**In Your light we see light**  14/4/24 dkm

Read: Psalm 36, Romans 3:1-20

Text: Psalm 36

Psalms: 63:4-11, 17:6-11, 36:1-7, 117

Jesus referred to the generation in which he lived as faithless and perverse or twisted (Mat 17:17). He called the ‘experts’ of his day hypocrites and blind guides (Mat 23:15, 15). Do you think Jesus would say anything different of our generation? We hear many preaching tolerance, and claiming to be tolerant and loving, but what happens when you do not agree with them? They bitterly reject you! Remember what happened when the police wanted to march in the MardiGras!

Many think that we as human beings evolved from monkeys, and that the earth is billions of years old, contrary to the teaching of the Bible. This false teaching, along with other lies, has led to a perversity that is even greater than in Jesus’ day. More and more, our schools and universities are becoming places of ‘blind guides’, places of darkness rather than places of light, or even of learning!

In Psalm 36 David writes an oracle given to him concerning the sinfulness of the wicked (36:1). Yes, David also lived in a wicked and perverse generation. The wicked do not even know the truth about their own life because they are blinded by sin. They think they are living the best life possible in this world; for them this world is all that exists. Darwin’s God-denying theory of evolution boldly teaches the survival of the fittest, and many live according to this teaching. Thankfully, David does not leave us in the dark pit of perversity. He contrasts the light and love of the Lord. He urges us to come under the ‘shadow of your wings’ (36:7), or into a covenant relationship with the Lord, and live a truly abundant life. Our subheadings are: ‘Characteristics of the godless’, ‘Covenant love of God’, ‘Continuing covenant love’ and, ‘Cast down’.

**1. Characteristics of the godless**

Psalm 36 is a psalm of David, described in the title as a ‘servant of the Lord’. David was chosen by the Lord and anointed king of Israel. He was a man after God’s own heart, a wise man and a prophet. An oracle is a divine revelation. The Lord put into David’s heart the words which he speaks in this psalm. It is a wisdom psalm, like Psalm 1, contrasting the ungodly person with the godly, or in this case with the Lord himself.

The wicked is characterised first and foremost as having ‘no fear of God before his eyes’ (36:1). Proverbs declares: ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ (Prov 9:10). To fear the Lord we must have knowledge of the Lord, but knowledge in itself does not mean wisdom. The wicked think that knowledge is all they need for life. Many think the more educated a person is the more wisdom they have. Is this why the press always interviews university professors, even about things not in their field of expertise. The ‘university professors’ in Jesus’ day were called ‘Scribes and Pharisees’, and look what Jesus says about these men! A Hindu professor I worked with worshipped cows! Education of the poor helps lift them out of poverty, but it does not bring them out of darkness.

Humanism is the chief god of our society. We may not see professors worshipping cows, but they still worship a god, the god of humanism. This is what David is describing here in this psalm. No fear of the God of creation is the beginning of a lack of wisdom. Note that the apostle Paul includes the words of verse 1b as the climax to his assessment of the human heart the world over (Rom 3:18).

Where do people look if they don’t look to God? Some look to the creation itself and worship the sun, the moon, the trees, or the cows! But ultimately the ungodly look to themselves. They see only the things of this world, and the immediate or passing pleasures of sin, as Moses said (Heb 18:25). They walk in darkness and see no further than their nose, as we say. They are blind, as Jesus said.

David speaks of the wicked as flattering himself in his own eyes (36:2). His eyes are focused on himself and, because of pride in his sinful heart, he thinks of himself more highly than he ought. Humanism is marked by narcissism, love or worship of one’s self. The Hebrew of the second part of verse 2 is difficult to translate, but the sense is that this person no longer sees his sin, or hates sin; sin is self-deceptive. He may even think walking in sin is ‘cool’. As Jesus said, ‘He loves darkness rather than light’ (John 3:19). Lies and deceit are no longer his second language- they are his first language! (36:3). Truth is no longer truth in our perverse generation. Lies are no longer lies; they just alternative truth!

We called this a wisdom psalm, and here in verse 3 David says of the wicked, ‘He has ceased to be wise and to do good’. Paul quoted this psalm in Romans 3 so he may have meditating on it when he wrote in Romans 1: ‘Although they knew God they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful’. ‘Professing to be wise they became fools’ (Rom 1:21, 22). God’s revelation in creation should make people fear him and seek after him. But no, the wicked cease to be wise and to do good. Doing good is impossible when there is no fear of God in the heart. Tell that to people who think they are good and are doing good! They will probably accuse you of hate speech!

What is in the heart of the wicked if not fear of God? Thoughts about pleasure and self-glory of course, and hence thoughts of deceit, wickedness, and revenge. ‘Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications and thefts’ said Jesus (Mat 15:19). The wicked devises such wickedness on his bed (36:4). Instead of meditating on the law of the Lord, as with the wise man of Psalm 1, he mediates on how he can get more pleasure and power and glory in this world. To achieve these goals he is guided by his own corrupted moral compass, not by the laws of God. He does what is right in his own eyes, not the eyes of God, the ultimate judge (36:12).

**2. Covenant love of God**

Another way of living is living in a covenant relationship with God. We are born into a human family in which the bonds of love are strong. But the covenant love of God is even stronger (Isa 49:15). We enter into this covenant by the grace of God when we repent and believe in Jesus. In telling of the wonderful love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, the apostle Paul speaks of this love being incomprehensibly long and wide, and high and deep (Eph 3:18,19). David uses similarly ‘exalted’ language in describing the covenant love of the Lord in verses 5 and 6. The word ‘mercy’ is the Hebrew word ‘*chesed*’ which means covenant or steadfast love. This love is as high as the heavens, and the Lord’s faithfulness reaches the clouds (36:5). God is faithful to the covenant he makes with us in the blood of Jesus Christ.

The covenant the Lord makes with his people is one of righteousness. God is righteous, and he declares those he chooses to be in covenant relationship with himself righteous. There is a sense of beyond measure about God’s righteousness, as with his love, but this time it is the ‘mighty mountains’ to which David compares his righteousness. We continue to note the vast difference between this description of God’s love and faithfulness and righteousness, with David’s description of the wicked.

The fourth and final character of God’s covenant is that of judgment, judgment that is just, and here described as ‘very deep’ (36:6). The Lord is faithful to his covenant, but there are necessarily consequences or judgments for covenant breakers. The last line of verse 6 reminds us that the Lord is actually sovereign over all his creation, over both man and beast. If we look to the flood of Noah’s day, the whole creation was involved in God’s judgment. It will be the same on the Last Day. While the Lord is active in preserving man and beast today, on that day he will be active in judging all human beings who have ever lived. The terms under which the Lord will judge everyone are clearly stated in the Bible, so there will be no excuses.

Being in this covenant relationship with the Lord is a blessing, not a burden. The laws of the Lord are not burdensome (1John 5:3). David is deeply moved by the covenant love of God, calling it precious, and describing life within this covenant as being like a chick under the wings of the hen. Chicks completely trust the mother hen, darting under her wings as soon as she calls. She finds food to satisfy her chicks, just as the Lord satisfies our mouth with good things, with ‘drink from the river of your pleasures’ (36:8). Jesus not only gives physical bread of course- he is the bread of life; in him we have life, abundant life (John 10:10). Jesus told the Samaritan woman he could give her living water, and she received this when she received Jesus as her Saviour and Lord.

Moreover, Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12). ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of men’ (John 1:4). Jesus was born into a world of darkness and death, and so are we. The wicked love the darkness but this darkness leads to death. Praise God that when he shines the light of the gospel into our hearts, we see our sin, repent and enter into the light which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you seen this light? Are you walking in this light? Can you say with David, ‘In your light we see light’ (36:9)?

**3. Continuing covenant love**

The oracle within David’s heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked gave way to a wonderful picture of the covenant love of the Lord. The way of darkness in contrasted to the way of light, with its associated covenant blessings. In the closing verses of this psalm David turns to prayer, asking the Lord to continue his covenant love towards those whom he has chosen and called to himself, here described as those who know the Lord (36:10). This is not just knowing about the Lord, but knowing the Lord and his covenant love. He is referring to those who know God’s love for them and what he has done for them in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is referring to those who are committed to the Lord under the terms of the covenant.

God is faithful to the covenant, and you should be faithful also. If you know the Lord and are in this covenant relationship, you will be living in obedience to his covenant commands. Jesus summarised these commands for us as: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all you mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. (Mat 22:37-39). The wicked who have no fear of God have no desire to obey these commands. Do you? You can only do so from within this covenant relationship with the Lord.

In addition to continuing his covenant love, David asked the Lord to continue his righteousness to the upright in heart (36:10). This is a parallel line in the psalm and means much the same thing as the first line. Righteousness is a feature of the covenant love of the Lord. (36:6). When we are born again of the Spirit of God, he imputes righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, to us. Note the prayer refers to ‘Your righteousness’ because we have no righteousness of our own (36:10).

As part of the Lord’s Prayer we pray, ‘Deliver us from evil’ or from the evil one. Even though we belong to God as his covenant children, and come ‘under the shadow of his wings’, we still face opposition and attacks from the evil one and his agents. Though Christians make up only 2-3% of the population of India they are still harassed by militant Hindus. Why do they bother? For the same reason that the wicked target believers in our society- they love evil and hate good, they love wickedness and hate righteousness. In their pride the wicked will not tolerate open criticism or even perceived criticism. David prayed, as we must pray, that the proud foot of the wicked will not come against us (36:11).

When we truly fear the Lord we will not fear man. The hand of the wicked may come against us, bashing us or throwing us into prison, as happens to believers in many countries (36:11). Let us be praying for these fellow believers, and be praying for ourselves, not to be moved, and not to be driven away from the Lord. The Lord promises no one can pluck us out of his hand, but that does not mean the wicked will not try.

**4.Cast down**

In the closing verse of this psalm David reassures himself, and us, that the Lord is sovereign and indeed victorious over Satan and all his agents, as in the wicked. ‘There the workers of iniquity have fallen’, cast down and not able to rise (36:12). David saw the end of the wicked, and so must we. Let us remember that Jesus took our sins upon himself when he died on the cross, so do not listen to anyone trying to rake up your sin to accuse you- not even your own heart! And remember that Jesus is risen from the dead and you have eternal life in him. Not even death threats should cause us to stumble because the Lord will cause the wicked to stumble and fall; ‘They have been cast down and are not able to rise’.