

## The Fools Delusion

BIG IDEA - The practical atheism of mankind will lead to their destruction despite thinking they have nothing to fear. Meanwhile God will restore the fortunes of his people with salvation from Zion (Jerusalem)

### 1. Intro<sup>1</sup>

- If you read or listen to an atheist long enough, it won't be long before you see them pointing the finger at religion for much of the evil and violence we see in the world
- Renown atheist Richard Dawkins once said
  - *It is fashionable to wax apocalyptic about the threat to humanity posed by the AIDS virus, 'mad cow' disease, and many others, but I think a case can be made that **faith** is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate.*<sup>2</sup>
- Atheist Christopher Hitchens makes a similar point in his book 'God is not great' the subtitle of which is *How religion poisons everything*
- Recently, I had brief FB conversation with an old school mate who made it very clear that religion is evil and our world would be a much better place without it
  
- But is it true to say with Hitchens that 'religion poisons everything'?
- Are the atheists right to say ... 'our world would be a better place without God?'
  
- To help us think about these things and answer those questions this morning, we're going to look at Psalm 53 and see what we answers we come up with

### PRAY

### 2. The Delusion (v1-3)

- The psalmist begins saying ...
  - *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."*
- There are many like Richard Dawkins, and Hitchens who are intellectual atheists
  
- However, they're among a small minority of intellectual atheists

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<sup>1</sup> Title – According to Mahalath – name of a tune or an instrument? Probably a mournful tune or sound. Almost identical to the word for sickness / disease > psalm depicts the sickness / disease of mankind

<sup>2</sup> From the opening line from a speech Richard Dawkins gave in 1996 to the American Humanist Association whilst accepting their "Humanist of the Year" award for 1996

- They take an intellectual position 'there is no God'
- In their own mind, they have intentionally and rationally concluded God does not exist
- But there is a very significant **majority** of people who live as **practical atheists**
  - That is ... their atheism is not so much expressed in their intellectual thoughts and arguments
  - Its expressed in the way they **live their life**
  - They live their life
    - like there is no God
    - like God has no claim on their lives
  - They live as they please
- **This** is the ultimate expression of atheism
- It's even possible for such a person to acknowledge God and believe he exists ... yet still live like an atheist ... in that they never allow the reality of God to shape their life
  - They might say he exists ... but they live as though he doesn't
  - They live as though they will never have to give an account of their life
- This what the psalmist is describing here ... for he says
  - *The fool says in his **HEART** ... there is no God*
- In biblical thought, the heart is the centre of human spirit
  - The heart the place which is the source of our emotions, thoughts, motivations, and desires
  - His view on God is shaped very much by his inner being ... rather than his rational mind
- And the psalmist says ... such a person who thinks and acts like that ... is a 'fool'
  - Not that they're dumb or incompetent
  - But they lack wisdom
- He's describing them from God's perspective ... those who, whether powerful or smart ... live and act on basis of wrong view of reality
- In the NT, the Apostle Paul describes such a person like this
  - **Romans 1:19-22** <sup>19</sup> *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* <sup>20</sup> *For since the creation*

*of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*

- What Paul is saying is ... all humanity sees enough of our creation ... its complexity, beauty and splendour to recognise there is a creator God who ought to be reckoned with
  - And yet despite the heavens declaring the glory of God ... they choose to ignore all that, and ignore him!
  - And while they think they are wise in doing so ... in reality they're fools
- What's true for the example of the atheistic fool in v1 ... the psalmist goes on to say is just an example of all humanity
  - <sup>2</sup> *God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are*
    - *any who understand,*
    - *any who seek God.*
  - 
  - The image is similar to that of Diogenes (Greek Philosopher in C4 BC) who searched all of Athens with a lantern in the daytime looking in vain for an honest man
- And God searches humanity for such a man ... he finds none ... for
  - <sup>3</sup> *Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt;*
    - *there is **no one** who does good, **not even one.***
- Regardless of age, colour, gender, or race ... all humanity is the same
- They do not seek God, they do not seek to know God
  - And the result is a humanity who's
    - ways are vile
    - are corrupted in what they do
    - are characterized by moral failure
- Because whenever individuals, communities and nations say 'there is no God' ... it's inevitable that wickedness, corruption and evil will follow
- **Application**
- It was during the Enlightenment (C18th), that atheistic worldviews began to surface

- However, it was philosophers of that time like Voltaire who held that without belief in a God who punishes evil ... the moral order of society would be undermined
  - That is, since atheists gave themselves to no supreme authority and no law and had no fear of eternal consequences, they were far more likely to disrupt society
  
- The rise of modern secular humanism ... which has sought to push God out of mind and out of sight ... is now reaping the fruit of that movement in what we see in our culture today
  
- Atheism has given rise to most of the world's greatest atrocities
- Soviet Russia, Communist China, the Khmer Rouge and Nazi Germany
  - All atheistic regimes ... and all were determined to remove or tightly control religion in their cultures
- Result was not harmony or the bettering of society they proclaimed ... but oppression, destruction and tragedy on a scale the world has never scene as they purged millions of people from their nations
  
- It's just as true in our culture today
  - A culture like ours that says 'there is no God' and has no fear of eternal consequences will
    - approve of and legalise abortion and euthanasia
    - turn a blind eye to the suffering of refugees on Manus Island ... while tuning in on their TV to Love Island
    - allow pornography to go unchecked and then wonder why sexual abuse and domestic violence is such an issue in our society
  
- Michael Jensen writing in SMH last year<sup>3</sup> says
  - *"One of the most difficult things for an atheist to describe is how, if there's no God, right and wrong have any meaning. Without God, how can we meaningfully speak of the ethical? ... But when we don't care about ultimate questions we are really at our worst. ... And when we don't have a story to tell the next generation about the meaning and purpose of human life – a "reason to hope" – then we are only a hair's breadth away from barbarism."*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/cancellation-of-atheist-shindig-is-a-disappointment-to-me--seriously-20171108-gzh3vh.html>

- When humanity says ... 'there is no God' ... the it's like yeast that permeates through dough
  - A single decision to turn away from our creator and judge ... will infiltrate all aspects of our nature and therefore our culture
- It's no wonder the psalmist says such a person is a 'fool'
  - The consequences for the individual and the society they are part of are devastating
  - As a culture we reap what we sow ... and we're reaping the consequences of our foolish choice to turn our back on God
- However, there's no room for arrogance here for the Christian
  - The believer cannot point the finger at others
  - You cannot say the problem is out there
- Because the psalmist is saying this is the condition of **all** humanity
  - And he's quite emphatic about this
  - When God survey's humanity ... he can't find
    - ANYONE who understands or seeks God
    - EVERYONE has turned away
    - NO ONE who is good, NOT EVEN ONE
- The psalmist knows this is the state of the entire human race
  - Everyone of us is born sinful and rebellious towards God
  - God's people are not born morally better than others
  - The Bible makes that very clear
- There is a fundamentally deep problem of rebelliousness that is true for all of us

### 3. The Doom (v4-5)

- Not only is it foolish to say 'there is no God', because of the consequences it has for our society ...
- But it is also foolish to say 'there is no God', because of the consequences it has for our eternity
- Have a look at v4-5
  - <sup>4</sup> *Will the evildoers never learn—those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on God? <sup>5</sup>There they were, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread. God scattered the bones*

*of those who attacked you; you put them to shame, for God despised them.*

- Here we are starting to see that there are two groups of people that the psalmist is referring to
  - There are the evildoers ... those who do not call on God
  - There's another group called 'my people' or God's people
- And God is exasperated with what he sees as he surveys humanity below him
- He asks "Will evildoers ever learn?"
  - And the implied answer is "No!"
  - They're unable and unwilling to discern the truth about Him
- And one way they express their rebellion and rejection of God is in the way they persecute God's people
  - They eat them up like you and I might eat a piece of bread
- And as a consequence, they face the wrath of God as he protects and rescues his people
- Have a look at v5
  - *There they were, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread. [For] God scattered the bones of those who attacked you; you put them to shame, for God despised them.*
- It's a tricky verse ... but what it seems to be saying is this
  - Those evildoers from v4 persecuting God's people will be overwhelmed with fear ... even when humanly speaking there is nothing to fear
  - Why?
    - Because while they may be more powerful, have the upper hand and have them surrounded ...
    - God will bring destruction upon them when they least expect it
    - In a sense ... out of the blue ... when everything seems to be going their way and they seemingly have nothing to fear
- Now there were times in Israel's history when this scenario played out for them
  - 1 Kings 19 – Israelites surrounded by the Assyrians > Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, that night angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp
  - 2 Kings 6-7 – Arameans laid siege to Samaria so the city was starving > despite being surrounded and facing defeat, the Lord caused the

Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they fled in fear and panic

- It could be that the psalmist is reflecting specifically on those situations ... or it could be that he is speaking generally about what God does / will do to those who persecute his people
- Either way ... the message is clear
  - Those who stand against the Lord ... are doomed
  - Those who despise him, he will despise
- But what is most frightening is ... they will not expect it
  - They don't think God is someone to reckon with
  - From a worldly perspective, everything seems to be going well
  - They think there's nothing to fear
- But out of the blue, 'like a thief in the night' God will call mankind to account
- And those who have deliberately and persistently opposed God ... will face judgment
  - CS Lewis – *"In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe, must be turned upon each of us ... either conferring glory inexpressible ... or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised"*
- **Application**
- Friends, if you are here this morning, and you know you're not yet one of God's people
- If you know in your heart ... you are yet to be born again and give your life to Christ ...
  - Then this is the future you're facing
  - Your life might be going great
  - Humanly speaking ... you might be winning at the game of life
    - Family, financial security, comfortable lifestyle
  - From a worldly perspective, you have nothing to fear
- But there will come a day ...
  - When God is going to call you to account
  - When every knee will bow before him ... whether believer or not
- And if you have chosen to stand apart from God ... v5 and the rest of the Bible is clear ... you will face certain doom
- Don't presume it won't happen just because things look good for you now
  - Lest the words of v5 become true for you

- These verses are talking about the certain doom for those who stand opposed to God's people
- But we need to reconcile something here
- Because didn't we say in v1-3
  - that all humanity is the same?
  - that no one does good
  - that everyone has turned away
- How is it that all are sinners, and yet one group faces doom and the other group doesn't?
  - Clue is there in v4
  - One group – 'the evildoers', are sinners who DON'T call on the name of God
  - The other group – 'my people', are sinners who DO call on the name of God

#### 4. The Deliverance (v6)

- So for those who call on the name of God
  - For those God calls 'my people'
  - There is deliverance and salvation
- Despite being numbered among the sinners of the world ... God's people not caught up in the doom he brings on those who oppose him
- See this in v6
  - *Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!*
    - [Jacob a poetic name for Israel]
- This psalm was composed at a time when God had promised to dwell with his people Israel in the temple in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion
- And so the psalmist looks to Zion, that place of promise, to God himself ... looking to God for him to rescue his people
  - He expresses his great longing that God would
    - bring the victory and deliverance he had promised to His people
    - and to restore their fortunes
- However the deliverance that's needed, the restoration that's required ... is not from human enemies or armies or persecutors
  - It's from sin and death
  - These are the true enemies of humanity



- You see the rebellion, wickedness and sin that God sees when he looks down on the human race reviles him
  - And because he is a just God and a holy God ...
  - He will bring doom on all who stand opposed to him
  
- The sinful human nature that we all inherit means that death and judgment is due to all of us
  - This is what we truly need saving from, this is what we need deliverance from
  - While God's people will always face persecution of some kind throughout all the ages
  - It's the enemy of sin and death from which we need restoration
  
- And so while the psalmist looked to the temple on Mount Zion ...
  - we now know that we look to another temple ... a better temple ...
  - a temple which is not a building ... but a person ... the Lord Jesus Christ who said ... destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days
    - Of course he was speaking about his death and resurrection
    - For it would be through his death on the cross that God would destroy the enemies of sin and death
    - For at the cross the price of sin would be paid for and therefore death for sin would be conquered
  
- When Christ went to the cross and rose from the grave ... sin and death was doomed ... scattered like an invading army over the field
  
- So when the psalmist looked for salvation to come out of Zion
  - Little did he know that 900 years later ... salvation would come out of Zion ... as Jesus came out of Jerusalem, carrying his own cross on his shoulders, and willingly walked to Calvary's hill to be crucified
  
- For it was there that he
  - brought God's people salvation and
  - restored their fortunes and
  - delivered them from their persecuting enemies
  
- **Application**
  
- So the psalm gives us a very blunt and honest analysis of our true human nature
  - It reveals the rebellious state of our hearts that by nature turns away from God and therefore ... stands under his judgment



- When Martin Luther King Jr confronted racism in the white church in the South he called on those churches not to become more secular, but to become more Christian > to be true to their beliefs
- King knew that the answer to racism and violence was not less Christianity but a deeper and truer Christianity
  
- For when we turn to God and acknowledge him and his ways ... then our world is able to flourish
  
- Why?
- Because true religion ... true faith looks to the one who said
  - turn the other cheek, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you
- And as you and I look to Christ and all he has done at the cross ...
  - We know that's exactly what he did for us
  - For at the cross
    - He turned the other cheek
    - He show loved for us his enemies
    - He prayed ... Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do
  
- The fool who says 'there is no God' reaps what he sows, both in this world and in the world to come
- The one who calls on God, and looks to the saviour who came out of Jerusalem ... will help this world to flourish ... and share in the salvation to come

## **PRAY**