

April 26

Psalm 1, 14, 15, 36, 37, 39

I want to direct your attention to Psalm 1. What a contrast there is in this Psalm of blessing! There is a marked contrast between the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly. The Psalmist emphasizes two keys and an ultimate result. The keys he mentions are the associations we keep – the people who form the inner core of our friendship circles – and the role of the Word of God in our lives. Without that support group, and lacking that focus, Lot fell, big time, but with them, we can stand. A small group of Christians who will nurture you and disciple you, and a clear focus on the Word of God – that is what the Psalm prescribes for a life of blessedness. And with that, it says, *"He shall bring forth fruit in its season and whatever He does will prosper."*

Psalms 14, 15 and 36 were not terribly uplifting or tending toward praise. Although there were some glimpses of ultimate victory and some hints that God will rise up and defend the righteous, thus provoking from them a response of praise, the main thrust of what you read is that mankind is bad, corrupt, evil and completely deserving of whatever judgment and penalty God might choose to bring upon them.

I guess you have long since learned that not every passage of Scripture will lift you up in glorious celebration – that is generally true because not all passages of Scripture focus on telling us about the attributes and actions of God. Some, like the Psalms we read today, tell us about more about the attributes and actions of men. Because the Scripture always tells the truth, these parts can be pretty depressing.

In Psalm 36, there is a grim description of the class of men that David calls "the wicked." They have 'no fear of God, they flatter themselves so much that they can neither see nor hate their own sin. They are deceitful, foolish and irrevocably committed to doing evil.' What a marked contrast David offers in that Psalm between corrupt men and a faithful God whose 'love reaches to the heaven, whose faithfulness reaches to the skies, whose righteousness is like the mighty mountains, and whose justice is like the ocean deeps.'

From these Psalms it is clear enough that evildoers are not only corrupt, but are thoroughly corrupt -- totally depraved. What is not clear from these Psalms alone is whether or not David, like Paul, would insist upon placing all of humanity in that class.

In Psalm 36, the description of the wicked man is such a good description of the man Absalom. Here is the list of characteristics of an evil man:

1) He has no fear of God. The very reason that David would not lift his hand against King Saul was because he feared God and was determined to let God decide who should be king and when. Knowing that we are ultimately accountable to God is a very sobering thing, and that is what living in the fear of God is all about. Absalom had no fear of God, and did not believe himself accountable to God. That is the mark of a wicked man.

2) David says a wicked man is one who flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. That's a great description of Absalom. When you flatter yourself enough, you begin to believe your own lies. Absalom spent years telling the Israelites, 'If only I were the judge of Israel, things would be very different around here.' At first it was just a ploy to trick the people into wanting him to be king instead of his father. By the end, I think he really believed that David was a bad king and he would be a great one. There is only one thing more dangerous than the flattery of other people, and that is our own flattery of ourselves. Tell enough lies and you'll finally start believing them.

3) Wicked people tell other people lies. You just can't trust anything they say. "Father" said Absalom, "I made a vow to the Lord that I would offer sacrifices at Hebron." It was just a lie.

4) Wicked people cease being wise. They become fools – their judgment is increasingly bad. Absalom began as a very wise and cunning man. By the time of the rebellion, he is making one bad decision after another. The classic 20th century example of this is Adolf Hitler. He was cunning and wise at first, always self-serving, always deceitful -- but smart. But he too ceased to be wise. He became a fool.

5) Finally, he stops doing any good things. He spends 24 hours a day plotting evil. Psalm 36 ends with this sentence, "See how the evildoers lie fallen – thrown down, not able to rise!" That pretty well sums up the life of Absalom, doesn't it?

Psalm 37 puts everything in perspective so beautifully. When your back is to the wall and the enemy is pressing hard against you, when you know the only thing you can do is to pray and you are ready to do that, how do you pray? How do you adjust your attitude and move from fear to faith? There is no way of knowing whether David wrote Psalm 37 before or after the rebellion of Absalom, but the Psalm itself tells us that he wrote it as an old man. The truths it contains, however, are without question the ones he was reminding himself of while he waited beside the city gate for the troops to return from the battlefield. It is a 'Wisdom Psalm' – very much like the literature we find in the Book of Proverbs – and like several other Psalms, it is an acrostic – each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet so that it will be easy to memorize and remember. You can almost see David pacing the wall and muttering the words of the Psalms as he ticks off each successive stanza. It contains a six-step formula that will take us, as it did David, from fear to faith:

1) Do not fret because of evil men. They are not going to last. They will wither like grass and disappear.

2) Trust in the Lord and do good.

3) Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart.

What a great promise!

4) Commit your way to the Lord. He'll make your righteousness shine forth like the dawn.

5) Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

6) Refrain from anger and turn away from wrath.

Ancient words ever true

Changing me and changing you

*We have come with open hearts
Oh let the ancient words impart*