

Psalm 36: Righteousness from the Lord

Intro

Welcome everyone, its great to be with you. Im sure school holidays are already driving a few parents in the room crazy. Today we are going to be looking at Psalm 36, often here at the Peak we will look at a psalm or two over the holiday periods. The Psalms are one of the most under rated books in my opinion. They are songs and poems that are a true and meaningful expression of the faith of the composers. But it is also the inspired word of God for his people which means we can take these texts and ourselves sing them or pray them in our own situations. In these texts we see God's power, we see how he deals with evil in the world, and we see his overwhelming capacity for compassion for his people. Today we are going to see a few of those things.

But before we kick off how about I pray for us?

I want to start by telling you about a time when my over confidence blinded me...
...I was blind to my actions and really I was blind to the consequences.

The confidence of the wicked

The Psalmist, begins by outlining a great trouble he has. He has appeared to receive a message from God, literally an Oracle. Concerning the wicked. This tells us that this psalm is more prophetic in nature than some of the others. Prophecy isn't always about predicting the future sometimes it is God speaking wisdom into a situation. There is a bit of both happening here. As is often the case it seems that there is an enemy facing David. In these situations we expect to see a description of the horrific things the evil or the wicked are doing. But this time we have a critique of them, a description of what they are like and how their wickedness consumes them.

There is no fear of God
before his eyes.

²In his own eyes he flatters himself
too much to detect or hate his sin.

³The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful;
he fails to act wisely or do good.

⁴Even on his beds he plots evil;
they commit themselves to a sinful course
and do not reject what is wrong.

The image that forms for me as we read these verses is of a confident person. So confident that they are in the right they are unable to see their sin at all. They think too highly of themselves and the direction they are taking why? Because they have no fear of the Lord. Keep that in mind ill come back to it in a bit. We have the picture here of an unstoppable wickedness that consumes people they cannot see otherwise and it consumes all parts of

their life, even on their beds they plot evil its saying that it is a permanent state, even at night they do this.

When I look at our world now, particularly the west and the direction it is going from social perspective there are a whole bunch of different things which concern me. But overall it is the overwhelming confidence that scares me the most. That a social direction is being taken which happens to be away from Christian values but that's not my main concern. My main concern is that society is so confident that we are going in a better direction which will cast aside all oppression and all people will be happy because they can follow any desire of their heart and no-one has the right to say anything to the contrary or they are oppressive and a problem. There is shrinking room for discussion as the confidence in the ideology grows and suddenly any point of view which disagrees is considered harmful even evil. That is the world we now live in. Where the confidence of the world in its ideology has reached a point were to question it is to be considered wicked. But actually it is in this way of thinking that we can see the true wickedness in the world that the psalm is talking about. Wickedness that is prideful, confident that it is right in all it does, unable to see that their might be another point of view, blind to its flaws.

However, here at Church at the Peak we aren't about looking out at the world and judging them. I don't want you to look and think, yes that is the wicked over there in the evil world oppressing Christians. Yes that is evil. But what I want you to do is take that frustration, take that upset, take that judgement that you may be putting onto the world around you. And now I want you to imagine how a loving all good God who created and sustains all things might think about you. You may not be overtly wicked but do you have wickedness in your heart. Do you make decisions based on what God thinks is best for your life or are you confident that you know a way is better for you and maybe for your family. Are there things in your life that you are persistent in continuing even though you know they are harmful? Are you confident in your sin? Are you blind to it because of that?

Suddenly as we read the description of the wicked it starts to feel close to home. Not because we are overtly evil but because we are sinful people who constantly fall short of the glory of God. I think we can be wilfully blind to our sin, letting it consume us. Whether its greed, lust, selfishness, anger, some of us here feel trapped within these struggles continually falling down in them again and again, we realise that the wicked are in fact all people in the world. That this message from God, is for us as much as it is for the wicked in the time of David which I think includes him.

The wonder of the Lord

Following a section describing the wicked we would usually expect to have a section describing the righteous, the good guys in the story. But in this message from God the next section addressed from the psalmist to God describes something else.

⁵Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.
You, LORD, preserve both man and animals.

As David despairs at the wickedness he sees in himself and the world around him his only response is to declare his trust in the power and glory of his God and to wonder at his majesty. To consider who God is, and his true nature. The key reason for this comes back to the wicked's failure to fear the Lord which is the first charge brought against their character at the beginning.

In this section of the Psalm part of what David is trying to do is get across exactly why that is a poor strategy. The great heights and depths imagery is not just restricted to his love but to his justice. Something that they spent a lot more time talking about in the Old Testament was the power and size of God. His control over all things, his role in the sustaining of the universe. That is a good but is also a terrifying thing. That there is no way the wicked understand the respect you need to treat that guy with. We forget this all the time. We forget that the earth opened up and swallowed the sons of Korah, we forget that fire came down from heaven killing hundreds of priests of Baal, we forget that the sons of Aaron were obliterated by the holiness of God because they entered his presence in an unworthy manner. At youth in the term just passed we looked at proverbs and we understood that the fear of the Lord is to treat him with the respect that his power calls for. That to be foolish is to forget this and put him aside doing whatever we want.

Let me tell you about a time I was foolish...

...I did not treat my mum with the respect and fear she deserved and so what happened. But if I had just kept that in mind I wouldn't have done it and be fine.

How foolish are we? How many sins that we continue in would we avoid if we remembered the power of the God who we sin against, his majesty, his size, his fierce judgment, AND his compassion for his people in the face of all our wickedness. That's why it is so important that we are not blind to wickedness that we may have in our lives. We need to grasp just how bad it is to him. If we don't grasp this then we don't just put ourselves in danger we endanger others. At the end of verse 4 it says that the wicked do not reject wrongdoing. If we allow little sins to sneak into our lives then it's even harder to protect each other from them and so we let little sins sneak into our community and become part of our culture. Maybe it's the way we speak to each other, maybe excessive sarcasm and payoffs, maybe it's forming cliques, maybe it's pride over our personal achievements, maybe we become that little too accepting of sporadic church attendance, maybe our culture accepts drinking habits or talking about alcohol in a way that we know is not glorifying. These are things I think are present in many churches and that I've experienced in all the churches I've been to which is why I chose them. We find it harder and harder to reject what we know to be wrong, we treat things like they are small, when we don't reject wrongdoing no sin is small to God and so while we will fall and rely on his love and forgiveness and be patient and loving to one another we can't say those things are ok to keep doing, but we will if we do not understand the Lord, if we do not treat him with the respect that we must. We will convince ourselves that what we think is best is right.

That our persistent confident sinning pushing him away and pokes the bear who rightfully could and will in the future enact judgment on that wickedness, because to fit into the category of the wicked is to be someone who does not fear the Lord.

True Righteousness

- ⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.
- ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.
- ¹⁰ Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.
- ¹¹ May the foot of the proud not come against me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

So who are the righteous? Who avoids the judgment of God? Who stands in opposition to the wicked? The answer is, those who turn to the Lord. David finds himself among the righteous not because of anything he has done. One of the biggest problems in the church today is that too often do we use the world's standard of good to measure ourselves by. That we think we can fit into the world's standard of what it is to be a good person but that does not meet the standards of this guy. We can't meet those standards on our own and so what is there to be done?

The psalm looks to the future as it speaks of the unfailing love of God and what he will do for his people. We see that true righteousness comes from him himself. That in the face of the wickedness of the world and of our own hearts we have the opportunity to flee to the Lord, to turn to him, to put our trust in him, to find refuge in him to receive his love and righteousness to be the ones who are sustained, who feast in his presence, to drink from the fountain of life and to see the true light. That it is through him that we can receive righteousness, that it is by believing in him that his people are saved and secure and protected. But in this image of the future has God just cancelled the debt of all the wicked and brought them into his righteousness?

- ¹² See how the evildoers lie fallen—
thrown down, not able to rise!

But how could this be achieved, how could the Lord redeem us from our wickedness while still judging wickedness and dealing with it? How can some of the wicked be saved and some not. For the Jews it was by following the law in faithful obedience to God but that wasn't enough, they were looking forward to this time described in the Psalm. For us, we now know, that to be found among the righteous, to drink from the fountain of life, to find refuge in the wings of the king of all creation we need to turn to Jesus. That God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that he who believes in him will not perish, but instead have eternal life. That verse that we throw around from John 3:16 is talking about the profound fact that we are redeemed from our wickedness, from our disrespect, from our sin, from the desires of our heart that trap us in a cycle of pain and anxiety, that instead of punishing us he would place Jesus in our place. That if you follow Jesus then your wickedness has been judged, it didn't disappear it was still treated with the great depth of

God's justice. But that it was Jesus would die as a substitute for our punishment. That we can become one of the righteous through our faith, God says this to the prophet Habbakkuk in the face of great evil and suffering he says "the righteous will live by their faithfulness". We cannot do it through our feeble attempts to free ourselves. His love, his faithfulness, his righteousness, his justice, is enough for us, that they save us, redeem us, make us his people and all we need to do is believe in him and follow.

What an incredible gift that is. That us, stuck in our wickedness could find life again through the unfailing love of God. That is the joy of the psalmist. That he sees wickedness in the world and in himself, but that is nothing compared to the love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice of God. And it is because of that, that he is truly and rightly, confident.