**The fool** /3/22: 1/1/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 14, Romans 3:9-26

Text: Psalm 14

Psalms: 27:1-5, 92:1-9, 53, 117

If you start reading the Bible at Matthew’s gospel, your first sighting of the word ‘fool’ will be in the Sermon on the Mount. In dealing with the commandment about murder, Jesus spoke of being angry with a brother and with saying to him, ‘You fool’ (Mat 5:22). Jesus condemned such anger, and such words, in the strongest terms. We must refrain from calling someone a fool in anger.

In Luke’s gospel however, Jesus tells a parable about a rich fool. God says to this man, ‘Fool! (Luke 12:20). Why was he a fool? Because he was ‘not rich toward God’. In fact, he gave no thought to God whatsoever. He was what we call an agnostic. There are a lot of agnostics in our society, even on the church. There are people who go to church but have no saving knowledge of God: ‘a-gnostic’ means ‘without knowledge’.

Here in Psalm 14, and in Psalm 53 which is virtually identical, we read, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (14:1). To say there is no God is technically to be an atheist, but it is doubtful if anyone is a true atheist. Even the outspoken atheist, Richard Dawkins, endorsed the message posted on London buses which read, ‘There is probably no God’- ‘probably’ means ‘not sure’. It is strange that a man who doesn’t believe God exists has spent most of his life fighting God and his followers! Dawkins was professor of evolutionary biology at Oxford University, a highly educated man, but education or knowledge of this world is not the same as wisdom- remember the rich fool of the parable.

Educated people can be fools, according to the Bible. This psalm characterises a fool as a person who says there is no God. Other characteristics of this fool are referred to in this psalm. This psalm is set out in four sections in our Bible. The first of these is about the fool, the second about God, the third about sinners, and the fourth a cry for salvation.

**1. The fool**

Psalm 14 begins with a description of the person who says there is no God. We could of course, include the millions who make their own gods, gods made in the image of man. As a secular humanist, Dawkins made his own god- Dawkins! Hitler, who also took to the theory of evolution like a duck to water, did the same- his god was Hitler. Has Putin adopted the theory of evolution? He certainly has a god from the same stable- Putin!

The writer of this psalm was David, king of Israel one thousand years before Christ, so clearly fools have been around a long time. The fool that David speaks of is not simply someone doing something foolish. David, like all of us, did foolish things from time to time. A fool is one who lives a life of ignorance, and generally arrogance. He or she is a person who turns away from a knowledge of God, which has nothing to do with secular education.

Dawkins tries to convince the world that those who believe in God are fools, but the Bible says he is the fool. He might claim that there is no proof that God exists, but then, there is no proof that he does not exist either-it a ‘probably’. God has in fact given plenty of evidence for his existence and has even spoken to us, if we care to read the Bible, the most read book in the world in which nothing has been proven incorrect.

God has revealed himself in his creation, which includes this world and everything that exists- evolution has not been able to disprove this truth. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies proclaim the work of his hand’ (Ps 19:1 NIV). The wonderful theological treatise that is Paul’s letter to the Romans, begins with God’s revelation in the creation: ‘His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; even his eternal power and Godhead’ (Rom 1:20).

In ancient times men made up stories about gods or serpents or sea creatures being involved in creation, but in the western world we have been told the story, called ‘Darwinian evolution’. Many people have fallen for this lie- Hitler, Dawkins, Stalin and millions of others believed this story. This clever story left God out of the picture with regard to creation, and hence out of all human life. We can call such people fools, because as our psalm declares, ‘The fool says in his heart, there is no God’. Don’t go around calling every evolutionist a fool, but do remember this when they call you a fool- you can refer them to this psalm.

The apostle Paul writes of, ‘God’s wrath being revealed from heaven against all who suppress the truth in unrighteousness’ (Rom 1:19). God does not like to be left out of the picture. He is a jealous God, who will not give his glory to another when it comes to creation, to worship, or to judgment. He is the almighty, uncreated creator who sustains all things by the word of his power (Heb 1:3), and who has set a day when he will judge the world in righteousness.

God is gracious enough to point us to his creation and speak to us through his creation. He speaks in the wind, the fire, the flood, the pandemic, and other disasters. We read about this in the Bible, in the flood of Noah’s day, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in Jesus stilling the storm- not to mention raising the dead! God continues to speak to us, but we as a people choose not to listen. We choose to be defiant and resilient, saying we will ‘bounce back’.

The secular humanists, the unbelievers of our day, refuse to believe in anything they cannot see or touch. The humanist believes he is just another animal, a bit wiser than a whale maybe, but he lives and dies just like a whale. This is the end, the tragic end of the fool who says there is no God. The end of many is even more tragic than that of the whale because we as humans chose to kill six million Jews, to kill thousands of innocent Ukrainians, to kill our elderly, kill our unborn, and kill ourselves in defiance of almighty God.

The Psalmist moves on to the tragic outcomes of atheism or agnosticism. He speaks of being corrupt, of doing abominable works, and being unable to do anything good (14:1). These are serious charges, but we have just referred to a number of abominable works. Corruption is widespread; it is a pandemic afflicting the whole world. Lies are accepted by the fool; anger and violence are part of life for those who say there is not God. We make laws of course, and police and judges enforce that law, as long as they are not corrupt themselves. But are our laws just? What law did Hitler follow? What law is Putin following? What law is your neighbour, the person who says there is no God, following when he leaves his wife and children? Have you noticed that almost half the poor and struggling in our society are single mums?

After telling us that God has revealed himself in his creation, Paul goes on to say that mankind did not seek after God but turned away from God, turned away from the light to the darkness - ‘Their foolish hearts were darkened’ and, ‘They became fools’ (Rom 1:21,22). Paul was familiar with the psalm we are looking at, and actually quotes from it in Romans 3. But for now, read on in Romans 1 and be shocked at what men and women do when they say there is no God- or you could have watched the *Mardi gras* in our city!

Beware of sitting back and saying only a few people are so bad. The nightly news allows us to do this, but the Bible doesn’t. The psalmist twice says, in verses 1 and 3, that, ‘There is none who does good’ Paul quotes these words, before concluding, ‘For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God’ (Rom 3:23). You have nothing to boast about just because you are not like Hitler or Putin. We are all born in sin, born with corrupt and sinful hearts, but if you believe God exists and believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again for your salvation, your heart by the grace and power of God, has been changed. You answer to a higher authority than yourself- assuming you believe God is a higher authority and not a God to do your bidding.

**2. The Lord looks down from heaven**

The German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, famously said, ‘God is dead’. A smart student wrote under these words on the wall of the university, ‘Nietzsche is dead’ says God. To say that God is dead is to accept that God exists or did exist; like all atheists, Nietzsche’s logic was not the greatest. While many may not agree with this philosopher’s conclusion, they still think that, ‘God is way up there and does not care’; they do not believe in a living and active personal God. But David writes of the Lord God looking down from heaven upon the human race (14:2).

God is not dead. God is not even blind. God the Lord, or Yahweh, is looking down upon the world he created, and especially upon men and women whom he created in his image. He is looking for any who understand, any who seek after God (14:2). This is what God expects from the revelation of himself in his creation. Jesus said, ‘Seek and you will find’ (Mat 7:7). The knowledge of salvation is not revealed in the creation, but God will reveal such knowledge to those who seek him. He does so through the prophets, through Jesus, and through the Bible.

So what does God see as he looks down on this world? He sees that all have turned away; all have become futile in their thoughts (Rom 1:21). They think they are clever and wise but it is worldly wisdom, sensual, demoniac, and self-seeking wisdom (James 3:14). True wisdom comes from above, from Jesus Christ the Son of God. God does not hide himself or hide anything from those who seek him. The fool has turned away from God’s revelation of himself and refuses to listen when God speaks from heaven; his gaze is fixed on himself. A ‘But God’ moment is needed, a movement from God in his grace towards sinners like us (cf. Rom 3:21, Eph 2:4).

**3. Sinners oppressing ‘my people’**

The fool who says there is no God is a danger to society. He or she does not go off and live a quiet life, or a life looking out for the needs of others. They ‘eat up my people’ or ‘devour my people like bread’ (14:4). If God does not exist, then I am all that matters. I must devour others if I am to get to the top, and must keep kicking rivals down. We see such behaviour in politics, in business, in sport, and in every part of life. A society that says there is no God becomes a dog-eat-dog society, or ‘survival of the fittest’.

David says they act like this because of fear, ‘great fear’ (14:5). Is it fear of man or fear of God? Probably both. They have cause to fear God because he hears the cry of the poor and oppressed. The Lord is a refuge for the poor (14:6). After David came other kings, kings who persecuted orphans and widows, only to feel the wrath of almighty God.

In India it has been notoriously difficult to reach the Brahmin class with the gospel because they are on the top of the religious and social ladder. It is the poor and the outcast who are responding to the gospel in great numbers, in spite of the threats of the upper class. As God looks down from heaven, he does not look on your class or your pedigree. He does not look at your riches or the position you hold in society. God looks on the heart; he looks for righteousness, for men and women after his own heart

(1Sam 16:7).

**4. Salvation**

The closing verse of this psalm is prophetic. It is a call for salvation, salvation that will come out of Zion. Zion was the holy hill in Jerusalem, symbolic of the heavenly throne of God. We referred to a ‘But God’ moment. David sees such a moment, a moment when the Lord brings salvation to his chosen ones. All are sinners who do no good at all. Our ‘total depravity’, as the Reformers labelled our condition from birth, is also ‘universal depravity’. ‘Not one’ does any good. Yet this psalm ends with the hope of the gospel, with rejoicing and gladness in Israel or Jacob. We hear such rejoicing and gladness at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, albeit from angels in heaven.