

Darkness and Light

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Once again, the new cycle has highlighted the dark side of life for us in the past few days and we're kind of used to that, maybe a little bit numb to the reality of that, but the blackness and the darkness of it is actually a spiritual opportunity for us, especially in light of the Psalm that is in front of us here this evening. Scripture teaches us how to turn that kind of darkness into godly meditation and that's what we're going to do this evening as we look at Psalm 36 together.

You know, the Psalms as one of the things that has struck me as we go through, Psalms are typically and even rightly called the worship book of Israel, the worship book of the Bible, and that has a way of conditioning you to expect when you read a Psalm to see it opening up with a call to worship or perhaps a confession of sin, something along those lines, but as you've seen as we've gone through the Psalms, numbers 1 through 35 so far, the Psalms are actually very different in what they are doing and they are different in the way that they open up and Psalm 36 is particularly like that. Psalm 36 does not open with a call to praise, it does not open with a confession of sin, it opens with an assessment of man in sin, and that's what we're going to see. There are three sections, basically, to this Psalm. It opens up with an assessment of man and then an assessment of God and then David turns to prayer in verses 10 through 12, and we'll work through those things.

I had opportunity to speak to someone recently about the nature of the Psalms and why we preach a single Psalm in a single message rather than stretching it out over time. There are a number of reasons for that, but the main thing and the thing that I think is most profitable for you as you receive the teaching of these Psalms is this, is that you get the opportunity and the benefit of seeing the flow of thought of the Psalm from beginning to end in a single setting, and that's really crucial in order to receive the full impact of what David was teaching in any given Psalm. You must see the flow of the Psalm to see the entire unit of his thought in one place, rather than lifting up one verse out of context and focusing simply on that. That's especially true here tonight in Psalm 36 because what David does is he opens up with a meditation, as it were, about the sinfulness of man and then he contrasts that with the character of God, and then moves into prayer in response to those twin devotions, those twin meditations on the reality of spiritual life. So that's what we're going to see, we're going to walk through it here very quickly to here this evening.

Point 1, if you're taking notes and I certainly hope that you are taking notes tonight, is we're going to see the darkness of man's sin. The darkness of man's sin. David opens up and he is reflecting on the problem of sin in the human race, and even more specifically, the problem of sin in the human heart which actually explains everything that we see going on around us. Notice how he opens up thinking on, meditating on, writing on the reality of sin. Verse 1 of Psalm 36, he says,

1 Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; There is no fear of God before his eyes.

There are a pair of principles that is true of every person who does not belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, to every unregenerate man, to everyone who is still in his sin and refuses the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there are two things that are true about him according to God's word. First of all, he is in rebellion. Transgression is a word that speaks to rebellion, a rejection of, a refusal, a hostility toward God and his word, and that's what animates the heart of every unsaved man regardless of the level of consciousness he has about that spiritual reality in his heart. And you know, well, let me finish the pair before I go off on a tangent. It's too early for a tangent. I've only been at this for three minutes. He's in rebellion, that's the active positive side of things; that's what's present in his heart. There is also something that is absent, something that is missing, that goes to the nature of true reality and it's totally absent from his heart. What's absent is the fear of God. In the unsaved man, there is no sense of dread as David is describing him here, speaking in general terms about the reality of the unsaved man. He says, "There is no fear of God. There is no terror. There is no sense of coming to grips with the reality of God's impending judgment." And so on the one hand, transgression and rebellion and hostility against God is present in his heart, and on the other hand David says, "There is no fear of God before his eyes." No real earnest interaction with and recognition of the coming judgment of God.

Now, that twin reality of sin in a heart, plays out in different ways. It manifests itself externally to others in different forms. There might be a jesting rejection of the Gospel. There might be an indifference to the Gospel. There might be the suggestion of philosophical difficulties with receiving the Bible as God's word. Or there might be the utter devotion of self to sin in very degraded forms. Lots of different ways that this manifests itself but don't fool yourself, understand what Scripture would have you to do is to take that outward system and trace it biblically back to the root that is at the heart of it all, rebellion against God, a lack of fear of God. How is it that a man can devote himself to degradation and the pursuit of sin and infidelity in his marriage without any fear of the consequences? Why can he do that? Because the animating principle of his heart is rebellion against God and he doesn't think that really there is going to be any consequences to his actions.

Now, the biblically informed mind, the regenerate mind understands that, no, these things are true. As we said and alluded to on Sunday as we talked about the reality of a true disciple, a true disciple recognizes these truths and submits to them, gives allegiance to Christ in the midst of them, and a true disciple is someone who has come to grips with

the reality of God's judgment and realizes that he needs deliverance from that judgment that he deserves. That's what a true Christian does. That's why a true Christian comes to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. He says, "God's judgment is rightfully against me because of my sin and I need someone to save me and deliver me from it or doom will be my lot for all of eternity." So there is a clear contrast between the man in sin and the man that is in Christ and David is making these things apparent in what he says. As he reflects on the darkness of man's sin here in the first section of this Psalm, he's describing a man, he's describing in general the nature of an unsaved man as someone who does not take God seriously, rejects his truth in the deepest part of his being.

That has consequences. That has a lot of consequences and we see him start to work out in verse 2, look at verse 2 with me. He says in verse 2,

2 For it flatters him in his own eyes Concerning the discovery of his iniquity and the hatred of it.

This principle of rebellion, this principle of rejection of God, has an impact on the way that the unsaved man thinks about himself, and we see this all around us. It teaches him and it flatters him to think that he's basically a good person, that "There is nothing fundamentally wrong with who I am. I'm a good person," he says to himself. Why would God let you go into heaven? "Well, I've basically been a good person." And he flatters himself to think that he's much better than he is. He sees God as somewhat lower than what he is and therefore the two can meet in the middle and so sin is teaching him the wrong thing. His heart is speaking lies to him saying, "You're a good person. You're not so sinful. You're not so bad." And that's how people can say the foolish things that they say about themselves when the truth is, the reality of it all is this: he is separated from God, Isaiah 59:2, "Your sin has made a separation from you and your God. Your iniquity has hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." In fact, he's separated from God, in fact, his heart is dominated by evil influences within. His heart is in sin, his heart is in rebellion and it speaks lies to his mind that says, "You're a pretty good person. No sweat. God's not a problem to you." When in reality his heart is filled with wickedness and his self-assessment and his self-confidence is totally unfounded. It's a desperately bad and deceptive place to be if you're not a Christian because you can't even trust the thoughts of your own heart to tell you the truth.

The unsaved man does not see sin properly. He is under a delusion. He has drunk a toxic brew of self-deception and self-confidence and what's the impact of that on his life? What does that do to an unsaved man? It makes him hard. It makes him dismissive of Scripture. He has no fear of God before his eyes. He flatters himself. And because he is hard and dismissive to scriptural testimony about the reality of his sin, what does he do with it? Look at verse 2, his heart has flattered him so that he doesn't even discover his own iniquity and learn to hate it. His heart says, "You're a good person," therefore he's blind to his sin and he doesn't see it and he doesn't hate it like he should.

Now, friend, let me say this to you: if you don't see yourself as a sinner in the sight of God, if you don't understand that God sees you in sin and that you are not a good person

apart from Christ, you need to ask God to open your eyes and to overcome the deceptive whisperings of your own heart because the reality that Scripture points to is that you are in rebellion against God and you should not deceive yourself to think anything different. Scripture doesn't paint a very good portrait of the unsaved man at all and so he's perverse in the core of his being and now that has consequences. Sin spills out of his life.

Look at verses 3 and 4. So here he is in sin, here he is in rebellion, no fear of God, and what comes out of his life as a result? Verse 3,

3 The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit;

So he speaks evil. He speaks deceptively.

He has ceased to be wise and to do good. 4 He plans wickedness upon his bed; He sets himself on a path that is not good; He does not despise evil.

So what can we say about this unsaved man in light of Psalm 36? We can say this: he is committed to sin. That's why when you share the Gospel to somebody who truly does not know Christ and you're trying to talk with them, this is the primary reason why he's not interested in hearing what you have to say. It's not because you're not using clever enough arguments; it's not because you're somehow missing the silver bullet argument that converts everyone to Christ; it's not true as Rick Warren said about himself that if he could just find out a person's felt need he can automatically lead them to Christ. That's nonsense. No, the unsaved man is committed to sin. He plans it when he should be going to sleep. He sets his path to pursue it. Look at the end of verse 4 there again, "He sets himself on a path that is not good." He chooses his way and he chooses a way of sin and rejection of God, defiance to Christ, indifference or outright rejection to the Gospel, and a pursuit of sin. He doesn't hate sin like he should. He doesn't see it like God sees it. He is blind and he has no capacity for wisdom or to do good to the glory of God. It's not a very good thing to be an unsaved man, is it? Separated from God and congratulating yourself while you do. Incredible.

Let's look at a couple of New Testament passages to reinforce this for us. Turn to Mark 7 just to see echoes in the New Testament, the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Mark 7:20, "Jesus was saying, 'That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.'" Jesus says it's not sin that makes you a sinner, you're a sinner and therefore you sin. It comes out of the very core of your being. He is echoing in different language this principle from Psalm 36 that says that rebellion and sin and transgression animate the inner core of the unsaved man. It's desperate. It's serious. This is no light matter. This is not simply a matter of, "Oh, I did one or two bad things." This is a matter of having an existence that is completely wrong, perverse, and completely out of order with the holiness and righteousness and goodness of God. That's the reality of it.

Look over at Romans 3 which quotes Psalm 36 as we'll see in a moment. Romans 3:10, Paul sets forth the universality of sin for Jew and Gentile alike. Romans 3:10, I know it's a familiar passage but it echoes everything that we've said here so far. "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." Scripture is completely opposed to the pride of man and the spirit of our age that congratulates man on being someone good. And in verse 18 of Romans 3, Paul quotes Psalm 36 in the summation of his argument. He says the problem is, "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

So Psalm 36 has laid before us the darkness of man in sin. If you want to put it in theological terms, Psalm 36 is an early passage in the progress of divine revelation that is teaching us the depravity of man, the total depravity of man. Unsaved men have no spiritual merit before God whatsoever. They are unable to do anything of any spiritual good. They cannot change their lost condition. They cannot earn the favor of God from anything that they say, do, or pray. There is nothing. They are helpless, dead inside and unable to do anything to provoke the favor of God on their lives.

Now, we've said and we'll say it again, an unsaved man is not as bad as he possibly could be, there are elements of restraining grace that are at work, common grace that are at work, but he is a rebel. If you're here tonight and you're not in Christ, you're a rebel against God and that defines the spiritual reality of your existence and we need to deal with that. We need to come to grips with what that means.

Now, kind of painted that in personal individual terms, let's step back and look at things a little more broadly as we look at the world around us and what we see. In light of the news, there's no need to even repeat what we've seen over the past 72 hours or so. Here's the thing, beloved: most men are not saved. Scripture says that there are few who find, Jesus said there are few who find the path that leads to life. Well, do you know what that means? That means that most of the people that are walking around in the world with us have this principle of rebellion and wickedness in their heart. Just simple application of the Scriptures that we're seeing. "There is no one who does good." Now, what does that mean when we see atrocities committed? What does that mean when we see people mocking the Gospel? What does it mean when we see the government training more and more hostility against true believers in Christ? If nothing else, it means this shouldn't surprise us. We shouldn't be surprised when we see mass murders take place. We shouldn't be surprised when we see a wicked religion like Islam moving forward in the design to promote terror in everyone that doesn't submit their neck to what they teach. That doesn't surprise us. That's what we expect. This is what you would expect from a heart in rebellion against God, from a society that is in rebellion against God. This is to be expected.

So when you see these things, you should not be so shocked as to be bewildered about what's happening in front of you, you shouldn't be so shocked when you find false teachers propagating ridiculous false teaching in the name of Christ. This is all an outflow of the principle of rebellion that is embedded deep in the human heart that

controls human existence and so we're not surprised when we see wickedness in life around us. We realize when we share the Gospel with people who don't want to hear it, we understand that sinners will attack Scripture and maybe attack us like wild dogs in their vicious denunciation of the clear teaching of Scripture. We expect that because they've lost all sense of right and wrong. They refuse what is good and, beloved, what that does, what that means for us is that it shapes the nature of what our existence on earth is perhaps going to be like. We're going to encounter this. We're going to say, "How could they think such ridiculous thoughts? How could they do such wicked things and seem to have no compunction of conscience to restrain them? How can they deny the truth of what's right in their very face?" Why? Because there is this principle of dark rebellion that is in their heart that shapes the entire nature of their existence and if you multiply it by a few billion people, that's what you're going to find in life around you. So it's not without purpose, it's not without reason that the call of the Gospel from Scripture to sinners in part is framed in these words, "Be saved from this perverse generation. Come out of the world. Come out of that wickedness for its doom is certain and it's just wrong to be like that. So come out and be saved from that perversity in the world and in your own heart."

So are we left with a hopeless perspective on life because this is the reality of man, this is the horizontal realm in which we live? Ah, beloved, when you ask that question, as you follow David along, you realize that the sin of man does not have the final word for those of us who know the God of the Bible. We realize that the sin of man does not set the limits, the book ends, of what will be the nature of reality. Oh, it's the nature of reality for unsaved men but it does not exhaust the nature of reality in the universe, in the spiritual realm. It doesn't exhaust that at all because what this does, David goes from the sin of man someplace else and here's what I want you to see; we're going to kind of turn a corner on this depressing view of man and now as believers in Christ, here's what I want you to see just following the flow of thought in Psalm 36. When you see these things taking place, this is an opportunity for you to draw closer to God; to draw closer to your Christ who saved you; to remember lots of really wonderful things about the nature of God as you see the black backdrop of life. The black backdrop of the sin of man becomes that which sets the glory of the character of God off in great and striking contrast and that is the way that your mind should begin to work as you see these atrocities play out in ever increasing frequency. You say, "That is really dark. That reminds me to pivot my attention to the God of the Bible."

Look at point 2 here as you're writing down your notes. We've seen the darkness of man's sin, now we're going to see in point 2, the light of God's love. The light of God's love. And with no verbal cue, with no transition clause or word of any kind, David completely changes the subject. He turns from a horizontal meditation on man to a vertical contemplation of God. Look at verses 5 and 6. He pivots from the sin of man to a praise of God and a recitation of his attributes. Verse 5,

5 Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your
faithfulness reaches to the skies. 6 Your righteousness is like the

mountains of God; Your judgments are like a great deep. O LORD, You preserve man and beast.

Do you see what he's doing here? He has just portrayed man in stark, honest, dark terms, and now he is drawing a contrast between what man is like with what God is like, and he extols and he elevates and he recites the character of God in the loftiest of terms. He catalogs the goodness of God in contrast to the wickedness of man. He extols God for his lovingkindness, a word that refers to his loyal love to his people; for God's faithfulness, his righteousness, and his judgments, the fact that he preserves the lives of men and beast alike. In this God, we all live and move and have our being.

And he particularly highlights the lovingkindness of God. Look at verse 5 with me again. I want you to see this because this kind of sets little sub sections in place in the outworking of the text. Verse 5, he says, "Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens." Verse 7, "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!" Verse 10, "O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You." So while he talks about multiple attributes of God and the infinite perfections of his glorious being, he is particularly emphasizing this lovingkindness of God. He uses that term three times and it points out the faithful love of God.

Beloved, I want you to understand something really important which is why I guess I'm teaching here tonight. I want you to understand this. That's why a teacher teaches. God is a God of loyal love, right? He is perfectly trustworthy. He is faithful. His goodness is immeasurable. It goes beyond the skies. You could go to the farthest point that you could see in the sky and if that were the lovingkindness, the loyal love of God, you wouldn't exhaust it, you wouldn't even get to the outer edge of it. His loyal love is like the Rocky Mountains in their height. It's a Mount Everest of fidelity. It's deep and vast as the unexplorable depths of the ocean. Look at the deepest, most far recesses of nature as a metaphor for the loyal love of God and you'll find that you can't exhaust the recesses of nature. Beloved, that is how you are to think about the outworking and the depth of the perfect attribute of God's loyal love. It's inexhaustible. It cannot be measured. We will never get to the bottom of it. We will never get to the end of it. His righteousness soars like mountains. He is trustworthy, without limit. His excellence is immeasurable. That's who God is.

Now, why is that important? Well, it's important for a lot of reasons but what this means for those who belong to this God, who are in his family in New Testament language, those who have been redeemed and belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, what does this mean for us here tonight? This is awesome. It means that this is the realm in which we live and move and have our being. This high, broad and deep loyal love of God defines the atmosphere in which we breathe. It defines the certainty of our future. It helps us understand the entire working of God in our lives in the past. Above us, around us, behind us, below us, we are surrounded by a perfect immeasurable love of God which has our best interest in mind and will protect us for the outworking of his perfect glory in the end. That's the light of God's love and, beloved, you and I really need to sink the roots of

our thought and our aspirations and our hopes deep into the love of God, particularly in the realm in which we are living here today.

I saw a video of a well-respected Bible teacher today saying that in five years he expects a lot to change in the church; that he thinks they will lose their tax exempt status, that it's going to become a lot more difficult for us. He may or may not be right either on the outcome or on the timing of it, but as you watch the video, it's kind of a stark, sobering assessment that taken just by itself would make you start to tremble a little bit in fear. And he went on and he said other things to highlight the faithfulness of God and I appreciated that aspect of it, but here's the thing for you and me tonight: you see what's happening in the world around us. You see the future of our country as it's laid out in the political realities that seem to be coming down on us over the next six months. You see the news headlines perhaps more often than I do. Well, how are we to think about that? How are we to respond to that? And how is it that we are protected from a sense of anxiety and fear about what lies ahead? Here's how, beloved, and we do not, even as we watch these things unfold and we realize that it could get worse for us in a temporal earthly way, we do not look at those things with a perspective of anxiety, fear or what's going to happen to me? No, that's not what we do. That's not how we think at all. Why? Why? Because God is who he is. God is high and broad and deep in his loyal love to his people. God is sovereign over all and he exercises that sovereignty in loyal love to us. Do you know what? The faithfulness of God to us guarantees that his love toward us will be constant. His righteousness means that evil will not prevail in the end even if it flourishes for a time, even if it seems like the well-being of the church, the well-being of individual Christians may seem to ebb, the candle is burning low for us. Beloved, we don't evaluate those things by external appearances. We start our thinking with who God is. He's a God of great loyal love, of great faithfulness, of great power, and he is always faithful to his people therefore whatever we're seeing that threatens us for now is only temporary. It cannot be the undoing of us in the end. Under no circumstance is that even possible. I don't care in the context of which we're talking about this, I don't care in the great outworking of the purposes of God how a false religion may flourish for a time and threaten us with terror. No, we view this from the long view. We view it from the long perspective and the long perspective, the ultimate outcome is guaranteed to be good for us because of the loyal love of God. He never abandons his people. You would sooner fall off the face of the earth, you would sooner jump to the moon than to find that God's faithfulness to his people had failed. It's not going to happen.

God is a God of loyal love and that means that you and I as his people, we will see his salvation in the end. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph. And it means that these wicked people who seem to flourish for a time in our day and age, they're going to see his judgment if they don't repent. That's the outcome. It's more certain – let's put it this way – it could not be more certain than if it had already happened because that's who God is. And because that's who God is, because we see the light of God's faithful love, David leads us as he writes this Psalm, he leads us to rejoice in that because God shows loving care to his creation.

Look at verse 7. He says,

7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. 8 They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.

God is immense and yet to his people, God is intimate, and this care that he gives to his people even spills over in temporary ways to men who will never bow the knee to him. He sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. So good, so great is the lovingkindness of God and David praises God.

Look at verse 7 with me again. Notice how he extols God for the refuge that we find in the shadow of his wings, for the drink that we find in the abundance of his house, and the drink that we find in the river of his delights. All of those metaphors, beloved, pointing to an unseen spiritual reality that God's people enjoy his protection and his provision, and so even as we perhaps enter into darker times than what we've known in our prior earthly existence, we go into them realistically because we've seen the darkness of man's sin and we know that the wickedness that we've seen so far could get worse, it probably will, but we go in without fear because we're going in, we belong to a realm where the loyal love of God is operative, and out of that loyal love that never fails, he protects his people and provides for them. So what's going to happen to us in the future? We're going to be on the receiving end of unfathomable faithfulness from God, the recipient of his protection, and we are going to enjoy his provision, perhaps in ways that differ from what we've known in the past, but we are going to know the faithful loving hand of God on his people because that's how he deals with us without exception. And every one of you who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, that is your certain hope. That is what belongs to you. That is where you can rest your aspirations as you look to the future. No fear. No anxiety. Just resting in that.

David sums it all up. He is extolling God. He is calling him precious. He has talked about the height and breadth and depth of his great love and he just kind of sums it up here in verse 9. "For." Why am I praising God? You might ask David, "Why are you praising God in light of the first section where you've talked about the darkness of man?" I'm praising God, "For," verse 9,

9 For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

God gave us our life. He gives us understanding. He has provided for us. He will provide for us. And beloved, here's the thing: it is in light of God's self-revelation, it is in light of the way that he has made himself known, especially in the Scriptures, that you and I can understand our existence and the world around us. We have light and understanding and joy because God has made himself known. He has conquered our rebellious hearts, brought us into submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, and now we can see things clearly in a way that we didn't see them before, and in the light of what he has made known, we see with understanding.

So what should you do with this? The Psalm is not done yet. There must be something more to be said about it, and there is. And let's just do a little bit of review here of what we've seen so that we can appreciate the end of the Psalm like we should. David in the first four verses, verses 1 through 4, has talked about the darkness of man, the darkness of sin, and it is a bleak picture, and in one sense, in a horizontal sense, that is the realm in which he lives and, beloved, that is a realm in which you and I live is in this human horizontal realm of wickedness being in, humanly speaking, control. Yet, on the other hand, there is this vertical dimension which the people of God reside in where his lovingkindness, his loyal love is directing and protecting them. Even in the midst of this wicked realm, he's leading us, guiding us, protecting us, providing for us. So we're kind of in between, there is a little bit of a tension between the world in which we live and the God in whom we live.

So what do you do with that? How do you respond to that? Well, our third point for this evening is: the response of prayer. The response of prayer. And as you read the Psalms going forward in the future, you will often find, I haven't documented this with individual Psalms but it's something that you see repeatedly over and over and over again, even in long Psalms, sometimes the prayer that David offers is found in just one or two verses. He has laid forth a lot of things, a lot of truth, and then he prays and the prayer is fairly short and brief at the end; the actual literal prayer, "Lord, do this on my behalf." That's what we find here in verses 10 and 11. David's meditation about the sinfulness of man compared to the glory of God leaves him in a tension, in this tension, he turns to prayer.

Look at what he says in verse 10,

10 O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.

David now, having extolled and stated the loyal love of God in the prior verses, verses 5 through 9, now appeals to that lovingkindness in prayer and he says, "God, you're like this. Now, God, I ask you to continue to exercise that lovingkindness on behalf of your people. Continue to work out your loyal love, not just for me but for all the people of God." He has all of God's people in mind. He intercedes for those who know you. Look at verse 10, "continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and to those who are upright in heart."

Beloved, this is really practical. This is really right where your life intersects with God and with what you see going on in the world around you or in the difficulties of your own life. What do you do in light of the way the world is and in light of who God is? Beloved, you go to God and express your dependence upon him and you ask him to keep being the God that he is, by which we mean, "God, work out in my life the reality of this loyal love that you show to me." Here's what it is: you reject a prayer list approach to life that says, "Well, God is who he is and so it doesn't really matter what I do or say." No, you don't do that. Watch this: you reject a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency that says, "I can handle this on my own." No, in light of this great environment of the loyal love of God, you go to him humbly, you bow before him, you say, "I recognize that you are a God of

lovingkindness, a God of loyal love, and, God, here I am. I want to appropriate, I want to draw upon that love. I ask you to work it out and to manifest it in the circumstances of my life as I go forward. As I see the wickedness of the world around me, as I go through trials in my own life, God, manifest your love in tangible token ways that I can see. Keep exercising your love toward me. Lord, keep being to me who you already are." You depend upon him and you express it in humility in prayer rather than becoming boastful, careless, indifferent; all of these things drive you to your knees.

Look at verse 11. David says,

11 Let not the foot of pride come upon me,

Conquering kings in those days used to put their feet on the necks of the enemies that they had defeated as a sign of victory. David says, "Lord, don't let pride come upon me like that. Don't let proud men have the victory over me. Protect me as we go forward." Verse 11,

And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.

"God, even as these wicked men who are animated by the spirit of the first four verses of this Psalm come upon me, Lord, protect me so that they would not have victory over me. God, help me. Protect me. Provide me in that ever flowing river of your delights that you so gladly give to those that you love." There is a spiritual depth to this, isn't there? This is what Christian life can look like for you. This is what God would have your inner man to be like: an honest assessment of the environment in which you live, a recognition of the greatness of his loyal love, and then a contented, trusting dependence upon him as you move forward in whatever days he gives you on this earth. And David, as he closes the Psalm, expects complete victory.

Look at verse 12. He says,

12 There the doers of iniquity have fallen; They have been thrust down and cannot rise.

What is he saying here? Wicked men may plan evil on their beds, they may carry it out for a time in the realm around us, but their defeat is certain at the hands of David's God. God's superior power, God's surpassing grace, will prevail over sinners in the end. All of the wickedness we see going on around us is temporary. It cannot be the final outcome of a universe in which this God of righteousness and loyal love reigns. He tolerates it for a time, and the ultimate purpose of it will ultimately be to be shown that in all of the great power of the wickedness of man, God's righteousness and power to overcome it reigns supreme and he lost not one of his children in the process of working out his purposes. God will prevail.

Now, Christian, let's wrap this up. The truth of the matter for you is this, you just think about yourself alone before a holy God, God has already intervened for you, hasn't he, in

the surpassing most important way of all. The Lord Jesus Christ has already intervened for you at the cross of Calvary. So great was God's loyal love which he set on you before time began, so great was his loyal love upon you that he made certain that your sin would not result in your ultimate destruction at his holy hands. Christ has already made a blood atonement for you. Christ has already dealt with the wickedness that once resided in your own heart. Christ has redeemed you from that and has secured you for all of eternity. That's what Jesus has done. That's why we praise his holy and majestic name. You see, in your salvation here in the New Testament era, you see how great God's loyal love is. You see how wonderful and majestic it is that he overcame sin in your heart in order to bring you into his family. He overcame the guilt of your sin in order to justify you based on the righteousness and shed blood of Christ. That's how great his loyal love is. Your own personal guilt didn't hinder him from blessing you out of the intentions of his own good and loving heart. Wow, is he good! Even your own sin did not have the final word on your destiny.

Well, beloved, let's just summarize it with three final principles here to walk away from, just really rehearsing things that I've already said just by way of summary. 1. You should expect that wicked men are going to do wicked things and so when you see the world biblically, you see that evil in this life is inevitable and it doesn't throw you off spiritually. You can account for that in your worldview. And sometimes it will be wicked men personally doing wicked things to you and lying to you and all kinds of things. Well, you understand where that comes from.

Secondly, you expect wicked men to do wicked things but secondly, you should nevertheless live with hope. Live with a confident expectation of the ultimate prevailing goodness of God. That is what Christians do. Christians do not live with a pessimistic spirit about what the future holds. We cannot do that and be faithful to our God because God's loyal love defines existence for us and so, of course we are optimistic as we look to the future, in the ultimate outcome of things. Not in a foolish sense of optimism that denies evil around us as if we were Christian Scientists, God forbid, but rooted in even as we see the evil of men, we say, "God is a God of loyal love. He is a God of power. He is faithful to me. God is over all in love and wicked men will not have the final say in the outcome of my life and destiny." So if the final word comes from a God of loyal love who has already sacrificed his Son on your behalf, how can it come out for you anything other than supremely blessed in the end? So out with our pessimism and our negative views of what the future holds.

Thirdly, finally, you should pray with humble dependence. This world gets discouraging, doesn't it? It gets heavy at times. The discouragement can be long and deep and the chronic suffering under trials that won't go away start to bend the shoulders of the strongest of saints. We understand that. When you find yourself in that place, draw strength from what we've seen here in Psalm 36. Don't be downcast. Don't be utterly despairing. Draw near to this God in prayer and with the simplicity of the words that David modeled for us say, "O God, continue your loyal love to me, would you please?" It's a prayer that God would be delighted to answer on your behalf. His loyal love,

beloved, make this the thought that defines how you walk out of this room tonight: his loyal love means that you can trust him to the uttermost.

Let's pray together.

As we've talked about this Christ, I can only help but ask you whether you have turned to Christ for life and light. Have you found in him the forgiveness of your sins or does the darkness of the evil of your own heart still define who you are? Oh, my friend, I offer Christ to you today. He calls you to come to him out of this wicked world and into the life of his loyal love. Won't you come to him today before you leave this room tonight?

Our Father, we pray that indeed you would continue your loyal love to us. We know you through our Lord Jesus Christ and so we pray that you would confirm in our own experience and in the outworking of our eternal destiny, loyal love that surpasses anything that we could ask or think. We do indeed trust you to the uttermost, O God. We know that we won't be numbered with those doers of iniquity who fall at your feet, thrust down and unable to rise again because they have been judged by you. No, we'll gather around the throne of Christ. We'll see the face of our Jesus with those who have loved him through the ages. That will be the outcome. And Father, we just simply humbly ask you to do that in us which you have already promised and committed yourself to do. We align ourselves with your purposes as we close in prayer tonight. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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