

Righteousness Like the Mountains

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Psalm 36, Psalm 36, to the choir master of David, the servant of the Lord. Psalm 36, verses 1 to 12.

Let me pray for us. God, as we open your word, we incline our hearts toward you, wanting to hear your voice, wanting to conform our ways, our thoughts to your will.

So we pray that you would help us to do that, that you would meet with us through your spirit, that you would speak to us clearly, and that you would challenge us specifically and personally.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

Your righteousness is like the mountains of God. Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God.

[1 : 55] The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delight. For with you is the fountain of life.

In your light do we see light. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright in heart. Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

There the evildoers lie fallen. They are thrust down, unable to rise. The first four verses of this psalm are a portrait of the wicked.

And then verses 5 to 9 is a praise to the Lord. And then verses 10 to 12 is a prayer for the righteous. So it's a portrait of praise and a prayer. And it answers the question, what is at the heart of wickedness?

What is at the heart of sin? What causes it? What's ultimately responsible for it? And B.F. Skinner was widely considered the most influential U.S. psychologist in the 20th century.

[3 : 01] He was a Harvard psychologist. He argued for a deterministic world. He said that everything is predetermined by our previous choices or by our environment, that we don't really have free will.

Free will is really an illusion, he said. And in this kind of world view, we can't really hold anyone ultimately responsible for their wrongdoing. What's at the heart of wickedness is the environment. It's not the person's responsibility. So then when someone is racist, we say, oh, it's because of his upbringing. When someone steals, oh, it's because of his poor upbringing. Or when someone is selfish, it's because, oh, it's because he didn't have love from his parents.

So everything becomes attributed to something other than the person in this kind of view. There was another influential psychologist in the 20th century, another Harvard psychologist named Carl Menninger.

And he took a more biblical approach to that issue. And he wrote a book entitled *Whatever Became of Sin* in 1973. And in it, he pleads for the revival of the idea of sin and awareness of it and taking responsibility for it.

[4 : 08] Because he writes this, he says, a sense of sin would bring hope because it implies both a possibility and an obligation for intervention.

Because if there is no such thing as sin and no one's responsible for wickedness and wrongdoing, then there's no hope for change. There's no hope for intervention. There's no right to intervene in any way, right? And so, and this is really confirmed by Psalm 36 because it begins right in verse 1. Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. That's where sin springs from. It springs from the depth of the human heart. And that means that we are ultimately responsible for our sins.

But that means there's also hope for restoration and reparation, right? And so, this is teaching us to distinguish the context for sins, the environment in which sin happens, and the cause for sin, which is the cause which lies in the human heart, deep in our hearts.

And then another fundamental characteristic of the wicked is in the rest of verse 1. It says, there is no fear of God before his eyes, right? The wicked people, what characterizes them is that they live as if they are not accountable to God, right?

[5 : 18] Their outlook on life is summarized by verse 2. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found and hated. So, instead of living with the fear of God before their eyes, as it says in verse 1, they flatter themselves in their own eyes.

There's a contrast there. And what they're saying is basically, well, they're above accountability. They're saying no one's, God's not going to ultimately hold us accountable so they can do what they want. Their iniquity is not going to be founded.

This would be basically a functional atheism, right? And something, even Christians who are immature or nominal Christians can live in this way, right?

Even though they say they believe in God, but they live as if their actions are not accountable to God. As if what they do is not seen by God, right? And so that's the heart of wickedness.

That's a portrait of the wicked in verses 1 to 4. And normally at this point, in a typical psalm, the psalmist will go from kind of describing the wicked to describing the righteous. But this one is unusual in the fact that it goes from the description of the wicked, portrait of the wicked, to praise of the Lord, right?

[6 : 23] Verses 5 to 9. And it begins with this, you know, several metaphors, like nature metaphors, that basically extol the limitlessness and the vastness of God's love, His faithfulness, righteousness, judgment.

So in verses 5 to 6, it says, Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God.

Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. And this is, this doesn't mean that the animals are going to be saved and be in heaven, because this here is referring not to salvation, spiritual sense, but it's referring to God's provision for all creation, all of His creation.

So that's why it's a man and beast you save. And His steadfast love, faithfulness to righteousness and judgment, referred to what He does for all of mankind. That's why in verse 7, it says, The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of His wings.

And in fact, verse 9, it says, He is the fountain of life. So that means God is the source of all that is good in this world. He's the source of all life. So in reality, every single human being, including all of the wicked, owe everything that they have to Him.

[7 : 35] And so this contrast makes their wickedness all the more heinous and unthinkable, right? The fact that they live as if they're above accountability to God. And they live without reference to God, even though they owe Him everything.

And so after that portrait, it turns to the final portion to the prayer for the righteous in verses 10 to 12. And because David turns to this because he recognizes that though God is loving and He provides for all of creation, no one enjoys that for eternity unless they are part of His people, unless they're saved by Him, redeemed by Him.

And so he prays in verse 10, Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your righteousness to the upright in heart. And then he says, The ultimate fate of wicked is in verse 12. There do the evildoers lie fallen, they are thrust down, unable to rise. So there's a contrast here between the upright, which literally means straight, some language straight, and how did he describe the wicked in verse 1, that they commit transgressions, which is to really stray from God's boundaries.

So they're not going straight, they're going astray, rather. It's transgression. It's a word that typically refers to kind of transgressing someone's property. So there's a contrast being drawn there, that those who are upright in heart will in perpetuity enjoy God's love, but those who have transgression will ultimately perish, as it says in verse 12.

[9 : 03] So this then leads us back to the first question we begin with. What's the heart of sin and how do we deal with that? And that answer Paul gives us from Romans 3, where he quotes this psalm.

He quotes verse 2 of this psalm in verse 18 of chapter 3 of Romans. He says that all of humanity, there is no fear of God before their eyes.

So for all of us, we live with no fear of God before our eyes. So then left to our devices, there's no hope for salvation. But then Paul says that there came another righteousness that's different from the righteousness that was expected in the Old Testament.

And it's not a righteousness that comes through the law, but the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Because all have fallen short of the glory of God, but he says in the rest of chapter 3 of Romans, but are justified, those who believe in him in faith, are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

This is helpful because as we talk about the righteousness is like the mountains of God. It says in verse 6, right? But this mountain of righteousness is not a beautiful vista for the sinner, right?

[10:19] But rather it's a daunting, insurmountable obstacle for us when we look at that mountain of righteousness from the perspective of a sinner. But because we have been clothed with Christ's righteousness, now that righteousness becomes ours, and it becomes something we can enjoy, and we become eternal recipients of God's steadfast love.

So that's really the psalm, very simple, the gospel presented in this psalm. So with that in mind, let's turn to prayer.