that you read in verse 4 the Lord exclaiming, although he knows, "Have" all of the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and they don't call upon the name of the Lord?"

Man continues to reject God, though the evidence is there that we should believe in Him. They continue to say He doesn't exist, or your faith in Him is just a crutch and you're a weak individual, as if there'll be no accounting. Look, He calls them workers of iniquity. Why don't they call on Me with all the evidence they have? Why don't they turn? Why don't they respond? Because they have the evidence. Despite all of that, they say no. Creation, the wonderful work of God's spirit, the testimony of the church. God is with the righteous, verse 5. He is with the poor. He'll sustain the weak. He'll have His way in the long run. Despite all of that, there are so many that just continue to hold their ground. Ignorant of the truth, intolerant of the Lord, indifferent to the evidence. I just

want to be a fool. And you are.

But notice what the Lord says of them in verse 5, "There they are there in great fear." It's interesting that man is so brazen and bold in his expression of his opinion about God in the present tense, and yet the Lord paints him as someone who is gripped with fear about what is coming, and that his future is uncertain. And we know from a biblical fact that on judgment day he's going to be in horror that he'd made the wrong choice. He should have listened.

Psalm 53, as we said, was exactly the same. In verse 5 of Psalm 53 it's a little different. It says, "There they are in great fear where no fear was." In other words, they choose to -- they lead a life of unbelief when they could have just come to the Lord and had peace.

We sing in church saying come, Lord. It's going to be great. We'll all gather together in glory. And yet the world sits at home wondering what comes next. No assurance, no understanding. They might strut their selves outwardly, but their hearts are kind of gripped with an unexplainable dread. And they better look up before it's too late, but the Lord says of them, "There they are in great fear," while God is with the generation of the righteous. He's in the company of -- he's in the circle of righteous. Righteous, those who do what God likes and appreciates, those who live their lives in a way that pleases God. That's where you'll find the Lord. Not amongst the world, the fools who have evidence and they won't walk with Him, but they'll trade "I'll have it my way" for fear and dread. And then there's you and I, who have traded in sin and death for life.

They underestimate, verse 6, God's special care for the weak and the downtrodden and oppressed, whose hope is in the Lord. By the way, a majority of the saints fall into this category of the world. "You shame the counsel of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge." God is with those in need. It's those who don't see their need that find themselves in opposition to God. The judgment of God is pronounced: man is foolish, he has no hope. The court is cleared. The convicted are turned and carried away to execution. And it's terrible verses. If you didn't have verse 7 it would be terrible, but we have one more verse. And out of nowhere, all of a sudden, this verse appears. And I would say to you it's completely out of step with the rest of the chapter. Horrible news, six verses, and then we read, "Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out Zion! And when the

Lord will bring back the captivity of His people, Jacob can rejoice and Israel can be glad." A wonderful new truth has arisen. The court is reconvened. It is brought to the attention of the court by the witness Himself, and the lament is oh, that God would come to save. And the witness drops a bombshell: God has a salvation plan, one that will cause the banished to not be expelled, that there's life to be had.

Now, truly verse 7 finds its complete fulfillment during the great tribulation and the Lord's returning as He delivers Israel from the antichrist's plan and He brings His people into the millennial kingdom, but it is just as equally applied to the salvation that God brings to every heart today, when the Lord brings back the captivity of His people. This same savior that will transform Israel can transform your life, because He comes to save fools. He comes to give sinners life. His name is Jesus. He's the son of God.

When Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, I think it's verse 30, he makes the comparison between the true wisdom that the gospel brings with the apparent wisdom of the wise of the world, the smartest that the world has to offer. And then he sets beside them somebody who knows the Lord and knows His word. And Paul says that God has destroyed human wisdom by giving us Jesus, who is the wisdom of God. And in Jesus you will find yourself to be holy and righteous and redeemed. The world's wisdom, you'll just live in fear. You got nothing going for you. You got no hope. Left to ourselves, we're going to run away from God. But God hasn't wanted us to be gone. He wants us near. He sent His Son so we can have fellowship with Him. He's given us light so that we could make the right choice. It isn't lack of information. It's the intent of your own heart that makes you a fool.

It's like when the Lord says to the church, hey, get out into the world and preach the gospel. The fields are white on the harvest. He's literally saying, there's plenty of fruit out there, but the laborers are few. If we don't see the world around us as pickable, as ripe and able to be reaped, we're going to say nothing. But if we see it from God's perspective, there's lots to be done.

Good thing for verse 7. The court will offer a stay of execution. It's a stay that is enforced today. You can go to Jesus and find life or you can be the fool and live in your own sin and stand before God guilty and have no excuse. You're not going to be able to say I didn't know. He'll say I gave you

plenty to go on. 3,200 fulfilled prophecies over thousands of years and every one of them exactly so. Try that on your own.

The fool denies what is plainly evident. The fool denies moral authority in the universe. The fool believes in a tremendous effect without a cause. The fool is gambling that he's got it right, while looking away from the truth of God found in his creation and living a fearful life instead. That is a foolish way to live. And God doesn't say it once or twice, He says it four different places, so we wouldn't miss it.

Thank God for verse 7. He has suspended your sentence for eternity through the suffering and bloodshed of His Son. Oh, that salvation will come. Well, He's come. And not only that, He's coming back.