

Psalm 36

*The Lovingkindness of God in the Face of Our Sin-Sickness**
For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD.

- ¹ Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart;
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
- ² For it flatters him in his own eyes
Concerning the discovery of his iniquity and the hatred of it.
- ³ The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit;
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.
- 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.
- 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.
- ⁹ For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.
- ¹⁰ O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You,
And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.
- ¹¹ Let not the foot of pride come upon me,
And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- ¹² There the doers of iniquity have fallen;
They have been thrust down and cannot rise.

David the Psalmist: This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and man anointed to become king. King Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. They chased David into the wilderness, where David slowly gathered those who supported him and trusted God and believed that he would one day ascend the throne.

v.2b is difficult to translate: “that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated” (NRSV, ESV); “until his iniquity be found to be hateful” (KJV, KJ21); “when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates” (NKJV).

v.7b: “shadow of your wings” refers to God’s self-description as a mother eagle hovering over her young (Dt.32:11).

v.9a: “fountain of life” uses the picture of Eden as a source of water (Gen.2:10).

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Hebrew Biblical Poetry:* These poets rhyme *concepts* more than *sounds*, where the rhyming goes from a general thought to a more specific one. That makes it nice for those of us who have to work from the English translation. Here’s an example of a rhymed concept in v.5. Consider what the poet is saying by pairing these two lines:

I acknowledged	my sin	to You,
And	my iniquity	I did not hide;

- *David’s Trust in God’s Promise:* David knew that God defended the human leaders He appointed, and also was faithful to fulfill promises He made.
 - *God Defended Human Leaders He Appointed:* In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses unjustly, and God defended Moses. In Numbers 16, Korah led a faction in wholesale rebellion, and God used the earth to swallow them up.
 - *God Fulfilled His Promises:* In Genesis 1, God said, “Let there be light,” and then, there was light. Then in Genesis 12, God made promises to His people, and called them to trust Him. For example, God promised Abraham and Sarah He would give them a son despite them being dead in a reproductive sense. In 1 Samuel 16, God through the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king. That was God’s promise; David is trusting God to fulfill His word.

Questions

1. According to v.1 – 2, how and why does sin speak to us in our hearts?
 - a. Because it is not obvious to someone outside us, in the moment. It happens in the privacy of our own hearts.
 - b. But it influences how we see things. In v.1b, David says, “There is no fear of God before his eyes.” That means that the awe and reverence that we owe God are not present. So we “see” things not as God sees them, but as we might want to see things. Like a sexually attractive person who is not your spouse but who wants to have sex with you. Or like easy money. Or
 - c. Because there is something alluring and deceptive about it. It “flatters” us (v.2a).
 - d. Sin also makes us think that we will not be discovered. That seems to be what v.2b is saying. And, sin also makes us think that we do not have to hate it. We can cherish it in the deep privacy of our thoughts and emotions and secret actions. We can keep those things secret. Notice that all this happens “in the heart” and the diagnosis is that something that starts off as a secret makes us think that it will stay secret. ***It will not stay secret.***
 - e. Why won’t it stay secret? For one, because Jesus will expose it at some point, one way or another. And another reason is that sins we try to keep secret usually causes us to implode in some way.
 - f. Sin also gets us to like it, even love it. Notice that in v.4, the wicked person who plots on his bed does not “despise evil.” The God-revering person should despise evil. That leads me to think that in v.2, the best translation is still the NASB. We should “hate” our own sin.
2. In v.3 – 4, how do people speak when they have listened to the sin in their hearts?
 - a. In v.3a, “wickedness and deceit.”
 - i. Illus: When a conflict-avoidant person tried to manage people around him, he wound up lying. He thought he could keep people separate. And then when he feared being found out, he internally distanced himself from people close to him. Whether he started off with laziness or fear, or both, it really didn’t matter.
 - ii. Illus: When someone who wanted power...
 - b. In v.3b, they “cease to be wise and to do good”
 - i. What does it mean to be wise? Wisdom comes from God, and we can become wise in a human way. In the Hebrew Scriptures, we are meant to take in God’s commandments so deeply that they become “second nature” (e.g. Proverbs 3:3; 7:3; 8:22 – 36). That’s how we become “wise.” It’s not just about knowing facts. It’s about knowing what character qualities to show in any given situation, to show God’s wise and good rule over the creation, and our faithfulness to God’s rule.
 - ii. What does it mean to cease being wise? To do things for short term gain and not our own long term good, especially the good of our relationship with God. To lose perspective on values and character, and instead make rash decisions.
 - c. In v.4, this person “plans wickedness” even while they are on their bed. They should be sleeping and resting. Instead, they are plotting. They have nervous energy and adrenaline-infused anxiety.
3. In v.5 – 9, how does David experience God? Granted David uses poetic language to describe God. Let’s try to grasp it.
 - a. Lovingkindness and faithfulness are qualities that extend high above us, as far as we can see.

⁵ Your lovingkindness, O LORD, Your faithfulness	extends to the heavens, reaches to the skies.
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 - b. God’s righteousness and judgments span the earth, from highest to lowest points.

⁶ Your righteousness Your judgments	is like the mountains of God; are like a great deep.
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 - c. So God’s protection is from the heights. And notice God preserves both humans and animals.

O LORD, You preserve man and beast. And the children of men take refuge	⁷ How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! in the shadow of Your wings.
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- a. Illus: C.S. Lewis' statement about light: It's not just that we see Jesus, but that by Jesus we see everything else.
- b. Sin causes deformities within us. It is a poison that acts within us. It changes our desires and the way we relate to ourselves, other people, and all things. And it is addictive.