

Psalm 14

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[0 : 0 0] So, we turn to Psalm 14, and I'd like to consider with you as we start reflecting upon this passage reasons why people may not believe in God. And from the outset, I just want to say that this is not an exhaustive list. I just have here three main groupings, and the two of them overlapping with each other. And the world we live today, in our society and the Western society in general, some people do not believe in God because of nurturing. That's how they were brought up. From birth, they were told that there is no God. They saw in the way they were nursed, and the way they were educated, and the way they were led through life from childhood into teenage years, that no reference, no relevance, no indication was made to them by their parents, among other people, that God is not there, that God is irrelevant, that the idea of God might have been useful in the past, might be good to discuss if you are going and trying to understand history, past history of your culture or world history. But in fact, for some of them, the message is passed to them as if it's been proven, which it hasn't, but as if it's been proven that God does not exist. And for example, and I think it's the 1950s, you remember the shallow statement of the Russian astronaut who went all the way above the stratosphere and saw space and said that he hadn't seen God there. Yes, in the materialistic society, there is this general tendency to only believe in what you can touch, what you can see, what you can hear, and what you can smell. But they never consider the limitations of our sight, the limitations of our ability to hear, the limitations of our ability to perceive what is there, and surely what is there goes beyond our ability. That's why we as Christians, we believe in revelation, because it's not a matter of a man able to understand that God is there, but a God kind and loving enough, despite our limitations, to come and speak our language, and even to become flesh like one of us, just to make it as easy as it is possible for us to believe in him, to put our trust in him, and to submit ourselves to him. So no alternative, no different narrative is given for many in our society today of the existence of God. So nurturing is a problem.

The second reason why people do not believe in God, or might say they do not believe in God, is questions unanswered. And they think that because of a number of questions they have are not addressed properly. They think that those who believe in God, they believe if there is a God, they are more, you know, borderline between, you know, atheists and agnostics. They say this is an inconsistent God. And it's generally about the presence of evil in the world, not evil personally experienced, not evil that actually hurt their own flesh, or might have bruised their soul and heart, and might have confused their minds. But it's just that general understanding and perception of the world as it is, a world in pain, a world in suffering, and a world with so much evil in it.

And I'm not treating them, you know, with contempt because I can see where they are coming from. And their questions are questions that we need to listen to. And I would say that most of them, if not all of them, they are trying to be sincere in the way they're approaching the matter. But here you have, and they think that God, if there is a God, is inconsistent, because after all, He says that He is good, and yet, look all the evil we see around here. And more or less overlapping with the second one, you have those people who would say that God is not real because of traumatic personal experience. And if the first group questions a God who is inconsistent with His own character and standard of morality and dignity and justice, the second people, they are more into the idea of the absent God. Where was He when I was suffering? Where was He when I was struggling?

Where was He? So if He is real, and of course, we believe in a God that is not only eternal, but present, present everywhere. So where was He? And normally, this kind of rejection of God is fueled by stories of personal suffering. As I said before, the last two, they more or less overlap in some ways, and they both operate on wrong premises. First, the premise that tried to exclude suffering as such from general human experience. And second, the premise that tried to exclude our responsibility in bringing about a good measure of such suffering, whether individually or collectively.

And there's a lot of evil in the world that's not God made. It is man made. And the way we describe the presence of evil in the world as Christians, we always refer people back to the pages of the Old Testament, to the first chapters of the Bible. How was the world there and then when God created it?

[6 : 59] Well, the world was good. And when human beings were created to rule over creation, then the world became very good. And we know that it is the inception of an idea of rebellion. It was the acceptance of that idea and the acting upon the idea of rebellion in order no longer to be servants of God, but to become the very gods of this world with the knowledge of good and evil. And we know that it is the world that we now have been born into. A world that is already marred by suffering, by injustice, by sin, by rebellion, by disobedience, by disobedience, and we can add as many words to this list as necessary.

Well, these are, I would say, reasons why people would say they don't believe in God, and I think we should respect them and very kindly point them to the flaws in their own premise. First of all, there is a God, even if you have never been taught about Him, because there are so many things actually in the universe you have never been taught about, and yet your disposition in the heart is actually to consider the possibility that they exist, not the contrary. So why, when it comes to God, you start from the standpoint of negation instead of the standpoint of affirmation of His existence? There are some people on the streets, for example, if you ask them, do you think there is life in other planets?

Without any evidence to actually to support a yes, that's what they will say. Yes, there is. But with so much of testimonies and the revelation that we have here in human history over the millennia, that God is a real God, that God is a God that interacts with people, speaks to people, and tells them again and again that He is real. Psalm 19, a creation that reveals the hand, the power, and the ability, the wisdom, and the goodness of a Creator with all that. And they will say, no, nah, He doesn't exist.

So, although honest in their approach, it needs to be told them that it's not the only way of approaching the issue. It's not the only way of actually considering the point. People who believe in God also suffer. People who believe in God also have personal traumatic experiences.

And different from the other group, they see the other side of the coin. They see a God that did not allow them to lose themselves into this turmoil of evil and suffering that kept them safe, not outside the hurricane, but right at the eye of the hurricane, and kept them steady and strong. This week, we were talking with some people talking about Auschwitz, for example, concentration camps in the Second World War, and this strange phenomenon of people actually not believing in God, going through painful experiences, and at the end of it, coming out of it as believers. And unfortunately, you have the stories that tell you the very opposite of it. So, they have at least to consider that their approach should not be the only legitimate one. For us who believe in Jesus Christ, I think the matter is more than settled, and that for a long time. However, there is another reason why people deny or suppress the truth of God.

[11 : 17] It's simply because they are sinful in nature, and the idea of a holy, pure, perfect God does pose a problem to their life choices and adopted values. And you might see how people sometimes are put off by Christianity, not because Christianity, not because Christianity is bad, but because that would mean that their lives would have to change, and they don't want to do it.

And what is easier? To change your life? Just stick your head into the sand and shout as loud as possible until after a million times you are absolutely convinced that there is no God. People think that this option is the easiest one is the easiest one. It is much more convenient. Some will resent him, especially when he becomes more specific about what and who to believe, and how such faith should be translated into practical actions.

And the psalm, that seems to be the problem. Who is the fool in the psalm here? He or she is a person without any sense of moral values or social obligations, like someone in Isaiah 32, verse 6.

And there we read, He or she is careless of good.

And if verse 1 speaks more of the nature of such person, the natural consequence follows, the natural consequence is someone who does not seek the Lord. The fool not only says there is no God, of course, the natural consequence is if there is no God, there is no God to be found, there is no God to be searched for, there is no God to be looked for, so let's live our lives as if God does not exist.

[13 : 49] And if anyone tells them that that's not the case, they will deliberately then turn their backs to God. Who are they? And there are some examples of such people in the New Testament.

And I have to tell you some of the examples I've managed to collect here are quite surprising. First of all, think of Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus for money.

There are all sorts of ideas and theories about Judas being a zealot who was trying to force Jesus' hand by his betrayal so that he would reveal his power, he would reveal his might, he would show his full authority as the Son of God, as the promised Messiah, defeat the Romans and defeat all the enemies and establish the kingdom of God once and for all.

If only the New Testament would give us a clear picture of this theory about Judas, that is not there. The picture of Judas is someone who did love money to the point that the purse for the poor, he occasionally, John's Gospel tells us, he occasionally would take some and put in his own pocket.

And 30 pieces of silver was a nice deal for him. I don't know what was going on. Maybe he was frustrated. Maybe he didn't see any profit in what Jesus was doing.

[15 : 20] Maybe that's, in the end, what he was really all about. And he betrayed the author of life, Jesus Christ. What a fool.

Think of the young rich man, a religious man. He loved the young rich man. He loved the young rich man. But when he came to the crunch, when the reality of God was described to him in such a way that every aspect of his life was supposed to be in submission and under the rule of that loving and kind and merciful God, he loved the young rich man, he loved the kingdom that he was so desperate, desperate to be a part of.

So the young rich man, he loved his wealth more than he loved Jesus. What a fool. Think of King Herod in the New Testament.

And I'm not talking about the King Herod who tried to kill baby Jesus. But think of his successor, one of his sons, and how John the Baptist was very severe against his lifestyle and against his married life and how all was messed up with the king's personal life.

And John the Baptist was very upfront in his thoughts and his teaching about that matter. Eventually, John the Baptist was arrested by Herod. And in the end, Herod gave the order to execute the prophet in a surge of drunkenness and lust.

[17 : 15] One detail, though, Herod would come down and listen to what John was saying. There are so many people coming to church, I'm not saying here, okay, but so many people coming to church who are exactly like this man.

They love to hear the word. They love to sing the hymns, the psalms, the praises. They love the atmosphere. They love to hear, but they resent anyone, any church, any preaching, or any teaching that will come to them and say, Hey, there are some aspects of your personal lifestyle that need to be challenged, changed, renewed, and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And in the end, Herod proved to everyone where your allegiance was, not with John the Baptist, and definitely not with the God that John the Baptist served.

And of course, we have to think of how Paul the Apostles described people who suppressed the knowledge of God through all means possible just to live comfortable lives in Romans chapter 1, verses 18 to verse 32.

I'm not going to read the whole passage, but just bits of it. In Romans 1, verse 18 says, The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

[19 : 05] God does not speak Greek, if I could put it that way. If Jesus had come here instead of Palestine, he'd be speaking English. God has made it plain to them.

That men are without excuse. And the passage will go on to the extremes people will go in order to live their lives the way they want, in order to deny the reality of God, and by doing so, creating this very evil world that we see so real and so painful to everyone today.

As you can see, the fool is not only he or she who lives a distinctive depraved life, like Romans 1.

Just read the passage when you have time. He can be a distinguished member of God, like the rich young man, the philanthropist, the politician, the religious, as well as those who cause oppression and injustice in the world, like the psalm points out to in verse 3.

The New Testament will use this psalm to include all those who are very clearly against God, but also those who are very good at concealing what's going on in their hearts, and trying to be good in their own eyes, but rejecting the reality and the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Jesus in their lives.

[21 : 10] All of them struggling to submit their thought and will to the truth about the existence of God and the implications of it. Years ago, back in Brazil, a lady came to talk to us, and we were having a conversation, a chat about religion, some personal problems, and after a number of meetings, she came to a point and said, you know, because her degree is in history, and she was very much into materialistic Marxism, and she came to me and said, you know what, I realize that because there is evil, there has to be good after all our conversations.

And I have to tell you, I believe there is a God. Fair enough. And then I told her, well, now we have to believe that God has a son, and we have to believe in the son as well.

And I just left it there shortly after we left Brazil, and to our delight, she professed her faith in Christ about a few months after.

Submitting the thought and will to the truth about the existence of God and the implications of it.

If God is real, Jesus is real. If God is real, the gospel is true. If the gospel is true, I have to do something about it. Trust and believe in the Savior of the world.

[22 : 48] In this psalm, we have this first group, and the indictment pressed against them by no other than God himself. But there is also a second group who God distinguishes for himself as his own people in the passage.

They are a generation with whom God is associated with. They are his people in verse 4, even those suffering under the rule and oppression of the fool.

But they call upon the Lord in contrast with the first group in verse 3. And they trust, they believe in God, and they take refuge in him under his wings, as it were.

They live in the expectation for the revelation of God's salvation. Verse 7 speaks of captivity, but also of a person who will bring salvation to them.

And of course, the New Testament shows who the Savior is, Jesus Christ. It is them who will have the last word. It will be a word of praise and gladness.

[23 : 56] I see implied here how they should remain focused on God and the Savior instead of the fool, lest we become like them.

And this is avoided by fixing our attention to Jesus, drawing from this relationship with him all pleasure and peace. Because it is in connection with Jesus that you and I, we will feed our hope that the final fulfillment of his promises of justice is coming.

There are wars in the world today, there is injustice in the world today, there is suffering in the world today. Take heart, do not give up, persevere, remember what God has already shown and revealed of his life, of his power, of his grace, of his kindness, of his love, of his mercy.

Either in your personal experience with him, or as a church, your experience and your walk with Jesus Christ, or as you look throughout history, how this world is never too evil to the point that it can't be healed and cured.

There is always an invisible deterrent to evil in this world, and that's the hand of God allowing just some of it. And even what is there, visible and in action in the world, working for the good of those who have been called to salvation in Christ.

[25 : 40] Which group do you want to be part of? And this is a question for believers as well as for unbelievers.

Why? Because believers from time to time, they do struggle with doubt. Read Psalm 73. The psalmist in Psalm 73 started to envy those people.

Why? They're rich, they're fat, they're strong, and on the face of it, their life is wonderful. And then he says, Then I went to the temple of the Lord, and I started to reflect, what is waiting them in the end?

Which group do you want to be part of? Choose the second group here in the psalm. Choose the Lord Jesus Christ. Choose Jesus. Choose his salvation.

Choose the forgiveness he offers. And also choose the whole package. Some people love Jesus because he's a savior, and the same people will hate him because he's a lord.

[26 : 50] And if he is lord, he has the right to tell you and me what to do, and what to stop doing. Choose submission to his will.

And to his rule, don't be a fool. There is a God whose son is savior and lord, who refrains evil, calling people into membership and fellowship in his kingdom.

God who is not only real in the beginning of creation, a God not only real when the Red Sea was split in two, a God that was not only real when fire came down from heaven and consumed the holocaust that Elijah had prepared, a God real who became flesh in the person of his son, Jesus Christ who walked amongst us and revealed his face and has shown his glory.

And a God who says, who is as real then as he is real here today. As I told the children, more real than magnetism, more real than radioactivity, more real than any of the things unseen in the world, and yet detectable somehow.

Real in your heart, real in the fellowship of the believers, real by the presence of his spirit, that enables us to cry out to him and say, Abba, Father.

[28 : 37] Amen. And may God bring his blessing to each one of us.