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Psalm 14

Introduction – The psalm-singer thought these words were so important that he nearly repeated them verbatim again in Psalm 53. The Holy Spirit uses them a third time as Paul quotes the center of this Psalm in Romans 3. Clearly then, these words from God demand our keenest attention. As it turns out, this psalm is the Good News – but it is only the Good News because it begins with the Bad News.

Functional Atheism (v1) – Calling someone a fool is not talking about their intelligence in the Bible. It is not an issue of education, but of morality and loyalty to God. The psalm-singer begins by stating that the fool says in his heart (meaning this is what he really believes), “*there is no God,*” or possibly, “*God is not here.*” This covers the outright atheist, but also everyone else who finds themselves in some area of their lives thinking that Jesus is not Lord here. We always act the fool when we sin, for we are always saying in those instances, “*God is not here.*” We are forced to get God out of our thoughts and knowledge (Rom 1:28).

Practical Results of Atheism – There are wonderful, neighborly, peace-loving and philanthropic atheists out there. But they are out there in spite of their belief-system and not because of it. They have no absolute, self-existing standard, and so, given time and enough momentum, atheism always leads to sins of commission (“*abominable works*”) and omission (“*none who does good*”). This is what springs out of men’s hearts (Matt 15:19). This is how they respond to God sending Light (John 3:20-21). And, as the next two verses make clear, we were once by nature just as much the fool (Tit 3:3).

The State of Mankind (vv2-3) – The natural state of all sons and daughters of Adam is that we are sinners, hating God. This rebellion is often dressed up quite nice in the garb of middle-class niceties and basically-good people, even people who claim to be seeking God, or seeking the truth. But notice what happens when anyone claims to have found God or the Truth and it just so happens that He is the only Way? All the seekers shake their fists and jeer. Our world respects seekers; it just hates finders. And actually, more and more, it hates seekers as well. “*There is no God,*” and “*God is not relevant here*” are the mottos of modernity.

Non-Religious and Religious Alike (Rom 3) – The reason these verses are used by Paul in Romans 3:9-10 is that it seals his argument. In chapter 1 he condemns the Gentile for their sin and rebellion against God. Sensing the agreeing nod of the Jew, he then condemns the religious for the same rebellion and sin in chapter 2. In chapter 3 he condemns all men, Jew and Gentile alike and declares the only possible solution: God (Rom 3:23-26). As we will see, Paul is expanding on the point made by the psalm-singer.

Lying to Themselves (vv4-6) – Because they have to suppress the knowledge (and conviction) of God, they have to eat up the children of God, and they do so as naturally as eating bread (v4). The psalm-singer gives two replies to this. First of all, he tells us that they cannot stop this mysterious dread they feel in all of it – “*they feared a fear*” the Hebrew says, a certain dread of judgment because God is with the righteous (v5). Second, no matter how much they mock the followers of God and no matter how weak the followers of God may find themselves, the wicked cannot take away their firm refuge (v6). Those in rebellion cannot shake a sense of doom, and the righteous cannot be shaken from a sense of coming victory. And that is because of the truth of verse 7.

The Only and Promised Answer (v7) – The only answer for the problem of sin, the problem of every man, woman, and child, is a narrow and powerful answer. The answer is Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our sins and being raised from the dead for our justification, now sitting on the throne of God until all His enemies are made His footstool. This is the salvation of Israel; this is what God had been promising since the days of Abraham. What mankind could not and would not do for himself, God did for mankind, in the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Out of Zion – When salvation comes out of Zion, it comes from heaven. But when does this normally occur? When does heaven come to earth? The normal means by which men held captive in their sin are released is in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus. The church, in her preaching and in the lives of her saints, reveals the way of salvation as the Holy Spirit works in and through us.

Amazing Grace – There is nothing really amazing about grace unless there is really bad news from which grace saves us. That was John Newton’s point when he wrote the hymn – he was reflecting on the same truth that this psalm-singer penned. Why is it so important to sing such things?

“Saved a Wretch Like Me” – God owes us nothing; we are saved by grace and nothing else. To be a part of the church of God is an overwhelming, unparalleled blessing.

“Once was Lost, But Now I’m Found” – We never would have found this place without the active work of God to bring us here. God loves sinners and rebels, the religious and non-religious, even seekers who think they have something to offer.

“’Twas Grace that Taught My Heart to Fear” – There is no good news without bad news. The bad news is offensive, but we must not avoid it. God has shut up all men under sin – but He has done so in order to have mercy upon them all.

“When We’ve Been There Ten-Thousand Years” – In heaven the perfected church will glorify the Lord and enjoy Him forever. Here on earth, we are still called to the same end – it is in us that Jacob and Israel and all who have been appointed by the Lord will rejoice and be glad. It ends in heaven. It begins here and now on earth. *dth – September 2, 2007*