

# Assessing Atheists

*Psalms Series*

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 14

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## **Truth Community Fellowship**

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Well, it's a joy to come together to study God's word again tonight as we look at Psalm 14 and I think that we're going to appreciate afresh how much God has prepared us in his word to live in the midst of the hostilities that are around us. It gives us the perspective that we need in order to understand why we don't fit in with the world and Psalm 14 is certainly an example of that. Psalm 14 is a Psalm that is repeated a couple of times in the Bible. If you look at Psalm 53, you'll find that it's almost a verbatim repetition of Psalm 14 and then in the famous passage in Romans 3 that we'll look at in a little while, it's quoted there as well. So this is an important text of Scripture for biblical theology. It is biblically prominent.

What we see in Psalm 14 is David examining the corruption of the human race. As he opens it up, he is longing for Yahweh to establish his kingdom on earth for he is weary of the hostility of those who deny the very existence of God and he examines it in a very precise and incisive way. When we think about the hostility of atheists, when we think of the way that people who are not Christians love to mock our faith and to be sarcastic toward it, Psalm 14 gives us insight into the way that we should think about it and the Bible makes no bones about it, it calls people like that "the fool." They are foolish people that are opposed to the work and the person and the existence of God. But as it goes on and as you understand this, I'm just kind of giving you a little bit of an overview here right now, is to understand that Psalm 14 treats atheism as sort of a symptom of a broader problem in humanity and that's what we're going to see as we look at this. The foolishness of atheists is simply a symptom of a greater problem that dominates everyone in the human race, that dominates everyone apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. So that's what we're going to look at here in Psalm 14 this evening.

We're going to look first of all at the first three verses and see that the fool defies God. The atheist is a fool and the fool is someone who defies God and we're going to look at the first three verses as we begin here. Look at them with me again,

1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.

It's a very bleak picture that David gives us of the environment that is around him. It's a bleak picture of humanity mocking and ignoring God. We need to understand what exactly he's saying when he calls them fools because what he is saying, he is not accusing them of intellectual stupidity. This is not about a lack of information that they have, rather this term "fool" is one that has moral connotations. It's a negative moral term. It refers to someone who has made an ethical choice for evil. He lives as if there is no God. James Montgomery Boice says, "The reason that this person is a fool and not merely mistaken is that he knows that there is a God and yet he chooses to believe and act as if there is none." When we're looking at those people that mock the faith, that claim to be atheists, we need to understand that the Bible does not accept their premise at face value. The Bible pierces through that charade, that mask that they put on and says, "Here, let me tell you what's really going on inside them." It gives you a picture of what the actual spiritual reality is. There is no one who truly does not believe that there is a God. As we're going to see, the Bible makes this very clear. It's simply a moral, ethical choice that they have made that they want to live without God.

So what we have here with the atheist is not a lack of information, it's not a different perspective on spiritual reality, it's not anything like that at all. What you have with the atheist is open defiance. There is in the atheist a refusal to listen to reason. He rejects the fear of the Lord which could have led him to wisdom. This is a deliberate choice to reject that which is obvious around him, above him in the skies and even within him in the sphere of his own conscience. So what we have when we have an atheist in front of us, and it's not that they're outwardly hostile to everything. Sometimes they can be pleasant enough people but deep in their heart, the Bible is telling us what is going on. There is a morally culpable corruption in their heart that God does not tolerate and that Scripture utterly condemns.

It says there, look at the end of verse 1, you see it in what they say that they believe. They say that, "There is no God," and then their lifestyle is corrupt, "They have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good." To take the language of what this verse is saying, these men are destructive, they do detestable things and according to Scripture spiritually speaking, there is no redeemable trait in them. What should we say about this if we're just going to take this and apply it at the moment? Instantly, beloved, you should see that as born again Christians, as those who accept and receive the word of God as our final authority, as those who know the truth, there is no reason for us whatsoever to be intimidated by the scoffing, the intellectual mockery of atheists. There is no reason to be intimidated by them at all. We need to see them not on a horizontal plane as men who are opposed to us and perhaps, you know, sometimes intellectually superior and have more brain power than we do. We need to see it for what Scripture calls it to be: foolishness and outright defiance to the God of the Bible.

One of the ways that I think about this is you think about, for example, college professors who have letters after their names and spend their class time trying to rob sincere young people of their faith simply because they, the professors, don't have anything of their own to say, anything of their own to build a life upon, so they try to destroy the foundation of

those who have come to them for instruction. That is utterly detestable. It is an abominable sin against God and it is a sin against humanity to spend your time and influence in trying to destroy what others have built into those lives over a period of 20 years or so. And when Scripture look at that, it says that this is not sincere atheism. This is a chosen path that these men have taken to remove the restraints that hinder their enjoyment of sin.

"The fear of the Lord," Scripture says in Proverbs 8:13, "keeps a man from evil. Keeps a man from sin." It directs the course of his life. When a man understands that there is a God who has authority over him, who has spoken in a book, who has made himself and his law known and who says that there will one day be a day of accountability for everyone on earth, "You will all come before my Judgment Seat and give an account," it's not surprising that men who love sin want to throw off the reign of a God like that. So Scripture says they make up this worldview that defines this God out of existence so that they are free to go ahead with their life. David says that's foolish. It's morally corrupt. It's against the testimony of everything that is in nature around him and inside his own heart. That's how he opens up verse 1.

Then as he goes on in verse 2, this is very interesting. He calls God as his witness to what he just said, what he just explained, what he just asserted in verse 1. He now calls God as his witness to what he had just said about the fool. Look at it there in verse 2 with me,

2 The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God.

Here's the verdict in verse 3,

3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.

So what happens here is that David has expanded this out, he's stretched this out and called God as his witness to what he is saying about the human race. What you have in verses 2 and 3 is an expansion that goes beyond those men who would verbally assert that there is no God and it expands to a condemnation of the entire human race. David is saying, what this Psalm is saying is that the atheistic spirit of verse 1 is simply a symptom of a greater problem that plagues everyone in the human race and as we see this and understand it and maybe for some of you young people this will bring a word of conviction upon your own soul as you understand the workings of your own inner heart, this is more than just those who would verbalize that there is no God. This is now a statement that condemns everyone in the human race. Look at it in verse 2 with me, "The LORD has looked down from heaven," this is an expression of his omniscience. It is a statement that God examines the entire human race. He looks down as a witness on the actions and attitudes of men and the question is: is there any exception to the broad statement made at the end of verse 1, "There is no one who does good"? Because that's a pretty striking statement. That's all comprehensive and the question is: has it been

overstated? David calls God as his witness and God's judgment and assessment of the human race, very man, woman and child that has ever lived, is that there is no exception.

Look at it there in verse 2. This is very sobering. God says, "Are there any who understand? Are there any who seek after God?" And the verdict from the witness is this: no. There is not. "They have all turned aside." The entirety of humanity collectively and individually has turned aside from God. "Together they have become corrupt," and that word "corrupt" is from a term that speaks of sour milk. It is curdled milk and so you take one whiff of it and you just turn away in revulsion at the odor that is emitted from the sour milk. It is that kind of corruption that marks the entirety of the human race and at the end of verse 3, notice what it says here: "There is no one who does good," so it repeats what was said in verse 1 but then it adds this emphatic conclusion, "not even one." As you look at these statements, look at how comprehensive this statement is at the end of verse 2, "Are there any who understand?" No. Verse 3, "They have all turned aside," all of them without exception. "Together they have all become corrupt; There is no one who does good, there is not even one." Notice that this is making a universal statement that applies throughout all of humanity. All of humanity is like curdled, sour milk in the assessment of God.

Now, to say that obviously expands it beyond simply those who would verbalize their defiance of God and say there is no God because that doesn't mark everyone in the human race, does it? There are people who even in false religion would say, "I believe in God." They have something going on with which they would testify to their lives. This is making a broader statement in verses 2 and 3 and saying that the atheism of verse 1 is simply a manifestation of a worldwide corruption that marks everyone in the human race. Here's the way that I think that we need to think about this and to be brought short by it, as it were, is to recognize that even for those who would say that there is a God, let's examine that a little bit more closely. Out of that subset of humanity, that larger subset that would have some kind of theistic statement, theistic worldview, how many of them actually will sit down and read the Bible? How many of them will actually get down on their knees and pray and worship this God that they say that they believe? Who actually take the time to do that? Who would actually express dependence upon the God of Scripture for their daily lives and for their spiritual well-being? How many of them would actually confess to the truth of what Scripture says that they are sinners separated from God who need a Savior? How many would say that? Well, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, none would and suddenly you see that this is such a broad statement about the corruption of humanity.

Here's what I want you to see about this: you have the atheists in verse 1, "There is no God." Well, the person who refuses to read the Bible, the person who has no time or interest in prayer, the person who never thinks and contemplates the fact that there is a future judgment coming, who lives his life in disregard to the fact that there is a coming day of accountability before a holy God, that person is a practical atheist. There is no difference between a person who is marked by that kind of spirit and the one who openly says there is no God. The utter core of their being is exactly the same, the God who has made himself known in the Scriptures, the God who reigns, the God who is the Judge, the

God who has given his law to both those who verbalize their atheism and those who simply live it out in a practical way, there is no meaningful distinction between either one of them.

So for the person who is disinterested in the Bible, uninterested in Scripture, to the person who for all intents and purposes puts their fingers in their ear when spiritual discussions come up, what Scripture is saying in these first three verses of Psalm 14 is true of that person as well as the one who says, "There is no God." There is an utter condemnation of that atheistic spirit that says, "I will live life my own way. I will live in disregard to God. I don't care what anyone says. I don't care what Scripture says. I will be my own man. I will be my own woman. I will be my own boy. I will be my own girl. I don't want this God around me!" There is no distinction in that even if they say, "Well, there may be a God but I don't care." There is no distinction between that and the atheist who verbalizes it. This is what the first three verses are saying. So it opens with a statement in verse 1 about the atheist who says there is no God and then it expands out to say they're all like that. There is a common corruption and the common thread that runs through humanity ultimately, spiritually speaking, is this defiance and this rejection of God and Scripture condemns it as being morally culpable. It's a sweeping indictment.

Turn over to Romans 1. Scripture repeats this and you need to see this and this helps us understand the world in which we live. Why is it so bad? Why is there so much mayhem? So much murder? Why is abortion embraced as it is? How can the corruption of homosexuality be embraced? How can we go forward with all of this obvious corruption all about us? Well, this explains it: it comes from the core of the human heart that has cast aside God and therefore has no restraint on the evil that is within. Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who," watch this, "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." There is the moral culpability of the professing atheist. He has within him bubbling up the reality, the testimony of his conscience, that there is a God and he suppresses it. He strangles it, he shuts it down with his verbalization and he refuses to listen to that which his own heart speaks to him.

Look at verse 19, "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." There is no excuse for this. It's morally culpable. It is something for which they will be held accountable and responsible. There will be no excusing themselves at the Judgment Seat of God by saying, "Well, I didn't really believe in you." God is not going to accept that. He's going to say, "You knew and you simply refused." It's that refusal to listen. It's that young child in a Christian home who just turns his heart away from the instruction of a mother and a father and says, "I don't want this. I won't listen to this." That is as morally culpable as the flaming atheist because it is a refusal to hear that which their own heart testifies to.

Look at verse 21 of Romans 1, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart

was darkened." They knew it all along. They said, "I'm not going to honor that, God. I'm not going to submit myself to that, God," and an increasing cloud of darkness descends upon their soul and their life reflects the reality of that. God has plainly made himself known. The evidence is open and available so that any child who would look up at a nighttime sky could see it and acknowledge it and Scripture says that the whole human race is like this, hopelessly perverted, hopelessly corrupt.

Turn the page to Romans 3:9. You know, this is very unsettling at one level. You know, before you get to the Gospel and you just realize what Scripture is saying about the state of humanity, you realize this is very sobering. It's disorienting almost to realize that we share blood with a race that is utterly corrupt and condemned and perverted, that this is describing everyone that we know. Verse 9, Romans 3, "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." Here's what I wanted you to see from this passage is that Scripture expands this out and applies it to all of humanity. Verse 10, "As it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one,'" here's our quotes from Psalm 14. "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." The depravity of humanity is universal. It is all inclusive. It is all encompassing. There is no one outside this condemnation. It doesn't matter if it's somebody that has been brought up in a so-called Christian nation or if it's a savage on an island that has never heard the Gospel. The condemnation is the same. They are not seeking the true God despite the evidence that is around them to do so.

Therefore, we're all lost. We're all judged. Speaking of humanity apart from Christ, we're all under a universal condemnation and what you see, turn back to Psalm 14, is this. I want you to see a little bit of how Scripture makes the connection and follows everything all the way through. Going back to verse 1, we'll kind of sweep through it one more time here, is how a man responds – please pay attention to this – how a man responds to the revelation of God, how you respond to the revelation of God either in Scripture or simply in the way that God has displayed himself in nature, the way that you respond to that will have ethical consequences for the way that you live. You cannot escape this. Ungodliness in the heart eventually leads to ungodly behavior. You can't separate the two. Jesus said in Mark 7:20-22 that dirty sins come out of a dirty heart. That what comes out of a life is a reflection of what's in the heart. So notice here in Psalm 14:1, "The fool has said in his heart," it starts there. It starts inside him. It starts in that Mission Control Center, that where his affections are defined, where his deepest attitudes are held. Then he says, "The fool," this morally corrupt one, "has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" I'm going to set myself, I'm going to set my life on the path that says there is no God. He took up counsel within his own soul.

Now notice here that that's not divorced from real life. That's not divorced from the day-to-day walk of how he exists because David goes on and immediately says under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds." The ungodliness in the heart is connected to the ungodliness in the external life and it's only a matter of time before those two things are displayed simultaneously. As

my former pastor used to say, "Time and truth go hand-in-hand." And what's true in an ungodly heart is eventually going to come out in an ungodly life.

So for those of you that are here and you're not a Christian, I just want to tell you and warn you and plead with you that when you set aside God in your thinking, your desires no longer have the restraint of his word or future judgment to hold you back. It may seem like an innocent display of, "I'm going to go a slightly different direction with my life," but what you need to understand, you young people, there are a lot of children from a lot of families in here and you're still sorting things out in your own thinking and life. I want you to understand that as you're sorting these things out, that this really matters and that where you land on this, how you're going to respond to the teaching of the word of God, the teaching that your Christian parents have tried to inculcate into you, how you respond to that is setting a trajectory for the future of your life. Once you're old enough to understand the teaching of God's word, you're old enough to be accountable and responsible for it in that if you can understand in a general sense the things that I'm saying, then God is holding you accountable for how you're responding to it and what you're thinking about it in response to that. This is very, very serious.

Look, this is turning into a youth group meeting for some reason but you adults can listen in because it applies to you too, doesn't it? You know, there are 30-40 young people in here under the age of 18. That's incredible for a little gathering like this. Don't let anyone tell you that Truth Community doesn't teach youth, okay? Because we do. We just teach you side-by-side with the adults. What I really want you young people to understand is that you're in a church with elders. When I teach and Dan and Dane as elders and the other adults that are around here, you're in an environment where people really love you and care about your souls. We earnestly desire your genuine salvation. We care about what happens to you both in this life but even more in the life to come and so when we teach you these things, it is incumbent upon you to understand that Christ himself is pleading with you directly even as a young person to pay heed and to respond to the word that is being spoken to you. You can't blow it off and say, "Well, I'll deal with this when I'm an adult." No, it doesn't work that way. If you can understand, you're accountable. You're responsible to hear and to respond and to turn away from your sinful ways and to repent and put your faith in Christ.

That's what's incumbent upon you and your ungodly attitude as a young person is often displayed in the attitude that you take toward your parents, the one role of authority that God has put in your life. When you are rebellious and angry and mouthy toward your parents, what you are displaying is a mouthy, rebellious attitude toward God. It's just frightening to realize that you're so cold and indifferent to that. The way that you should view this church and this time here tonight as a young person is, "Wow, God brought me here tonight so that I would hear this and that my own heart would be convicted." God is being gracious to you by pouring his word into you at a time like this where you're able to listen and hear and understand and you have the opportunity to respond. Don't mistake your rebellious attitudes and rebellious behavior here for anything less than what they are. When you're rebellious against your parents, you are rebelling against God. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right."

So we all need to sort these things out but for some reason the Lord has taken this and applied it directly to the young people tonight as we've just trusted him for the leading in the word here tonight. You young people, I'll just say this one last time: understand that if you've got that core of rebellion in your heart, understand that it's going to come out in your life. You know, for some of you it's just a silent resentment against what your parents stand for and what they've taught you in all of that and you won't say anything outwardly but you know inside your heart how much the corruption is there and how much you resent it. That makes you guilty before God. So I extend an invitation to you to repent and put your faith in Christ.

Now, we've said that the fool defies God. That's what we saw in the first three verses. What I want to do now is to take you to the next three verses and see another aspect of it and see how this atheistic spirit, this rebellious spirit, works itself out. Point 1: the fool defies God. Point 2: the fool defies God's people. The fool defies God's people and when you think about it, there's just an ever opening display of the wickedness of the human heart and the way that it manifests itself in life. It starts with a core of rebellion against God himself and says, "I reject this. I don't want a sovereign God. I don't want a holy God over me restraining me in my sin and so I'm going to get rid of him." Well, understand that that's like knocking over the first of a string of dominoes and a lot of different dominoes start to fall in your life. Without a doubt, it's just inevitable that it would be like this and so once a man makes a decision in his heart, "I don't want that God over me," then the Bible gets set aside. Then prayer gets set aside. We're talking analytically, not chronologically here. But all of those things that would be a vertical response to God in receiving his word, in speaking to him in prayer, that gets rejected and set aside because you don't want anything to do with it. Well, there are other dominoes that fall along the way and eventually that hostile attitude toward God himself is displayed in a hostile attitude toward the people of God.

Look at Psalm 14:4 with me. I've got to stop closing my Bible for illustration purposes because when I go back to look at the verse, I've got to look it up again and so it's messing me up that way. I need two Bibles up here: one that I can close and pound, the other that's right here in front of me that I can read and preach from. "Our pastors really good, man. He takes two Bibles into the pulpit." That wouldn't be a bad thing to be known for, would it? "Yeah, but he keeps one of them closed." Okay, we'll sort that out later.

Verse 4. The fool defies the people of God. Let me just kind of walk you into the text here. Sinners may try to eradicate God from their conscience and say, "I'm not going to listen. I'm not going to listen. I won't open the book. I'm not going to listen to my conscience. I'm going to put my fingers in my ears." But do you know what? They've got a problem with that because they still encounter the people of God. They still run into Christians. They still run into the people who open God's word and so the venom that they have already settled that they're going to spit out at God vertically now becomes directed toward the people of God. The hostility that is anchored in their heart toward a holy God rejects his word and then it rejects his people and it turns on them as well.



Look at verse 4, notice how the shift changes to a horizontal view here.

4 Do all the workers of wickedness not know, Who eat up my people as they eat bread, And do not call upon the Lord?

They turn and they devour people. They abuse them. They take advantage of them. Perhaps it's as simple as mocking and scorning and sarcastically mocking and making fun of what a believer holds dear. You can see it in the television. You can see it in your family relationships. You can see it everywhere around you. You know what this is talking about, that those people who reject God, who have been described as corrupt and not good, these are the same people that are now named as the workers of wickedness in verse 4. They go on the attack against God's people. They go on attack against Christians in today's world and they eat them up as easily and as thoughtlessly as they eat a slice of bread. They just stick it in their mouths and chew it. It doesn't even take any effort. It doesn't take any thought. It's just the natural overflow of a life that has previously ordained itself to hate God. Well, if you hate God, you're going to hate his people. Once the dam breaks, once the dam in your heart breaks and you say, "I'm going to reject God," then that just starts to flow out everywhere is what Scripture teaches.

David here is expressing a sense of amazement that these sinners are so wrapped up in their senseless hatred of God and his people that they never stop to think about what the ultimate outcome of their attitudes are going to be. Verse 4, he says, "Don't they know? Don't they understand that when they do this, when they eat up God's people, when they don't call upon the Lord themselves, don't they understand that there's consequences to that?" Verse 5, that in that position,

5 There they are in great dread,

They are in great danger with that attitude. Why? Look at the end of verse 5. Why is that such a perilous place for them to be placed?

For God is with the righteous generation.

God is with his people in their distress. When sinners, when atheistic people, when those who deny Christ and hate Christ, train their guns on the people of God. The spiritual reality of that is this: they are training their guns on God himself because God is with his people and therefore the hostility of sinners against the people of God is doomed to ultimate failure. To attack them, to attack God's people, is to attack God himself and David says, "How can you do this so complacently? How can you do this so easily when the outcome of your hostility is certain?" Look at verse 6, he says,

6 You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted,

You would mock and scorn those who trust in the living God in the midst of their hardship. You mock them and scorn them from a position of false intellectual superiority

as if you're talking down to somebody who is ignorant and you are speaking from a sense of superiority. But understand this, understand all of it, in verse 6,

But the LORD is his refuge.

Notice the all caps there. By the way, it should be all caps in verse 4 as well if you're reading a NASB but they slipped up there. It's the same word, Yahweh, that's translated in the capital letters for Lord.

He says, "The outcome of your hostility toward the people of God is doomed to failure because the Lord, because this promise-keeping, covenant-keeping God is their refuge. This God who loves his people. Who defends them to the very last drop of his blood, as it were, defends them even on Calvary, defends them with his providential care, will justify them and vindicate them in the end. This is their refuge. You are going against someone that you cannot possibly defeat. This is going to turn out bad for you in the end," he says to those who attack God's people. Don't you know that? Isn't it obvious that you can't separate the people of God from the God who protects them? And if you attack his people, it's an attack on God himself and that's going to turn around and boomerang on you and be very bad for you in the end. Don't you see it? Can't you think through logically to the conclusion that what you're doing is self-destructive?

For those of us that are the people of God here tonight, what we should think and what our take-away is from this is that when that hostility comes from within a family, from outside, from the politics that maybe get set against us or as we see world events and Christian suffering in other places even if we're not, beloved, we have to step back and we've got to be able to see the big picture view. We have to see where the outcome of all of this is going and let that filter back and inform our perspective on it. Yes, persecution is bad and it's wrong and it's evil and people do it with wicked intent but didn't Jesus himself say, "Blessed are you when you are persecuted?" Look back at Matthew 5. I want you to see this. You see, there are so many people and there's a reason why I feel like I have to repeat this kind of stuff time and time again because I know that you get fed in the name of Christ and in the name of Christianity, you get fed with all the sense of resentment and a victim mentality and, "This is so unfair and look at what these wicked people are doing," and destroying the foundations of the people of God. I get that. I understand that. And yes, at a human level, it is unfair and it is unjust but we were told to expect this. For the love of God, people, we're supposed to rise above that. We're supposed to transcend that. We're supposed to find joy in the fact that we are suffering the same kind of strokes from the same kind of wicked people that our Lord himself felt. It is a privilege to suffer for Christ. It is a privilege to experience rejection for the name of Christ. That's not something that we get angry about and file lawsuits about and raise up rallies to oppose out of a sense of fear or anger. No! No! We know the outcome. This all turns on their head and it comes out good for us in the end.

Look at Matthew 5:10. One day from this platform, I'll be speaking about Matthew 5 if I have my way with it but that's down the road a year or two. Matthew 5:10, our Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom we trust, the one whom we believe, the one who loves us and gave

himself up for us, what does he say about persecution? Forget about the fund raising letters that want to play it up and make us feel the victim. What does Christ say about it? That's what I care about. Christ says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Christ tells us, "When this comes upon you, even if it's as light as someone insulting you for being a Christian." He doesn't limit this to those who have lost their heads or spilled blood in the name of Christ. He extends this blessing even to those of us who are criticized or mocked for being faithful to him.

What does he say? "Blessed." You are in a position of divine favor when this happens to you. That's the word blessed. It's a word that means you're the privileged recipient of divine favor. Those of you that have been on the receiving end of mocking from your family, those of you who have perhaps lost position in workplace situations because of your faith, Christ looks at that and pronounces blessing upon you. He defines it for you and says, "You are the privileged recipient of the goodness and blessing of God," in that position. Christ would not have us panicked, angry or fearful when persecution comes to us. He would have us respond with joy. With a sense of perspective that realizes that, "I'm connected with the prophets who were persecuted before me." We're in a long noble line here. The prophets suffered for preaching the word of God. Christ suffered on the cross and shed his blood at the hands of unrighteous men and those who said he was aligned with Beelzebub and going on through the apostles and the church martyrs over the centuries. When we are criticized and mocked and suffer for the name of Christ, we're not supposed to react against the man that's doing it, we're supposed to step back and say, "Wow, what a long, noble line and I'm a part of it. Praise God! Do you know what? This comes out in heaven for me. This is awesome!"

"There is a nobility to what I'm going through," is what we're supposed to say when that happens. It's a blessing for us and for the unrepentant one who delivers the blows upon us, who mocks us? Go back to Psalm 14. It says, "Don't they know that they're in great dread? God is with the righteous generation. You would shame us but the Lord is our refuge." David is saying, "This comes out bad for you. You should be afraid and ashamed of what you're doing. If nothing else, out of your own self-interest, this is really going to collapse on you in the end because the Lord is with the righteous generation. The Lord is the refuge of his people. The Lord reigns over all. The Lord has declared what he believes about this, what he's going to do with this and a day of deliverance and judgment is coming and this persecution now will be reversed. God's people will be on the receiving end of his blessing and the wicked will feel the stroke of his judgment."

So while the fool holds God in contempt, God patiently bides his time until the day of judgment comes and then it's all going to be reversed. Suddenly, God's judgment will come on the wicked. Their persecution of God's people will end. Dread will overtake them where before their arrogant mocking had ruled. You know, you just think about the arrogant mocking of Christ on the cross. "If God is pleased with him, have him come down from the cross and then we'll believe in him." Well, you see how that turned out.

The point is that the wicked defy God. The fool defies God and he, by extension, defies God's people but we as the people of God are not falling under the weight of that. The Lord is our refuge. So what's the outcome for us? Where is it that this Psalm ends up? Where is it that our hope and expectation should be? Look at verse 7. Point 3 here: I've stated the point this way, God will defy the fool. The fool now defies God, now defies God's people but in the end, God will defy the fool. Look at verse 7,

7 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!

Oh, that deliverance would come from Jerusalem for the people of God, is what that means. That in the midst of this affliction at the hands of ungodly people, David says, "I am longing for that day when the Deliverer steps up. When the Deliverer comes forth and reverses course, turns over the present situation and installs righteousness and casts down the wicked. Oh, I'm longing for that day! I pray that it would come!"

When the LORD restores His captive people,

That has the sense of restoring their fortunes, making the situation better for his people as they are under the stroke of oppression from these wicked people who deny the living God. Oh, that that day would come when God turns the situation around. In that day,

Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad.

The Old Testament people of God will rejoice when their Messiah asserts himself and in the same way, we as Christian people in the New Testament era, we look forward to that day when Christ will assert himself. When he will return and righteousness will be established on the earth. When that which the world loves is condemned and set aside and sealed away. When the name of Christ is no longer a curse word but it is exalted and praised. Oh, for that day to come! That's when we'll rejoice. And that day is certainly coming. That day will no doubt arrive.

David here is longing for God's righteous rule and the destruction of unrepentant wicked people and he's saying this, he's saying that the conflict between God and the fool is going to end. It has an expiration date. You think about the sour milk of corruption, well there's an expiration date on the sourness of their souls. It's going to come to an end and David says, "I'm longing for that day." So when you feel the weight of opposition from those who deny your Christ, who mock your faith, the idea is that you would bounce off of that and get closer to God, that you would bounce off of that and remember why they're like that. First of all, there's this ungodliness in their heart and you are on the receiving end of that. They can't strike Christ so they'll strike you instead. But also when this comes into our lives and when it comes inevitably and we face it corporately somewhere down the road, that time of pressure is simply designed to call us to look beyond this world to look to the hope that we're living for. To be confident that that is coming. Whether it's on a personal level or whether you're seeing glib, well-spoken intellectuals who are denying everything that we hold dear, Psalm 14 teaches us this: we

should not be intimidated by that. We should not be ashamed when well-spoken intellectuals speak derisively about our God and about the Gospel. We don't have to respond that way at all. God has given us what we need in his word to see through it all, to see the reality of why they are speaking that way. We know the truth about their inner corruption. They don't know more than we do. Their godlessness is self-inflicted and abominable.

We're Christians. We have the real word of the real living God. We're not ashamed. We're not afraid. We're not intimidated. Why would we be? When the holy God of the universe is aligned on our side? When Christ himself is our refuge? When Christ himself will be the fulfillment of our desires and will vindicate his people. In the meantime when we suffer at the hands of ungodly men, he says, "You're blessed." Why would we be intimidated? Why would we be afraid? We're not overwhelmed. The presence of this kind of opposition simply brings us back to what we believe and to what our hope is. God is with us. God will defend us. God will one day restore the situation and give us the fullness of joy.

Do you know why? I'll show you again. Turn back to Psalm 1:6. This verse explains so much of the Psalms. It's a guiding, interpretive principle as we go through the Psalms. It's that which more and more just in my own life, I just find myself settling into this verse as I see the news that you see, as I contemplate my own corruption, my own weakness. Yet, as the Lord knows, your heart and mine, like Peter, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. I know that there's not much to see right now to prove that to you, not by way of external great stuff in my life but, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." Verse 6 of Psalm 1 says, "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." Right there is where we anchor our life. The Lord knows. That's all that matters. It doesn't matter what happens in the meantime as long as the Lord knows. As long as I am in the hands of Christ. As long as I belong to him. Nothing else matters by comparison. And when I see the wicked prospering in the way, when you see violent people rising up in the Middle East, they're living on borrowed time. The foot has already been placed on their air hose because the way of the wicked will perish without fail.

So you and I as Christians, we're strong. We're courageous. We're ready. We're unafraid. Because the Lord knows our way. And all of those who oppose us in unrepentant wickedness, they're going to perish. So we go forward. Noble. Strong. Courageous. Willing. Unafraid. Because our Lord, our covenant-keeping, faithful God who is our refuge, knows our way. And those who oppose the God of the Bible, their way will perish. We live now with the joy of the certain outcome even while things are difficult at the moment. It's only temporary and we frame our life, we frame our thinking, we frame our attitudes, we establish our whole perspective knowing that the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish.

Let's pray together.

*Father, what a sweet, great, wonderful privilege you have bestowed upon us to be Christians and to be able to come to you as our refuge and know that you would love us and that you care for us, that you know our way and that we will never be lost from your sight. I pray for these dear brothers and sisters in Christ who perhaps are suffering at the hands of unrighteous people right now, Lord. I pray that you would strengthen them with a bright and glorious hope that the outcome is assured.*

*For the young people that we have spoken to tonight, Lord, have mercy on them. Lord, we as parents know that at our best we give them an imperfect example and so, Lord, we cry out for the work of your Spirit to do a work. There are so many. There are dozens in here, Lord. So many families represented just in the room right now. We pray for those young people that their repentance would be real, that you would lead them to faith in Christ, that you would open their heart as you did Lydia in Acts 16 to believe the things that were being spoken, that they might put their faith in Christ and be saved.*

*Lord, thank you for this building. Thank you for these people. Thank you for this church. Thank you for your word. Thank you for the indwelling Spirit. Thank you for Christ who died, who rose again, who intercedes for us at the right hand of God in heaven, who is coming back, who will receive us and take us to be where he is now. O God, you have blessed us so greatly and so abundantly. Thank you seems inadequate but we say it with all sincerity, Lord. Thank you. We praise you. We honor you. And we trust you here tonight. In Christ's name. Amen.*

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