

“THE WORKERS OF INIQUITY”

Psa. 53:4-6

See also Psa. 14:4-7

Intro: I decided, and I trust that this is of the Lord, to spend one more Sunday on these two Psalms: 14 and 53. We might refer to them as *twin Psalms*, and they are almost identical twins, but not quite. There have been various explanations as to why we have two Psalms so much alike. The most likely is that they were written at two separate times to meet different needs, and yet based on the same foundation of either the rejection of God or even the denial of God’s existence.

Since I have been using Psalm 14 as a basis for my two previous messages, I want to use Psalm 53 tonight. Actually I could use either one because the question I want to call your attention to is in both Psalms. You find it in verse 4 of both Psalms. The only difference is in Psalm 14 the word “all” appears. The question is: “Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?” In Psalm 53 it is simply, “Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?”

Our first task in considering this question is to ask, What did David mean by “the workers of iniquity”?

I. “THE WORKERS OF INIQUITY.”

First let me say that this is a term by which David, directed by the Holy Spirit (as all of the Biblical writers were directed), used this term to describe all of the human family *except for the group known as “My people” to whom David referred in the next clause in the verse: “Who eat up my people as they eat bread.”* This does not mean that all of the people of the world are guilty of all kinds of iniquity, nor does it mean that God’s people are sinless. I hope those distinctions will become clear as we go on looking at this expression. All of God’s people were formerly “workers of iniquity,” but, by the grace of God, they have been rescued from that kind of a life, and now have as their primary objective in life, a desire to please God and to delight in Him.

Well, what did David mean that the people of the world are “workers of iniquity”?

I think that most readers of the Bible would recognize that the word

“iniquity” is one of the Biblical words for sin. But Hebrew scholars tell us that there are different words used for sin to bring out various aspects of sin. They all speak of that which is contrary to God, and displeasing to God, but individually they look at sin from different angles.

The word that David used here for sin is more often than not, translated as it is here, “iniquity.” One Hebrew scholar has this to say about the Hebrew word which is translated “iniquity”:

. . . the word **Aven** suggests not so much [a] breach of law,” *i.e.*, God’s law, or His Word, “or injury done to another, *as a course of conduct which will in the end prove unprofitable to the doer* (italics mine). It presents the evil devices of man in their false, hollow, and unreal aspect; and by the use of this word the inspired writers put the stamp of nothingness or unreality upon every departure from the [Word] of God, whether it consists of wrongdoing, evil devising, false speaking, or idolatrous worship (Girdlestone, Robert Baker, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*).

Sin often is made to appear to us as something very desirable, something which will make us really happy, something that is absolutely essential to our pleasure. But all of those appearances are to cover up the fact that they are not-at-all what they appear to be. The appearance of pleasure is like a mirage. It just is not there. Or if it is there momentarily, it is not real to think that it can produce what it promises. This is a good definition of idolatry. The idol may have eyes and ears and a mouth and feet, but it can’t see, nor hear, nor speak, nor walk. It is just like it did not exist at all. That is one way to look at sin. It is iniquity.

But what about “workers”? What does this contribute to the phrase, “workers of iniquity”? “Workers” are those who do anything habitually, systematically, as a way of life. It describes people of this world as in constant pursuit of that which they can never attain. They do what they know is not right, but they hope to make it right. The word “iniquity” pictures for us the deceptive nature of sin, all sin – not just some, but ALL SIN!

Now the full question is, “Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?”

Obviously David would not want to go on record as saying that the people of the world are a bunch of morons, or imbeciles. There are many very brilliant people in the world. And you will find them in every generation. There are people who devote their lives to the accumulation of knowledge

in all areas of learning. If my folks were living today they would absolutely astounded at the advances that have been made in all realms of knowledge from a human standpoint. What, then, was David referring to when he spoke of the people of the world as having no knowledge?

I want to answer that question from Psalm 53. The same answers are to be found in Psalm 14.

II. IN WHAT WAYS IS THE MAN OF THE WORLD WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE?

Or to state it another way, How do the people of world demonstrate their lack of knowledge – and of what kind of knowledge?

A. The knowledge of sin.

You would not think that it would take the Bible to describe the awful nature of sin just by the effects which sin produces. With all of the terrible things that are going on in the world, and the tragic effects that sin produces, why is it that people don't realize that something is very wrong in the human heart. It is because sin has a blinding, a hardening effect, upon the human mind. We know that something is terribly wrong with man just by observing human behavior, and by noticing the tendencies and the temptations that we all face in our own hearts. By nature we are like the fool described in these two Psalms. By nature we think that we are self-sufficient. If there is a God, we can do without Him. And we are experiencing in our own country the tragic, tragic results of sin.

Do you know how and where we ought to get our information about sin? Many years ago now I remember that one of my seminary professors said that we don't learn about sin by experiencing sin. Sin blinds us, and by sinning we only go deeper and deeper into sin. This professor said, "Learn about sin from your Bible." He told us that in the Bible sin is stripped of all of its glamor and trappings, and we see what a dreadful, deadly, and damning thing sin is.

The reason that the world has no knowledge of sin and its real effects, both for time and eternity, is because they don't read the Bible. But let me as this word of caution for those of us who know the Lord. The only reason we can tolerate sin in our own lives is that we are failing to read our Bibles as we should, asking God to deliver us from all forms of sin,

and to make us long to be what He wants us to be. And what does He want us to be? He saved us to make us like His Son. We can't make ourselves like the Lord Jesus, but there is power in the Word of God, and there is power in the Spirit of God. There is power available to us in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The Psalmist said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11). What did he mean that he had hidden the Word in his heart? Did he mean that he had memorized it? Probably. But he meant more than that. He meant that he had taken the word into his heart where it would transform His life. We desperately need to know the doctrines of Scripture, but the only way we can be sure that we are making progress in knowing God's Word is by the effect that it has in what we are and the way we live.

The reason that sin is running rampant today is because so little attention is given to the Word of God. In many cases, no attention at all. The less there is of the Bible, the more there will always be of sin.

David was saying, "Don't any of the workers understand this? Don't they understand what sin is, and what it will do to you?" The person who doesn't want to hear the Scriptures, and who doesn't want anything to do with God, is going to be doomed by sin, now and forever!

But let me point out another fact that David was marveling about.

B. The knowledge of God.

Now I don't mean to imply that David thought that the workers of iniquity should know these things, but he was pointing out what they did not know that we might understand, and maybe some of them could learn, what they needed to know.

Stephen Charnock, in his amazing two-volume set on his *Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God*, had this to say about every culture and every generation throughout human history. He said that there never has been a culture at any time any place in the world that did not recognize the existence of a god, or gods. It proves what Paul said in Romans that God has placed in every human heart the consciousness that there is a God. But sin has so corrupted man that even though he has this recognition in his heart, instead of seeking the true God, he makes his

own gods, and worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. And so people make God what they want Him to be, not as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, in Christ, and even in nature itself.

David was dealing with this in verse 2 of our Psalms. He tells us that God is able to see great distances, and He sees everything clearly. I read this morning that verse in John 3:19 that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Do men honestly think that God can't see in the dark just as well as He sees in the light? Just because there are many things that we don't know, do they think that God is just like we are? And just because they say, "No God for me," or that "there is no God," does that mean that God doesn't exist, or that since we don't want to have anything to do with Him, He won't have anything to do with us? Is God like the truck drivers sign on the back of his truck which says, "If you can't see my mirror, I can't see you"?

We have been learning in our study of Exodus that everything that God did during the time of the ten plagues was that Pharaoh, and the Egyptians, and Moses, and the Israelites, might "know that He was the Lord." God sees all of us all of the time. He not only knows where we are, but He knows what we are doing. And He even knows what we are thinking. And there never has been a man, or any nation, that could keep God from doing what He intended to do.

"Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge" – of God? They take His Name in vain. They violate His laws. They refuse to give Him glory. In our generation Mother Nature gets more attention than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. People will follow their false gods in droves, but God will not tolerate this ignorance forever. The greatest need in America today, and in every nation on the face of the earth, is to know God, the one living and true God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Author of our salvation.

The ignorance of God among men is the most amazing wonder of the world, and it is all traceable to sin.

But let me make one more point.

C. The knowledge of "My people."

Perhaps we are to blame because we are not a greater influence in the

world than we are, but here David referred to the fact that instead of asking the Lord's people to tell them why they are the way they are, they eat them up! The very people who could tell them about God, and who could tell them about Christ, and salvation from sin, they want to destroy. They don't understand us, but most of the time they don't want to understand us. And yet sometimes you will hear a person telling about their salvation out of the world and out of the sin, say something like this: "I had a friend. I didn't know why he was the way he was, but I knew that I wanted whatever he had. I wanted to be like him. And I found out that what he, or she, had was *Christ!*"

I am afraid that we live in a generation of Christians who seek to be like the world in order to win the world, when what we need to be is to be like Christ so that people will ask us to give them a reason for the hope that is in us. See 1 Pet. 3:15. Remember what the Lord said in Matt. 7:14-16:

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

Do you know what it means that people will "glorify your Father which is in heaven"? It means that they have come to know your Father as their heavenly Father because of the light in your life has brought them to Him who truly is "the Light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).

And so I bring you again to the last verse of both of these Psalms. The remedy for man's sin comes from Zion in Jerusalem. It was in that area that our Lord offered Himself to the Father as a Sacrifice for the sins of all who would ever believe on Him.

Concl: It is the knowledge of Sin that causes people to realize their need of a Savior. It is their knowledge of God which enables them to see that they cannot save themselves. But it is also their knowledge of God that teaches sinners that God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. And then it is among the Lord's people that those who come to Christ learn more of Him through the Word, and join with the people of God in living to glorify God.