

Psalm 14

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[0 : 00] So we're going to be looking at Psalm 14. So we've been working our way through the Psalms and our Lord's Supper services on Sunday evenings.! There is no God.

They are corrupt. Their deeds are vile. There is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.

All have turned away. All have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. Do all these evildoers know nothing?

They devour my people as though eating bread. They never call on the Lord. But there they are, overwhelmed with dread. For God is present in the company of the righteous.

You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge. Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion when the Lord restores his people.

[1 : 24] Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad. Amen. Nick, over to you. Thanks, Steve.

All right, well, let's just pray before I get started. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Father, that it has been passed down through the generations. Thank you, Father, that you are true to your word and always faithful.

Help me as I go through this psalm. I pray, Father, that it will make sense. I pray that the Holy Spirit will speak to each and every person in here.

And so, Father, we ask for your blessing this evening. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Okay. So, yeah, a few years ago, Richard Dawkins, the famous evolutionist, science communicator and atheist, lent his support to an atheist bus advertisement campaign.

You may or may not remember it. You may not even be aware that it existed. It happened in 2008, 2009. And as I switch it on, there we go.

[2 : 41] This was their slogan. There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life. So this was plastered on buses all over the place.

Initially, the crowd funder that was set up was ignored. And it wasn't until Richard Dawkins put his name to it that it then raised enough money to get going.

And it actually ran across the whole nation, not just on a few buses as they originally planned. And it's where it was...

The campaign was thought up by this lady, Ariane Shireen, and she had seen a... She'd actually seen a poster quote in a Bible verse. And the Bible verse was from Luke, chapter 18, verse 8.

And there it... That was on the poster. I couldn't find this poster, by the way. So I looked on the internet to see if I could find this poster. But I guess it was a bit too old for someone to have uploaded it.

[3 : 47] But the verse in question is, When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? And the poster had a link to Jesusaid.org.

Now that website is no longer there. There is a .uk, but it's a different site. So I went on the Wayback Machine.

So you can look back. There's an archive of a lot of websites. So I went to the website. And this lady objected to something that she read on God's Wrath Against Sin page.

It's a bit small, isn't it? But generally, she saw another quote, and this time from Matthew. And Matthew, chapter 25, verse 41.

And it says, Then he will say to those on his left, so this is Jesus speaking, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

[4 : 53] So she felt that hard-pressed London commuters might be brought to despair reading this. They've led stressful lives, and they might read this, and it just might be too much, and they might end it all.

The good thing is that Christian organizations did not just go and leave this campaign to itself. They did respond. And so one of the campaigns started doing bus adverts saying, There definitely is a God, so join the Christian party and enjoy your life.

So there's the opposite view and the truth being spoken there. So it's interesting to note that both the atheist campaign and the Christian campaign told their readers to go off and enjoy their lives. So I'll just think on that. The good thing is that these campaigns did get people talking about God. So it was a good opportunity to discuss God, to discuss Christ, to discuss is there something more than what you can see in front of you.

But it's interesting, the psalmist, the psalmist, the psalm is not here to debate whether God exists or not, because he patently does. So before we look at the psalm, I'll just make that a point, that this psalm 14 is almost, word for word, the same as psalm 53.

[6 : 34] So if you, at some point afterwards, go and look at Psalm 53, you'll see that, bar a few words, it's actually the same psalm.

So from one point of view, I was thinking, well, maybe what's being said in the psalm is really important, that it gets two goes in the book of psalms. Or maybe it was sung to a different melody, or it was used at different occasions.

But that's just an interesting aside. The psalm itself is a lament to the Lord, a call to the Lord during the suffering of Israel at the hands of the godless.

And it's a reminder that the Lord is their refuge, and source of salvation, and to trust and to wait upon him. So that's the structure of it, even more briefly than the psalm itself.

So I do pray that I, everything will, I will go, it may feel like I'm going to go off at tangents, and so I do pray that you'll follow along with me.

[7 : 45] So the psalm does start here, it's saying, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. What does saying there is no God do to someone's heart?

What does it do to their outlook in life? To the way they may treat other people? To the way that they consider themselves?

For example, someone might take evolution and natural selection, and then take slogans like survival of the fittest, and look out for number one, and greed is good, to justify their own self-centeredness.

Not only that, to justify cruelty to other people. So what you believe and what you say shapes how you live out your life, and how you act, and how you are towards other people.

In verse one, the fool David is talking about is one who is living their life believing that there is no divine consequence to their actions.

[8 : 59] So they may believe there is a God, or as was very likely back then, that Israel's God was just one of the many gods, with little g's, that the various tribes and people had.

And so from that point of view, if they had experience of their own tribal God, and they didn't really have a relationship with him, or whoever that little God was, they might have treated and thought of the one true God as not realizing that he is the one true God.

So that's the tribes that don't know God. So it's interesting that either way, their actions mean that they're actually living out their life as a practical atheist.

So they're living as if God doesn't exist. And as the psalmist states, this results in their corruption, and in them doing vile deeds.

If you look at the footnote in the NIV, it says that the Hebrew word used for fool denotes someone who is morally deficient. And in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the word there kind of gives the impression that the person is not of sound or proper mind, or that they're not thinking correctly.

[10 : 46] David goes further, and he says that no one that does good, that there is no one that does good. And in this first, I was wondering, does that include the people of Israel, or does it include the atheists?

But really, it doesn't matter, because we're all sinners. All of us are sinners. We've all fallen short. And if we look at Jesus' response in Mark 10, when he calls out the rich man calling him a good teacher.

The rich man was actually asking him, how do I get eternal life? But he said, why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

So, and then in verses two and three, David then does kind of like, without confusion, say that all of the children of man do no good.

So, sorry, at the, yeah, so we see there that no one is excluded from this. And this is, this is, this is, where I, I just thought it occurred to me, it would be useful to, to actually look at the, Heidelberg catechism at this point.

[12:22] And, seeing how it relates to these first three verses of, of the psalm. I could actually, do this talk without referring to the catechism.

Um, but the catechism itself is such a great blessing. And it is worth, uh, sharing. Steve introduced us to the catechism already.

And, um, the song that we sing, um, uh, Christ, our hope in life and death is actually inspired by, um, by the catechism. Um, if you don't know what a catechism is, very briefly, it's, um, it's a way of learning by asking questions.

Um, um, stating the answer. Um, the Heidelberg catechism was published in 1563 in Heidelberg. And it brought together, um, it was brought together to clarify lots of theological issues, um, um, of the day that arose because of the reformation of the church.

And one of the great things about the Heidelberg catechism also is that every answer has Bible verses, um, backing it up. So underneath you can see all the, um, Bible verses.

[13:40] Um, should have had that up there earlier. Yeah. So you can see. So as I've just said, that's, um, and so the way that, um, the catechism is split, um, it's, it's split into 52 Lord's days.

And, um, on each day you have maybe one or two, three questions that you are given and there's answers to. And, um, it's, well, yeah.

And so it, that's how it's split. So it's, it's kind of the, the focus of the catechism. Um, there's a summary at the start. there's a small section that deals with our guilt.

And then, um, you've got grace and gratitude, take the big chunk of it. Um, so it's worth considering the, uh, the, the authors that put it together, how they, um, yeah, weighted the catechism.

And, uh, so you can, it's, you can download it for free, but you can also get it as a, as a book. So, um, okay. So back to the Psalm.

[14:49] So, um, yeah. So in the Psalm, the Lord looks down from heaven. And, um, one of the, um, this brings to mind, uh, verse in Genesis six, verse five, which I'll, I'll read.

So the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth. Um, and that every inclination of the thoughts and, um, the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

The Lord regretted that it made human beings on the earth and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, I will wipe from the face of the earth, the human race I have created.

And with them, the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground for, I regret that I have made them, but Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. So in, in that instance in time, the Lord looked down and he did see Noah.

Um, in the, in the catechism. So you might say to yourself, Oh, you know, are we really just that bad? Are we really, really that bad?

[16:08] Um, and, um, so question eight of the catechism, which I should have really made much bigger again, but that's from the book. But, um, it, the question asks, but are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil?

And the answer is yes, unless we are regenerated by the spirit of God. And if you look at the question five, it asks whether we can keep God's laws perfectly, to which the answer is no, I'm inclined by nature to hate God.

And my neighbor. Now, um, you, again, the Bible verses, they both underneath, they both, both of them actually point to Genesis six, verse five.

And they also point us to Genesis eight, verse 21. And, um, this, in, this is just after the floodwaters have subsided. Noah has left the ark.

He's built an altar and he sacrificed to the Lord. So, um, that's Genesis eight, verse 21. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, never again, will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

[17:32] And never again, will I destroy all living creatures as I have done. So we have from the Lord's mouth, the truth regarding our depravity. Um, praise God, he vowed not to wipe out all living creatures again.

Um, so it's, it's, so it's, so I'm just highlighting how the Psalmist has captured these, these truths. And these truths are, you know, straight out of the Lord's mouth as well.

Um, also as a, as an interesting aside, the catechism also references Romans three, verse 10. And there Paul quotes from the Greek translation of Psalm 14.

He also includes other, um, pieces of scripture where he lays out in that letter that no one is righteous, Jew or Gentile. Um, so yeah, this is quite a dire state of affairs and, um, none of us are exempt from it, though we have that sliver, that sliver of hope, big hope, where it says, unless we are, um, have been regenerated by this Holy Spirit.

Um, so in verse four, we, we talk about, it's, it, it poses, he's asking this question, do, do all these evil doers know nothing?

[18 : 56] And so the catechism is, is, um, one way we can guard against, uh, ignorance. Especially as we seek to teach the next generation, the gospel.

And in judges, um, there's another warning about how easily, um, we can forget and, and slip into these ways.

In judges, uh, two verse 10, the Israelites forgot the Lord in, in, in a, in a single generation. So, um, and this is, uh, judges two verse 10.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who neither knew the Lord, nor what he had done for Israel.

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt.

[19 : 53] They followed and worship various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord, the Lord's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

So, um, so it's, so it's really important for our local churches to be declaring the gospel in our communities.

And it's not only for the benefit of those that are around us in our local communities, it's for our benefit as well. We need to be reminded as well, um, of who, of, of, um, of God and of Christ.

So, um, so yeah, verse four, do, do all the evil doers know nothing. So as we've seen, the ranks of the evil doers come from all of the children of man.

So before going, um, on with any request to the Lord, we must seek to deal with the proverbial plank in our own eye. Um, so are we, are we guilty of what we are, um, if what we'll then be complaining to the Lord for?

[20 : 59] I mean, as Steve said this morning, we need to be self-aware. And we need to bring that to the Lord and, and ask him to help us. Um, so here in, in, in that verse four, we see this, uh, the Psalmist is really crying out to the Lord in pain because he's seeing his people under attack and being exploited, exploited by those that don't even know the Lord or call on him.

And they seem to be profiting and growing and, and doing well at the expense of those who love the Lord, of the Lord's people. So, um, whilst all people are depraved, there are those that the Lord draws to himself and they seek him.

In David's time, it included those in Israel that put their trust in the Lord. And since Messiah Jesus came, those who follow him and are born again. As we saw in the answer to question eight of the catechism, uh, we are all corrupted unless we have been regenerated by the spirit of God.

Um, around the world, Christians are being persecuted and murdered for their faith in Christ. And the perpetrators seem to flourish. The reports pour in every day via Barnabas fund and open doors. And, um, like, like the Psalmist, we are to send our laments and our prayers and our cries up to the Lord, to them. Um, um, so in the, in the next, um, um, verse, um, okay.

[22 : 32] In the next, um, in the next verses, David, uh, delves below that facade, you know, um, are, are the evil, are the evil people really all that happy and really, you know, living it up and being, you know, having a joyous time.

Are they really doing that? Um, and he says, um, in verse five, but they, but there they are overwhelmed with dread.

Okay. So I'm going to go a bit off the beaten thing here already. So I'll say, can I dare to call that dread existential angst? Um, for the atheist, I imagine it's, it's this feeling that's preventing them from going off and enjoying their life as they're instructed to.

By the posters on the buses, even with the probabilistic assurance, there is no God to hold them accountable. Now I'm not a philosopher.

I'm not a psychologist, not even a theologian come to that, but we must all seek to firm up our understanding of the gospel. And that includes spending some time investigating the human condition.

[23 : 44] So, um, if you turn to the internet, which I did and look up existential angst, did I actually, you know, get, get it right. Well, it says, um, existential act, angst, someone called, uh, sometimes called existential dread, anxiety, or anguish, is a term common to many existentialist thinkers.

Um, and it's generally held to be a negative feeling arising from the experience of human freedom and responsibility. I read that and I, yeah, I read that and I, yeah, quite surprising really.

Um, so, but I, I think it's, it's, if you bear with me, it's, it's worth, um, it's, it's worth spending some time here because, um, we're, we're seeking to identify what the fool is really experiencing.

And it may be that we recognize some elements from what we were like before the Lord called us and we were reborn. It may also be that, um, in your life, you're actually feeling some of these, um, things.

And it's important to remember, um, as, as, um, that we have been born again. And we, and Paul writes in Romans eight, um, that, um, that we are no, that, that through Christ, we are no longer in the realms of the flesh, but in the realm of the spirit.

[25 : 18] So it's to take heart and realize that you are reborn and regenerate and, um, that, you know, but it's, it's important to recognize those feelings and be reminded that Christ has got your back, basically.

So a bit further down, it then talks about existential despair. And despair is generally defined as a loss of hope. Um, and in existentialism, which is this philosophy of, philosophy, but I'm not going to go into that.

It is more specifically a loss of hope in a reaction to a breakdown in one or more of the defining qualities of oneself or identity. It goes on to say, it goes on to say, what set, what sets the existentialist notion of despair apart from the conventional definition is that existentialist despair is a state of, is, is a state one is in, even when they are not overtly in despair.

So long as a person's identity depends on qualities that can crumble, they are in perpetual despair. So for the person that says there is no God, they're very likely having to deal with this sense of dread and uneasiness.

when the noise and busyness of the world subsides, um, that cloud starts to appear. Um, and so we come to the second half of verse five, for God is present in the company of the righteous, right?

[26 : 57] So big amen to that. For the regenerate believer, our core identity is now rooted in Christ. If my life before was all about my ability in doing some thing or identifying my worth through my job title and nothing else, I would be in that precarious position.

But as one of the Lord's people, my core identity now has its root in Christ. And God's qualities definitely are not going to crumble.

So in my own walk with the Lord, it's, it has taken many years for me to transfer that solid rock truth from, um, from my head to my heart. And, and God has been, um, graciously patient throughout that, all that time.

Um, so I would, so I would bring before us the, um, this first question, the, the, the first question of the Heidelberg catechism.

I think it's worth just, um, reading it and, um, and, and, and taking our comfort from it. So it's, it asks, what is your only comfort in life and death?

[28 : 12] And the answer is that I am not my own, but I belong with body and soul, both in life and death to my faithful Jesus, savior, Jesus Christ.

He is fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly father, not a hair can fall on my head.

Indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

So that really is a true source of comfort, um, for the believer. So take heart. The Lord is gracious and compassionate and he knows the problems that you battle.

And as a community of believers and as individuals, um, we, we have, we must pray that we reflect on God's presence amongst, among us, the love that we show each other, the joy we have in the Lord, and being about his business should cause visitors to pause and consider that something

supernatural is, is, is happening.

[29 : 32] Um, but not only when we gather, but also in the, the daily mundaneness of our daily lives. So in, in verse six, the Psalmist acknowledges, uh, that evil doers do, um, frustrate the plans of the poor, but the, the Lord is, um, the Lord is there, their refuge.

And so how does that work in, in practice? Um, question 28 of the catechism asks, what does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by his providence?

And the answer that's given there is, we can be patient in adversity, we can be thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future, we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father, that no creature shall separate us, um, from his love.

for all creatures are so completely in his hand, that without his will, they cannot so much as move.

So, the Lord is working for us, and he's, he's, he's, he, he's in control of every aspect of our lives.

The catechism references Job, Job, uh, one, verse 121, um, and that's where Job is, has heard that all his children, um, had just died.

[31 : 04] And he proclaimed, naked I come from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.

And it also references Romans 8, verses 38 to 39. So Paul writes, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present, nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Lord is truly our refuge. And so, to the last verse. How blessed are we to be alive now?

David's outpouring of desire for God to restore Israel from our lives, out of Zion, is something that we have seen fulfilled. And not only that, God's word is available freely to almost every person on the planet in so many different languages.

And we stand atop a mountain, seeing the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the coming of Christ Jesus, and the saving, and the saving, and his saving work on the cross.

[32 : 27] But we also have our own waiting and trusting in the Lord to do. And David acknowledges that salvation is God's, is God's alone. Without him, we can do nothing.

We cannot do good works, or sacrifices, or promise God anything through our own effort. The standard is just too high. Question two of the Catechism asks, what do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

And the answer is first, how great my sins and misery are. Second, how I am to be delivered from my sins and misery.

And third, how I am to be thankful to God for such a deliverance. So it's the guilt, grace, and gratitude over, and over, and over.

Christ will surely return. So we have that waiting and trusting upon the Lord to do. And whilst we may be desperately saying, come Lord Jesus, come, in our hearts, each day God waits is one more day for the Lord to do his redeeming work on our loved ones, our neighbors, and our enemies that have yet to be saved.

[33 : 48] So, that's it. Amen. Thank you.