

Psalm 14

"Blessed are the Poor in Spirit"

October 22nd, 2023

1. Intro

- a. At around the age of 23, William Perkins, a student of Mathematics in Cambridge, England was walking down the streets of the city
 - i. As he walked down one particular street, Perkins was horrified as he watched a mother scold her young child who was misbehaving, and he heard her say to the child, "Hold your tongue, or I will give you to drunken Perkins!"
 1. You see, William Perkins had become quite the notorious sinner in the town of Cambridge
 - a. In addition to being one of the town's many drunks, Perkins was also known for his foul language, which was full of all sorts of "colorful" profanities
 - b. Even worse, Perkins, who was a highly intelligent student, had become very interested in black magic and the occult
 - i. At 23 years old, Perkins was fully enjoying his life of recklessness and self-indulgence
 2. Willam Perkins' story is a familiar one, isn't it?
 - a. Most of us have known men or women who have become so far removed from God that their reputation for sinning almost seems to precede them as they enter a room
 3. Maybe, that is YOUR OWN story
 - a. Maybe, as you sit here this morning, and you hear just a brief introduction to William Perkins' life, your mind is going back to your own life of depravity
 - b. Maybe, as you think about your own sinful past, you might think to yourself, "What a fool I have been in my life..."
 4. Fortunately for us – or maybe unfortunately, depending on how you want to look at it – the Bible has an awful lot to say about fools
 - a. The book of Proverbs alone speaks of the fool, or the foolish man, well over 20 times
 - i. Proverbs 1:7 says,
 1. *⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*
 - ii. Proverbs 10:8 says,
 1. *⁸The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.*
 - iii. And Proverbs 14:7 warns us to,
 1. *⁷Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.*
 - b. We could spend all morning, reading Scripture after Scripture about the folly of the fools
 5. But, in our main passage for this morning, Psalm 14, we find the greatest of all fools...
 - a. The fool that says in his heart, "There is no God."
 - i. Let's look at this Psalm together...

b. Psalm 14

- i. *To the choirmaster. Of David. ¹The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. ²The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. ⁴Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD? ⁵There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. ⁶You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge. ⁷Oh, 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.*

c. Context

- i. We don't really have any contextual clues in this Psalm to help us know when David wrote it, or who he was speaking about
 - 1. But there are a couple of interesting things we can note...
 - a. The first thing to note is that David rewrites this Psalm, almost word-for-word, in Psalm 53
 - i. There are a few minor changes, but it is basically the same Psalm
 - ii. Spurgeon helpfully comments on this repetition by saying,
 - 1. "David has given us in Psalm 53 a second edition of this humiliating psalm, being moved of the Holy Ghost thus doubly to declare a truth which is ever distasteful to carnal minds."
 - ii. There's a lot of truth to that comment, isn't there?
 - 1. If you simply acknowledge that someone doesn't believe in God, that is heralded as being "understanding" and "tolerant"
 - a. But when you say that their words and their actions are the words and actions of a fool, well, that becomes a truth that is ever distasteful to their carnal mind
 - b. So the repetition of Psalm 14 in Psalm 53 brings these truths home, and sets them firmly within the truth of God's Word
 - iii. The second thing we can note about this Psalm is Paul's use of part of Psalm 14 in Romans 3, when he asks the question, "Are Jews better off than Gentiles because they were God's original chosen people?"
 - 1. He answers by saying, "No, not at all..." and then he unloads a series of verses, including Psalm 14:1-3, to show us that ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – both Jew and Gentile alike
 - a. But we'll get into that in just a few moments...
 - d. As we unpack this Psalm, we can look at it in four categories,
 - i. The WORDS of the fool
 - ii. The ACTIONS of the fool
 - iii. The FEAR of the fool
 - iv. The RICHES of the poor
2. The WORDS of the fool
- a. In Psalm 14:1, David writes,
 - i. *¹The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."*
 - b. I don't know if you've been paying attention to the religion statistics in America over the past decade, but if you have, you've likely heard the phrase, "The rise of the nones"
 - i. This isn't a scary movie about how the nuns in the Catholic church are rising up to smack all of us on the hand with a yardstick
 - 1. This is talking about the "nones," n-o-n-e-s
 - a. This is the rapidly growing population of people who, when asked what their religious affiliation is, they check the box labeled, "none"
 - ii. Just a couple of weeks ago, the Associated Press ran a long article giving us an update on these nones
 - 1. The numbers are staggering...
 - a. Back in 2012, in the age group of those that were 30-60 years old, it was estimated that 1 in 10 of this group identified as a "none"
 - b. Today, that number has skyrocketed to 1 in 5
 - i. 1 in 5 Americans say that they now have no religious affiliation whatsoever
 - c. But the numbers are far worse when you look at those that are between the ages of 18 and 29
 - i. In this age bracket, the age when people are just starting their families, and just starting their new careers, the "nones" now number 43%
 - 1. Almost every other American, from the ages of 18-29, now says that there is no God

2. This article from the AP opens by talking about a man in Southern California named Mike Dulak
 - a. It says, "Mike Dulak grew up Catholic in Southern California, but by his teen years, he began skipping Mass and driving straight to the shore to play guitar, watch the waves and enjoy the beauty of the morning. 'And it felt more spiritual than any time I set foot in a church.'
 - b. Further down in the article, Ashley Miller, a self-proclaimed "secular homeschool mom," says, "We really want [our children] to have a deep connection to nature and be connected with the changes of the seasons and all of the tiny things that make up an ecosystem... We are part of something bigger, and that is the Earth. There is meaning just in being."
3. Whether you want to call it atheism, or agnosticism, or deconstruction, or just simply "none," the evidence is undeniable
 - a. More and more people are claiming that there is no God, and they are unashamedly passing this belief on to the next generation
- c. And David would call them all, FOOLS
 - i. This label of being called a "fool" is offensive enough, but in the Hebrew it goes far deeper
 1. For, to understand the full sense of this word, these "fools" are not just foolish
 - a. This word also means that they are stupid, and vile, and wicked
 - ii. This feels really harsh to us, doesn't it?
 1. Especially when you think of homeschool moms and guys on the beach playing their guitar
 - a. Are they REALLY... stupid?
 - b. Are they REALLY... vile?
 2. What about another lady in the article who just wanted to set up a social group for her fellow nursing home residents to find comfort and community, free from any kinds of religious bias?
 - a. Is she REALLY... wicked?
- d. At the root of these questions, and at the root of our uncomfortableness with making such statements, is this one simple fact: we are a people who have forgotten who God is
 - i. We've forgotten that God is infinite...
 1. God has no beginning or end
 2. No one "made" God
 3. And He will NEVER die
 - a. God WAS, and IS, and forever WILL BE
 - ii. We've forgotten that God is immutable
 1. He will never change
 2. He will never grow weary
 3. He will never say, "You know, I'm kind of tired of being good and holy and righteous... I think I'll try something different today"
 - a. God is not a man who is blown along by the ever-changing winds – He is solid and steadfast... He is THE Rock
 - iii. We've forgotten that God is self-sufficient
 1. God needs NOTHING from us
 2. He didn't create us because He was lonely, or because He felt like something was missing in His life
 3. God has existed in perfect love and unity with the Son and the Spirit since before time even existed
 4. He is the Creator
 - a. And He needs NOTHING from His creation
 - iv. We've forgotten that God is omnipotent, and omniscient, and omnipresent
 1. He is all-powerful
 2. He is all-knowing
 3. And He is EVERYWHERE!

- a. The heavens are His throne, and the earth is but His footstool
 - v. And we've forgotten that God is HOLY
 - 1. There is not a single drop of evil, or wickedness, or unrighteousness in the character of God
 - 2. He is perfect in EVERY way
 - a. Not because He adheres to some law of morality outside of Himself, but because He is GOODNESS ITSELF
 - i. EVERYTHING He does is good
 - ii. EVERYTHING He does is just
 - iii. EVERYTHING He does is right
 - vi. My friends, the reason why we struggle with saying that people who say, "There is no God," are foolish and stupid and wicked and vile is NOT because of our desire to be kind and compassionate and understanding
 - 1. It is because we do not understand who GOD is
 - a. If we did, we would IMMEDIATELY join with David and say, "The FOOL says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"
 - vii. But David doesn't stop at the words of the fools... which leads us to our second point,
3. The ACTIONS of the fool
 - a. Look at the different ways that David describes the actions of these foolish people
 - i. Still in verse 1, David says that they are corrupt, and they do abominable deeds
 - 1. This word David uses for corrupt has the idea of leading something towards its ruin, or causing something to begin to decay
 - 2. In other words, David says that everything these foolish people touch, begins to rot
 - a. We see examples of this all around us, don't we?
 - i. Our government is in shambles because foolish men and women (on both sides of the aisle) have filled DC with corruption
 - ii. Businesses are collapsing left and right as corrupt CEO's chase after greed and power and prestige
 - iii. Marriages are falling apart all over because our whole idea of what marriage even is has become utterly corrupted by our sinful flesh
 - b. But let's be honest, it's not just "out there," is it?
 - i. Corruption is running rampant within our churches, as we hear more and more stories every day of sexual abuse, verbal abuse, theft, and deception
 - 1. Our churches are falling into rot and decay because, even though we say with our mouths, "There is a God," our ACTIONS are full of corruption
 - ii. Painfully, David keeps going...
 - 1. He says that they are corrupt, and they do ABOMINABLE deeds
 - 2. This word for abominable is used all throughout the Old Testament, often referring to the idolatry of the nations, or the idolatry Of Israel
 - a. But nowhere is it used more uncomfortably than in Ezekiel 16
 - i. I will leave you to read this chapter on your own
 - ii. There might come a day when I am bold enough to dig deeply into this chapter for an entire sermon, but today is not that day
 - 1. If it were not in the Bible, Ezekiel 16 would be considered far too vulgar and graphic for the follower of Christ to read
 - 2. But it is in the Bible, and therefore it IS for our instruction
 - b. As the Lord speaks to Israel through Ezekiel, he calls her a whore, and speaks of her nakedness and her prostitution and her lewdness before the nations
 - i. He even goes so far as to call them "A sister of Sodom"
 - 1. This is the depth of their ABOMINATIONS before God
 - b. My friends, these are the ACTIONS of the fool
 - i. They are utterly corrupt... and they are absolutely abominable
 - 1. What makes their actions so awful?

- a. Regardless of what they SAY with their mouths, they LIVE as if there is no God
 - c. And do not miss how David concludes this first verse...
 - i. There is NONE who does good
 - 1. This is where we go back to Paul in Romans 3, as he again asked the question, "Are the Jews better off than the Gentiles?"
 - ii. Look at how Paul very clearly answers this question... starting in verse 9
 - 1. *⁹What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. ¹³Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. ¹⁴Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. ¹⁵Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷and the way of peace they have not known. ¹⁸There is no fear of God before their eyes.*
 - d. Friends, we need to understand that these are not just pagan sinners that Paul is talking about in this passage
 - i. These are THE JEWS who have turned aside
 - ii. These are THE GENTILES who do not understand
 - iii. This is YOU who doesn't seek after God
 - iv. This is ME, who is worthless
 - 1. We have ALL turned away from God
 - 2. There is NO ONE who does good... NOT EVEN ONE
 - a. For there is NO FEAR OF GOD before our eyes
 - e. Back to verses 2-4 of Psalm 14, again, David brings this home for us...
 - i. *²The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. ⁴Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD?*
 - 1. The answer to that question is clear...
 - a. Have WE no knowledge, we who do not call upon the Lord?
 - i. We do not
 - 1. For we have ALL turned away
 - 2. We have ALL become fools
 - f. And we see the inevitable outcome of our foolishness in our third point...
4. The FEAR of the fool
 - a. My friends, think about the world in which we live today
 - i. Is it not a world that is absolutely consumed by fear and worry and anxiety?
 - 1. Turn on the news for five minutes, and they will give you a hundred new things we are supposed to be afraid of today
 - 2. Get on social media and scroll around for just a few minutes, and you'll find an endless flow of rants that are full of stress and frustration and anger
 - ii. In David's words, according to verse 5, "they are in great terror."
 - 1. WHY are they in great terror?
 - a. Because they have said in their heart, "There is no God."
 - b. Because none of them seek after God
 - c. Because all have turned aside
 - d. And no one calls upon the Lord
 - i. And therefore, God IS NOT WITH THEM
 - b. This is the ONLY fruit that the atheist who says that there is no God can expect
 - c. This is the ONLY fruit that the growing number of "nones" who give up church and God and Christ so they can go play guitar on the beach can expect
 - d. And this is the ONLY fruit that all who call themselves Christians, yet live their lives as if there is no God, can expect
 - i. For our salvation doesn't rest in a label

- ii. Our salvation doesn't rest in whether we are a Jew or a Gentile
 - iii. Our salvation doesn't rest on if we say there is a God, or even if we call ourselves a Christian
 - 1. Our salvation depends WHOLLY on KNOWING God through Jesus Christ, and living our lives as a reflection OF that knowledge of God
 - a. Which brings us back to "Drunken Perkins"
 - e. William Perkins had lived the first 23 years as if there was no God
 - i. He had become such a fool that mothers in the streets threatened to hand their disobedient children over to him for their punishment
 - ii. And it was at that moment that Perkins found himself in great terror, for he realized that God was not with him
 - 1. He realized that he was not among the "generation of the righteous"
 - 2. Perkins fear led him to the ONLY reasonable response to his utterly helpless condition
 - a. He repented of his sinful rebellion against God, and he sought refuge in the cross of Jesus Christ
 - f. The transformation for Perkins was an astounding one
 - i. Upon his awakening to the grace of God, William Perkins would fully forsake his life of sin, he dropped his study of mathematics and black magic and the occult, and he entered into the school of theology
 - 1. Perkins first ministry was to the prisoners in the Cambridge jail, where he would help many of them to find peace in Jesus Christ, even as they awaited their execution on death row
 - 2. He would then become the pastor of St. Andrews church, where he would faithfully minister until his early death at the age of 44
 - 3. But, during those twenty years of ministry, Perkins would become one of the most prolific writers of the English Reformation
 - a. As England struggled to fully implement the changes brought about by the Reformation, a group of English Pastors emerged who pushed for an even greater Reformation there
 - b. They realized that, although the church had come out of the corruption of the Roman church of that day, they were still dealing with their own sins, rooted in their own pride and unbelief
 - ii. So Perkins, and others, would begin a call for a greater pursuit of holiness in the church – a deeper pursuit of the PURITY that God's people are called to have
 - 1. Perkins detractors would come up with a derogatory name for people like him... THE PURITANS
 - a. Thanks to a recovery of Puritan history, and a recovery of so many of their sermons and writings, William Perkins is now viewed by many as the "father" of the Puritan movement
 - g. So how do we account for such radical transformations in the lives of men and women all across the world, throughout our history?
 - i. The answer comes not in our good works, or our morality, or our decision to simply be better people
 - ii. The answer comes, as we realize the poverty of our spirit, and we realize that the Lord Jesus is our ONLY refuge
 - h. David closes his Psalm in verses 6-7 with these words,
 - i. *⁶You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge. ⁷Oh, 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.*
 - ii. My friends, do you realize that this prayer has ALREADY been answered?
 - 1. Salvation HAS come out of Zion
 - 2. For salvation has come THROUGH JESUS CHRIST!!
5. Which brings us to our final point this morning, the RICHES of the poor
- a. It is interesting to note that, in this Psalm, David does not contrast the foolish man with the wise man
 - i. Instead, he contrasts the foolish man with the POOR man

- ii. I believe that this was the very same thing that Jesus had in mind in Matthew 5:3, when he opened his Sermon on the Mount by saying, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven”*
 - 1. It matters not one bit which box you check on a survey
 - a. You can put a check next to “Muslim”
 - b. You can put a check next to “None”
 - c. You can even put a check next to “Christian”
 - 2. If you are not “poor in spirit,” then you are a fool
 - a. For Jesus makes it clear for all who are willing to listen
 - i. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for THEIRS is the Kingdom of Heaven
 - iii. Friends, there are no riches on this earth that could EVER compare to the riches of the Kingdom
 - 1. As Jesus said in Matthew 13:44,
 - a. *⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*
 - 2. And in verses 45-46,
 - a. *⁴⁵The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*
6. In this world, there are two kinds of fools
- a. The fool who says in his heart, “There is no God”
 - b. And the fool who finally understands that, apart from God, he is dead in his transgressions
 - i. This is the fool who looks to the cross and finds his refuge
 - ii. This is the fool who sees Jesus and says, “I will give up EVERYTHING to follow him!”
 - iii. This is the fool who counts EVERYTHING in this world as rubbish if only he may know Christ... if only he may be reconciled to his Father
7. We’ll close this morning with a quote from William Perkins, the father of the Puritan movement
- a. A movement that not only shaped much of English history in the 1600’s, but would also shape much of our own history here in the US as the Puritans would settle many of our original colonies
 - i. Listen to these words of Perkins himself...
 - 1. “Godly sorrow causes grief for sin, because it is sin. It makes any man in whom it is to be of this disposition and mind, that if there were no conscience to accuse, no devil to terrify, no Judge to arraign and condemn, no hell to torment, yet [even still] he would be humbled and brought on his knees for his sins, because he hath offended a loving, merciful, and longsuffering God.”
 - a. William Perkins finally understood who God was
 - b. And as he grew in his knowledge of God, he found TRUE repentance
 - i. And, like the Apostle Paul, his one consuming passion for the rest of his life would be to proclaim Christ to all who would hear
 - ii.
 - iii. Perkins writes, “The heart of all preaching is to preach one Christ, by Christ, to the praise of Christ.”
 - 2. According to the historian, H.C. Porter, “Perkins molded the piety of a whole nation.”
 - a. Drunken Perkins had become Perkins the Puritan
 - b. And Perkins the Puritan was a fool for Christ!