



FROM THE PASTOR

Psalm 53

¹ The fool says in his heart,
“There is no God.”
They are corrupt, and their ways are vile;
there is no one who does good.
² God looks down from heaven
on all mankind
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.
³ Everyone has turned away, all have become
corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.
⁴ Do all these evildoers know nothing?
They devour my people as though eating bread;
they never call on God.
⁵ But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,
where there was nothing to dread.
God scattered the bones of those who attacked
you;
you put them to shame, for God despised them.
⁶ Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of
Zion!
When God restores his people,
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

The biblical book of Psalms is made up of 150 Psalms or songs. All of these are arranged in five divisions, each of which is itself called a book. So, the biblical book of Psalms is a book of books. These divisions or books probably already existed before they were collected and put together into one big book of the Bible. Today, we are going to talk about Psalm 53. The first interesting thing to point out about Psalm 53 is that it has an almost identical twin. If you look in your Bible at Psalm 14, you will see that there is only one verse that varies between Psalm 53 and Psalm 14. Is it the same Psalm included twice? Many think so. It is not hard to imagine that whoever put these five collections together kept them intact and this same Psalm, with some alteration, appeared in two of the divisions.

“So what,” I imagine I hear you say. Well, I’ll admit that it is probably not the most significant bit of bible study that we could be doing—but it is interesting. I like

interesting things. It also indicates to me that this particular psalm was important. It was important enough that it made it into two different collections of psalms, before the book of Psalms was even written down. Then someone compiled the biblical book of Psalms and identified this psalm as being important enough that it was included twice. So let’s take a look at this psalm and see why it was so important.

The psalm begins with a straight forward claim about the human condition: ***“The fool says in his heart, There is no God.”*** In other words, the existence of God should be self-evident to all. Scientific study shouldn’t draw us away from God, but closer to God as we further explore the marvel of God’s creation. True wisdom cannot and will not ever outgrow or overshadow the reality of God’s existence. In fact, only with this reality, as our starting point, can we attain wisdom. Another psalm, Psalm 111:10 puts it well: ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of***



wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise." Why don't we all see this, if it is self-evident? Is it because our eyes are clouded and our hearts made dull by sin? The psalm continues, **"They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."** St. Paul quotes this psalm when he is talking about our need for a Savior in Romans 3:10-12: **As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."** But Paul doesn't leave it there. Our reconciliation to God—our salvation—doesn't depend upon our abilities but upon God's goodness and love. The psalm calls upon God for salvation, and God responds. God responds not with words of law, but with words of promise. After quoting our psalm in his letter to the Romans, St. Paul follows with these wonderful words of promise in 3:21-24: **"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in^[h] Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** The great hymn writer and evangelist, Charles Wesley, expressed it so well in two simple verses of a familiar Advent Hymn:

Come, thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee
Israel's Strength and Consolation
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart

Born Thy people to deliver
Born a child and yet a King
Born to reign in us forever
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit
Raise us to Thy glorious throne



Psalm 53 expresses it with a simple prayer: ***Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!***

In Christ's service,
Pastor Brian Shirey

Post Scripts:

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- † Our lessons for this Sunday, December 6, 2020, The Second Sunday of Advent, are:
 - First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11
 - Psalm 85
 - Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14
 - Gospel: Mark 1:1-8
- † Let me repeat from last week: If there was a single word that could summarize our present moment, it would have to be 'uncertainty'! It is not possible to do the work of St. Luke's with confidence that we will be able to do as we intend, but if there has ever been a time when we need to be faithful, patient and open to God's direction, it is now. Be assured that St. Luke's will continue to be as prudent and safe as we can be. So, as I have said so often, thank you for your patience and your faithfulness.
- † This Sunday we will be livestreaming the service once again. I am hopeful that we will be able to worship in person again after that. I am certainly hoping that we will be able to worship in person on Christmas Eve.
- † Thank you for all who watched last Sunday's worship on the web site. Please spread the word. It is one more tool for living out our life together at St. Luke's. Feel free to ask friends and family members unable to worship somewhere in person to join us on line. Visit the St. Luke's YouTube channel or go to stlks.com and click on the Welcome to Worship icon. You can also view past services. This week's service will be livestreamed at 8:15 am and will then be available for viewing at your leisure.

