

Psalm 14

Psalm 14 is probably one of the more familiar psalms not only because of its opening line—“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”—but also because the apostle Paul quotes a portion of this psalm in Romans 3 to prove the truth of total depravity and the need that even members of the church have of Jesus Christ for their righteousness.

Psalm 14 is about the fool. The whole psalm is about the fool, as that fool stands over against God and over against God’s people. The first four verses of the psalm describe that fool. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God...There is none that doeth good, no, not one.” The end of the psalm describes the judgment of that fool; the fear of that fool; the overthrow of that fool; and, therefore, the salvation of the people of God who are oppressed by that fool.

Psalm 14 has some strong things to say about the fool. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” That does not mean that the only way to be a fool is to stand before the face of God and shake one’s fist in God’s face and say to him, “You don’t exist” or “There is no God.” In other words, the man who is an atheist, who denies that there is a God, is not the only one who is a fool. Rather, what Psalm 14 is saying is that anyone who is a worker of iniquity, anyone who does not understand God and who does not seek God, anyone who goes aside, anyone who becomes filthy, anyone who does not do good is that fool. And the psalm describes the wickedness and the awfulness of turning aside and becoming filthy and not doing good by describing it as saying, “There is no God.” Everyone who does wickedly may as well say, “There is no God.” That is how bad the wickedness and the sin of man is.

When we read that, we might say, “Well, that would apply to a lot of people in the world, and maybe I can even think of some of those people; but that doesn’t apply to members of the church.” But when the apostle Paul makes use of Psalm 14 in Romans 3, he shows that it applies to the members of the church. What we are by nature is the fool of Psalm 14. In Romans 3 Paul is talking to the Jews. In Romans 2 he had talked about the Gentiles—all those who were outside the church of the Old Testament—and he had showed that all of those who were outside the church were under condemnation as they were in themselves. And then he spoke of the church. “What advantage then hath the Jew?” (Rom. 3:1). The Jews were the ones who had the sacraments—circumcision—they were the ones who had the Bible—the oracles of God—they had all these things that marked them out as the people of God. What are we going to say about those Jews? Are we going to say about the members of the church that they are *not* corrupt like the Gentiles are, like the people outside the church; or are they too corrupt? And when Paul would prove that the members of the church also are corrupt, he quotes Psalm 14. “There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (vv. 10–12).

What we have in Psalm 14, then, is the doctrine of total depravity, as that total depravity affects the members of the church, as it affects you and me. Perhaps we’re not used to thinking of our wickedness in these terms. It is as if by our wickedness we had said to God, “You don’t exist. There is no God.” That is the corruption, that is the depravity, that cleaves to us. That is the depravity that fills our old man. That is the total depravity of our old man of sin.

That means that the church of Jesus Christ needs deliverance from somewhere else. The deliverance of the church cannot come from herself. That is true with regard to deliverance from those foes who are outside the church and attack the church. We have again in Psalm 14 the conflict between the wicked

and God's people. "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD" (v. 4). That is a very vivid description. A man sits down at the dinner table; he has his plate in front of him with a loaf of bread on it; and without a second thought he picks up that bread and takes a bite, another bite, another bite; without even thinking, pretty soon that whole piece of bread is gone. That is how the wicked treat the people of God; without even thinking, they eat them up as a man eats bread. Verse 6: "Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge." That is, they mock him; they say that he is wicked or foolish for believing the things of God. The people of God in the church need deliverance from these fools from outside of themselves. But the people in the church need deliverance from their own corruption and their own sin from someone else as well.

And that is the way the psalm ends, on that glorious note of the gospel: "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! Zion was the mount of God. Zion was the place where he dwelt. Zion was where the temple was built. Zion was where the most holy place was. Zion was where the ark of the covenant was. Zion was the dwelling place of Jehovah God. Zion was a picture of heaven, the heavenly temple. And out of Zion, out of heaven, came the salvation and deliverance of the church. For the Lord Jesus Christ came down in our flesh, suffered for all our sins, and redeemed us from the curse of the law, which we would have been under except for our Lord. Our salvation has come out of Zion.

That is the way the apostle Paul goes on from his quotation of Psalm 14 as well, in Romans 3. After proving that we too are corrupt, that we too have done no good, that we are part of that "no, not one," he says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (v. 20). And then he speaks of our salvation out of Zion. "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" (vv. 21–22). Then, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (v. 28). There is our salvation: in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has come out of Zion.

And the result, the fruit, of that salvation for God's people, who by nature are fools, who by nature are corrupt and filthy and have not done any good—the result of being saved by the righteousness of Christ is that Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad. "When the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." And truly that is the joy of God's people. That is the rejoicing and the gladness of our hearts. We are righteous for Jesus' sake and therefore have him as our eternal refuge.