**Special Presentation**

**Psalm 14:1-7**

**Mr. Jordan Obaker**

**May 12, 2024**

 **Jordan:** Okay. So as Ted mentioned we are going to do a number of different selections on the Psalms here in the upcoming weeks. And I wanted to share with you just a few resources that were particularly helpful for me as I was preparing for this study. And the first one is from Charles Spurgeon; it’s called *The Treasury of David.* It’s a three-volume set from Psalm 1 through Psalm 150. It includes his own commentary as well as commentary from hundreds of other theologians that he found as he was providing his own. I cannot recommend that volume to you enough if you’re someone who would like to have a set on the Psalms. I’ve made it a plan for my own Bible reading this year to try to read through the Psalms throughout the year. And there’s a good chance that it’s going to take me more than a year, as I’ve found so much good information in just going through them slowly and meditating on them slowly. And this has been a phenomenal resource that I’ve used as a companion for that. So I can’t recommend that highly enough.

 The second one was recommended to me by a professor at the seminary for our church. The professor didn’t write it, but the recommendation came from him, and the author’s name is Dale Ralph Davies. And he had written a bunch of shorter books that cover about ten Psalms at a time. And the one that happens to cover this Psalm—Psalm 14—is the one that’s called “Slogging Along in the Paths of Righteousness.” And it was very anecdotal; it was written very down to earth, which was good for me; it made it easier to follow. And so that’s been a help.

 And then the last book here is actually a little bit more of a deep dive into Scripture. We’re going to talk about this a little bit later on, but it’s called *The Flow of the Psalms.* And it was written by O. Palmer Robertson. And in this book he argues how we should be reading the Psalms as a whole, not just thinking about them as individual collections. We’re going to touch on that here a little bit more later.

 I want to commend these resources to you if you are interested in them. I know the middle one can be found as an audible book on Amazon; that’s how I had gotten hold of it. And I think the other two are still in print; hopefully you can find them affordably.

 And so as we start I want to try to answer a question. Why did I pick Psalm 14? It’s not really known as one of the more popular Psalms. It doesn’t have a neat fit into a certain category of Psalms that you might see with others. It’s not squarely a praise or a lament or a thanksgiving wisdom Psalm, etc. So why Psalm 14?

 And as the one commentator Dale Ralph Davies put it, *“Psalm 14 is like a mutt or a mongrel dog. It has some of this and some of that.”* And yet he was quick to point this out: How do you treat mongrel dogs? *“You love them; you receive them. And in the case of a Psalm, you listen to them.”*

 And so I thought that was an interesting way of kind of describing what this Psalm is. It’s not really neatly any one thing; it’s sort of a combination of a lot of things.

 I think it’s also important to note, as far as why I chose Psalm 14, that it is referenced in other places in Scripture. We see it clearly referenced in Romans 3 in the letter of Paul to the Romans.

 But more than that, it’s referenced in Psalm 53. And when I say it’s referenced in Psalm 53, this is the part that started to intrigue me, where I wanted to spend more time looking into Psalm 14. It’s referenced almost identically.

 **Transcriber’s Note:** Jordan presents some slides.

 **Jordan:** This is Psalm 14 on the left, compared to Psalm 53 on the right. And to make it easier for you I’ve highlighted in green everything that is identical between the two Psalms. And here in blue is everything that is not identical but immaterially different; the same wording may be said a little bit differently.

 And as you can see, the only difference between the two is a few extra words that are included in the fifth verse in Psalm 53. That had me intrigued. Why are they both here? If they say the same thing, why both of them?

 Not only that. When you look at the titles of the Psalms, they both have titles. Psalm 14 is just quite simply *“To the Choir Master. Of David.”* Interestingly, Psalm 53 says, *“To the Choir Master, according to”* a particular tune, and then a type of Psalm. *“Of David.”*

 And so it had me wondering. Was Psalm 14 a rough draft? *(Laughter)* Was it David’s first attempt, and was Psalm 53 the final version? And if that’s the case, then why include the rough draft in the Scriptures?

 That was an itch that needed to be scratched in my case. And so I purposely chose Psalm 14 to help scratch that itch. And so with that being said I figured I would let you all know how I went about scratching that itch. And this is where the rabbit hole comes into play. And I’ll confess I had two rabbit holes for today. But for the sake of time, and since I was already asking for an extra week on top of the one I was allotted, that I would forego the second rabbit hole. But I’m going to leave it to you as food for thought.

 Both of these Psalms in the title say *“To the Choir Master,”* which implies they were meant to be sung. And so when you think about the nature of the Psalm as we discuss it more, in our churches we are very used to singing Psalms that make us feel good, singing Psalms that are of praise, and so forth. But this is a Psalm that isn’t just squarely praise; it has some laments to it.

 And that was meant to be sung in public worship. And I think it still is today that we sing that way. And I’m not going to go any further down that rabbit hole. But just leave that as food for thought. What does it mean that we should be singing Psalms like this to the Lord?

 So the rabbit hole begins. I don’t know if any of you recognize what this is. First of all, these are cassettes. I am old enough that I can say that I used cassettes. *(Laughter)* And that’s probably about as old as I am; I don’t go any further back than that.

 But every year there used to be a group of people that would put out the top thirty Christian hits of that year. This was the first one: “Wow 96.” And so the question is: Are the Psalms essentially the temple’s best hits, the collection of the best hits of the temple? And I think it’s fair to say that people would say, “No, that’s not the case.”

 I think that commentators would say that there’s a structure to the Psalms. It’s an orderly structure that has been arranged intentionally by an editor. And there are signs to help us to see that today.

 Some of those signs are on the surface. But before I get there I’ll just mention that this kind of approach to how we think about the Psalms as one unified whole is called *reading the Psalms canonically.*

 It’s a big word, but the idea there is that it has a canon in it. It has an authority to it; it has an intention to it. So it’s not just an independent collection of random pieces-—or worse yet, divergent pieces that don’t go together—but there is a unified whole to the Psalms. There is a literary shape to the book. And scholars who have studied this would say that there is a flow to the Psalms. It’s not just that it has one overall message. But it has a message that has a flow to it intentionally.

 And so I want to spend a little bit of time talking about where we can see that. And in particular some of this you can see yourselves on the surface, if you look at the Psalms. Some of you may already know that the Psalms are split into five books. I think that if you were to take a look in your Bibles you might even see that if you were to turn to Psalms 42, 73, 90 or 106, that there would be a heading in your Bible that says, “Book 2,” “Book 3,” “Book 4.” So clearly on the surface there is a structure to the Psalms; they were put in order of books.

 What you may not notice, unless you scratch below the surface, is that the last Psalm of each book contains a benediction. If you were to turn to Psalm 41, the last words you’ll see at the end are: *“Blessed be the LORD.”* Turn to 72 and you’ll see the same; the same with 89, the same with 106, and toward the end of Book Five.

 So clearly you start to see that wow, there is really some order here. There are books. The end of each book has a benediction to the Lord.

 Now to dig further below the surface is where I think you need a Biblical scholar to come in and help you. And that’s where O. Palmer Robertson was a help to me, because he spent a lot of time researching what is the structure beneath that, and what is the flow beneath that. And he suggests that the flow to the five books is to tell one glorious story of redemption starting with the historical David. And then the book anticipates the promised and ultimate King who is to come and who is God Himself.

 While each Psalm is captivating in its own right and set in its own historical context, when put together it becomes evident that a greater story is being told. He argues that the flow of the Psalms is moving from confrontation to consummation. And this is a diagram that he has in the outline of his book, one of many. And this is just at a high level. And this is where I apologize that the note sheet got cut off, because you’re supposed to have all five sections here that you could write in.

 But he argues that this is where we see the flow of the book. And I’m just going to read his words here.

 He says: *“The LORD God Almighty rules eternally over heaven and earth. But the mystery of iniquity has arisen to challenge His sovereignty among humanity. In response to this challenge, through covenant and promise, God has committed Himself to redeem an innumerable host from every tribe, kindred, language and people to be His own. The instrument by which this redemption will be accomplished is a singular saving Hero, who in the fullness of time will enter into mortal conflict with Satan himself. As a consequence, confrontation will characterize the whole of human history until the consummation.”*

 So his flow is moving from confrontation—our confrontation and our struggle with sin—all the way to consummation, where we see the glory of the coming King that is to be at the end. And the flow of the Psalms takes us in that pattern. He goes on to say—Yes?

 **Ted Wood:** Jordan, could you read that last quote about history being a consequence?

 **Jordan:** Yes. He says: *“As a consequence, confrontation will characterize the whole of human history until the consummation.”*

 **Ted:** Isn’t that interesting? That’s exactly what Marx says. Marx said that all of human history is confrontation. So maybe Marx and God got it right, except that God has it from God’s perspective and Marx has it from man’s perspective.

 **Jordan:** Sure. And certainly it would make sense that it would be that way, given that we believe that Scripture is authored by God, and He would have a plan in that sense. So he goes one to say that Book 1 tells of the confrontation. You see a lot of David’s confrontation with Saul.

 Book 1 he says is communication, where the Psalms move toward communication with peoples of other nations, such that they should recognize the true King. And because of their sin Book 3 shows themes of devastation, which is being sent into exile. And then the catalyst of exile brings about maturation, which is seen in Book 4. And then finally we end up with the climactic praises of consummation in the everlasting kingdom throughout Book 5.

 He goes into admirable detail in his book, not on just these themes but many other patterns that you see within Scripture. And just as a brief sidestep, one of the other things that he mentions—which I thought was neat; I never realized this before, so I’m just kind of sharing this as additional food for thought—is that he mentions other evidences to support that the Psalms were arranged in a particular thoughtful order, there’s a concept that he’s noticing in the Psalms called *poetic pyramids,* where groups of Psalms seem to form a pyramid where the middle Psalm is the pinnacle, and the Psalms leading up to it on both sides express the same theme.

 So for example in Psalms 20-24 Psalm 22 serves as the pinnacle Psalm. He notices that within Psalm 22 there are depictions of the Kingship of Messiah and the Kingship of Yahweh that are seen in Psalm 22.

 On the left-hand side—20-22—you see Messiah presented as King. And in 23 and 24 you see Yahweh presented as King. So Messiah is King, Yahweh is King. And the Psalm in the middle shows both.

 He also suggests in the grouping from 111 to 117 that these are Hallelujah Psalms. Psalms 111 and 112 begin with Hallelujah! Psalm 113 begins and ends with Hallelujah! Psalms 115 and 116 end with Hallelujah! And Psalm 117 begins and ends with Hallelujah!

 The pinnacle Psalm is a Psalm about Israel being delivered out of Egypt—God’s deliverance of His people. Praise to God, praise to God! He has delivered His people.

 That’s interesting, just food for thought. And if that’s the type of thing that interests you as well, as I said I’d recommend Robertson’s book in this regard.

 **Ted:** Jordan?

 **Jordan:** Yes?

 **Ted:** I’ve been thinking about this. Historically the liturgy of the church has always had a place. But everything has been replaced. And I think that in our evangelical churches we never have things ordered in our worship, except that the pastor comes. We have some singing and you have him sitting up there. You hear a sermon and then you are dismissed. Well in the *Book of Common Prayer* everything is in order and in place for a reason, just like this. The Psalms have been called the prayer book of Israel; I’ve heard them referred to as that.

 **Jordan:** Yeah. I think it’s Paul in 1 Corinthians who instructs the church to have orderly worship; it’s certainly there.

 **Ted:** Right.

 **Jordan:** And you look at the Old Testament and all the instructions that God had given His people, and the order and specificity with which He required to be worshiped.

 **Ted:** And this is ordered in spades.

 **Jordan:** Yeah. So just kind of wrapping up this rabbit hole, arguing for an intentional arrangement of the Psalms does not take away from the personal nature of each Psalm, right? And it certainly doesn’t take away from the divine authorship of it. It simply brings a better context to how we understand the Psalms as a whole. And if anything it affirms that only because the Holy Spirit was at work to inspire each Psalm and the whole Psalter do we have such a magnificent book.

 And I think that this is the most important part of all of this. Taking this kind of approach to the Psalms still touches every emotion of the human soul. But it does so by bringing every emotion into contact with Christ. That’s the flow: the consummation. The Psalms point us to Christ, even though they are in the Old Testament.

 I know that in our denomination we sing the Psalms exclusively; that’s all we sing. And I have a friend who has mentioned this to me before. And he’s always saying, “Oh, you’re singing the shadows, brother. You’re singing in the shadows because it’s the Old Testament Scripture speaking of what was to come.” And from our perspective we’re singing of Christ, because that’s who the Psalms point to. And the more we see it as a whole, the more amazed we should be with God. And the more we should desire to read and pray and sing the Psalms.

 And you know, I think it was important for us to go down this rabbit hole, because over the next number of weeks the guys are going to be coming up here talking about different Psalms that are important to them. And I think it’s good for us to remember that these aren’t just a collection of the best hits of the temple. But they are part of a larger whole.

 Okay, let me see what I have next on my slides. Okay, I want to return to the question that I asked originally. Why Psalm 14? Did I scratch my itch? Why are they both there? And I’ll say that I still think I’m still looking for a 100% satisfactory answer. But I’m okay with the answer that I have today.

 And the answer that I have today is that we can get behind Robertson’s idea that Book 1 and Book 2 have different parts of the flow. What I think is interesting—and I’ll come back to this slide here,--is that some of what you-all notice as the references in blue are references to God. In Psalm 14 in the Hebrew the references to God are the LORD—the personal name of God—Yahweh. In Psalm 53 he doesn’t use Yahweh. He uses Elohim, which is not the personal name of God that was received by Israel, but the name that’s used to talk about God the Almighty One to others who may not know Him personally as Israel did. And if you recall, Robertson suggests that Book 2 of the Psalter is communication, where the Kingship of God is communicated to the rest of the nations.

 And the other thing that’s interesting is that if we can see that the whole of the Psalter is the story of redemption, I think we see that in just these brief seven verses as a snapshot. It is so important for all mankind to know this that it was told once to the Jews personally. It’s told again to the rest of the Gentile nations through Psalm 53. And Paul takes both of those and combines them together in Romans 3 when he talks about that whether you’re Jew or Gentile, *“all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”*

 And so for me I’ve scratched the itch enough to say that I’m comfortable with that as understanding why they are both in the Psalter. The story is so important; the revelation is so important that we need it twice. The audiences may be different audiences. Paul brings both of those together when he applies these Psalms in Romans 3.

 And so with that being said, we’ll go ahead and try to look at this mongrel Psalm in a little bit more detail. And I’m thinking that we’ll probably only get through the first three verses today, which is why I’d asked for a second week to get through the back half.

 So first I just have in a nutshell that I think that if you were to sum up this Psalm in kind of one sentence, this is the sentence: Mankind is universally depraved. Yet there is a people who have been and will be delivered.

 And then I’ve provided kind of a mini-outline that I’m going to follow as to how we can think about the breakup of this Psalm. I think the first three verses show *crisis.* The next three show *a conundrum.* And at the end we have *certainty.* And I wasn’t shooting for alliteration when I started writing that; it kind of worked out that way about two-thirds of the way through.

 **Ted:** You sound like Bruce Bickel. *(Laughter)*

 **Jordan:** And so with that being said, let’s go ahead and look at the first verse.

*“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*

*They are corrupt; they do abominable deeds;*

*There is none who does good.”*

 And I have a question for you all which is not a trick question. But I think sometimes that we think about this maybe not as well as we should. What is a fool? And I’m just curious to hear a response from you guys. When you think of a fool what do you think of? Yes?

 **David Miller:** Someone who sees the truth and misinterprets it without knowledge.

 **Jordan:** Okay, you’re better than I was. But yes?

 **Gary Craig:** I was just going to say somebody who is not necessarily stupid but just off on his own track.

 **Jordan:** Yes. So it’s someone who is in error who knows what he should be doing and doesn’t do it. What’s interesting is, I think that when we first read this, when we say that *“the fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God,’”* most minds immediately go to say that the atheist is a fool. And they’ll say, “Oh, there’s ignorance there.” The atheist doesn’t know that there is a God; he doesn’t claim that there is a God.

 And I think we need to think about this differently. What’s interesting is that the word in the Hebrew that’s used for “fool” here is the word *nabal.* And that might sound familiar to a couple of you who are familiar with your Old Testament history,--you see where my bag is!--with that story of David in particular.

 But before we go to that story of David, the word *nabal* is also used in Isaiah—Isaiah chapter 32 verse 6.. And I’m just going to get there really quickly and read that. Isaiah 32:6 says: *“For the fool speaks folly, and his heart is busy with iniquity, to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the LORD.”*

 It goes on from there. But if we go to the story that maybe some of you initially thought of with the word *nabal,* there’s a story in 1 Samuel where David, after he is fleeing from Saul, he and his men are out in the field and they come across some shepherds. And they take care of these shepherds; they protect them. And then when he and his men are looking for food and drink to sustain them they go to the owner of these shepherds. And they say, “Will you bring me food and drink?”

 And as they approach him, the man’s name is Nabal. *“And Nabal answered David’s servants: ‘Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are so many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed, and give it to men who come from I do not know where?”*

 Now before I give you his wife’s response to that comment,--remember, we’re talking about someone who maybe should know better!—I’m going to take you back a couple of chapters in 1 Samuel, to show you something that I think is really neat when it comes to this; it really hammers this home. Five chapters earlier, in 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan and David make a covenant. And Jonathan says, “I will protect you; I will vouch for you.”

 And he goes to his father King Saul about vouching for David. And he basically says to Saul, “Why are you trying to kill David? He has done no wrong to you.”

 And this is Saul’s response. *“Saul’s anger was kindled against Jonathan. And he said to him, ‘You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and the shame of your mother’s nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established.”*

 Clearly Saul knows that David has been anointed as king and is the rightful king of Israel. So Saul knows that. Three chapters later—

 **Ted:** What were those verses?

 **Jordan:** 1 Samuel 20; the story where I started was verse 30. But the story is kind of before and after that. Not even three chapters later—one chapter later, in 1 Samuel 21,--we’ve acknowledged that the king of Israel knows who David is as the son of Jesse. David flees from Solomon after this, and he’s on the run. And he comes to the king of Gath. And while he’s brought before the king of Gath, the king and his servants tell him: *“Is this not David, the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances: ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’”*

 The kings of foreign lands know that David is the king of the land. And yet we have Nabal two chapters later saying, *“Who is this son of Jesse?”* “Who is David? Why should I give up my goods for him when he was good to me?” Interesting! He should know better, shouldn’t he?

 **Ron Baling:** Would Goliath have already been slain by then?

 **Jordan:** Yeah. Goliath was from Gath; right. And so this is Nabal’s wife answering David.

 So David and his men basically say, “Nabal has done me wrong so we’re going to go and kill him.” That’s essentially what they say. And Abigail the wife of Nabal—this is 1 Samuel 25, starting around verse 24,--Abigail comes to david. *“She fell at his feet and said, ‘On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him.”*

 And so here I think we have some examples in Scripture. When they say “the foolish person,” when they say “the fool,” they’re not talking about ignorance. They’re not talking about someone who can’t claim they don’t know that there is a God because no one told me. The idea is no; you know that there is a God. And yet you say there is no God.

 And I mentioned earlier that this Psalm is quoted in Romans 3. And Romans certainly has the very famous opening to that letter where he says that all men are without excuse, because creation around us speaks to there being a God. The law is placed on our hearts whether you’re a Jew or a Gentile, because we are all made in the image of God. And so for someone to claim that there is no God is truly foolish because everybody knows, whether they profess it or not, they know in their hearts that there is a God. And if they don’t profess it, they are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, as Paul tells us in Romans.

 So I think that’s important for us to pause there on what a fool is. And then the question turns to who is the fool? We just read the story about Nabal. David purposely uses the word *nabal* here. Is he talking about Nabal? We mentioned that Psalm 14 is in this confrontation stage of David’s life. He was on the run from Saul. Is this the nabal? Maybe this is the one he wrote this Psalm for.

 But I think that if we look at the second half of the verse, we can clearly say no. *“The fool says in his heart, …They are corrupt; they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.”* We are not talking about a singular fool here. We are talking about a group of fools.

 I was going to mention a funny story on top of this; it might be a dead horse. But I read a story that a friend had invited someone over to his house who was from another country and offered this person tea. And the friend had never had tea before. And so the friend gives him the cup of hot water and he gives him a teabag. And the man takes the teabag and he rips it open and he dumps it into the water. *(Laughter)*

 “No, no, no. You stick the bag into the water’ you don’t have to rip it.” And then the friend gives him a sugar packet. “Do you want some sugar with your tea?”

 “Sure.” So he takes the sugar packet and he throws the packet into the water.

 “Oh, no! You rip that one open and you don’t put that one in it.”

 “Oh, okay, okay.” You wouldn’t say that friend was a fool because he was truly ignorant; he didn’t know any better.

 But if I tell my daughters “Don’t touch the stove when the red light is on,” and they come into the kitchen and they see the red light on, and they wonder, “Is it really hot?”, and they burn themselves, I could say to my daughters, “That was foolish. You knew better and you chose not to obey.”

 And so I think it’s just this idea here again. When we talk about the fool we’re not talking about ignorance; we’re not talking about naiveté. We’re talking about people who know better. And yet they decide to act in a certain way otherwise. Yes, John?

 **John Gratner:** I think that’s a very useful point. Also in the context of which this was written, there weren’t atheists, right?

 **Ted:** No.

 **John:** They all believed in gods, period—full stop. That’s how life worked, right? And so Abigail goes on to say there that it’s “to my lord,” meaning David. She then invokes Yahweh to say, “He doesn’t believe in Yahweh; that’s why he’s treating you this way.” He’s rejecting that God.

 And here it’s the same thing. You know, somebody hearing this in the temple wouldn’t have thought, oh, these people are idiots. They don’t believe in Yahweh, as though that was the only option; they’re just ignorant that Yahweh exists. They believed in the wrong gods. And the point is that it’s the fool who rejects the true and living God who is the God of gods.

 But they wouldn’t have had this. We live in our own context where people just reject the notion of the supernatural out of hand—any gods; any ideas of anything beyond this humanity. And that’s certainly foolish with all of the evidence for that. That’s not quite the same context they were living in here and that Paul was also talking about when we get to that. It’s not an ignorance thing; it’s an arrogance thing.

 **Jordan:** Sure. You know, I had this written down in my notes and I skipped over it. But a pithy quote I heard in a sermon that maybe I heard in a sermon last summer sometime which I thought was just kind of fun is: *“Atheists claim they don’t believe in God. But truly it’s God who doesn’t believe in atheists.”* And this verse kind of proves that, right? God tells us that “there is no such person who can claim that they don’t know Me, because I’ve put My image on all of you. I’ve given you creation to attest to Me.”

 **Don Bishop:** Romans 1:18.

 **Jordan:** Yeah.

 **Don:** There are two places here. 19: *“For what can be known about God is plain to them.”* And then further on: *“His power and nature have been clearly perceived,”* and they suppress it.

 **Jordan:** Yes, they suppress it. And you know, that’s one of those things that I think is easy for us to try to dismiss. Or if you have a friend who claims to be an atheist it’s easy to say, “Oh no; you’re purposely suppressing this.” But I think we need to take the Scripture as it is and what it says.

 And I know that Jeff has been up here and that he’s given examples before of people he’s known who have claimed not to be believers. And yet they’ll make comments that clearly show that they understand, like there’s something bigger going on.

 **Don Bishop:** I heard one from a friend of mine on FaceBook. He was talking to a group of college kids in a debate. He said that the reason the atheist can’t fathom God is the same reason that the criminal can’t blame the police.” *(Laughter)*

 **Jordan:** That’s good. Did you have a comment to that?

 **Don Nemit:** You have to believe in something in order to deny it.

 **Jordan:** Well you know, that’s a great point too. Another thing I had read in one of the commentaries was that denial of God is a faith in and of itself. You’re believing in order to deny. That’s a great point. Yeah?

 **David** **Miller:** The believer in naturalism essentially has named nature as God. And even if they see something miraculous, if they attribute that to nature, it was formed by their god—nature. And even if something miraculous happens it becomes a part of nature.

 **Jordan:** Sure. All right, I’m going to move us ahead here. I’m not sure I’ll get through all the slides that I had even planned for today. But to the middle point—who is the fool?—it’s all of us, right? It’s everyone; everyone is the fool; it’s not a singular person. This is a crisis of humanity. I mentioned that the first three verses speak of crisis. This is a crisis.

 **David Pinyot:** I was going to say that when a person asks, “What is a fool?”, I’m going to say, “The person I see when I look in here.”

 **Jordan:** Yeah, there you go; right. But it’s easy for us to look at others who may be the atheists or who believe in other gods and say, “Oh, you’re a fool!” And we don’t look in the mirror.

 And that brings us to our last point. What does the fool say? More importantly, where does he say it? And it says that it’s *“in his heart”* that he says this. This doesn’t have to be a public profession for it to be true; it’s a saying of the heart.

 And I think it’s really good here for us to pause and say, what does this mean for us and how we live our lives? And a lot of commentators like to also use this first verse not to just talk about atheism, but practical atheism, even for believers. And I’m going to ask some questions. And I want you to know that these are just as much for me as they are for all of us. Do we acknowledge that God exists with regular prayer? Or would our prayer life if made public expose that we haven’t talked with God in some time, or at least not in any meaningful way outside of mere repetitionary custom? If He exists we should be talking to Him, right?

 How about with our faith? Are we truly trusting in the Lord and His promises, or are we placing our trust in the things of this world, whether it be riches or relationships or status, or whatever may be the modern version of chariots and horses?

 What about or obedience to His law? Or do we live as though He doesn’t see or watch us with longsuffering? And if you are feeling that way, I’ve got some more bad news for you as we go into verse 2. And remember, I forewarned you that the first three verses show crisis. So if you are thinking that God doesn’t see—and so you can live in sin and not have to repent of your sin—the very next verse says:

*“The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,*

*To see if there are any who understand*

*And who seek after God.”*

 He is from a position of authority as a Judge. The word that’s used in the Hebrew for “looks down” means “careful inspection”—not just a casual, cursory “Oh yeah; people are down there.” But no, He is inspecting carefully the children of man.

 So if you’re led to believe in verse 1 that the crisis is just a denial of God, verses 2 and 3 show not just denial, but thoughtless neglect. We’re not even seeking Him; we have turned aside. And it’s probably good for us to pause here and reflect on our sinful condition, how corrupt it is, and the despair that is there if it were not for God Himself to reach down and save us.

  *And you know, on top of that, even if you’re still feeling like well, this isn’t about me; this is about other people, we have in verse 3 the double emphasis of* “There is no one who does good, not even one.”

And remember, David is writing this. The man after God’s own heart is writing this even about himself. And so you may disagree with the assessment. But it is not you who has written the Psalm. It is inspired by God through His Spirit. And if we’re trying to find ways to listen to what the Psalm has to say, I think we’ll clearly see that there is a crisis here in these first three verses. And in Romans 3 Paul picks up on this crisis when he affirms the sinfulness of mankind.

 I have one additional slide that I want to share with you before we close. I’d mentioned at the very beginning that it was part of my Bible reading plan for this year to be working my way through the Psalms. And something I had seen just kind of by happenstance was an approach someone took about how he reads the Psalms. And I just want to share that approach with you now in case it’s helpful for either any additional studies you do in the Psalms or other Bible reading.

 But what he did was, he would take a section of the Psalms. In this case I just have the first three verses that we covered. And he would first put a box around the subject that is the same in a section. So for instance the purple/pink box here is “the fool.” And in the rest of these three verses here are all the references we see to the fool.

 And then from there he would start to underline: What are the actions that the fool takes? What are the things said about the fool?

 And then what I thought that was particularly helpful was that he turns it into a diagram. He would place the subject in the middle. Now list everything you are reading about that subject.

 I think this helps from a meditation standpoint. You’re not just reading it for the sake of reading it, but you’re meditating on what you’re reading.

 And so in this example we see the fool. And what is it that we see about the fool? We see that he speaks: “There is no God.” He seeks no God. He does no good, and he is no good. And I just wanted to share that with you because I thought it was interesting. I hadn’t seen that before; I thought that was a neat approach. I think that’s the way to help us to slow down when we’re reading and to be more thoughtful about what we’re reading and to really meditate upon it, as opposed to this trap that I can fall into. Oh, I need to read the Bible! I’m done for today, right? I think that if we slow down—and I think an approach like this can help us slow down,--we’ll find so much more richness out of what it is that we’re reading.

 As with all the cliffhangers, we’ll stop here for today. I encourage you to come back next week where we find out if there is a resolution to this crisis. And in the meantime I would encourage you this week to meditate upon your sinful state. Consider where you would be if it weren’t for the grace of God. And in so doing seek to increase your love and thankfulness toward our triune God who first loved us even when we were dead in our sins.

 And I would also encourage you this week to consider these words and the state of your heart. The fool in his heart says that there is no God. When it comes to seeking God and if you see that you find yourself lacking—which I anticipate we all will!—that you repent of your unbelief and ask the Lord to give increase. And so with that I’m going to close with a prayer from *The Valley of Vision,* which talks about needing to repent of our repentance, and that we don’t do it as well as we should. But maybe before I do that, any final thoughts or comments on what we talked about today? You are welcome to come up afterwards if you have anything.

 Okay, let me close in prayer. *“O God of grace, in my Christian walk I am still in rags. My best prayers are stained with sin. My sorrowful tears contain so much impurity. My confessions of wrong number so many aggravations of sin. My receiving the Spirit is infused with selfishness. I need to repent of my repentance. I need my tears to be washed. I have no robe to bring to cover my sins, no loom to weave my own righteousness. I am always standing clothed in filthy garments. I am always going into the far country and always returning home as a prodigal, saying, ‘Father, forgive me.’ And You are always there, bringing forth the best robe.*

 *“Grant me to never lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the exceeding righteousness of salvation, the exceeding glory of Christ, the exceeding beauty of holiness, and the exceeding wonder of grace.”* I pray these things in our Lord’s name. Amen.

 **Brave Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*