

The Fool Says In His Heart There is No God

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- [0 : 0 0] So we go to the sermon text from Psalm 14. I forgot, I remember I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Chris Bradley. I'm one of the ruling elders here, and I'm here because the session has given Matthew the week off to prepare an Advent series, which starts next week.
- So we're taking a break from 1 Peter, and before our Advent series, we'll be in the Psalms again for one week, and it'll be Psalm 14. So if you open your worship guides or your Bible to Psalm 14, and if you have your Bible next to you, it would be good to turn forward to Romans 1 and 3, because we'll be there too, all right?
- As we do that, let's open the Word of God and hear what He has for us this morning from the Psalms. Psalm 14, starting in verse 1, to the choir master of David.
- The fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt. They do abominable deeds. There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.
- They have all turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the name of the Lord?
- [1 : 2 1] There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans of the poor, but the Lord is His refuge.
- Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion when the Lord restores the fortunes of His people. Let Jacob rejoice. Let Israel be glad. And may the Lord add His blessing to the reading and the careful hearing of His Word.
- Amen. Amen. So we've been in the Psalms before, earlier in the summer, and when Pastor Capone introduced the Psalms, he introduced types of Psalms, and all the Psalms have one or more categories that they'll fit into.
- And this is a Psalm that fits into two categories, really. It's a Psalm of lament, and it's a Psalm of wisdom. We've talked about the Psalms of wisdom before. A Psalm of wisdom gives us answers to what is wisdom and what is foolishness.
- And this Psalm, in particular, describes the fool and contrasts him with God's people who are called the righteous. We are the righteous in the Psalms, God's people. And it's also a Psalm of lament.
- [2 : 2 6] A lament is a complaint that comes in brutally honest terms. Now, it's not just another word for a scripture, a piece of scripture that's a downer. That's not what lament is, really. It instructs us how to grieve. It is when we are down, when we are grieving, that we can go to the Psalms, and the Psalms are our instrument that God gives us to grieve for the sin both in us and for the sin around us.
- And it is both things. There is the sin in us that we grieve, and there is the sin around us that we grieve. The question that's posed by the lament frequently in scripture is, how long, O Lord? And though those words aren't in here, in verse seven, that is the lament.

How long, O Lord, till you redeem Israel? Now, before we go into it, we have to be honest at the outset of how this Psalm strikes us, because we are a culture that doesn't like to judge. We're a culture that doesn't like to call others foolish and call ourselves righteous.

We talked about this a little bit in Sunday school this morning. Judgmentalism is almost the unforgivable sin in our culture. But when we read Psalm 14, we see in pretty stark terms, God contrasting the fool with the righteous.

[3 : 30] And what we're gonna be doing today is saying what scripture says, saying the same thing, confessing scripture about how fools act and how the righteous are to act. Starting with verse one, the fool says in his heart, there is no God.

So who is the fool, first of all? The Psalm is describing it for us. We find the term in the Bible frequently, and we need to understand its meaning. We speak of fools and speak of the term in a different way. We talk about stupid people or ignorant people, but that's not the meaning of the biblical word.

The fool is something different. The fool is ignorant, yes, ignorant of something, but he's more than that. The fool is evil. The fool is corrupt, like verse two says, doing abominable deeds.

A fool, in short, is someone who rejects wisdom. And you look in the Proverbs to see that borne out. The fool is who rejects wisdom for the sake of their own evil. It's not how we use the term when we wanna describe someone who has just this sort of benign ignorance.

It's a word for someone who in their malevolent rejection of God hates wisdom. That's the fool. And it's not something benign. The kingdom of God is under attack by fools and their foolishness.

[4 : 40] And this is what David's psalm was lamenting. Now, a word about language. Because kids, you have a role in this too. I'm gonna call on you in a minute. But one thing we have to say about the language we use in this sermon and in the psalms, because your parents may have told you not to call people fools, not to call people stupid.

And that's good advice. Let's just say that first. That's good advice to all children. Don't call people fools. It's good advice for adults. Don't call people fools. But I'm gonna give you an exception today. And the exception is this. When the Bible calls someone a fool, we need to say the same thing.

And that's good advice for you kids. It's good advice for us adults. When the Bible calls someone a fool, we should say the same thing. And the reason why you're not to use that word lightly, you're not to use it casually for someone you're angry with, is because the fool is someone who's condemned by God.

When you call someone a fool, you're using the condemnation of God and naming it among people. So we don't use that word lightly. We don't call down God's condemnation on people.

That's up to God alone. Jesus gives us an example. This is in Luke 9, when the disciples are going through Samaria, sharing the gospel with the Samaritans, and they're rejecting them. And one of the disciples says, these were James and John, they said, Lord, do you want us to call fire to come down from heaven and consume them?

[5 : 57] In other words, call down condemnation on these fools who were rejecting the gospel, and Jesus rebuked them. He said no. So why did Jesus rebuke his disciples here? Because only God knows the time and place for his judgment.

And that time was not the time and place. Jesus' ministry was not the time and place for judgment. So we are not to call down judgment on others. But we are to say the same thing that scripture says. Romans 12 says, Repay no one for evil for evil, but give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

The calling of the Christian is to bear with foolishness, to call it what it is, but to bear with it and not return evil for evil. And so we don't use the word lightly, but we must use it when scripture does because foolishness can't be ignored.

It's not something benign to be laughed at. It's a threat to God's people. It's a threat to God's kingdom. As the psalmist tells us, the threat of foolishness is a real threat to the people of God because God is concerned with defending the defenseless and the weak.

[7 : 09] And this is what the fool says in his heart. Verse one, There is no God. Notice what the fool says. It's not from his lips that he says there is no God. It's from his heart.

So is the psalmist speaking of just atheists here? I think the answer is no. We could include them under the rubric of a fool, but that's not who the psalmist David is speaking of. It's not those atheists that say with their lips there is no God.

It's those who say it in their heart. And what they're saying is, there is no God who rules over me. That's the practical atheism. Even if it's not atheism professed with one's lips, it's the heart that says it.

There is no God who is responsible for me, who I am subject to. The denial of God isn't necessarily a verbal denial of his existence or of atheism.

Though that is what is unique about our time in history. There's a movement now in our culture called popular atheism. And there's a category for it that the philosophers call it rationalist atheism.

[8 : 12] All right, that's the category that they describe it with. A rationalist, by rationalist, I don't just mean rational. Rational just means using your own reason. And that's a good thing. It's a good thing to use your own reason.

But a rationalist believes that his own power of reasoning is all he needs to arrive at the truth. He doesn't need an authority above him. He just needs his own reason.

That's the rationalist. And it's an intellectual trend that's only emerged recently. It would have been foreign to David. There would be no atheist who would speak such with their lips that would say, all I need is my own reason.

That's a recent trend. It's the idea that you need nothing but your own reasoning power to show that God does not exist. And as Christians, we should see the problem with that. Because our rationalism doesn't factor in sin.

The fact that in our unrighteousness, we suppress the truth. So as much as our reasoning has power, it's deceived. Because in unrighteousness, we suppress the truth. So that means those who outright deny God's existence, the rationalist atheists, they're just one special kind of fool.

[9 : 13] But they do provide an example of when the foolishness of man arrives at its peak. Rationalist philosophers, for example, try to deal with this question. The question that philosophers deal with is what or why does anything in the world exist at all?

Or put another way is why is there something rather than nothing? And maybe some of you have thought about this question. Why is there something rather than nothing? It poses a problem for the atheist.

But it's a simple question. And it has a simple answer. And you kids have learned this question and have learned this answer. I'm going to test this. I'm putting a, I'm taking a risk here.

But kids, when I say, who made you? What do you say? Yeah. When I say, kids, who made you? God made me.

Right? You kids know this and pay attention, church. It's from these lips that God has ordained praise. They understand the simple question and they understand they're wise enough to answer simply.

[10 : 12] Why is there something rather than nothing? Who made you? God made me. So take note. On the other hand, there are atheists who answer this way.

They say, the question, who made you, is the wrong question. Because there's no who. It's where did you come from? That's the right question. And the answers were from the universe. And in one instant, the universe exploded from nothing.

The stars, the planets, life, energy, everything, each one of them created themselves in effect. If you want a working definition of foolishness, it's this, that there is no creator.

That everything just became of itself. Now, kids, again, if I taught you this, if I taught you that the world you live in created itself, what does the Bible say you ought to call me?

A fool. We know this. We know this as children. When someone says to you, there is no God. Everything that you are, everything around you just came to be.

[11 : 15] There's no God over you. There's no judge. There's no father. This is where you use the words of scripture. And you say, you are a fool. That is foolish.

And because you're Christians, you should say it with gentleness and respect or you shouldn't say it. Okay? That's also important. But from then on, you ought to stop listening because wisdom, as the Bible says, is known by her fruits and a fool doesn't have them.

This kind of fool will reject the plainest knowledge that there is that all that's around us had to come from something or someone. Someone who is beyond all of it. Who isn't just matter.

Who is eternal and uncreated. And kids, you're going to find this. You're going to find it in school, especially if you go to college. There are fools who teach you that you came from nothing. But, are those atheists just stupid?

That is not true because there are some very important and smart people who profess atheism. No, this foolishness isn't stupidity. It's something worse. This foolishness is the result of a heart that hates God.

[12 : 23] Practical atheism is what we call it. Practical atheism is what caused Peter to deny Christ because he was ashamed of him. Remember Peter who confessed to Jesus, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, the believer who then, weeks later, when Jesus was on trial and Peter was recognized as disciples, he said, I don't know him.

That's practical atheism. And believers, like Peter, are subject to practical atheism. A theologian said it this way, all sin is founded in secret atheism.

All sin is founded in secret atheism. You see what that means. It means that though you are a believer in Christ by the Holy Spirit, you still have a heart that secretly holds on to its own atheism.

It does that so that you can justify your own lusts and follow your own temptations. and it's very clever at doing it as well. One of my favorite authors is Fyodor Dostoevsky, a Russian author.

And he said this, he took a take on Mark 10, 27 where Jesus said, with God, all things are possible. And Dostoevsky recorded this ironically and he said, without God, all things are possible.

[13 : 36] Do you see his meaning in that? Without God, all things are possible. It means if you can just get rid of God, then you can do anything you set your heart on. Because your heart will say anything to give you an excuse to do what you want.

The phrase might never come to your lips, there is no God, but your heart will say it constantly. Without God, you can lie for what we call good reasons.

Without God, you can follow your own lusts wherever they lead you. Without God, you can live like you are the only person that you are responsible to. Without God, you can justify murder.

And without God, you are completely free from judgment for all those things. Then on the other hand, the very idea of a righteous God would ruin your heart's liberty to justify its own abominable deeds.

So it's the latent atheism within you, within us, that says, as you sin, it says, I'll never be judged for this. Or, Christian, when you say in your heart, God will forgive me for this.

[14 : 42] What is that but practical atheism? Though on your lips you might say, God will forgive me, and that's true. In your heart, you're doing it because you're rejecting God. You're denying his holiness, and you're denying the calling that he put on you, the name that he put on you to live a holy life.

And we rationalize our own actions by saying, God will forgive me for this. Our fool's heart says there is no God simply because it's what we want to be true.

There's no intellectual reason. It's just what we want to be true. When a sinner wants what's evil, he or she will always reject God to justify their sin. That's why atheism can exist.

That's why Westminster Larger Catechism, number 28, says the Lord sent strong delusions because they rejected the truth so that they would believe further lies. Scripture gives us these words to remind us of the universality of that foolishness.

Believer, unbeliever, Jew, and Greek, no one seeks for good. It catches up all of humanity in its net. Now as we move on to verse 4, verses 4 to 6, the Bible speaks of what it is that the fool does to the people of God, the kind of threat that foolishness is to the people of God.

[15 : 59] And he says, as if he puts the words in the psalmist's lips, have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the name of the Lord? They are all in great terror for God is with the generation of the righteous.

You would shame the plans of the poor but the Lord is his refuge. Here's what God finds particularly grievous about the deeds of the fool or the one who rejects God.

They eat up my people as they eat bread, he says, and they do not call upon the name of the Lord. How can they do this is what the psalmist is asking. Have they no knowledge?

It's words of shock. How can you do this? It's like you have no knowledge at all. Have they no knowledge, the psalmist asks. Or in other words, how is it possible to be such fools so consistently?

It's like the reaction you have when you know someone's about to do something monumentally stupid. And we see this if you look at videos on the internet. This is the way I think of it. When I look at a video on the internet and it starts with one of two things.

[16 : 59] It starts with someone on a skateboard or someone lighting a firecracker. That tells you something very stupid is about to happen. We've all seen this. And you say in your heart, have they no knowledge?

Are they not even thinking? And then what happens, you watch the video unfold and you watch it because it's going to be funny. That's why I got on the internet. And you watch. But while you watch, you think to yourself, don't they think?

What made them think this was a good idea? Don't they know what's going to happen? So it is when God says, or that God says, when someone decides to do something like steal from the poor, and I'm thinking specifically of payday lenders.

They hang out around military bases a lot where they can charge 36, 40% interest, up to 500% effective interest for someone to bring your pay stub in so that you can get an advance on your next paycheck while they take a third of it out.

Why do they do that? Because they've taken so much money from you that you have to come back again. And you get deeper and deeper in debt. They take people who have a need and they sell them a loan and plunge them into debt.

[18 : 13] They eat up my people as they eat bread, the Lord says. They steal from the poor. How can you do that? How can you do that and feel like it's okay?

You won't be judged. Or the evildoers, the fools, trap vulnerable people in addiction. Think of gambling. Think of sex.

Think of alcohol. We used to live in Las Vegas. You go to the casinos there and they have ways of trapping you into all three at once because you'll go in there and all three will be present. Gambling, alcohol, and sex because they know you're likely to get trapped by at least one of them.

And they want to plunge you in your temptations. They want to eat up the people of God as they eat bread. Or they could convince a woman that she should claim her reproductive rights and destroy her child.

That's atheism. You can't do that if you believe there's a God over you, that there's a God who will judge. When this happens, the Lord says that these fools are eating up my people as they eat bread.

[19 : 28] How can anyone be so shameless is what the psalmist asks. The psalmist asks, have they no knowledge? How could anyone so high-handedly do these things to men and women who belong to God?

Do they think that he doesn't see? Do they think that he doesn't care? The problem is that the fool does know. It's not a knowledge problem. It's a sin problem. The knowledge is there.

In verse 4, we read it. All the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the name of the Lord. As if the Lord is there, the knowledge is there, but they're not calling upon him.

God is holding all humanity accountable for calling upon the name of the Lord. The first chapter of Romans, if you'll turn to your Bibles there, Romans chapter 1, and I'm going to read verses 19 and 22.

The first chapter of Romans says that each of us, whether we call ourselves believers or unbelievers, we do know God in an important sense. Not the sense of knowing him as a savior necessarily, but the sense of knowing him as our creator.

[20 : 31] And this is what Romans 1 tells us. Romans 1, and I'll read verses 19 to 22. Follow with me. For what can be known about God is plain to them, and he speaks of the fool, the one who suppresses the truth, because God has shown it to them.

For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.

They knew God, but they didn't call upon God. And God is holding those accountable for calling upon him. And he's holding those accountable for following him and defending the defenseless, because that's who God cares for.

God is caring for the defenseless. So though they knew God, they were completely blind to the fact that there is a just God in heaven. Yes, knowing God, even having that knowledge, they became fools because of the evil that they wanted to follow.

[21 : 37] This is a fearful psalm for the fool, but even as it admonishes us for the foolishness that still lives in our hearts, it's also a great comfort for God's people. Because though they are reckless and shameless in their evil, devouring people, as the scripture says, in a manner of speaking, like it was their daily food, God sees.

God is not standing aloof. God will put an end to evil for the sake of his people. He isn't just watching, aloof and uncaring. What is God doing?

God is watching judgment pile up on evildoers for his judgment, his righteous judgment. Because what does it say in verse five? God is with the generation of the righteous.

Who are the righteous? Own it, people of God. You are God's righteous if you are in Christ. Foolish as your heart is, you are God's righteous.

Here's where the lament of scripture is so needed for God's people, and that's right there in verse five. For God is with the generation of the righteous. Among all the fools of humanity, God has still called to himself a people.

[22 : 46] And if you are a believer in Christ, though you know your own foolishness, you are also his righteous. And we need Psalm 14 because we need to say that to ourselves.

Because we don't say that to ourselves. We don't like to consider ourselves a holy huddle, to be holier than thou when we look at the world around us. But we need scripture to say that to us, that God is with the generation of the righteous.

And when I speak the psalm in my lament, when I speak the psalm when I'm suffering for my own sin, when I'm suffering from the sins of others, I need to look at the psalm and say, I am God's righteous and God is for me.

And he will put an end to evildoers. In the meantime, we lament. We lament with the psalmist who says, how long, O Lord? That's the lament of scripture.

And it's in different words here in verse 7. The psalmist says, oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion. When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

[23 : 48] When he says that the Lord will come from Zion, he's meaning God's holy hill, not necessarily the physical location of Zion and present earthly Jerusalem, but God is going to come from the capital of his kingdom, in this case from heaven, to rescue the righteous and put an end to evildoers.

And that should not terrify us because we are his righteous and we need to have confidence in that. When we lament over our own sin and we lament over our own foolishness, the word of God has to have priority because we have to call ourselves righteous when scripture calls us righteous.

Though we know our own foolishness. So that's how and why we ought to lament, particularly when we lament with Psalm 14. Because when we do it on our own, we grieve on our own, we lament on our own, what do we do?

We do one of two things. We either devolve into self-pity because we have no hope for ourselves or we absolve, what's the word, devolve into self-righteousness because we look at all the sin around us and we call ourselves better.

We don't look at the foolishness in our hearts, we look at the foolishness in others and we get self-righteous. We could be in self-pity as we lament or we could be in self-righteousness.

[25 : 06] Scripture doesn't allow either error to happen. When we see the foolishness of unbelief around us, we are sometimes tempted just to wag our fingers but then we look at the words of the psalmist and he says, when God looks from heaven down on the children of man, what does he see?

No one. No one who seeks for good. And what does Paul say that we read earlier in the preparation for worship in Romans 3? Jew and Gentile alike, educated and uneducated, professing atheist or professing believer, all alike, do not seek God.

If we are to have any hope to be saved, it's not in our hope of finding God, it's in our hope of God seeking us. He is the one who seeks and he's the only one who seeks.

Which is why David says in verse 7, oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion. It has to come from him because we don't seek him. When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and let Israel be glad.

So when we lament with the scriptures, we're not given the option of self-pity and we're not given the option of self-righteousness because it wraps up all men alike under the same umbrella of the fool and it rescues God's people specifically from the fool.

[26 : 21] God's spirit takes away our self-righteousness and in its place, he gives us hope in God's righteousness. The Lord gave us this psalm as a lament that his people can share.

When we follow scripture's laments, we hear God expressing words assuring us that he sympathizes with our weaknesses and with our sufferings. Because, after all, God knows what it's like to be eaten up by evildoers like bread.

Now, don't let those words escape your notice when they eat up God's people as they eat bread. That's what the evildoers are described as. Did that occur to you that we lament the evildoers who want to eat up God's people?

Because God himself gave his body as bread to a people who previously hated him. I don't think those words are an accident when the psalmist uses the metaphor of bread because Jesus Christ was willingly eaten up like bread by fools who did not call upon his name, who did not seek him.

He sought them out and he gave us the Lord's Supper as a symbol of how he has sought us and what it cost him to seek us, to bring people who hated him into his kingdom.

[27 : 35] The symbol of our communion with Christ is even given to us in this picture, that Christ was eaten up like bread for people who in their foolishness did not call upon the Lord. In fact, this is the Lord's Supper.

It's many things, but one thing it is, it's God's people remembering how we in our foolishness ate up a just man just like bread because God knows that of this human race on whom he looks down from heaven, there is no one who seeks for God, no one who does good.

Every one of those that God calls his, they are his because he sought them out himself. The Lord is the one who seeks. Before you were sought by God, all of you, without exception, whether you came to faith as a child or later in life, all of you, without exception, everyone were by nature haters of God.

Practical atheists, we could say, who don't say there is no God with their lips maybe, but they say it in their hearts. Knowing God, but pretending not to. We pretend not to know God, so we can follow our lusts.

So for all us who suffer with evil, God sympathizes because God did more. He knows what we endured because he endured it himself in Christ. He also knows how powerless we are over our own foolishness, which is why he gave us wisdom from himself.

[29 : 00] He rescued us from our foolishness, not by making us smarter, but by giving us the Holy Spirit, his Holy Spirit who enlightens us to know wisdom. And more important than knowing wisdom, loving wisdom.

He had to give us a heart to love wisdom before we would seek wisdom. So when we lament with the words of Scripture, we lament rightly and with hope. And this kind of lament, the lament in Psalm 14, brings us nearer to the gospel because it culminates in this hope that salvation will come from Zion, from God's holy hill.

We've seen the first fruits of that salvation already when Paul in Romans 11 writes and he declares what the psalmist says, the deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob, and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

That salvation is not just freedom from the evil around us, though that is part of our freedom, it's the freedom from the evil within us. That when the psalm makes believers face the practical atheism that's even in themselves, what comes out of us is a lament for deliverance from our own evil finally and for good.

And this God will do because he promised that God is with the generation of the righteous. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, it's you who teach us through the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 22] So do that now as we reflect on this lament from your word. Accept the pleas of the fools that you saved and be pleased with the feeble attempt at obedience that we're making as we're inspired to give it to you and to give you glory.

And we do indeed give you glory as the one who sought us, the only one who sought us. When we of ourselves wanted nothing else to be free from our sovereign king and judge, to follow our own desires, to follow our own rule, you rescued us from our self-will.

Now keep us firmly in your hand, not allowing our foolish hearts to draw us away from the love that you showed us in Christ. Now make the praises we give in song now be pleasing to you as we repent and are assured that you have called us your righteous.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.