

Depravity and Deliverance

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Bible Text: Psalm 53
Preached on: Tuesday, December 13, 2016

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I'm delighted to return to the Psalms after a bit of a hiatus as we did some studies in systematic theology together, and I'm very delighted to be able to come back. I think of Tuesday night as the night on which we study the Psalms even though it isn't always working out that way in real time.

Let me do something by way of reminder, by way of kind of resetting the whole context of the Psalms and help us to prepare for our study of Psalm 53 here this evening. Go back to the very beginning of the Psalms. I want to remind you of something that we said and that we repeat but you can't say it often enough. The first two Psalms, Psalm 1 and Psalm 2, stand like pillars at the entrance way into the Psalter. They introduce the entire book of Psalms in a way that is sometimes overlooked as we study or read individual Psalms. We forget sometimes that the book of the Psalms is bound together in many different ways that we won't rehearse tonight but that the first two Psalms are setting a theme and a context for the rest of the Psalms by which you understand them.

In Psalm 1, you open up and you see the distinction drawn between the righteous and the wicked man. Look at verse 1 of Psalm 1, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night." Verse 4, "The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." Why is that the case? "The LORD knows the way of the righteous," verse 6, "But the way of the wicked will perish." And we've said many many times that it's an oversimplification but it is a guiding principle through so many of the Psalms, that much of the rest of the entire book of Psalms is an exposition of that concluding verse of Psalm 1, "the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." And as you go through the Psalms in different situations, David and the Psalmist keep coming back to this basic principle: "The Lord knows my way, the Lord knows the wicked. I trust in him and I know that sooner or later he will deal with the wicked who oppose me." And it's like an axis around so many of the Psalms turn. In Psalm 2, you have a Psalm that is pointing to a coming Messiah. Look at verse 12 of Psalm 2, actually verse 11, "Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!"

And so the Psalms right from the very beginning call us to recognize that the Lord is sovereign over righteousness and wickedness; that those who turn to the Son in repentance and faith, who trust him and look to him for salvation will find the Lord's blessing and protection upon their lives. Those who reject the Son will find that the Lord's wrath is kindled against them; that their prosperity is temporary and that their final concluding doom is certain and the entire Psalms, the entire book of Psalms, the entire Psalter, is reinforcing these basic principles again and again and again. So if we would rightly understand the Psalms, as it were, with Psalm 1 on our left, Psalm 2 on your right, and you walk through the Psalms and that is the gate, that is the entryway into the Psalms to help you understand everything else that follows. And as you do that, again and again you are brought to the point in the Psalms as the Psalmist works through different issues, it comes back to a fundamental issue that in the end the Psalmist is praising God, giving honor to God, thanking him for his fidelity to his promises, his faithfulness to his people and the fact that he truly does what Psalm 1 says he will do, he knows the way of the righteous, he will bless them in the end, and he will deal with the wicked in his way and in his time.

So that if you turn to the final book or the final Psalm in the Psalms, if you go to Psalm 146, for example, as we've pointed this out, we're just resetting the Psalms for you here this evening, the concluding five Psalms are like a magnificent climax to a firework show where there are just multiple bursting glories of pyrotechnics going on and captivating you with their color and their splendor and the booming sounds of glory. The Psalms end in that way. Psalm 146:1, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being." Psalm 147 starts out, "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God." Verse 20 ends Psalm 147 with the phrase, "Praise the LORD!" Psalm 148 opens, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!" And on and on it goes. Psalm 149, "Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, And His praise in the congregation of the godly ones." And then Psalm 150 is just the great climax to the whole theme that the Psalms are designed to drive us to. "Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness." And finally in verse 6, "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!"

Praise the Lord, it says, and so the Psalms tell us how God governs his moral universe, guarantees for us the outcome for those who turn to him in repentance and faith, and as a result of that, what is the response of the people of God? What do you do in response to everything that is revealed to us in the 150 Psalms that make up the book of Psalms? You respond to him with your adoration, with your praise, with your gratitude, with your thanksgiving, by ascribing greatness to his name, greatness for his attributes, and you ascribe praise to him for the greatness of the splendor of the way that he has dealt with you, an undeserving sinner. And what better time for us to have these things brought back to our mind than in this season where we remember and celebrate the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; that in a way that was still in the distant mists of time from the perspective of the Psalmist, now we see on the other end just exactly how far God will go

to protect and bless his people. He will go so far as to descend down from heaven, as it were, take on human flesh and go to the cross of Calvary in order to pay for the sins of his people. Why? So that he can bless us. So that he can keep us. So that he can manifest untold riches of grace and kindness upon us unworthy sinners that we are; those who were dead in trespasses and sins, under the wrath of God, under the bondage of Satan, with no hope in this world, with no desire for Christ, not seeking God, not understanding as Romans 3 says.

That's what God is like to us and how fitting for us to be brought back to the booming thunders of praise found in the Psalms as we're remembering the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; that for you as a Christian, the Lord had you in mind by name from the beginning of eternity, from before time began, and as he went to the cross, he went there to bear your sins in particular; to have you by name on his heart; that he would think of you in the midst of his suffering and say, "Yes, Father, I offer my life, my righteous life. I offer my spilled blood as the perfect sacrifice that would redeem you by name." What can we do except to go back to the words of Psalm 150 and praise the Lord with all of our breath, everything that has breath, to praise the Lord? So the Psalms set the stage for us and now in light of New Testament revelation, in light of the coming of Christ, in light of your own salvation that Christ purchased for you, now as it were, we stand on the foundation of Scripture, we stand on the Psalms, and we have even more reason to burst forth in praise as we find our God presented to us in Scripture.

Well, with all of that background in mind, let's go now to Psalm 53 and let it make its contribution to the sense of praise that we have. And in these Psalms in the 50s and 60s, you'll often find the Psalmist dealing with the problem of wickedness that is being perpetrated against him, dealing with enemies that are attacking him. And so David and the other Psalmists are wrestling through these issues and coming back to these fundamental points. And in Psalm 53, you see something that is underlying and undergirding this, is David's confidence that God will be faithful to the things that he has revealed, and that he will be faithful to know the way of the righteous and that he will be faithful to deal with the wicked who oppose his people and oppose God himself. So in Psalm 53, David is coming back to that theme.

Let's look at it now with that lengthy introduction that we've gone through. Let's go back to Psalm 53 and with the context of the Psalms keeping us fresh in our thinking, we'll see what Psalm 53 has to say for us here this evening. It opens with an inscription, "For the choir director; according to Mahalath." It's an inscription that they really don't know exactly what it meant in the original time; commentators think that it may refer to the instruments or the tune that was used for musical accompaniment by those who would have sung this Psalm in Old Testament times. To call it, "A Maskil of David," is to relate it as something that is skillfully written; something that is good for meditation. So the idea here is that there is a musical bed, as it were, to the thought of this Psalm that inspires you and brings you into meditation about the problem of evil; about the problem of the opposition that wicked men bring to the people of God. And what you're going to find as you go through this Psalm, as we go through this together, is that Psalm 53, for all of its brevity and its familiarity, is giving us basic truth that helps shape our

understanding about the entirety of life. I never weary of this aspect of the Psalms, that with great Spirit-inspired brevity and yet depth, you are finding things that shape the entire way that you think about all of life; things that you can actually build your life on; things that you can rest your soul on and give praise to God for; things that settle the hard issues of life in a way that bring peace to your soul.

We all need this, don't we? We all face opposition in our individual lives. We all see the proliferation of wickedness in the world and culture around us and it seems overwhelming at times. It seems as though the waves of wickedness are going to crash down on us and we're going to be thrown into the beach, as it were, crushed under the weight of it and drowning under the weight of it all. Well, where do you find the comfort for your soul? Where do you find that that gives you peace and gives you stability and gives you a courage that rises to the occasion and says, "I live above this. I live above this realm and this wicked realm in which I live, the opposition which I face, is not powerful enough to crush my heart and to drive me into despair. I have," you say to yourself, "I have a hope that transcends all of it. I know the living God. I know the truth. I know what he does with all of this and I can" – watch this – "I can bear with, I can persevere through, the temporary setbacks that wickedness brings because I know the ultimate outcome. The ultimate outcome is guaranteed by who God is and what he has revealed. The way of the wicked will perish and he knows the way of the righteous."

And you go back to that again and again and again. In some ways, beloved, in some ways all of the things that weigh you down and the multiplicity of challenges that seem to overwhelm you, the guiding principle through all of that is found in the simplicity of Psalm 1:6: if you belong to Christ and if you are seeking to follow Christ, you can know and you can rest in the fact that the Lord knows your ways and that's enough. That's all you need. Christ is sufficient for you. The fact that he loves you and gave himself for your soul, the fact that he is in sovereign control of your life and he is directing your steps so that you will certainly arrive safely into his heavenly kingdom with him, means that you have all the context you need to go through life with a sense of stability, joy, and quiet peace and confidence. And to the extent that you are lacking that in your life, to the extent that that is not what animates your heart, then you have an opportunity for spiritual growth to say, "These are the things that I need to draw closer to. This is what I need to sink my heart into." You see, even if you got the solution to all of your financial problems, all of your physical difficulties, if every relational problem that you had was suddenly instantly solved and everything was right today, what happens? You wake up tomorrow and something new hits. You see, it could never be, spiritual life and the stability of spiritual life, could never be about the circumstances that you're facing and just massaging those to your liking. There has to be something else. There has to be something else upon which we stand that gives us courage, joy and confidence. There has to be something else that marks our life as distinct, something else that triumphs over the trials. Something else that gives you courage through the sorrow. Something else that comforts you. Not that the circumstances are to your liking but that the Lord knows the way of the righteous.

Beloved, do you know Christ today? Then it is well with your soul. Everything is going to be fine. Everything comes out well for you in the end. That's what God does for his people. And I know, I get it, I'm the same way, in your heart there is something that echoes, "But you don't know about this. Or what about that? Or I've been waiting so long for such-and-such." Beloved, don't let your heart use that adversative word "but." As soon as your heart starts to say that, you tell it to stop because we are to trust God and to know God in a way that says, "The Lord knows the way of the righteous. Period. That's enough." An entire section of Scripture is built on that principle. And you rest in it. So every one of you here tonight that know Christ, you should rehearse in your mind as we're going through this and saying, "The Lord knows the way of the righteous. Period. That's enough." And let it rest there. Manifest your trust in God. Honor God. Glorify your Christ with the sense that says, "Lord, that is enough for me. I rest in that. And no human circumstance, no human opposition, no human conflict, is going to knock me away from that which is the security and foundation of my soul."

Let's look at it in three basic points here this evening and consider first as David considers the depravity of man. The depravity of man. The opposition of wickedness is rooted deeply in the heart of men and David assesses those who oppose God and oppose his people and deals with them in a way that gives us strength for our own lives here today. As Psalm 53 opens, David, in a sense, is groaning under the provocation of the wicked. He is dealing with the wickedness in a close-up, personal battle and now he is bringing perspective to it to strengthen his own heart and through the Spirit of God giving us that which would give us perspective in our own lives here 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 years later.

Psalm 53:1,

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

The word "fool" here refers to someone who has made a moral decision to live a wicked life. It's somebody who has turned his back on God and has embraced his love of sin as the defining and operative principle by which he would live. He lives as if there was no God. It's not so much what we think about as atheist today as those who are theoretically atheists, that's not so much what's at issue and what's at stake here. This is a man who says, "I'm going to live as if there is no God," and he just pushes it out of the perspective without defending the philosophical position of atheism. He just says, "I'm going to ignore the reign of God. I'm going to ignore his rule over men and I am going to live the way that I want. I'm going to follow after my own heart." That's always a dangerous place to go. Don't listen to anybody who tells you to just listen to your heart. Why would you do that when your heart is full of wickedness and desperately evil and needs to be sanctified by the Spirit of God? No, no, when men push God out of their thinking and out of their priorities, evil takes its place. And this person is a fool because he knows that there really is a God and yet he is choosing to act and behave as if there were none and all the while, while his conscience is testifying against him saying, "Stop! Don't do this! This

is wrong! Pay heed to the knowledge of God that is within you!" and he says, "No," and sticks his fingers in his ears and stamps his feet so that he doesn't have to pay attention.

Look over at Romans 1. We go there often but it's never too often enough to recognize what it is that is the principle that is at work in fallen man. Romans 1 says in verse 18 that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Notice the word "ungodliness," living as if there was no God, denying it with their mouth and living in an unrighteous and sinful way. But how do they do that? How can they do that? It's only because they are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. They are holding it down. They are pressing it to silence but it's not because in their heart of hearts they really think there is no God, they know better. Verse 19, "that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them."

So their heart is waging war against the knowledge of God that God himself has planted within them and it is a fool, only a fool that would ignore that and suppress it. He's got a testimony within his own heart and he lives contrary to it and so that's why he is a fool. He is openly defiant to the testimony of God within his own heart. He rejects – watch this – he rejects the very thing that could have led him to wisdom. And what's the spiritual result of that moral choice that he makes? Atheism is never about a lack of information, it is never sincere, it is always a moral choice for evil, for wickedness, a conscious deliberate choice of life to deny the testimony of God in creation above and in the heart within, to ignore the testimony of Scripture, to ignore the testimony of the conversions of Christians throughout the ages and the testimony of the true Church of Christ. There is no excuse which is what Paul goes on to say in Romans 1. They are without excuse and Psalm 53 is operating from that premise.

What's the result of it? Look at verse 2,

2 God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there is anyone who understands,
Who seeks after God.

What this verse is saying is that God looks down as though he is ready and he is prepared for judgment and he examines the entire human race in light of the statements that David has just made, that there is no one who does good. It is as if he's searching for any exception in the human race. Are there any exceptions? And the answer sadly is no. Verse 3,

3 Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
There is no one who does good, not even one.

There is no fear of God, no desire for God, no submission to God. Do you know what happens when you turn away from the light? You get darkness. Do you know what happens when you turn away from righteousness? You get sin. Do you know what happens when you turn away from Christ? You get Satan. You get an evil demonic world as your dwelling place, as your realm, and it corrupts you and you become part of it and

the consequences are great. So Psalm 53 gives a sweeping indictment that every one of them have turned aside and there is no one who does good.

Now I could have said this earlier: Psalm 53 is largely a repetition of Psalm 14 that we've studied in the past, and the themes of these two Psalms are picked up by Paul in Romans 3. Go back to Romans to chapter 3, if you would. Romans 3, Paul picks up these themes from the Old Testament and indicts the entire human race with guilt; that there are no exceptions and that it doesn't matter if a man is born a Jew or a Gentile, the same conviction, the same verdict is rendered against us all. Verse 9 of Romans 3, Paul says, "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; 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.'"

Beloved, you know, this is hard scriptural truth, isn't it, in some ways? This is not the stuff that you say and teach when you're trying to attract the attention and the popularity and the applause of men. We understand that this is convicting, that this convicts not only us in this room and reminds us of our prior lives before Christ saved us, we realize that we're talking about a universal indictment of the entire human race. We realize that Scripture tells us that man is not basically good, man is evil at his core. He is corrupt. That there is no one who does good and that there is no one who seeks for God. You say, "Well, what about all the other religions besides true Christianity? Isn't that at least an indication that men are trying somehow to find God?" No. No, all that is is just a further religious manifestation of their wickedness that they are pursuing idolatry rather than truth. This is hopeless apart from Christ. There is no human solution to this. Satan, Scripture tells us in 2 Corinthians 4, Satan has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving lest they see the Gospel, the light of the Gospel in the face of Christ and men are bound in sin that they love.

Look over at the Gospel of John 3. And we're driving home a really important fundamental point that men are in darkness through a deliberate moral choice and a moral love that they have. They prefer evil to good. They prefer self to the Savior. They prefer the rule of Satan over the rule of Christ. And with the Jews at the trial of Christ, they said, "We will not have this man reign over us. We have no king but Caesar." And look at verse 19, Jesus said, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world," John 3:19, "the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." Why is it that men refuse the Gospel? Why is it that they mock you when you share Christ with them? Why is it that they want nothing to do with that which would forgive their sins and give them eternal life? It's because they don't want that. They love the evil instead. And some of you can probably remember back in your time before you were a Christian where you were hardened like that and you did not want the Gospel either because you realized that it would have consequences for your life. That is the testimony of Scripture.

So as we teach the Bible, better stated, as the Bible speaks to the human race, as it speaks to mankind, it contradicts the prevailing spirit of our age that says men are basically good. Yes, men love to flatter themselves and to flatter each other with that but Scripture will have none of it. Scripture rejects it and says, "No, that is not the case." Scripture cuts like a surgeon's scalpel to the heart of the matter and flays it open and lets it be there for all to see, anti-God, loving sin, preferring lies over the truth that would save them.

So what's the result? What's the outcome of this? The outcome of this is that man is in a position where he cannot please God. He cannot receive the things of the truth because his will is in utter bondage to the lies, to the devil, to his love for sin. He is in chains in a below-ground dungeon that has concrete poured on top of him. He cannot get out by his own ability, by his own efforts, and he wouldn't if he could. What we're face-to-face with here this evening, beloved, is the doctrine of total depravity indicating that, and what that means is that unredeemed sinners have no spiritual merit before God and they are utterly unable to do any spiritual good to change their condition or to earn the favor of God. They are utterly and hopelessly lost and that's what you were like before Christ saved you. The sinful desires of a man's heart flow from a sinful condition that permeates his very being. Every man has a corrupt disposition that turns him away from God and toward sin and evil and he cannot change that black power in his heart by his own ability. That's the depravity of man. David lays it out for us here in Psalm 53.

So as David is dealing with the consequences of that, as he is feeling the weight of opposition from wicked men, he looks at it and with the aid of the Spirit of God, he diagnoses what is the spiritual condition that is producing this opposition to him. He finds in revelation that which explains his opposition that he is facing as a righteous man, one who has been redeemed, one who is trying to live now for the God of the Bible, now he finds, "Ah, there is a spiritual reality going on here." You know, beloved, maybe that would help you to remember in the midst of the opposition that you face, in the midst of those who mock you and reject you for the sake of your testimony to Christ. We always need to come back and let Scripture help us diagnose what's going on there, even when it's the people closest to us relationally. To realize that in the words of Ephesians 6, our struggle is not with flesh and blood but there is a spiritual dimension to it, there is a spiritual realm that we are fighting against and that we are wrestling with, and that is what makes life difficult for us. There is a wicked spiritual realm that is opposed to the people of God and it manifests itself in part through the opposition of those who reject Christ. So no wonder, no wonder as we try to walk as righteous people, as followers of Christ through an evil environment like that, no wonder it seems like we're trying sometimes to push a rock uphill. It's because we haven't yet arrived at the perfection and the culmination of our salvation. We're not yet in the final realm where God brings us into heaven and all sin and opposition has ceased. We're still in the battle right now. David was in the battle when he wrote Psalm 53 and so he diagnoses it to help him understand and to bring back hope and perseverance to his heart.

Well, David goes further. Having diagnosed the condition as the depravity of man, he speaks to the ultimate outcome of that depravity and that brings us to our second point here this evening: the death of man. The death of man and David here, again, brings a

diagnosis to bear upon the situation and he lays out the foolishness of sinners and their sinful thinking, their shortsighted blindness to what they're doing. In verses 4 and 5, look at what he says. He says,

4 Have the workers of wickedness no knowledge, Who eat up My people as though they ate bread And have not called upon God? 5 There they were in great fear where no fear had been; For God scattered the bones of him who encamped against you; You put them to shame, because God had rejected them.

What's he saying? Here in verse 4, he's amazed, as it were, he's amazed at the ignorance of wicked people. He's amazed at their foolishness. Do the wicked think that they can actually abuse the people of God and there be no consequence to that? Do they actually think that they can persecute his people, that they can harm them, and that God will never work to justify, to defend, rise up to the vindication of his people, is that what they think? If so, they really are fools. Have they no knowledge? Don't they consider what's happening as they swallow up the people of God like they're just eating another loaf of bread? Don't they realize the consequences of what they're doing?

And in verse 5, David seems to be applying this general truth of the condition of man and the vindication of God and perhaps applies it with remembrance of a past military victory where a foreign army had opposed the people of God and opposed Israel and God had brought a great victory to his people. Look at verse 5 with me again. When God moves to act on behalf of his people, when God eventually brings judgment upon the wicked, what happens? Contrary to, in distinction from their prior arrogance, their prior boasting, their prior self-sufficiency, when the judgment of God comes upon the wicked, there is a total reversal of attitude and change and perhaps some of you should think about that as you continue to reject Christ in your life, maybe some of you over the live stream listening in. There is a time where that arrogance will be punctured. There is a time where that puffed up balloon of pride will be popped and what happens then? Verse 5 tells us, "There they were in great fear where no fear had been." Suddenly the fear of God comes upon them when it is too late to do anything about it. I think about this often when I think about when Christ returns and brings judgment on the world and all of the arrogant boasting people suddenly have in front of them the holy display of the unfolding fury of God against a wicked world. What's that going to be like for them? Revelation tells us that the greatest of kings and the greatest of military commanders will tremble and shake in fear and try to hide under rocks in order to avoid the coming wrath of the Lamb of God.

You see, there is an allusion taking place right now as people are arrogantly avoiding God and mocking him and confidently going about thinking there's no consequence to all of their immorality and their idolatry, living as if there was no God. Scripture says the time is coming when God will say, "Enough!" And when God says enough and judgment starts to rapidly unfold, there will be great fear where before there had been arrogance and cockiness in the hearts and lives and words of those who never knew him.

Here in the context of Psalm 53, perhaps David is recalling a time where a foreign army came against the forces of Israel and thought they had an easy victory at hand, went out to battle, but as they did so, relying on human strength, looking at perhaps a numerically weaker enemy from their perspective, what did they do? They took no account of Israel's God and presumed that victory would be theirs. And what was the result in verse 5? God "scattered the bones of him who encamped against you; You," speaking of God, "You put them to shame, because God had rejected them." What happened and if you remember perhaps this is not the occasion behind Psalm 53 I don't believe because it came after the life of David, but if you remember in Isaiah 37 where Sennacherib's army was laying siege to Jerusalem and Assyria was bringing the full force of their might against the nation of Israel and there was no military response that they could do, Scripture tells us that in one night God struck down 185,000 members of the Assyrian army. They woke up with victory assured and God acted and there are these massive incalculable casualties and Sennacherib returns home ultimately to be killed in the temple of his own god. What happened to those godless men that were boasting and expecting victory? They were routed. They were killed and their bones were left on the ground. Instead of an easy victory that they expected, they instead met with a crushing defeat.

Beloved, do you understand that that is the outcome for everyone that rejects the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you understand that what was true of nations in the history of Israel is going to be true of individuals? And it is fearsome, it is holy to contemplate, it is tragic, it is sad; there is just a wealth of reactions that are woven together as we contemplate the awfulness of the judgment of God on wicked men who have opposed him. Their fortunes, as it were, will be reversed in a moment of time and their prior godlessness, their prior arrogance, their prior boasting, has simply set the stage for them to have one colossal fall. Beloved, when God displays his power and his judgment and vindicates his holiness against wicked men, they will go from great arrogance to great dread because God will reverse the entire situation. Wicked people will learn too late, they will learn too late that their mocking refusal to submit to God has led to their own destruction and they will be caught in a swirling vortex of destruction and judgment from which there will be no escape. It is a fearsome thing, Scripture says in Hebrews, it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

When that happens, beloved, looking at it now from within the perspective of the people of God, when God vindicates his holiness, when Christ comes in judgment, when God establishes his reign here on earth, do you know what's going to happen? This is part of our hope. This is part of the glory of salvation that belongs to us as his people. When God finally rises up and acts, do you know what's going to happen? The opposition and the wicked persecution from wicked people is going to come to an end. It will stop. It will cease because God will speak and say, "Enough!" and he will bring judgment upon them and establish peace for his people. And rather than enduring the insults and opposition of wicked men, we will finally be under the manifests gracious rule of our Christ and it will be glory. All of that, beloved, I say this so many times because I think it's just so very helpful, all of that is an outgrowth of the principle that we saw at the start that the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish. It could be no other way. When a holy God who is faithful to his people, reigns sovereignly over all of the

universe, there can be no other outcome. The wicked should fear. The righteous should rejoice.

And David ends on that note of hope for God's people. Point 3. We've seen the depravity of man, we've seen the death of man, the outcome of their wickedness is death, and point 3, we see the deliverance of God's people. The deliverance of God's people and we've been kind of alluding to this all through the Psalm so we'll just touch on it briefly here. David is in the midst of the difficulties, looking forward and crying out for the ultimate deliverance, the ultimate intervention that he knows is sure to come. Verse 6, he says,

6 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores His captive people, Let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

The people of God, Jacob and Israel, synonymous names for the people of God in the Old Testament, David reminds his readers that there is a coming time of deliverance; that God's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will in fact manifest himself. He will display himself. He will come out of Jerusalem and he will be known and when that moment comes, the deliverance of the people of God will be complete. And do you realize now as we stand in the echo of the first coming of Christ and stand between that first coming and the second coming, do you realize how thoroughly blessed you are to be in Christ and to be on the receiving end of promises like this? That now you know in a way that David did not? Now we can look back and we see that the Deliverer from God did come and he came in a manger in Bethlehem. He came and lived a righteous perfect life in order to redeem his people. He came and he delivered us. He delivered his people at the cross of Calvary. That he lay down his life and he bore in his body your sins on the cross in order that you might be reconciled to God. Do you realize that his deliverance was complete? That it was accepted by God so that he was resurrected from the dead as verification that the sacrifice had been accepted in the throne room of God? Now he has ascended to heaven where in his session we have a brother at the right hand of God in the throne room of heaven who names us as his own, who represents us before a holy God, and we can look up and realize that truly the cost of salvation has been paid in full, that it is finished, that we are rightly reconciled to God. Why? Because the Deliverer has come. And do you realize that it doesn't stop there? That this Deliverer is going to come a second time out of heaven to receive his people, to judge this world, and that when Christ comes again, it will still be well with your soul. When he unfurls his fury against a wicked world, he will not forget you in the process.

Beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved, do you realize the magnitude of the grace that God has shown you in Christ? Do you realize the incalculable value that it is to be on the receiving end of his grace? Do you realize that the salvation that we have in Christ is why we sing "Joy to the world"? That it's why we sing "It is well with my soul"? Do you realize that having been saved out of like depravity of which we have discussed here tonight, that you look at that and you find yourself secure in Christ and no wonder you sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound."

If you've tasted of those things, beloved, then verse 6 makes perfect sense, doesn't it? Let Jacob rejoice. Let Israel be glad. God is with us. God has been gracious to us. God defends us. And in the midst and you take these superlative surpassing themes of sovereign grace, sovereign kindness to his people, and you take the future glory, you just have to do this, beloved, you have to be so assured and convinced by the testimony of God in his own promises in Scripture that he will certainly deliver you in the end; that that which he has accomplished, that which he has started in your life, he will certainly perfect until the day of Christ Jesus. So you realize that the unfolding glory that awaits you and the culmination of your salvation is just ahead. Just a little bit longer. And in the midst of your trials and in the midst of your struggles, as it were, you reach forward, you reach into the future and you grasp hold of a piece of that truth, something of the recognition that this is certain to come, so certain that you could speak about it as a past tense event because it is as certain as things that have already happened to come to you. You reach into glory, as it were, and you bring it back and you let that glory shape and flavor the way that you think about everything in life: the trials, the opposition, the sorrows, the weakness and say, "This shapes the way that I think of everything," and you take that concluding verse and you quietly bow before your Christ and say, "O God, I will rejoice. O God, I will be glad."

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for our salvation in Christ. We thank you for a Savior who loves us and gave himself up for us and who will come again for his people so that where he is that we would be also. Lord Jesus, you've gone to prepare a place for us and at times that place seems far away. In the midst of our sin, our own sin and disobedience even as Christians, our prayerlessness, our hearts grow cold, we get discouraged by the trials that come about us by people who just relentlessly seem to oppose us and all of that glory, all of those promises seem a little bit distant, we kind of forget, Lord. Well, we thank you that in a passage like what we've seen tonight in the fullness of the Psalms, in the fullness of New Testament revelation, that you have given us that which allows us to overcome. Indeed, our Lord, we look to you and realize that you have overcome the world and that in you, Father, in Christ, we too will overcome and therefore in this world we can have peace because you will prevail over the wicked in the end.

Father, for those that are still in the bondage of wickedness, still in love with their sin, still opposing you, O God, have mercy on their hearts and open their hearts like you did with Lydia, that they might believe the things that are being spoken for, Father, we have spoken of things from your word which are certain, eternal truth which are not to be contradicted or dismissed. And Father, as we've proclaimed the glories of Christ and his crucifixion and his resurrection, we have spoken of the things which would provide salvation to those who are still foolishly in their sin. O God, by a work of your Spirit, open their hearts to believe. O God, by a work of your Spirit draw them to Christ that they might escape the terrifying judgment that is to come. Have mercy on sinners in this room, sinners who hear this through other media. Father, have mercy on others in this wicked world who still need to come to Christ. You will glorify your name in judgment, O

God. Yes, but God, wouldn't you be pleased to glorify your name in salvation as well? To glorify by a manifestation of your grace to those who are still in sin?

Thank you for the sweet people that are gathered in this room, O God. I pray that your word would bring comfort and joy and strength to their heart as we close this time. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

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