

“The Foolishness of Unbelief Revisited”  
Psalms 53  
(Preached at Trinity, January 9, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to **Psalm 53** we soon realize it is very familiar to us. We’ve already seen it. In fact it is almost word for word with **Psalm 14** and much of it is in **Romans 3**. What do we do with this psalm? Should we skip over it?
2. We need to ask the question. Why does God often use repetition in the Bible? We see some passages, themes, and concepts over and over in the Bible. We can’t answer the question with absolute certainty. We can say this: No part of Scripture is without purpose. Every word is important. So if God has chosen to set a passage before us more than once there must be a good reason for it. If God says something once it is important. And if He says the same thing more than once we need to give particular attention to it.
3. Although **Psalm 53** is almost the same as **Psalm 14** it isn’t identical. God obviously wants us to continue to learn from the repeated passages as well as applying the new passages to us. This psalm is another psalm designated as a Maschil—a psalm full of instruction designed to teach. There are 13 such psalms including psalms 52, 53, 54, 55.
4. Assuming that **Psalm 53** was composed later in David’s life we can see that after the passing of time men are no better than they were in his youth; in fact he himself is still a sinner in need of grace.  
**Psalm 53:2-3** – “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were *any* that did understand, that did seek God. <sup>3</sup> Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one.”  
Spurgeon – “David after a long life, found men no better than they were in his youth. Holy Writ never repeats itself needlessly, [therefore] there is good cause for the second copy of this Psalm.”
5. David had lived his life and observed many men and had not changed his mind:  
**Psalm 53:1** – “The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*”
6. Man takes great pride in his wisdom. He loves learning new things. He takes pride in his knowledge. The truth is this: Human beings are fools. It would be more proper to credit them with madness than intelligence. Human beings are fools for their forgetfulness of God.  
**Romans 1:21-22** – “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,”
7. Man has rejected the most important knowledge a man can know. He does not know God.
  - A. This is after God has made Himself plainly known.  
**Romans 1:19** – “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.”

- B. They purposely suppress this truth.  
**Romans 1:18** – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (*suppress*) the truth in unrighteousness;”
8. This is the basis of **Psalms 14 & 53**.  
 “The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*”
- A. There is no wisdom apart from a knowledge of God. To reject Him is to reject the source of our being, the source of all knowledge, the source of all wisdom.  
 Years later David’s son will pen this truth:  
**Proverbs 1:7** – “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction.”  
<sup>NAS</sup> **Proverbs 9:10** – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”
- B. To embrace and trust in the living and true God is the starting place of true knowledge – the beginning of wisdom.
9. Instead of embracing God they deny Him, perhaps not openly with their tongue but inwardly in their heart and outwardly by their actions.  
**Psalm 14:1** – “The fool hath said in his heart . . .” – in the core of his life he lives as though God does not exist.
- A. His affections are not upon God. His passions are drawn aside after other lovers.  
 B. His mind is not right towards God. In fact he is not in his right mind at all. He is insane. Can you imagine denying the one through whom we live and move and have our being; the very source of life? It is depravity at its very worst. It is insanity.
10. This doesn’t mean they are not religious. Most people are religious. It doesn’t mean their consciences are completely dead. They may be drawn even into the Christian religion, but they will not submit themselves entirely to God.
11. This is a universal problem. David had seen this in Israel. While they pretended to be religious, their hearts were far from God.  
 In **Psalm 50** David described God’s judgment upon Israel for their hypocrisy – their half-hearted religion.  
**Psalm 50:7** – “Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I *am* God, *even* thy God.”  
**Psalm 50:22** – “Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear *you* in pieces, and *there be* none to deliver.”
12. This isn’t just a Jewish problem though. Here in **Psalm 53** we find further revelation. David describes Israel’s enemies.  
**Psalm 53:5** – “God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth *against* thee: thou hast put *them* to shame, because God hath despised them.”
- A. In the NT Paul uses this passage to remind us that it is a universal problem. It is an epidemic. Sin has infected all.  
**Romans 3:9-12** – “What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; <sup>10</sup> As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: <sup>11</sup> There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. <sup>12</sup> They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

- B. David says in **Verse 1** – “*there is none that doeth good.*”  
**Psalm 53:3** – “they are altogether become filthy; *there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*”
13. This psalm is divided into two simple parts. **Verses 1-5** describe the attributes of those living in unbelief. Then in the final verse, **Verse 6**, David gives a plea for the salvation of the poor fools living in unbelief.
- I. David describes the attributes of those in unbelief – this describes all who are not Christians
- A. They are corrupt – **Verse 1**
1. The word here refers to something that destroys or causes to go to ruin
  2. Although created in the image of God with a great capacity for creativity, human beings destroy everything they touch
    - a. Look at television and the movies
    - b. Look at what many do with the internet
    - c. Look at what the absence of leadership has caused in our country and around the world.
  3. They do all manner of “abominable iniquity”
    - a. In **Psalm 14** David describes it as “abominable works”  
Here he describes it as “abominable iniquity”
    - b. It would seem that as David spent his life observing the actions of men there has only been an increase of wickedness.
  4. The wickedness is universal in scope  
**Psalm 53:1** – “*there is none that doeth good.*”  
**Psalm 53:3** – “Every one of them is gone back”  
NAS **Psalm 53:3** – “Every one of them has turned aside”  
 All have turned aside from the pathway of righteousness
  5. **Verse 3** describes them as “filthy”  
 “they are altogether become filthy”
    - a. Literally the word means, “to stink.”  
No lost person sees himself in this way. They are abominable.
    - b. They have become “morally corrupt” – they are morally bankrupt  
**Job 15:16** – “How much more abominable and filthy *is* man, which drinketh iniquity like water?”
    - c. They have little regard for that which is holy or righteous. They put God and His rule far from their minds.
5. They are void of moral goodness - “*there is none that doeth good*”
- B. They try to exclude God from every aspect of life **Verses 2-3a**
1. In **Verse 2** God is brought onto the scene to testify to the truths David is speaking –
    - a. God looks, He sees, He takes notice – nothing can be hid from Him
    - b. He is describes as sitting on His throne – from heaven
    - c. The scene strikes us with His majesty and glory  
“The LORD looked down from heaven”
    - d. What God sees is a terrible plague of sin – all have rebelled against Him

2. None possess true understanding – spiritual understanding.
    - a. None of them know God
    - b. With sin comes a horrible blindness, a loss of discernment  
Lost humanity is wondering in a cloud of darkness.
    - c. Divine light shines upon all men - yet they are unable to comprehend it - Why? - Because they are blind  
**John 1:4-5** - "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not"
    - c. Lost men are void of spiritual intelligence, spiritual insight, spiritual wisdom.
    - d. True understanding and knowledge results in seeking after God
  3. None seek God
    - a. They will not have Him as God. They will not have Him alone as their treasure.
    - b. Instead of seeking God they do the opposite. They flee from Him, deny Him, oppose Him  
They are all gone aside
    - c. Because of his spiritual death or spiritual depravity the lost man has no desire for God.  
**Verse 4** – “have not called upon God”
  4. **Verse 3** - “No not one” – not even one – It is universal
    - a. No one seeks God simply because they don’t see any value in God. Not only do we not seek God. We do our best to avoid Him.
    - b. People seek religion but they don’t seek God.
    - c. No man seeks God, no man has any desire to submit to God because they perceive it is far better for them to live without God.
- C. They devour the righteous – **Verse 4**  
**Psalms 53:4** – “Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread: they have not called upon God.”
1. **Verse 4** begins with a rhetorical question – he has already established that they have no knowledge. Now David gives a great example – they devour those who are the most worthy of honor – God’s people, those who live according to righteousness.
  2. Calvin: “they have overthrown all order, so that they no longer make any distinction between right and wrong, and have no regard for honesty, nor love of humanity.”
  3. Lost humanity hate God and they hate His people. The millions of martyrs validate David’s words – the wicked consume the righteous like bread.
  4. They mock believers when they see believers suffering while they are prospering. They misperceive God’s rich grace upon His elect. They fail to recognize true prosperity. They mock the believer’s unfailing trust of God especially as it appears God is inattentive to their needs.
- D. They are filled with great fear – **Verse 5**
1. Everything on this earth is temporary and passing  
It is characterized by loss.

2. The lost man is terrified of loss – loss of goods, loss of love, loss of life. Having forsaken God he is left all alone in this world. They fear even when there is no cause for fear  
**Leviticus 26:17** – “And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.”
3. Sometimes their consciences prick their hearts and the terrors of hell strike them with fear, yet they remain unchanged
4. They have great cause for fear and alarm because God is against them  
**Psalms 53:5** – “There were they in great fear, *where* no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth *against* thee: thou hast put *them* to shame, because God hath despised them.”
  - a. This is why it is so foolish to deny God
  - b. Who would want such a mighty God against them?

- II. David’s hope for God’s ultimate deliverance from the wickedness of this world – **V. 6**  
**Psalms 53:6** – “Oh that the salvation of Israel *were come* out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, *and* Israel shall be glad.”
- A. This is a hope not only for personal deliverance but also a plea for the salvation of the lost.
    1. David, like Paul many hundreds of years later, longed to see the end of all wickedness. – **Verse 6** –  
“Oh that the salvation of Israel *were come* out of Zion!”
    2. This would be a cause for great rejoicing
  - B. If none not even one seek after God then what’s the point of **Verse 6**?
    1. In fact, doesn’t this mean that even David is lost and hopeless?
    2. The point is, salvation is impossible for men because no one has a heart for God, all hate and despise Him. We need a new heart.  
**Mark 10:26-27** – “And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? <sup>27</sup> And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men *it is* impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”
  - C. David is longing for salvation to come out of Zion
    1. Zion is the metaphorical dwelling place of God
    2. By “salvation” David is speaking of deliverance – the deliverance of Israel. Deliverance from what? Deliverance from the wickedness that has engulfed them.
    3. But as the Apostle Paul states this is a universal problem. All of humanity needs this deliverance
  - D. “when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, *and* Israel shall be glad.”
    1. David is not talking about his personal wanderings at the time of Saul or his exile at the hand of Absalom. Nor is he prophesying about the scattering of Israel by the Assyrians or the captivity of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. His mind has in mind the whole of humanity and the filling of the church.

2. Calvin: “by expressing his desire for the deliverance of Israel, we are taught that he was chiefly anxious about the welfare of the whole body of the Church, and that his thoughts were more occupied about this than about himself individually.”

Conclusion:

1. Wickedness is all around us. We live in a world of fools. How weary we grow of the foolishness. May God grant us to live separate and apart from the insanity. May we pray continually that God will save the wicked from their own folly.
2. May God grant us the great joy of seeing them come to faith in Christ. “Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad.”