

THE GODLESS LIFE, AND THE CURE

Psalms 14, 53

Intro: We noted last week the similarity between Psalm 14 and Psalm 53. But one major difference between the two is that there is a distinct emphasis upon Jehovah in Psalm 14, but none at all in Psalm 53. Instead, in Psalm 53 the emphasis is upon Elohim entirely. One explanation of this is that Psalm 14 is primarily pointed at the Jews, whereas in Psalm 53 it is at the Gentiles. However, there seems to be an attempt to show in both Psalms that this is a universal problem. By nature there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile in their relationship to the true God. The Lord is not only the God of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles, as Paul pointed out so well in Romans 3:29.

We saw also that the reading in the Hebrew text is not, “There is no God,” but simply, NO GOD! It can mean a denial of the existence of God (and that is what many people say they believe), but Paul’s words in Rom. 1:20 and 21 indicate that God has placed an understanding in every human heart of His existence. Many people live as though there is no God, but one way in which Jew and Gentile are united because of sin, is that they don’t want have anything to do with God. Pharaoh, about whom we have been reading the book of Exodus, is a good example of this. He was confronted with all kinds of evidence of the existence of God, and yet he constantly, until the day of his death, resisted all appeals to make himself subject to the will of God.

And we all have experienced that feeling. Sin makes us proud and gives us a feeling of independence, of self-sufficiency. We want our own way, not God’s way. But our Psalm indicates that the rejection of God and His will brings tragic results. In our day we are seeing many examples of corruption in high places as well as in low places, and all of the way in between the two. We are seeing wealthy men led off to jail because of their dishonesty in business, and at the other end of the line we see very wicked men taking little girls off and finally murdering them. We might call these the extremes, but the rest of humanity fills in the gap in between.

Fausset in the JFB commentary says, “Corruption of life flows necessarily from atheism in the heart. Man is the same ‘corrupt’ being in all ages as he was before the flood (Gen. vi. 12).” This is found in Vol. III, p. 129. This is what we are by nature, “corrupt,” and it can only be changed by

the grace of God. Delitzsch said in his commentary that David in these two Psalms “makes this prominent as the very extreme and depth of human depravity, that there can be among men those who deny the existence of God” (Psalms, I, p. 204), or, as we could also add, *that there should be people who do not want to have anything to do with God*. But this is the way we all are by nature. What we are in our hearts is what corrupts us in our lives. This is our ruin. This is why we by nature are abominable before God.

And so because we are corrupt by nature, we do what is abominable before God, and are totally incapable of doing anything that is pleasing to God. “There is none that doeth good.” So, if we are incapable of pleasing God, our condition by nature is hopeless.

All of this is in verse 1.

Condescending to our low estate, David approaches the Lord as carrying on His own investigation to see if this is really true because this is a terrible indictment of the human family if this is case. Of course, God is infinite in His wisdom, and He does not need to conduct a survey. But this is divine condescension.

What was God looking for? To see if there were any that did understand the true situation, and, consequently, seek God! What were the results of His investigation? You have it in verse 3: universal total depravity! This is what God saw at the time before the flood.

5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5).

And the fact that the Apostle Paul quoted Psa. 14 (and Psa. 53) in his day means that over those one thousand years from David to Paul there had been absolutely no change in man’s nature!

But now when we come to verse 4 we find another group of people along with the masses of people in the world. Unchanged people are called “workers of iniquity.” But there is another group whom the Lord called, “my people.” These are people who started out like everyone else, but who have been changed by the grace of God. They are a chosen people, an elect people, not chosen because there was any good that was in them, but people who God had awakened to their sinful condition, and whom He had brought to Himself.

But what do we notice about them? We notice that there is conflict, a deadly conflict, not by the Lord's people against the workers of iniquity, but of the workers of iniquity against the Lord's people. And the workers of iniquity are out to destroy the Lord's people with the same delight that they would sit down to eat a meal. In fact, the imagery indicates that the workers of iniquity find in the destruction of the Lord's people their chief joy. Hengstenberg translated "who eat up my people as they eat bread," *who eating my people, eat bread*. By this David evidently meant that killing the Lord's people was to the workers of iniquity no more sinful than eating a meal. In fact, it was justifiable and even lawful to do so. It is a terrible picture of the sinfulness of the human heart. Man by nature suppresses the truth in his own heart, and he will do what he needs to do to keep anyone else from giving him the truth. And the depth of his sin is seen in the fact that when he confronts people whose hearts have been changed, and who find their greatest joy in God, they do not call upon God.

However, the workers of iniquity have never been able to destroy the truth of God which is also the truth about God! Instead, time and time again they have come out of the conflict like Nebuchadnezzar did, or like Saul of Tarsus did. You all remember the story of Saul of Tarsus going to Damascus with papers which permitted him to bring every Christian he could find in that city back to Jerusalem in chains, but he never made it! Instead, God struck him down on the road. And Luke, in relating that incident when Paul was met by the Lord, tells us that Saul fell down to the ground, and he was "trembling and astonished" (Acts 9:6). And he asked the Lord what the Lord wanted him to do. And then he did it.

David, who knew what it was to face the opposition of the workers of iniquity, and who had been delivered time and time again by the mighty power of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, wrote, "Then were they in great fear; for God is in the congregation of the righteous." The workers of iniquity could not see Him, but He was there, and that was what made them afraid. In Psa. 53:5 adds, "where no fear was." Things often go along with wicked men so that they feel that they have nothing to fear until they are confronted in some way by the Lord, as the Apostle Paul was.

Now we need to remember that neither David, nor Paul later, was saying that all men are bad in that they are continually a threat to all other people. They were saying that the capacity for all kinds of evil is in every

human heart, and life on earth would certainly be impossible if it were not for the restraining work of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 6 shows God speaking to “the poor,” or the afflicted, tried, humbled people of God. The NASB translates verse 6 this way: “You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, but the Lord is His refuge.”

What is “the counsel of the poor,” or *of the afflicted*? It has to be the Word of God. It is the guidance that God gives His people by His Word. The word “counsel” can also be translated prudence, or wisdom, or it can be a reference to the Word as showing the plan of God for His people, their future prospect as well as their daily living. People who do not know the Lord seek to ridicule the Word of God. But the hope of the Lord’s people in addition to the comfort that they derive from the Word is that “the Lord” is their “refuge.” Solomon said in Prov 18:10:

10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Cf. Psa. 46.

This is the theme of so many of the Psalms, isn’t it? Cf. Psa. 23, 34, 37, 103. Our trials and the opposition of the world can actually be a great blessing to us because they drive us to seek our refuge in the Lord. We are driven to depend solely upon Him.

(Explain the meaning of God’s Name, “the LORD.)

Note how this verse is rendered in Psa. 53:5b.

But the child of God can never be satisfied just with his own security. Our salvation is not like that. We want two things: 1) We want to see others, even our enemies, brought to salvation. 2) We look forward to that great day when all of our struggles will be over, and we will have entered into the fulness of our salvation in Christ.

And so this is the prayer with which the Psalm comes to a close. It is a prayer for the coming of the Messiah. It is a prayer for the salvation of all of the people of God. Then “Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.” As you know, these were the two names of Isaac’s twin who was in the line of the Messiah. The nation itself could be called, Jacob-Israel. The names represent the old and the new, or rather the old made new. And

that is what salvation is! When the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ came, His death was for sinners past, present, and future. There never has been but one Savior, and there never will be another because Jesus Christ has offered a sacrifice for everyone who has ever been saved, who is being saved, and who will be saved in the days to come.

If you are reading according to our church Bible Reading Schedule, you are now reading in the NT the book of Romans. I never cease to marvel at what Paul wrote about the people of Israel in both Romans 9 and 10. When you read those chapters, think of how Paul suffered at the hands of his countrymen. And yet his heart was not full of hatred and a desire to see them fall under the judgment of God. Instead, the burden of his heart was that they would be saved. In fact, I have never to this day known of anyone who had the burden for the lost that he had as he expressed it in Rom. 9:3. Let me read Rom. 9:1-3 as I close tonight. This closely parallels what David wrote in Psa. 14:7 and 53:6.

- 1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,
- 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.
- 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:1-3).

It makes no difference whether a person is a Jew or a Gentile, true and lasting joy is only to be found in the salvation open to all in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's be thankful that the Lord has saved us. And let us be thankful that He continues to keep us – and always will! But let us pray that the Lord will use us to carry His Gospel to those around us who need to know the Savior.

(Tell about speaking at the Volunteers of America, and what I told them about the Gospel.)