

Songs of Summer: Psalm 53
Pastor Carlos Sibley
Sunday, June 23, 2018

Let's open our Bibles to Psalm 53. I want to share with you this morning what I believe is the second most profound, amazing, life-altering, blow your mind three word sentence. I believe the number one most profound, amazing, mind-blowing, life-altering three-word sentence is this: God loves you. Until we see Him, knowing why He loves us, the reasons He loves us, the depths of Him loving us - that changes our life. God loves you. God loves me. God loves us.

But this morning, I want to take a few minutes to talk to you about what I believe is the second most profound, powerful, life-altering, mind-blowing three word sentence, and it's this. Are you ready? God answers prayer. God answers prayer. The God of the universe - Who created us, made us, purposed us, designed us, and loves us - answers prayer. He answers your prayers, my prayers, our prayers. He delights in hearing from us. He delights in us bringing our praise to Him. He delights in us bringing our gratitude to Him. He delights in us bringing our requests to Him. He delights in communion with us. God answers prayer. It's amazing that He would answer us.

Some of you are familiar with the author Bob Goff. Bob wrote a book called *Love Does*. He has also written a recent book called *Everybody Always*. *Love Does* is one of those books that if you read it once, you'll want to read it two or three times. It is a very encouraging and uplifting book. Bob Goff is a popular guy, and the book *Love Does* was a New York Times bestseller. He speaks all over the world. He's recognized by the government as a U.S. diplomat. He's an honorary consul to the country of Uganda. He is self-described as a "recovering lawyer." He spoke here in Athens about five years ago, and some of you may have been in the room then. He made a statement at the end of his talk that I've never forgotten. I don't remember a lot of the other stuff that he said, but I remember this statement. At the end of his talk, he said, "If any of you would like to talk to me about anything I've said tonight or have any questions about anything, call me. I'll take your call."

I sat there thinking, "I'm a nobody. I don't think I could say that." I don't know everything about his social media, but I noticed this week that there was one social media post where he had over 129,000 likes. Did any of you know it goes to six digits? Did you do know that? Maybe some of you are thinking about how you just hit the 300 like barrier on your post. This guy had over 129,000 likes on one post, and he says, "Call me if you want to talk." In the back of his book, *Love Does*, listen to how he describes it.

He says,

One of the things I've learned following Jesus is how much He enjoyed being with people. Except for time with His Father, there seemed to be nothing He loved more. He didn't just love the idea of being with people either. He actually loved being with them. A lot of people in the world stop being available at some point. It's subtle, because it happens a little at a time, and it's not malicious or anything. It happens though. But Jesus wasn't that way. He seemed to have more time for people as time went on, not less. The same thing is true about people who have shaped my worldview. I've found that the people in my life who've actually been the most influential have also been the ones who are the most available. If you ever want to talk about any of the ideas in this book that ping you, my phone number is 619-985-4747. Give me a call sometime if I can be helpful.

It's right there! His cell number is right there! Can I make a confession? I have never called that number. I'm scared to. Why would I be scared to? There's something about this where I just believe that he'll answer. I'm not gonna give him a chance to be a liar. I've got Bob Goff's phone number. If any of you want to borrow it, I've got it right here. He says he will answer. Now Bob Goff is a New York Times bestseller, but he's got nothing on God.

There are 7 billion people in the world, and God takes His calls. God answers prayer. There is a big problem - the problem is that something separates us from God. God's greatest delight is being in relationship with us. He made us. He made promises that He was going to make it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. He sent His son, Jesus Christ to take on flesh and die and pay for the iniquity and sin of us all so that He could be in relationship with us, Jesus shared that Good News. He was buried, He rose again, He ascended to heaven. He gave us a promise that He is coming back to get us. He's at a place right now preparing a place for us. He's coming again, and He comes again so that we may be with Him forever. God wants a relationship with you. He wants a relationship with us. That relationship happens through prayer, but there's this problem initially. What is that problem?

This problem is talked about in Psalm 53. There are six verses, and five of the verses describe the problem that stands in the way of us being in relationship with God, of our prayers with God, and our fellowship with God. These five verses show the problem. They show our greatest need. When we describe this need, the reality is that we can't meet this need. We can't solve this problem. But in Psalm 53, our greatest need intersects with God's greatest delight. That's what's happening in prayer. Prayer is the avenue where our

condition and God's compassion cross paths. Prayer is the avenue where our condition and His compassion cross paths. The first five verses tell about our condition, our problem. Let's look at Psalm 53 together. It says:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity;

there is none who does good.

God looks down from heaven

on the children of man

to see if there are any who understand,

who seek after God.

They have all fallen away;

together they have become corrupt;

there is none who does good,

not even one.

Have those who work evil no knowledge,

who eat up my people as they eat bread,

and do not call upon God?

There they are, in great terror,

where there is no terror!

For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you;

you put them to shame, for God has rejected them.

Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!

When God restores the fortunes of his people,

let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the preacher of the 1800s, described this psalm as the "Song of Man's Disease." The first five verses of Psalm 53, this song written by King David, describe our disease. They describe our depravity. It describes our dilemma. It shows what we're struggling with, what's wrong with us, what separates us from a God who delights in having a relationship with us. The three - letter word that describes our condition is "sin." We looked at it a couple weeks ago in Psalm 51 when David was confessing his sin. He gave a reference to the fact that from the time he was conceived, he was a sinner. And then here in this song, it describes our condition in several ways.

The first verse says that we have foolish hearts. Verse two says, "God looks down from heaven on the children of man." This is King David's assessment of what God sees when God looks down on earth. These aren't David's original thoughts. This is not the preacher this morning coming up with some kind of assessment of what we are. This is not the assessment or the diagnosis of the Southern Baptist Convention on us. This is God looking down from heaven, and this is what He sees. God looks down from heaven. It says in verse one, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The first thing we see about our condition is that we have foolish hearts. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The Hebrew word for "there is no God" is actually a Hebrew word that simply means "no God." The translators from Hebrew to English believed that the way to get the flow of the sentence was to provide "there is" at the beginning of the phrase. But there's something to be said about allowing the thought of a foolish heart sit with us.

In Hebrew, it would read, "The fool says in his heart 'No God.'" This word is not a description of our intellect. He is not saying that the person who believes there is no God will have no business acumen. He is not saying that the person who says there is no God will not be able to have scientific understanding or mathematical genius or the command of multiple languages. He's saying that in the heart of the matter, in the core of the matter, if you go to the very baseline of everything that really matters - it is folly to say "no God." This song does not name a certain religion. Some people may ask "What is your religion?" and a person could reply, "I'm atheist." That may be a position that somebody has decided on. They have decided that they don't believe.

But the feel of Psalm 53 is not so much position or identification as an atheist as much as it is an assessment of practical living. The foolish heart, the heart of folly, says to life and living in everyday decisions - "No God. Not for me. There's no God for me. There is no authority. I do my own thing. I call my own shots. I do it my way." And God says that when you live that way, you are being a fool. It's Mark 8:38 coming to life - the question that says, "What profits a man if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul?" What Jesus is saying is that you could gain the whole world and be smart, intellectual, a great businessman with great skills and talent. You could have all the trophies, all the plaques, all the certificates, all the pins, all the promotion, but lose your own soul. And that would be foolish.

He goes on in this assessment. He says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt." Later in verse three, he says, "They have all fallen away. Together they have become corrupt." Some translations there use the word "tainted." When we think of the word 'corrupt,' sometimes we may think of a government. We may think of a company. We may think of an individual or a system. We may say, "That country's government is corrupt. That company - the way they do business - is very corrupt." This is a description God is using when He looks at the heart of humanity. He says they have become corrupt and tainted. The Hebrew word there that is translated as 'corrupt' or 'tainted' was the very same word that was used to describe milk that sours.

When we talk about milk souring, we don't say the milk has become corrupt. What do we say? Growing up in North Alabama, we had a phrase. We said, "The milk has gone bad." Or we might say, "The milk has spoiled." I don't know how this happens, but Carla was a nurse. She has handled the grossest of grossest things as a cardiac intensive care nurse, but she cannot deal with mold or spoiled milk. So she will say, "Hey honey, taste this and see if it's bad." And I just think to myself, "Are you kidding me?" And then I mutter to myself, "Love your wife as Christ loved the church." I want you to think for a moment about the milk that you bought at the store and set in the back seat in the summer and found a week later when Junior opened it and poured it in the floorboard.

"They have all fallen away; together they have become-" that. What we just moaned about. There's a problem between us and God. God looked down and that's what He saw in the human heart. He goes on to say, "They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity." Some translations say, "They are corrupt, doing vile things." We won't take the time this morning to give the litany of vile things that humanity does. You can replay the news and the headlines to see those things. You could Google, "Things God says are abominable" and

track through Scripture. It says that when God looks down on humanity, He sees that they are corrupt and they are doing vile and abominable things.

Later in verse one, he says, "There is none who does good." When you come to verse three, it says, "They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt." In case you didn't get it in the first verse of the song, he gives it to us in the third verse - "There is none who does good." At the end of the third verse, he says, "There is none who does good, not even one." There is a song that's out right now, and maybe it's your favorite. If so, I'm sorry ahead of time. Our good buddy Luke Bryan sings a line right now - "I believe most people are good." It's a fun song. It's lighthearted, and it feels like summer. It's one of those roll your windows down and ignore all the negative news kind of songs. Now, you can build your playlist with those kinds of songs, but you can't build your theology with those kind of songs. There's another song that was written about 3,000 years before Luke sang that song. It was written by King David about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. King David said that God looked and He said, "There is none good. No, not one."

I know there's "surface good." If you're hungry and you're at a restaurant, and you share your baked potato with your brother, that's good. If you just got fresh Chick-fil-A fries and you ordered a large, because like Tim Hawkins says, "You've got a large -sized hole in your body for fresh Chick-fil-A fries," and you look at your wife and say, "Honey, do you want a fry?" She may say to you, "You're good." The reality is that before Jesus changes our lives, there is probably some ulterior motive going on where you want to put change in the bank. Listen, there is none good. In the core, at the bottom line, when God looks, He says that there are abominable things going on. All have fallen away, and there is none good.

Next, he describes this picture of dread. He says, "There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror!" They dread things, and there's this gripping of anxiety. It says,

Have those who work evil no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God? There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them.

The phrase "who eat up my people as they ate bread" is a picture of commonplace everyday routine, normal way of living - eating bread. It is like when you sit down to watch a movie with a bag of popcorn. You're watching the movie, and without even seeing your hand move, piece after piece you're popping the popcorn in your mouth. When God looks down, He sees that they "eat up my people" like it's commonplace. They destroy one another like it's routine without giving any thought to it. Here's the problem with what I've

described. A foolish heart that is corrupt with abominable iniquity, where there is none who does good, fallen away with dread - the problem is that God rejects that heart.

It says here, "For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you. You put them to shame, for God has rejected them." This is the heart without Jesus Christ. This is the heart! This is our condition! Our greatest need is to be saved from a foolish heart, a corrupt life, a fallen away life, a no good heart, a dreading, worrisome anxiety-filled heart. Several years ago, Pink wrote words in a song. When I say Pink, I'm not referring to A.W. Pink, I'm referring to the rock star Pink. Goodness, we've gone from Luke Bryan to Pink to King David. We're hitting all the bases this morning and touching on all the great theologians of our world! Pink wrote these words - "I'm a hazard. Don't let me get me." King David is saying here in this song, "I'm a hazard." From my mother's womb, I'm a hazard.

We cannot save ourselves. So what's the solution? There is a prayer that God answers for a heart like this. Verse six, the last verse of the song, says, "Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!" Zion is a reference from the Old Testament to Jerusalem. It was a word that over time began to represent the place of God, the city of God, and the residence of God. By the time you get to the end of the New Testament, you're talking about Zion as the new Jerusalem. It is seen as God's home, God's presence - His holy place. King David wrote that salvation for Israel would come out of God's house. "Oh that God would provide salvation" is what he's saying here. It was a national prayer by King David. He looked at his people and said, "This is where we are. God, would You bring salvation to Israel?" This reference to Jacob and Israel is a picture of him praying a national prayer. By the end of the New Testament, it has become an international prayer. You can see in Revelation where every nation, every tribe, every tongue, and every language has gathered into the throne room, and they are giving their worship and praise to Almighty God.

God answers prayer. I've maybe read Psalm 53 maybe fifty-three times over the last two weeks. And the thing that kept jumping off the page when I got to that first phrase of verse 6 - "Oh that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion-" all of a sudden, I just thought, "It did! He did!" David prayed a prayer, and there were about a thousand years of waiting. And do you know what God did? He answered! He answered the prayer for foolish hearts, and fallen away abominable vile hearts. Salvation has come!

The word "salvation" in Hebrew there is actually plural. You see that and it is clear that *salvations* have come. For the foolish heart - salvation. For the fallen away heart - salvation. For the corrupt, spoiled, rancid heart - salvation. For the dreading heart - salvation. For the one who hurts others with hardly any remorse - salvations have come. We learned that when Jesus comes, He gets ahold of that heart, and He saves us from the

penalty of sin, the payment of sin, the presence of sin, and the power of sin. It's like God pours these multiple salvations out for our greatest need to be saved.

So I say this to let you know that as you look at a heart and a life that is corrupt that God is aware. God looks down. God knows and is in the midst of that. The good news is that God is also at work. More than your spouse knows you and more than your coworker knows you, God knows you, and He is aware of your heart. He's aware of your condition. God looks, God scatters, and God rejects, but look at verse 6. It says, "Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad." God is working in 10,000 different ways to bring salvation to each hearts that would trust Him. Today, if you have never been saved from this condition, there is a God who made you that would delight in having a relationship with you if you would call out to Him for salvation. That is good news!

This week at youth camp, there were several thousand teenagers there and were there. I was sitting in the stands waiting for the sessions to start. There were 6th through 12th grade kids roaming around everywhere, and I was watching and passing time reading T-shirts. When you get about 4,000 teenagers together at a Christian youth camp, you've got a lot of Christianese going on on the T-shirts. I saw this kid coming up the steps wearing a T-shirt, and I looked at it and read the big words. It said, "Earned Not Given." I just kept thinking to myself, "Earned, not given? What is that?" And the kid got closer and I thought, "Earned not given? I don't think that's right!" As he got closer, I read the fine print across the bottom, and it said "Beta Club" at some high school.

You know, that's true with grades and school work. You're supposed to study, work hard, learn, make the grades - it's earned, not given. With God, it is given not earned. God is aware, and God is at work. If we turn to him and call out to Him, He looks. He sees, He knows. John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world." John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life." Acts 4:12 - "There is salvation found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

So what do we say? We say pray! Pray. Receive Jesus if you haven't right now, and He will save you. If you have received Him, pray for the nations! Pray with David that salvation would come to our nation, to the unreached nations. Pray for your daughters. Pray for your sons. Pray for your parents. Pray for your neighbors. Pray for your roommates. Pray for your coworkers. As long as there's somebody who doesn't know Jesus, pray that salvation would come to their soul. God answers prayer!

Last, when He's answered that prayer for your life, what do we do? We rejoice! We're glad! Hear me? Rejoice and be glad! Rejoice and be glad. Get past the sadness. Get past the bellyaching. Get past the complaining. Get past the "woe is me" and thinking about how bad you've got it. Our foolish, corrupt, tainted, no good heart has been met by an awesome God who saves us when we pray. Now, I want you to know that prayer is the avenue where our condition meets God's compassion. So pray.