

Wil Owens
How Great is Our God; Psalm 36
GPBC
8.4.19

Introduction – As parents, we learn very early in parenting, with no instruction whatsoever, it just comes naturally and instinctively, that there are really only two methods of incentive when it comes to raising children. To encourage good behavior we issue warning for bad behavior and we promise reward for good behavior. As gospel believing parents we explain how sin reaps harmful consequences and how honoring the Lord is true life. We want our children to know there is a foolish path and there is a wise path. There is a sinful path and there is a godly path.

We know as adults that the world operates on these two incentives as well. College life, vocational life, the rule of law, society, the role of government, all of these spheres of life, if they are being conducted in a healthy way, they are each ingrained with warning and reward. Bad behavior is punished and good behavior is rewarded.

This is not a scheme of human ingenuity. This balanced equation of warning and rewarding is a biblical concept. God seeks to incite and encourage godly living with the same two incentives, warning and rewarding. Throughout the Bible, God commands and exhorts us to turn from sin and live our lives for His glory by explaining to us the dangers of sin and the blessings of godliness. The Bible is filled with this twofold incentive to surrender our lives to Him, warning and promise. Moses says in the closing chapters of Deut, “I have set before you today life and death, blessing and cursing.” Many times in Scripture, God warns us, if you indulge in sin, if you reject My Son, if you turn from Me, you will reap the awful and terrible and eternal consequences of sin. However, that incentive is contrasted with, if you turn to Me, if you embrace My Son, if you believe in Me, there is life and blessing and eternal joy.

Today’s text is a wonderful example of that second means of incentive to godliness as it sets before our eyes the greatest blessing of all, namely, God Himself. The greatest promise of the Bible for those who will believe in God is to know and be known by God Himself. And so the title, “How Great is Our God!”

- I. How Great is the Sin of Those who Reject God (vv1-4)
 - a. Vv1-4 describes the person who rejects the Lord. This is who he is and how he lives his life.
 - i. This is not how the world views the unbeliever. The world views an unbeliever as one who has courageously broken the chains of religion and has set himself free to live his life to the fullest by walking according to his own interests, agenda, and desire. The world celebrates the one who denies the authority of any person or any god above him. But that's not how God sees the one who rejects Him.
 - ii. This is also not how an unbeliever views himself. The unbeliever sees himself as unrestrained, unencumbered by the rules and ways of God. He or she is self-made with no need of a god. Religion is for the weak. He is strong enough and wise enough to find his own way. God is only there to take away his happiness, so he seeks to do away with God, convinced that his way is much better and far more rewarding than allegiance to God. But that's not how God sees the one who rejects Him.
 - b. No, God's view is far different, for God looks on the heart. God sees what the world and what the unbeliever cannot see. God sees from where rejection really springs.
 - c. So v1 describes the very essence of the unbeliever and vv2-4 then describe the fruit of such a heart set against the Lord.
 - i. Nature – The unbeliever's heart is deeply corrupted and deeply influenced by sin. It is never the case that an unbeliever is going his own way. We are either directed by God, or we are directed by sin. Being convinced that we are self-made with no need of God, that we are captain of our own souls is nothing more than the delusion of sin. Producing our own religion, our own worldview, our own way of salvation, our own idea of God is in the end, not our own view, but the deception of the enemy of our souls.
 1. Ill. the screwtape letters. Make him think that your thoughts are his thoughts.

2. Because the heart is deeply corrupted by sin, there is no fear of God for the unbeliever. He is convinced that his idea of god or of no god is true. The unbelieving heart has not seen God and therefore does not fear Him. He has only seen his own imagined idea of God, and there is nothing to fear, for the imagined god is nothing more than a reproduction of our self.
 - ii. And so what is the fruit of a deeply corrupted heart with no fear of God than a life deeply corrupted with no fear of God?
- d. In the end, the unbeliever does not go his own way, he just goes the way of sin and reaps the tragic and eternally destructive consequences of rejecting God.

- II. The Greatness of God and Great to His People (vv5-9)
- a. It's interesting that the remainder of Psalm 36 is not a contrast between the unbeliever and the believer, which is a common biblical contrast. Psalm 1. Psalm 1 contrasts the righteous man with the wicked man, and that is a powerful contrast. It's one of the biblical ways God compels us to faith. Psalm 36 poses a different contrast, for it sets the unbeliever over and against God Himself.
 - b. In other words, Psalm 36 says to the unbeliever, "If you are going to reject God, look at who you are rejecting. You don't see the true God, you see a God of your own making. Look upon the true God. Look, behold, and live!" God is not anything like you think Him to be. God is a great God.
 - c. First vv5-6 describe the nature of our Great God and then vv7-9 describe how this Great God is immeasurable great to His people!
 - d. Vv5-6 – The love of God and the faithfulness of God is beyond measure, beyond us, beyond comprehension. They are without end. They extend to the heavens, to the clouds.
 - i. Locating the end to the love of God and the faithfulness of God is much like our quest to find the edge of the universe. Where does the universe end? We don't know. We only know it keeps going. That's the love and faithfulness of God. How great is our God.

- e. His righteousness is like the mountains of God. It's unmoved, unchanging, everlasting. No matter how the winds and weather may beat upon the Alps, they remain. They don't budge. They don't give. The wind can be a powerful force. It can remove entire towns, but it cannot remove a mountain. That's the righteousness of God. It cannot be moved. He is always righteous. He is always right in His thought, in His will, in His action. How great is Our God.
- f. His judgments are like the deep. There are only a few forms of life created to live in the deep. God's judgments are like that. They are beneath every other judgment. They give rise to every other judgment. The laws of creation, the laws of man are founded on the judgments of God. The world moves and history moves according to the judgments of God. He is the foundation of it all because only He acts with no external influence or sway at all. How great is our God!
- g. God cares for all of His creation, He even saves man. Is man savable? Is man forgivable? Look at him – vv1-4! There is nothing in man that is savable or forgivable. You know why God saves man? Vv5-6! How Great is Our God!
- h. But God is not only Great, He is great to His people. Vv7-9.
 - i. God is the Supreme Being for many reasons, but one is this: It is impossible to desire more than God is or to desire to have more than God supplies!
 - ii. Do you desire to be loved? His steadfast love is precious.
 - iii. Do you desire comfort and security? He is the ultimate refuge.
 - iv. Do you desire to be satisfied, complete, overjoyed? V8.
 - v. Do you desire life and light? V9.
 - vi. How Great is Our God!

III. A Great Prayer to Our Great God (vv10-12)

- a. The prayer sums up the psalm this way: Those who know God, those whose hearts have been made upright, dwell in the love and righteousness of God. Those who reject Him lie fallen, thrust down, unable to rise.

Conclusion – God is Great and greatly to be praised!