

Psalm 36: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [0 : 0 0] Psalm 36 To the Choir Master Of David the Servant of the Lord Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness to the clouds.
- Your righteousness is like the mountains of God, Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
- The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life.
- In your light do we see light. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart. Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- There the evildoers lie fallen. They are thrust down, unable to rise. Psalm 36 reflects upon the experience of the righteous person who must live in the midst of wicked men, and the comfort to be found in turning to the Lord in such a situation.
- [1 : 3 3] The psalm begins with a description of the wicked. The meaning of the opening line is not entirely clear. Many commentators and translations interpret it as a description of the wicked.
- Rebellious speech is at the very heart of the wicked. Alternatively, John Goldingay suggests that it might mean that the rebellious utterance of the wicked is in the midst of the psalmist's heart.
- The words of the wicked have hit close to home for the psalmist and unsettled him. Alan Ross raises a different possibility. He translates it as follows. An oracle of the transgression of the wicked is in the midst of my heart.
- The Lord has given the psalmist a revelation about the character of the wicked, which he is about to declare. The rebellious person lacks all dread of the Lord, all awareness of the seriousness of the Lord's judgment.
- Even though they might not deny the Lord's existence, they live as if God did not exist. Such wicked persons act as if God did not see them and their actions. The wicked person flatters himself.
- [2 : 3 2] He has internalized the process of telling himself what he wants to hear, even though it is manifestly untrue. He is self-deceived, in particular in the belief that his iniquity is hidden and won't be revealed.
- He rationalizes things to himself, dulling his conscience. But his deceit does not end with himself. It infects his words to others. He causes trouble with his mouth, as his self-rationalizing lies are used upon others.
- He has abandoned the way of wisdom and of goodness which belong together. Not only does he deceive himself and corrupt others with his words, he is proactive in evil.
- He schemes at night in his bed. He commits himself to an evil path. All of these things flowing from his initial internal rationalization of sin, which itself comes from a failure to keep God before his eyes.

In the sharpest of contrasts with the wicked man and his ways, David turns to the character of the Lord in verses 5-9. The juxtaposition that he chooses here is not between the wicked and the righteous, but between the wicked and the Lord in the all-surpassing goodness, faithfulness and righteousness of his character.

[3 : 42] Derek Kidner writes, Here is a whole world to explore, a broad place to be brought into, unsearchable, heavens and clouds, impregnable, mountains, inexhaustible, the great deep, yet, for all that, welcoming and hospitable.

It is only man's world that is cramping. Human fickleness makes a drooping contrast to this towering covenant love and faithfulness. Human standards, where all is relative, are a marshland beside the exacting, exhilarating mountains of his righteousness.

Human assessments are shallowness itself in comparison with his judgments. The faithful character of God is the source of his people's delight and security. We take refuge beneath the covering that he extends over us, protecting us through all of the storms of this life.

As worshippers eating at the table of the Lord's house, we enjoy abundance as we feast on his goodness. As if returned to Eden, we drink of the Lord's blessing, as of a river of delights.

The Lord is the source of both life and light. He is the fountain from which life flows, the living water that endlessly springs up and eternally quenches the thirst of his people, refreshing them forever.

[4 : 56] He is the great light that illuminates all lesser lights. The light of his blessing is that which opens our eyes to see everything else. The psalm concludes with a petition to the Lord, a petition that the Lord would continue in his faithfulness and his righteousness towards his people, protecting the psalmist from the wicked that he described in the opening verses.

The fall of such wicked persons is certain and complete, and indeed is already in the process of happening. A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which God's light enables us to see light?

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