

How Precious is Your Steadfast Love
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Psalm 36
October 20, 2013

If you have your Bibles, if you would, turn with me to Psalm 36. We're going to be looking at this entire passage today, Psalm 36, 12 verses. The inscription to the Psalm says:

Psalm 36:1-12

To the choir master of David, the servant of the Lord.

- 1 Transgression speaks to the wicked
deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God
before his eyes.*
- 2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.*
- 3 The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit;
he has ceased to act wisely and do good.*
- 4 He plots trouble while on his bed;
he sets himself in a way that is not good;
he does not reject evil.*
- 5 Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.*
- 6 Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
your judgments are like the great deep;
man and beast you save, O Lord.*
- 7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*
- 8 They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.*
- 9 For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.*
- 10 Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!*
- 11 Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.*

**12 *There the evildoers lie fallen;
they are thrust down, unable to rise.***

As we read Psalm 36 this morning, we are presented with two different portraits. Now, some of you probably have portraits hanging in your home. It could be of your family members close to you. You may have a certain hero, or a person that you admire from the past, or the present, that you have a portrait of. An artist, trying to paint out, and draw out the likeness of that person so that you can look upon that likeness, and to remember it. But in Psalm 36 we are presented two very different portraits.

One is a portrait that is actually detailed out for us so there wouldn't be any criticism in the details. It seems like it is pretty clear to us. But what is hard for us when we read it is, that when we look at the clear portrait that is painted for us, it is very ugly. Now, when you think about the different kinds of people that you could have a portrait of in your home, it would be kind of odd, wouldn't it, to walk into someone's home and find a portrait of Osama bin Laden hanging there? You would probably begin to question why anyone in their right mind would have a portrait of Osama bin Laden. Or if you go back in history, going to years past, it could be Adolf Hitler, or Joseph Stalin, or Slobodan Milosevic, or people like this, that even the world itself would say, "Those are bad and wicked people."

But there is a second portrait that we are presented with today as well, and it's a very different portrait, and it is a portrait that lays out the God that we love, and that we serve, before whom we will stand accountable. We find in that portrait that there is nothing offensive, that there is nothing that would cause us to turn our eyes away, but rather it is a very engaging portrait that draws us to look at it, to gaze upon it, to go deeper, that would cause us to want to know more of this God, and who He is.

Today as we look at Psalm 36, I want to cover this in four points, so if you are taking notes, here they are. All of these start with the phrase 'God's steadfast love...' So God's steadfast love, number one, is absent from the wicked. It is absent from the wicked, looking at Verses 1-4. Secondly, God's love is central to His attributes, looking at Verses 5-6. Central to His attributes. Number three, God's steadfast love is a feast for His children, looking at Verses 7-9. A feast for His children. And number four, God's steadfast love gives us hope in an unrighteous world. Hope in an unrighteous world.

Today, as we study this passage, I want to call you to understand the steadfast love of God, and the hope that you have, the experiencing it in this life in the backdrop of human sin, and depravity that is with us now, and will be with us until the day that we die and depart from this earth.

1) God's Steadfast Love is Absent from the Wicked:

So let's begin by looking at the first point, that God's steadfast love is absent from the wicked. When we look through the Book of Psalms, we find many different types of Psalms. We find that there are some Psalms that seem to focus on the praise of God, almost completely. There are other Psalms that are mixtures where we have some lament of what is going on with some exaltation of God. We have some Psalms in particular that seem to be almost holy, and totally pointing forward to Christ as the Messiah, like Psalm 110. We find in Psalm 36, that we have both, as mentioned before, a listing out of the wicked and the unrighteous, and we have an exaltation of God.

So the question is, as we begin this: What is the overall flow or structure of this Psalm? I think in general terms, we could look at it like this, that it was written to us by David, here called 'The Sermon of the Lord', mentioned only in the transcription of Psalm 18 as well. But here was David, he was the man after God's own heart, His servant, who for so many years, having been anointed the King of Israel, had to wait while Saul was persecuting him. He had to hide, he had to live in caves, and so many of the Psalms that God has brought to us, have come from that period of his life, when he is on the run, and he is being pursued and persecuted. I think we can view this Psalm as perhaps David lamenting over the fact of the wicked who are in existence around him, whatever his stage of life was, but then in the midst of that wickedness, that he can turn to the Lord and exalt His love, and His faithfulness, and the other attributes that are listed. Then at the end of the Psalm, have confidence that ultimately the wicked will fail and perish, and that God will prevail.

But he begins here with this first section, Verses 1-4, as we go by point by point, and we look at the picture of the wicked man. Now I'm going to use a term to help us kind of define this. When we read this, what we think of first of all, and foremost when we read it is this is a portrait or picture of an abnormally wicked man, okay? We're going to list through it, and if you weren't convinced when you first read it, as we pick it apart piece by piece, I think you will become more and more convinced that this is the picture of someone, not just who is a little bit bad,

but it seems as if every aspect of their thinking, their motive, their heart, and their being is completely and totally bent on evil.

Now there are many portraits of wicked men in the Bible. We could look at Psalm 14, or Psalm 53. There is also that passage in 2 Timothy 3 in the New Testament that we find, for when Paul is writing to Timothy, and trying to encourage him in his pastoral ministry, and help him understand the context that he lives, here is what he says about the people that Timothy will need to expect to face in the world. They are, or will be lovers of money, lovers of self, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, soulless with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Now that's another aspect of a portrait that is painted for us, but this is not something we find just in the Old Testament, let's say, but in the New Testament as well. It is out there, pointing out to us, what man and his sin, apart from Christ can go to in that direction. But back to the portrait here, that steadfast love is absent from the wicked. Let's look at some of these points. Number one, we begin with Verse 1 which says:

Psalm 36:1 ~ Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

Now this first verse, there is some disagreement in translation. Some of the older versions believe that this said that, "Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in my heart," that is portraying the Psalmist as somehow hearing from those that are wicked. This is presenting it here in ESV, and also in NAS as ...deep in his heart;... It is the idea, or concept of, "Here is the wicked man who is so under the control of sin that it is as if sin is speaking to him." Get that picture in your mind there. Then it says that there is no fear of God before his eyes. Now what is more prideful than to not fear God? What is more prideful than to cast off all restraint?

Perhaps you see it around you. Perhaps you've seen it in yourself, that there is this, in our sin, this hatred of authority. That when authority is placed over us, whether it is our parents as we are growing up, or our teacher, or our coaches, or it is the law, or the fact that there is a law, or there are laws that we have to obey, and that if we don't obey them that there is somebody out there that has the right to enforce them and to punish us.

Here we see in this portrait, that the wicked man has no fear of God before his eyes. That is, he is so emboldened in his sinful pride, that he does not fear a being greater than himself. He has so exalted himself up in the heights, that in a way he views himself as his own god. We see as well that along with that, in Verse 2, that it says that he flatters himself in his own eyes, that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. So here he is flattering himself, and this verse is a little bit difficult to translate from the Hebrew, but this is the sense of it I think. It is the idea that he is flattering himself in his own eyes about this. “You know my iniquity, my sin, can’t be found out, won’t be found out, and hated.” Now there is an arrogance there, isn’t it? Have you seen it before? It is the idea that, “I can do whatever I want and no one is going to find me out. I can get away with it. There is no one that is going to call me into account for what I am doing. I am my own law, a law unto myself.” This is the picture of the wicked man.

We can take comfort of course in the truth that this is not really the case. In Matthew 10:26, where Jesus was sending out the 12 into ministry, and they were going to be prone to fear people, Jesus said:

Matthew 10:26 ~ “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

That is, there is no action of man that is done in secret, there is no action of man that is done in a place where no one can hold him accountable, that will not be called into account. And today if, as we go through this portrait, you look at it and you think, “Well, I’m not sure about that. I think that I can get away with some things. Maybe I don’t say I have no fear of God, but I don’t fear Him as He ought to be feared.” We can know here that there is nothing that is hidden from the sight of God. Nothing. No action. Even if you were to travel to the moon and live on a lunar base, away from the rest of normal, human society on earth one day, you would not escape the Lord’s presence that is everywhere at all times.

We see it as well in Verse 4 that, or going back to Verse 3, that the words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. Deceitful speech, his words. That is crafting words where you are not intending to accurately inform, but you are actually crafting your words in such a way as to deceive people. Now think about that. That your words are characterized by that. Not truth-speaking, not, “Hey, I want to make this more clear to you, but you know what? I want to say this in a way that is actually twisting its meaning.” The idea there of trouble that goes along with it, some people, when they speak, it is as if they were trying to instigate difficulty, that they

had no desire to pursue peace, but with every word, and every phrase, and every conversation, are going out to cause strife, and discord.

We see here that he has ceased to act wisely and good. That is, wisdom and goodness, even found at a basic level among mankind, has gone away from him in his wicked state. He is devoid of that. And then in Verse 4, it says that he plots trouble while on his bed. Now think about this for a minute, when you are sitting there at night, and the day is done, and you are laying there, and it is finally quiet, let's say, depending on your setting. What do you think about? This man, the wicked man, the portrait here, he is not thinking about, "What good could I do to bless another person?" He's not even just thinking about, "Tomorrow I've got to do this, this, this, and this to get my things done." He is plotting, and scheming on how to displease the Lord, go against His commands, and to do evil plotting. There on his bed, it is the picture that it is not enough in his life that he is out actively working, and doing, and speaking his words, but even when he is on his bed. The contrast here that we read in Psalm 63, is the godly man, what does the godly man do when he is upon his bed? Well he is meditating upon the Lord. It says through the watches of the night. That is, when he has the opportunity he thinks about his great Creator that he is in submission to, and his Lord, and his Savior. But here, the portrait of the wicked, is plotting to do wrong. Not only doing wrong, but plotting to do it even before.

Following along with that in Verse 4, it says that he sets himself in a way that is not good. One commentator put it like this, he said, "It is almost a picture of at night, he is sitting upon his bed, and he's thinking of all the bad things that he can do, and then in the morning, when he gets up, he sets himself in the wrong way to do the very things that he plotted to do. So he is planning, it is not just the case, for instance, where a person sets out to do right. Maybe you've had a day in your life where you got up in the morning, and you prayed, "Lord, I want to walk with You, and I want to be holy, and I don't want to give into sin." And you got out, and you got in your car, and it was raining, and it was cold, and you got on the interstate, and you started late, and there was an accident, and people were cutting you off, and before you knew it, your purpose to do good was thwarted by your own flesh because even though you had prayed about it, and set yourself in a way that was good, well it didn't happen. Then you repented and you came back. But this is a picture of someone who doesn't even start there. They don't just fall into it, they start that way. They focus, and they set their course in the wrong direction that is bent on evil.

Then lastly in the list, it said they do not reject evil. Not only are they people who participate in it, but they don't reject evil. It is that picture that if we accept evil ourselves, even if we aren't actively pursuing it, and participating in it, that we are. That if evil comes our way and we do not push it away, we do not reject it and say, "This is wrong. I will have no part in this," that we find ourselves party to what is taking place.

Now this is a very ugly portrait that we have just read about, but it is a portrait that is given to us in Scripture to help us see what wicked men, and men who are characterized, and dominated by wickedness are like. We find when we go to the New Testament, that in Romans 3, that these passages like Psalm 36, and similar to Psalm 14, and other places in the Old Testament where it seemed like in the Old Testament context it was talking about the abnormally wicked person, that we find that the descriptions here are now made with a much broader application. For we read, in Romans 3, starting in Verse 10:

Romans 3:10-17 ~ "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." 13 "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." 14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known."

And the last part of this section, in Verse 18 of Romans 3, is a quote from Psalm 36, it says:

Romans 3:18 ~ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Looking at the first verse of the Psalm and quoting it. What we find out when we go to Romans 3 is that these descriptions, all quotations from the Old Testament, many of them from the Psalms and some from other places, are not just applied to the abnormally wicked man, but they are applied to you, and to me, and to everyone else who has ever come into this world with the sin of Adam on his or her account.

Today I ask you, as we've gone through this portrait, do you see any reflection in yourself? You say, "Well, I'm not a murderer. I'm not a thief. I'm not a rapist. I'm not someone who destroys property, or sells drugs on the street." But I ask you, when you look through this portrait, are you someone who has a fear of God, or is there no fear of God before your eyes? I ask you today, do you ever think in your heart that you are doing something that you know to be wrong, but you think, and ponder in your heart, "No one will find this out. Out of sight, out of mind." Do you think as well, are you a person when you look at your own words, and your speech, are you dominated by deceit and trouble? Are your words that come out of your mouth useful for building up others according to their need? Do you see wisdom and goodness within you? Are you someone, when you have those quiet moments of reflection, are you plotting and scheming? Are you someone who sets yourself in a way to do evil and to sin against the Lord?

Today I pray that you would be searched by the Scriptures. Today, if you see this, I would call you to come to Christ, to see this portrait that I have read before you, both in this Psalm, and in Romans 3, of what mankind is like in sin. Your condition is hopeless. There is nothing you can do in your own merit, or your own works, to save yourself. I would urge you today to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, to repent of your sin, and to call upon the name of the Lord, for He is a gracious and a merciful Savior. For others of you today who look at these and say, "Well, I know that Christ has worked in my life, but as we read through this list, I see something of the old man, and these characteristics still working within me." Pray to God that He would give you the grace to turn from those, so then instead of deceitful speech, you would have speech that is clear, and that is useful. So then instead of a lack of fear of God, and His authorities that He has placed on this earth, that you would have fear, and reverence, and holy submission before Him.

2) God's Steadfast Love is Central to His Attributes:

Let's turn now to our second point, turning away from this very ugly, and dark, and dim portrait, to a portrait that is grand and glorious. To our second point that God's steadfast love is central to His attributes, in Verses 5-6. We turn from these verses about the wicked man in Verse 5, rather to the steadfast love of the Lord. That it extends to the heavens, that His faithfulness extends to the clouds, that His righteousness is like the mountains of God, and that His judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, oh Lord.

We sometimes talk about this concept of God having attributes, or characteristics. In other words, it is the idea that there is no way, for instance, if we were to ask this question, that we could fully define God in one statement. So if I pass out a slip of paper, and I said, “What is God like? And you can only put one word in the blank,” okay? Now what would you say? Well, you know that God is love, right? Straight from the Scriptures. Well, we also read that God is light, and we read many other things. What we begin to see is that, to use a human illustration, there are some mountains in this world that are set off by themselves. And there are single mountains, and they are grand and glorious, and when you are driving up behind them, or getting close to them, you see them off in the distance, and it is one mountain. But perhaps the attributes of God could be better described by a glorious mountain range, where as you look at it, there are many peaks there to behold, but all together is the sum.

There is no one Scripture passage of course, that can contain the sum total of His attributes. Not even this beautiful picture here in the Psalm. But the passage we have today emphasizes the immensity of His attributes. This picture of steadfast love, extending to the heavens, all the way up into the skies, His faithfulness up to the clouds in the very same places. His righteousness, like the mountains of God, that picture of strength, that picture of power, something great and bigger than ourselves. His judgments, like the great deep. This picture of something that we can’t search out in our own ability, and get to the bottom of.

When we look at this term ‘steadfast love’, perhaps in your translation it is ‘lovingkindness’. This is one of those words that we talk about from time to time that is a word that is difficult to translate into the English language in one word, and that is why you find, in your translations, these different terms, or couplets of words together to describe it. The focus here in talking about His lovingkindness or His steadfast love, is that covenant love that God has to His people. It is a love that is a faithful love, a love that He will continue and maintain for His people. And this covenant love that is described in His steadfast love is in great contrast to the “unloved”, to use that term, of the wicked in Verses 1-4.

J. I. Packer, in his book *Knowing God*, writes a chapter on the love of God, and in this chapter, he mentions two points about God’s love. He says, number one, God’s love is not the complete truth about God so far as the Bible is concerned, and he goes on to talk about how some people take God’s love out of context, and they don’t want a God of justice and a God of wrath, but they just want a God of love apart from these things, and He’s trying to emphasize that that’s wrong to do that.

That's not the only point. But the second point as it applies to the believer is this, that *God is love* is the complete truth about God so far as the Christian is concerned. The statement that God is love means that His love finds expression of everything that He says and does. The knowledge that this is so for us personally is the supreme comfort of the Christian. Every single thing that happens to us expresses God's love to us and comes to us for the furthering of God's purpose for us.

Do you see what His point is? His point is that to the Christian, that you have entered into a loving relationship with the Heavenly Father that you do not fear the judgment that is to come, that you can look to Christ and see that He has satisfied the justice of God on behalf of your sin, and that you can behold His steadfast love towards you, His covenant-keeping love, and that you can marvel and revel in it. We find out along with this in this passage that there is a mention of faithfulness. Psalm 85:10 pictures it this way:

Psalm 85:10 ~ Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

There's this connection of these different glorious attributes of God together. Throughout the Scripture, God is presented as a faithful God in practical terms. When the children of Israel had come into the land in the book of Joshua, the Lord could say through the writer that not one of His words fell to the ground, that as His promises to them are not like words that we make which fall to the ground sometimes in the sense that we can't fulfill them. Sometimes even when we want to be faithful to our promises, circumstances come in and keep us from doing that, but God is not like this. Nothing thwarts His purpose, and He is not like us who change our minds, but rather will fulfill and commit to all that He has done. His faithfulness is also described in His being a covenant-keeping God, for when Solomon was praying at the dedication of the temple, he could say, "Oh Lord God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or in earth beneath, keeping covenants and showing steadfast love to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart," that He is the God that will be faithful to the covenant that He has made. We can also rejoice when we think about His faithfulness in this.

2 Timothy 2:13 ~ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

That means that God's faithfulness does not depend on your faithfulness. It is not a relationship where He says as we would sometimes, "Well, if you're going to be like that, well, I'll be like this. If you're not going to do what you say, well you know what? I don't feel like I'm bound to do what I say anymore either. Because of your unfaithfulness, that justifies my unfaithfulness." But what the Lord says here is, "I am faithful regardless. It does not depend on you. It is not about you in keeping your promises that's going to determine whether I will keep My promises and act according to My character." We can apply this to our lives in this manner, that in a world of unfaithful people, unfaithful institutions that make promises to us, we have a God who will never fail to keep His commitments.

Today I would say to you do not say in your heart, "Well, everyone else has let me down in this life. I doubt that God will really fully make good on all of His promises either. Maybe most of them He'll make good on, but is He really going to come through? Is He really a God that I can trust? Even when things get really bad, so bad, and complicated, and difficult, and complex, and out of control, can I really trust that He is going to be faithful and be there when I need Him?" Trust in Him.

We see as well that there's a picture here of His righteousness. The idea that God is the one who makes the laws and standards, that He is the one who faithfully rules in a just manner according to the standards that He has created, that He is a righteous God, that in Him there is no relativity, there is no sliding scale of right and wrong that we struggle with today in our culture, when we even consider the laws of our own land and the way that some cases go. What is right? What is wrong? Isn't it relative? Isn't it situational? But this righteousness of God is so important to our understanding of what God has done in the Gospel, for we read in Romans 1:17, speaking of the Gospel:

Romans 1:17 ~ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The blessing that we have in the righteousness of God that we as believers can behold is that the righteousness that God requires is the righteousness that He also provides, that we have in Jesus Christ a Savior, and it is His righteousness that has been imputed to us and put on our account. The Savior who came to this earth took on a human flesh, was born under the law, and lived in a sinful world, and yet every minute of His life He lived being tempted and yet without sin, and because of His obedience and because of His sacrifice on the cross for our sins, His righteousness is given to us.

Today if you are looking to your own sense of righteousness, that is, how well are you living up to God's standards as a believer, or maybe even how well you're living up to your own standards, see, it's two different things, isn't it? Because you can purpose in your heart that you're going to lose five pounds next month and not do it, and walk around dismal and depressed, not because you've violated God's laws and commands, but because you didn't meet your own, or you can look and see your failure, how you turned from the right path and didn't obey the Lord, and think in your heart, "Well, today I can't go to the Lord in prayer. He won't accept me. I haven't done well enough today. Maybe if I start again tomorrow, I'll start with a clean slate," completely misunderstanding the righteousness of Christ that we have on our account, that we go to Him confessing, repenting, looking back on the completed, finished work of Christ on our behalf, that He has paid for it all, in repentance and humility and trusting in Him through the power of the Spirit for our lives.

This last attribute that is given to us in Verses 5 and 6, His judgments, this was a term that was based on a court's recorded decision, and therefore, it can mean His decisions that He makes as well as His revealed word to us. The wickedness of men and women in our world, and sometimes even the wickedness of our own hearts, can lead us to despair. Our experience of unloving actions from people that have been close to us, the experience we have of seeing people being unfaithful in their promise, and the relativity we experience of right and wrong in this world, can lead us to a very discouraged and despairing condition.

Today I would call you to look upon the attributes of God, that when you find yourself discouraged by this world, to consider the steadfast covenant-keeping lovingkindness of the Lord extending to the heavens, and His faithfulness to the clouds, and His righteousness like the mountains of God, and His judgments like the great deep.

Connected with the attributes of God mentioned here, and moving onto our third point, is now the relationship and the experience that God's children have with Him and what He has provided:

3) The relationship and the Experience that God's Children have with Him and what He has Provided:

As we start in Verses 7 to 9, we find that there is a little bit of turn in the text, that is, we're not just talking now about objectively who God is, but what we're now looking at is how does it relate—God's character and His attributes—how does it

actually come down to us and our experience of God and our relationship with God? Objectively we always remember that God's character, nature and attributes remain objectively true regardless of my experience and perspective. What does that mean practically? It means when hard times come into my life, I cannot say God is not good. He is good whether my experience at the time is blessing, or difficulty, or trial, or rejoicing, or happiness, or gladness. I don't change Him in who He is. He remains the same.

Whether a man rejects God, attempts to recreate Him in a different light, whether he experiences struggles with different aspects of His character, His character remains unaltered. This is the objective aspect of the attributes of God. It's extremely important for us to always keep before us, but there is also a subjective aspect to the attributes of God, and it is this, the spiritual experience of the believer, and this is important for us to understand because of this: Unbelievers, those without the Spirit of God, can be trained to memorize Scripture. They can attend Bible studies, they can write Bible commentaries, they can teach systematic theology in seminaries, they can relate to us many different types of "spiritual" experiences that they've had, and they can even serve as pastors of local churches, but there is something that they can never experience, and that is the joy of a relationship with God.

Throughout the Old and the New Testament, we are given evidences of the promise that God is not only to be feared, revered, praised, and honored, but that God is to be delighted in, and to be enjoyed in the holiest sense of the word. So let's look in these verses and see some of the blessings of our relationship with God set before us. In Verse 7, we read:

Psalm 36:7 ~ How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

It's that idea of preciousness like a jewel or something of great worth and value, the unique worth that is there, that God's steadfast love is not just something where I say in a very cold and calm manner, "Yes, God is a covenant-keeping God. He is faithful, and He always does what He says, and His love never fails." See, I've memorized that and I've regurgitated it back to you. But what this is saying is how precious it is to me—I have a personal, experiential knowledge of this steadfast love in my life, and it is precious, and it is more valuable like the pearl of great price.

We have a picture here as well of a description that we can take refuge in the shadow of God's wings. You can picture an eagle coming back to the nest with the little eagles or eaglettes, or whatever they're called, and here are the great big wings of the eagle, and the great big wings are shadowing the little ones there in the nest. There's protection there, and those little ones underneath are looking up to the eagle to protect them. This is not only acknowledging the objective reality of God's might and power, but placing your trust in Him and resting in His ability and care.

So what if I came to your house and I was staying with you for a few days, and you said, "Well, at night it's pretty safe out here. We don't have a lot of crime. I've got the doors locked, and maybe I have a security system, so you just rest secure. You go up to your room and you have a good night's rest." And I say, "I appreciate that. I think I'm going to stay up all night with my gun loaded and just sit here." Now, am I really resting in the shadow of your protection and trusting in you? No, I'm so paranoid that it's all about me, that I've got it under control, that I'm resting in that I'm going to take care of every need in my own protection and it's all about me and my ability to do this. My point of the illustration is this, that it's one thing to say objectively, "God, You are all powerful and strong, and You can do right, and You can handle any situation, and I acknowledge that," so I'm regurgitating it again. But it's another to come to Him humbly in faith and say, "Lord, I'm scared. I'm fearful about my health, about what may come upon me, about what's coming from the outside, about what's coming in the future, but You know what, Lord? You've told me to trust You and not live in fear, and I'm going to rest in the shadow of Your wings." Psalm 91 says:

Psalm 91:

- 1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.***
- 2 I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I trust!"***

My God, my refuge, my fortress. The experience of His attributes. We see as well in these verses this beautiful picture of an abundant feast that is set before, related to the love of God and the experience that you can have with the God that you love and serve. Now, for many of us here, we're in America, we're in the 21st century, we're at a time and a place where food is very abundant for us. We can get food from any part of the world, pretty much, often times when we want it. For most people, not all, food is pretty affordable, and there are places that are all you can

eat buffets where you can go just lavish yourself out to the highest level, and lay yourself out for days if you wanted to, but at the time of this writing and in many parts of the world, food was a little more scarce and a little more simple than what we experience today. So the picture and the image of a feast was something that was pretty grand and glorious, this idea of a place where there would be many dishes and enlarged quantities that would be set before you to partake in. The picture here is that this is something that God gives to us, for it says:

Psalm 36:8 ~ They feast on the abundance of your house,...

Do you get that picture? It's God providing and supplying what is needed, this picture as in Psalm 34:

Psalm 34:8 ~ Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

It's a picture of delighting and feasting upon Him in our experience. And as well, the next one:

Psalm 36:8 ~ ...and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

It's this picture of a fountain, that we'll get to later, a river flowing. Have you ever spent time just sitting and relaxing or resting by a river for some period of time? You stay still. If you're sitting on the rock and the water keeps flowing, and it keeps flowing, and keeps flowing, it's a little bit different than when you're by a pond. It's stagnant and it just sits. It's there and you're there, but when you sit by a river, you can marvel sometimes, even though scientifically we know the answer to this, but where does it come from? It just keeps coming, and coming, and coming, and it goes by, and the picture here is of feasting upon the Lord in our relationship with Him, of a river of delights so contrary to that picture of those who view God of, "You know, it must be awful to be a Christian. You have to get up early and go to church on Sundays. You have to go to Bible studies and take up your time doing all of these things, and you have to think about how you act and live." See that unbelieving mindset that this is just religion? That it's just something that is pressed down and forced down upon us versus the abundance of a river of delights that we can have, not delighting in our sin and our own pleasures, but delighting in Him and Him alone?

Then finally, in this list of our blessings in relationship with God, we have the illustration of a fountain. It's similar to the river. You sit by the fountain and it just bubbles over, and over, and over, and you watch it, and it just keeps on going as if there's no end to the supply that is there.

Psalm 36:9 ~ For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

We know that we have the promise of life, that God is the Creator of all life, the sustainer of all life, physical and spiritual, and that we have the promise that Jesus had that He did not come for us to have a miserable life but for us to have an abundant life in Him and to the fullest degree. Sometimes we struggle with this realm of experience because so many times in the Christian world today there are those that have taken the experience of the faith to a wrong degree, but we need to keep before us the absolute importance of our experience with Christ and of God in who He is, because as I said before, an unbeliever can do many of the things that we do—sit in this service today, pick up a Bible and read three chapters this afternoon, go do good works of service for someone else, give a portion of their income to the church back to God, but the defining point or line is do you know Jesus Christ? Not just the facts about Him, but do you know Him, having an intimate and personal relationship with Him?

4) Having Hope in an Unrighteous World:

Finally for our last point, point 4, having hope in an unrighteous world, we come to the end of this Psalm in verses 10 to 12. We read here, the Psalmist now turning to prayer:

Psalm 36:10-12

- 10** *Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!*
- 11** *Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.*
- 12** *There the evildoers lie fallen;
they are thrust down, unable to rise.*

In this concluding prayer, we see the Psalmist now living in the reality of a world where the wicked man is there and the wickedness of people is there, crying out to the Lord, “Continue that steadfast love to me,” and it’s a cry of the heart, because if I can’t have Your steadfast love, I’m stuck with all this crud that is around me and the sinfulness of man, and it’s destructive and it’s discouraging. We find here that as the Psalmist prays continuing to look at and to seek after the continuance of God’s love towards him, that he also prays for protection, that the foot of arrogance would not come upon them. The righteous cry out in the midst of oppression. Psalm 25:19-20 puts it this way when the Psalmist cries out:

Psalm 25:19 ~ Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. 20 Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

Now, there are believers in the world today that are undergoing physical, outward persecution that is intense and serious. Often times we’re a little bit blind to that, because we live in a world where we find in our society that there is persecution of different types, and when we look outwardly even in the realm of government and what might come in the future, there’s a concern about what may be there, but there are some who experience it very directly and physically, that by simply naming the name of Christ, they don’t have to do anything great and mighty, they don’t have to go stand in a public square and preach, but by saying, “I belong to Jesus Christ and not to the religion of this land and my family,” that they may be cast out of the family, they may find it difficult to get good employment, and in some cases they may be imprisoned for their faith, and in the worst cases, to be put to death.

Today we find out that in addition to this, something that we all around the world experience is that we live in the midst of an oppression of an evil and sinful world, and that we in that case should cry out to the Lord in the midst of it. Sometimes we want to get mad. Sometimes when we see it we want to bring it down to our level, but when we see unrighteousness prevailing and coming forth in different ways, we should cry out to the Lord with the same passion, “Deliver us! Deliver us, oh Lord. Protect us. Guard our souls and watch over us.”

In conclusion today, we have looked at two different portraits—a very dark and dim portrait of an abnormally wicked man first of all in our consideration, one who seems that every aspect of his being is controlled and tainted with sin, but we have also looked today at a portrait of a God of steadfast love and faithfulness, and of righteousness that we can trust in.

Today I would call you to look to the Lord, that if you are someone who has looked at these different portraits and that you find more in the first one of yourself, then I would urge you to turn to Christ, for there is no hope without Him. There is no hope in your own love and righteousness to save you, but to turn to Christ. And if you are in Christ today and you know His attributes, and you know information about Him, and you objectively can state true things about Him, but you find yourself not delighting in them, then pray that God would grant you that delight, that He would grant you that ability to revel in Him, that what we find so often in our experience of faith is that the world sets before us all these wonderful things that will satisfy us, and will bring us joy, and will bring us happiness, and we can become deluded so that we don't find that need to cast ourselves fully upon Him, to delight in Him as we ought. May God give us the grace to put these things into practice in our lives today.

Let's pray...

Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You for giving us both of these portraits in Psalm 36. We rejoice today that You did not leave us to ourselves to develop to the point that we are completely controlled by evil, plotting on our beds, setting our course to it, refusing to reject it, but that You came into our lives sending someone to speak and preach the Gospel to us, and giving us willing hearts to believe. We pray, oh Lord, that You would work by Your Spirit in us to grow us more into Your image, and I pray this in Christ's Name, Amen.

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