

LIGHT FOR DARK DAYS

Psalm 36

Intro: Several weeks ago I spoke on Psalm 37 which was the last Psalm from which our memory verses were taken last winter. In reading through the Psalms recently I came, as many of you did, to Psalm 37 again, but I was struck with the apparent connection that there is between Psalm 36 and 37. Both are Psalms of David, so I know of no reason why they could not have been written about the same time, and that that is the reason that the two Psalms appear together in the book of Psalms.

One thing that is very clear from reading the Psalms of David, is that David, the King of Israel, was faced with great opposition from his enemies throughout his life. Often he feared for his life. With all of the victories that the Lord gave him over his enemies, none of those victories seem to have come about easily. Therefore, much of David's Psalms, which amount to about half of the one hundred and fifty Psalms, have to do with troubles that he had from his enemies. But, thankfully, they also tell us how he coped with his troubles. In addition, we see how he benefited from them as a child of God. And that is what makes them so valuable to us today, as they have been to the people of God since they were written.

Being a child of God in a fallen world never has been easy. Some day God is going to do away with all of His enemies who are also the enemies of His people. One of my students at Multnomah said to me years ago, "I never had any trouble until I became a Christian." As I remember it had caused trouble with her non-Christian parents. She had lost friends her own age because of the change the Lord had made in her life. I am sure that she found new friends who would help her and be a blessing to her, but at the time it looked to her like the Christian life was a hard life. But the reality is that the Lord uses those difficult relationships and circumstances to strengthen us, and often we see how the Lord uses our trials to cause our loved ones and friends to think about their relationship with God. Nevertheless, it is true that this world is not friendly toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course, when the Spirit of God begins to work in people's hearts, then things can be different. Unfortunately a lot of church today try to make their services attractive to the world, but that is never done without some compromise with the teaching of Scripture and the truth of the Gospel.

Psalm 36 (2)

One day this past week I read Psalms 36 and 37 to Lucille, and she could see the connection between the two Psalms. If I have time this morning, I may read into Psalm 37 to show you what I mean. But if not, possibly some of you can do that after you finish your noon meal today.

But now let us look at Psalm 36.

The first four verses of this Psalm speak of the character of the man who is described by David as “the wicked.” And you will notice that he is spoken of as a single person all through the first four verses. The words, “the wicked,” could refer to one person, or it could refer to thousands of people. So in verse 1 David could have said, “The transgressions (pl.) of the wicked saith . . . there is no fear of God before *their* eye,” but instead of *their*, he said “his.” And then notice that in verses 2, 3, and 4 it is all in the singular, not *they*, but “he.”

Now I don’t know the particular reason for this. It may be that David was actually talking about a particular person. It is a word which describes all people who do not know the Lord and who are not, therefore, concerned at all about pleasing the Lord. Abraham used this word in contrast with the word “righteous” in his prayer for Lot in Genesis 18 when He asked the Lord if He would destroy the righteous with the wicked. There are certainly degrees of wickedness among men. But to be classes as wicked is to be put in the category in which all of us are by nature where we not only do not please God, but we are not interested in pleasing God. A wicked person may even deny that there is a God and yet the Bible specifically tells us that down in his heart he knows that there is!

Here the wicked are linked with transgression. What is the meaning of the word, transgression? It speaks of a revolt against God. It is rebellion against God and His Word. So that whatever a wicked man may claim himself to be, if he disregards the Word of God, or openly rejects the Scriptures, it told David, and it should tell us, that that person does not fear God. He refuses to humble himself before God. He will do his own will in opposition to God’s will. He is the kind of a person who speaks of the Bible as an old book that is out of date. He tries to convince himself that there are no absolutes in this world. He believes himself to be free to do whatever he wants to do. You can find people like this all over Portland, all over Oregon, all over the United States, and all over the whole world.

Psalm 36 (3)

What else is true of him? He flatters himself. He is proud. He is smooth in his sinfulness. The point that the Psalmist seems to be making in these verses is that he begins dealing with sin in a subtle way like he is in control, but as he goes on in his sin, he sees, and others can see as well, that he is not the master, but that he has become sin's slave. He may minimize the power of sin to begin with, but then he lies awake at night devising ways of sinning. And ends not abhorring the worst of sins.

I remember years ago hearing a verse of poetry which describes the subtle was in which sin overpowers people. I found it in Derek Kidner commentary on this Psalm. It was written by Alexander Pope and tells how sin can come more acceptable to us or anyone else. Listen to what he wrote. He used the word "mien," (pronounced *mean*) at the end of the first line. It is defined as appearance or behavior. Here is the verse:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet, seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

It seems that this is what King David was seeking to tell us here. And perhaps the singular all the way through the first four verses indicates that it does not take a lot of sinning to move us from a supposed master over sin to a literal and hopeless slave of sin. Kidner adds his own comment:

This is no anticlimax, for it shows a wholesale reversal of values, leaving good powerless to attract, and evil (hopeless) to repel (p. 146)..

We all need to realize that the temptation to sin is usually progressive. By steps we are gradually conquered. When Achan was explaining to Joshua what he had done to take at Jericho that which was forbidden by God, and which resulted in the death of his whole family, he said, "I saw . . . I coveted . . . I took . . ."

We warn young people about playing with sin, taking the first drink, trying drugs just once, looking at pornography just to see what other people are looking at. But we all need to be careful with any playing with sin, any compromise with evil. We know what sin is, but we think that we can stay in control if we do it just once. But that one time may be the first step toward total disaster. We are not to learn about sin by experiencing it. The safest place to learn about sin is from the Bible. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians 6:17-18:

Psalm 36 (4)

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Never compromise with sin. The penalty is always greater than you think that it will be.

But is there anything else that we should do if we are to avoid the tragedy of sin? David, who knew too well the subtle attractiveness of sin, says here in Psalm 36, “Yes there is something we can do, and the results are certain to be the best! Look with me now at verses 5 through 9.

What was David doing when he wrote these five verses? He was telling us that what we need to do is to concentrate on knowing the Lord, our God. Let me remind you of what Daniel said about this in Daniel 11:32 where he wrote these words: “the people that do know their God shall be strong.” Let us all ask ourselves, How long would it take me to tell what I know about God, or about the Lord Jesus Christ, or about the Holy Spirit? I am not asking about WHAT THE LORD DOES, but I am asking how much you know about WHO THE LORD IS. Both of these subjects are very important, but we often concentrate on what the Lord does rather than who the Lord is, and that is where we get into trouble.

David goes from telling us how subtle, and deceptive, and enslaving sin is, to speak to us about five of the glorious attributes, or characteristics, of the Lord our God. And each one of these applies equally to God the Father, to God the Son, and to God the Holy Spirit.

Note what these five attributes are:

- 1) In verse 5, His mercy,
- 2) And His faithfulness.
- 3) In verse 6, His righteousness,
- 4) And His judgments.
- 5) In verse 7, His lovingkindness.

Now these are not all of the attributes of the members of the Godhead, but they are five important ones that have to do with our warfare with sin, and the struggles that we all have with sin. Being sinners by nature even though we are saved and given a new nature, yet we are vulnerable to the temptation to sin. Although we are saved, we are still attracted to sin.

Psalm 36 (5)

And so what we need is such a knowledge of WHO GOD IS that our hearts will have that knowledge of the Lord, that fellowship with Him, that we will be enabled by the power of God to say “no” to temptation and to sin. Let’s spend just a moment on each attribute, and then in the days to come we can give more attention to each one.

What about the Lord’s mercy? What does mercy mean? Speaking of God’s attitude toward you and me, it means that the Lord is kind, unspeakably kind. It can be a synonym for love. God loves which can only be understood as we understand the death of our Lord on the Cross. We didn’t seek Him, but He sought us. Salvation wasn’t our idea; it was God’s. And that love, that kindness toward us, does not vacillate or change like our love for Him so often does. God is always merciful.

What about God’s faithfulness? The word “truth” is often used for faithfulness, the faithfulness of God, in the OT. He is always what He is. He stands by His Word. He is unchanging and unchangeable. You never need to question is deep, deep interest in you. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:13 that “if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” The Lord doesn’t change in His attitude toward us just because we are unfaithful to Him. It is not just that He will not; it is that He cannot. Oh, what a comfort that is! Peter could deny with oaths that he even knew the Lord, but that made the Lord faithful in seeing Peter restored. Only the Lord would have dealt with Peter as He did.

Going on to verse 6, what about God’s righteousness? The Lord is always just, always right and righteous. There are many times that we do not understand the ways of the Lord, such as when a little baby is still-born, but we can always be sure that God has not done something to harm us, but instead He is always intent on bringing greater blessing into our lives.

Hee again there is no variation with God. God is the God of the impossible, but when He doesn’t do what He can do, we still know that He is right, and we are wrong to question Him.

And then we come in verse 6 also to His judgments. These are His decisions, His decrees. It has to do with the ways of the Lord. This is what the Lord Jesus was submitting to the Father in, when He prayed that the will of the Father be done. Again, we do not always understand, but we can say with Abraham, as he prayed for Lot in Sodom, “Shall not the Judge of the all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Or see Ephesians

Psalm 36 (6)

1:11-12 where Paul, speaking of Christ, said.

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

And, finally, in this list of the attributes of God which David has given to us we have in verse 7 the lovingkindness of God..” Here David went back to the first of the attributes which he mentioned in verse 5. It is the Hebrew word *qesed*. In some ways this is a summarization of all of the attributes of the Lord: His love, His kindness. It is “excellent,” meaning that they are extremely valuable. If you and I are under the lovingkindness of the Lord, it makes no difference how little we may have otherwise. We are wealthy, extremely wealthy. We have in God Himself such security in abundance that we know that whatever our needs may be, we have more than enough.

In the last statement of verse 7 David confesses that this is why “the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. And verses 8 and 9 show that “the children of men” of verse 7 are not just satisfied, but “abundantly satisfied with the fatness,” the abundance, “of God’s house. “The fountain of life” is in God, meaning not only for time, but for all eternity.

Verses 5 through 9 give us good, solid doctrine. I repeat, King David was not just telling his readers what God could do, but he looked behind all that God could do to remind us Who God is!

But David did one more thing before he put down his pen. He did what we need to do when we contemplate the goodness and greatness and unchangeableness of our God: David prayed. And he was not just praying for himself. He was praying for all who know the Lord, and who are “upright in heart.” We need to be taught the truth, as King David was teaching his readers, his people, but then we need to pray the truth into our hearts and out into our lives.

Concl: I began by telling you that I believe that there is a vital connection between Psalm 36 and 37. Let me move you into it for just a moment. I think it will make you enjoy both Psalms even more.

Psalm 36 (7)

Does our knowledge of the Lord chase the enemies of the Lord, and of us, away? No, but it shows us that knowing the Lord we not only need to pray as David prayed in the last three verses (not only for himself, but for all other believers), but that we must never allow ourselves to be fired up with anger, nor be envious of the wicked. They may appear to have everything going their way, but look at Psalm 37, verse 2. Instead, notice and do verses 3 and 4 and 5 and 7 and 34. And let us trust that as the wicked see our great satisfaction and delight in our Lord, the Spirit of God will work upon their hearts to turn in faith to our Lord Jesus Christ that they may know what true joy and peace really is.

King David lived in dark days, and so do we. But he found the secret of true joy and peace in the Lord. May we find that where He did, the only place, or Person, in whom it can be found, our Lord and our God.