

Psalm 53 • So, you're an atheist, huh?

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Psalm 53. I entitled this one, So you're an atheist, huh? Psalm 53 is the response of God to anyone foolish enough to say, I don't believe there's a God. Right?

It's one thing if somebody says to me, I don't believe in God. I mean, that's dumb enough, but I'll give them that one. But when somebody says, I don't believe there is a God, that's the extent of foolishness. And I want you to see what the Lord says. It says,

"1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good.

2 God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

3 (Now) They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

4 Have those who work evil no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?

5 There they are, in great terror, (when) there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them. (correction- where there is no terror!)

(And then the psalmist ends it by saying,)

6 Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad." (ESV)

Do you know that what's interesting about this Psalm is that we gain a good sense of theology out of this particular Psalm. Paul actually quotes this Psalm in the Book of Romans, where he's arguing about the issues of man's corrupt heart. Let me put it on the screen for you so you can see Romans chapter 3. He writes,

Romans 3:9-12 (ESV)

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good; not even one."

What then? Are we Jews any better off? (Meaning any better off than Gentiles? He goes,) no, not at all. (He says,) For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, (meaning Gentiles) are under sin, as it is written: (and now here's where he's quoting Psalms) "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good; not even one.

Isn't that interesting Paul quotes this Psalm and he uses it to defend the idea that sin has essentially rendered the whole human race enemies of God. And living contrary to the will and to the purposes of God. In other words, what we're being told is, apart from the grace of God, we're all lost. We're all lost.

Isn't it interesting that it says, *"None is righteous, no not one;"* there. He says, "There's no one does good, not even one." This is one of the most challenging things. It's frankly, very easy to prove in the Word. But it's one of the most challenging things for people to embrace, that people aren't good.

I'm constantly hearing people say, well, as I've looked around and met people I really believe that people are essentially good. They learn to be evil. The Bible takes issue with that conclusion. The Bible says that there are none good. And Jesus confirmed that you'll remember when he spoke to a young man of some wealth who came to him and said, what must I do in order to, enter the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus started by saying, why are you asking me about what is good? There's no one good, but God. (Matthew 19:17, Mark 10:18)

There's no one good but God. That single statement by Jesus is for you and I, a truth that really has to grip our heart at some particular point in our life, or we're never going anywhere with God. As long as you think that there's some goodness inside of you, then you're never going to turn to the Lord with your whole heart.

Paul wrote later and he said, in my flesh dwells no good thing. There's nothing good in me, in my sinful nature, Paul said. There's nothing good. Okay? (Romans 7:18) If there's any good inside me now as a believer, it's Jesus doing a work inside my heart. It's Him. It's all Him, you see.

This is a theological statement. And again, it's a theological statement that people don't particularly like to think about. Because it casts us in a fairly negative light, that people aren't good. We're not good people. We can pretend to be good. Why? Because we have a knowledge of good.

Do you know that I know what's good and so do you? And I know what's evil and so do you. You know how we learned that? Our beginning mother and father ate of a tree that was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And they took on a knowledge of good. (Genesis 3:4) And that means that they can pretend to be good. And people who are unbelievers who have not the Holy Spirit, they can still pretend to be good. And they can know goodness to the point where they can emulate it. But when someone acts good, it doesn't mean they're good. You with me?

People act... And that messes people up. People who don't know the Bible, they'll say, the Bible says, ...that there's no one good except God. But I met a lot of good people in my life. No, you didn't. You met people who knew the difference between good and evil and they knew how to act good.

And people act good for different reasons. But that again, it doesn't make them good any more than if I act out the role of Abraham Lincoln, makes me Abraham Lincoln. I can get up on a stage and I can act out his life. Wow. You sound just like Abraham Lincoln. How would you know?

The point is you can act like something, but it doesn't make you that something. And so the Word of God makes a statement here that we all have to grapple with. And when we do grapple with it, it brings us to the cross. Because we realize if I'm not good, then there's no good thing that I can do ultimately, because God sees through acts of goodness.

Do you ever, have you ever wondered why our most, our best acts of righteousness are like filthy rags to God? (Isaiah 64:6) In other words, our best acts of goodness are just like filthy rags to Him. Because they're just acts. We're acting. Right? God sees the heart. He knows what's in it, and it's not good. And the sooner you and I come to terms with that, the better we are off.

It's interesting too, along these same lines of good and bad. And it's funny people like to ask the question sometimes when they're talking about God, talking about judgment and stuff like that. They'll say, how's... Tell me something pastor. Tell me this. How is God going to judge the people in these places where no one's ever found them yet? They're living in the bush, they're living in the, the whatever, and they've never ever heard the Gospel, these

savages, these heathens. How's God going to judge the heathen? And stuff like that.

We talk about all these heathen savages as if they're, as if they're different in God's eyes than we are. As if we're not savages! Which is, it's really just our pride talking. And I just say to him, well, He's going to deal with them the same way He deals with you, you savage! Right? We're all just, heathen savages apart from the goodness and the grace of God.

When God sees all mankind, He says, He says, what? There's none who does good. There's none righteous.. He doesn't say, well, there's... First, there's these people who go to church all the time. But then you got these savages over there that have never heard anything good. There's no good in them. No, God looks at all of mankind. And He says, there's none righteous, none who seek after God. Right?

Wait a minute, pastor, when I was 14 years old, I started seeking after God. That's because God drew your heart. Jesus said, no one comes to me unless the Father draws him. Right? Nobody comes unless he is drawn. (John 6:44) You started seeking God? Wonderful. Don't congratulate yourself. God was drawing your heart. It's even Him to draw us. "*No one seeks for God*," it says in this Psalm. Nobody. Nobody.

If God left us to our own devices in our own sin, we would not think twice about God. I wouldn't give Him another thought. And if God hadn't drawn my heart, I never would have come to Him.

So, David also says here in verse 4, he says, "*Have those who work evil, no knowledge*," David wonders, how these people can be so short sighted, so blind to the things of God all around them. And isn't that, as Christians, we're like that. We hear somebody go, well, I don't think there is a God, and we're like, really? Seriously? Are you that blind that you don't see?

The Bible says "*the heavens declare the glory of God*." You look at creation, it's his handiwork. That's what God's Word says. (Isaiah 66:22) In fact, it says that, the handiwork of God is constantly speaking to man, but we can actually become so blind and so turned away from God that we stop hearing it. Or we pretend not to, one of the two. And we make stupid statements like, I don't think there is a God or something.

And David is he's incredulous, he goes, dude, don't they have any brains? To just think and look at creation and say, seriously, you think that evolved? And I believe it's the pride of man and because it has a blinding effect.

Verse 5, he says, *"There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror!"* And what David is saying here, is that, there is judgment that is going to come upon those who deny the existence of God, to the point where they're going to come to a situation in their life, where they are going to run when there's no enemy. They're going to literally be afraid of their own shadow. And when there is no terror, they will run for terror.

And then David ends here in verse 6 by saying, *"Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!"* Of course, you and I know that it has in the person of Jesus Christ.

But, when you think about this whole idea of atheism... Atheism is a very challenging thing to confront when we're talking to people. And I know that some of you work with people, or maybe you have people in your own family who are atheists. Or at least they claim to be atheists.

You and I, however, we're coming from a standpoint where we've become so convinced about God's presence and God's power. We sense Him in our daily lives. We know, we know in our lives that this isn't me. We've come to understand that. We begin to see God's handiwork in our lives. We not only recognize it in creation, we start seeing it in our own lives. What God is doing in my life, in my heart. There's something going on in my heart that I can't explain. There's a hunger, there's a desire for God. There's a, there... You know what I mean?

And there's this, desire to serve the Lord. Where in the world does that come from? Because I know my flesh. My flesh is very self-centered. My flesh wants to please itself. And yet, there's this inclination in me to go beyond my comfort zone to serve the Lord. And I'm like, oh man, that is just so God. Right?

So, we become so convinced of God's power and God's presence in our lives that when somebody comes along and they say, I don't believe in God. We're like, good grief! How could you take such a ridiculous position? And not that we should say that necessarily. But I'm especially blown away when I hear 15, 16 year old, 13 year olds, saying to me, well, I'm an atheist. I'm like, seriously? I mean, you're not even old enough to know who you are, let alone who God is, or to figure out... Are you even sure that you exist yet? Let alone to determine

whether the God of the universe really exists. Can you really do that in 13 to 16 years? I don't think so.

I try to encourage these young kids to reserve judgment. It's like, why don't you just chill on that particular conclusion and just wait a few decades. And just, and see what maybe comes to this thing. Because... but you try to say that to a teenager. Right? And it's just like, in one ear and out the other.

But let's face it. When people say to us today, I'm an atheist," it's a sign of being cool. I mean, culturally speaking, it's cool, outside the church for somebody to say, I'm an atheist. I've seen some of these on the street interviews where they are talking to people.

Do you believe in God? They go, no. So are you an atheist? Of course. It's very cool. It's very cool to say that, because you see there's a great deal of pride connected with claiming to be an atheist. Because when you say, I'm an atheist, you're basically saying, I'm smarter than all those people who think that there's a God. That's what you're saying, I am superior in my intellect than all of the people who claim that there's a God.

And those people are either deceived or just plain stupid, but I am neither. And that's what somebody is saying to you when they say, I'm an atheist. I'm not dumb enough to fall for the God thing. Okay.

Here's the other side of the coin though. Flip that coin over. It takes humility. It takes real humility to admit that there is clear evidence for the existence of one who is greater than you are; one to whom you must give an account; one to whom you are responsible, for your very life. It takes humility to say that.

Somebody walk around saying, I believe in God. I believe that one day I'll stand before God. And I believe that God gave me my life and He's responsible for breathing breath in me. And we sing about it, every breath is yours. And it takes humility to say that. Right? It takes a broken person to say that. Broken in a good way; broken of their pride. But it's a very easy and very prideful thing.

So I'm an atheist. Of course I'm an atheist! You dummies, You dummies believe in God. I can't believe you guys. You're so gullible. Do you hear the pride?

Regardless of what people believe, we know this. Let me show you in Romans 14:11. It says,

Romans 14:11 (ESV)

"...for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." worthless; no one does good, not even one."

"...for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." worthless; no one does good, not even one."

And one thing I say when people tell me that they're an atheist, the first thing I say to him is, number 1... And I don't talk to that many atheists to be quite honest with you. But I say, number one: this God whom you say you don't believe in, just because you say He doesn't exist doesn't mean He doesn't exist. Just to deny something doesn't make your denial reality.

And the second thing I say is, well, you know what, regardless of what you believe, you know what my God says, someday, someday, you are going to get down on your knees and you are going to say to Him, You are Lord and I'm not. Someday, that's what you're going to do.

Now you can choose to do it of your own volition today. You can do it because He's worthy to hear that out of your lips. Or you can continue to claim that He doesn't exist, and one day you'll stand before Him anyway. And you will get down on your knees and you will confess that He is God.