

The Inexhaustible Love of God

Psalm 36

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A few years ago, I read a book entitled *Hunting Eichmann* by Neal Bascomb. It is about a band of Holocaust Survivors who formed the early Israeli Mossad (this is Israel's version of the Secret Service). It is an excellent book.

It describes how a team of Israeli Mossad agents tracked the infamous Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann across the globe and kidnapped him on May 11, 1960, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Then, they covertly transported him back to Israel to stand trial for his crimes. You may not know who Eichmann was, but during World War II, he deported millions of Jews to concentration camps. Most of them were tortured and executed.¹

Eichmann's trial was the first trial in history to be televised for the world to watch. During the trial, Yehiel Dinur, a concentration camp survivor, took the stand. The video of Dinur taking the stand shows him walking past Eichmann and stopping when he sees him. This was the first time he had seen him since he was in Auschwitz only eighteen years earlier. Dinur began to sob uncontrollably and collapsed to the floor. Later, reporter Mike Wallace interviewed Dinur and asked him about the moment he collapsed. Wallace writes:

Was Dinur overcome by hatred? Fear? Horrid memories? No, it was none of these. Rather . . . all at once he realized Eichmann was not the god-like army officer who had sent so many to their deaths. This Eichmann was an ordinary man. "I was afraid about myself," said Dinur. ". . . I saw that I am capable [of doing] this. I am . . . exactly like [him]."

Wallace summed up Dinur's terrible discovery with the terrifying phrase: "*Eichmann is in all of us.*" This horrifying statement captures the central truth about man's nature. Because of the fall in the Garden of Eden, sin is in each of us. We don't simply have the capacity to sin, but our hearts are steeped in sin.² We are born sinners, and that is why we sin.

James writes in James 1:13-14,

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Yet, there is hope for us. In Psalm 36, we will see that we are sinners, but thanks be to God – He is full of steadfast love and mercy. Psalm 36 pulls back the curtain on two radically different realities to make a stark contrast between them. First, we see the dark, corrupt interior of the human heart, and second, we see the faithful, steadfast covenant love of God. This Psalm moves from the depths of human depravity to the heights of divine mercy, and then to a prayer to persevere in grace.

Here's the deal: This movement is not accidental. Psalm 36 actually mirrors the gospel. It begins with us learning that we are broken by sin and separated from God, and ends with God's steadfast love and saving grace. Here's the main point of Psalm 36: *It is the contrast between human wickedness and God's steadfast love in Jesus, and the assurance of persevering grace for those who trust in Him.* I have three points to help us work through Psalm 36.

¹ Neal Bascomb, *Hunting Eichmann: How a Band of Survivors and a Young Spy Agency Chased Down the World's Most Notorious Nazi*.

² James Johnston, *Preaching the Word: Psalm Vol. 1, 1-41, 367-368*.

I. You are radically corrupted by sin (vv. 1-4)

In vv. 1-4, we see our sinfulness. Verses 1-4 are the bad news of who we are. We will spend a lot of our time in vv. 1-4, so we can get our minds around the bad news. If the bad news is not horrific, then the good news will not be very precious. As a matter of fact, the great Christian philosopher, apologist, and theologian Francis Shaffer was once asked if he had only one hour to share the gospel with someone, what would he do? He replied:

"I've said over and over I would spend 45-50 minutes on the negative, to really show him his dilemma—that he is morally dead—then I'd take 10-15 minutes to preach the Gospel".

Although Psalm 36 spends only four verses on the negative, these four verses are packed with startling negative descriptions of our unconverted condition. However, it speaks to the believer as well. Just consider the progression of man's sinfulness in vv. 2-4: Man is conceited, corrupted, and conspires to sin.

Well, let's get into the bad news in v. 1. Psalm 36 begins with a terrible statement about the human heart. Look in v. 1:

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

The word *transgression* means willful, open-eyed, deliberate revolt against God. It means to knowingly sin against God. An example of this is David's adultery with Bathsheba and then the murder of her husband. Another example is Joseph's brothers selling him into Egyptian slavery. These are deliberate sins, but the picture that *transgression* paints for us in v. 1 gets even worse.

Look at v. 1: David says, "*Transgression speaks.*" The Hebrew word for "*speak*" is "*oracle*." It could easily read "*Transgression is an oracle that speaks to us in our hearts.*" Basically, he personifies *transgression* as if it were some kind of powerful entity. His aim is to show the power of sin in the human heart. It is the picture of each one of us hearing the voice of sin whispering in our hearts, like that of some kind of influential person or deity. And here's the deal, we like what it says. Our hearts want to hear these sweet nothings sin promises us. Now, that's a scary thought. It's like Mike Wallace said, "*Eichmann is in all of us.*"

Listen, the root of evil is not a lack of education. It is not inequality or injustice, as terrible as these things are. Evil will not be solved by technology or progress. The problem is in our spiritual hearts. Our hearts, apart from the grace of God, love to sin. Sin speaks to us deep inside our hearts, and we willingly listen to it.

Why do we listen? The Apostle Paul tells us twice in Ephesians 2 that we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. He means the spiritual heart is dead and therefore only knows sin and loves only sin.

What is the spiritual heart? The heart is the center of our thoughts, emotions, and will; it is the control center of our personhood. Whatever controls our hearts will then control our choices, words, and actions. This means that the body will only ever go where the heart has already gone. What is the most dangerous aspect of sin's operation? It is sin's ability to deceive *what wants to be deceived*.

Listen to me, David is not talking about the worst people in the world, like murderers, evil tyrants, serial killers, or rapists. He is talking about himself. This is what I meant earlier when I said these verses are not only talking about the unconverted. These verses are a warning for the followers of Jesus. Verse 1 literally reads:

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in [my] heart;

If you are reading the ESV, you should have a footnote clarifying the translation and telling you that most Hebrew manuscripts read this way. You see, David is including himself in the wicked.

But wait a minute, wasn't David a man after God's own heart? He was. So, here is an even scarier thought, even though David was a man after God's own heart – he still struggled with sin. You see, even after you have been born again and given a new heart we still bear the marks of the Fall and so we will struggle with sin.

So, before we read these first four verses and conclude they are talking about someone else, we need to press pause and understand that we are included in these verses. Even as followers of Christ, we need to beware of sin's temptation. You are like me, aren't you? You hear the voice of sin inside you, too, don't you?

Well, let's keep going. Next, David says that because we sin, we do not "*fear*" God. The word *fear* in v. 1 is not the usual word for *fear*. The usual word for "*fear*" means "*a trembling reverence*." This word means something like terror and connotes "*abject fear or terror*."

What David is saying is that not only have we not learned reverence, but that we have not learned (in regard to the conviction of our sin) to tremble in the presence of a holy God. David says the voice of sin is so smooth and so seductive that we are not terrified of falling into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:30-31 tells us that our God is a consuming fire, and yet that doesn't cause us to fear Him.

Friends, the right kind of fear is healthy. We should tremble at the judgment of God, and the fact that we don't tremble reveals just how much sin has powerfully blinded us to that reality.

Think about it this way. If you are walking on railroad tracks and a train is coming, your heart should be pounding. I mean, you hear the horn blaring, and you feel the ground vibrating from the power of the train. You should be afraid and want to get off the tracks as fast as you can to get out of harm's way. This should frighten you because the right kind of fear is healthy.

But here's the deal: One of the worst effects of sin is that we do not fear God rightly. We do not tremble at His judgment. Jesus told us in Matthew 10:28,

*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him
who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Yet, sin blinds us to the fear of God. Sin's subtle words seduce us and cause us not to fear God rightly. The Apostle Paul quoted Psalm 36:1 in Romans 3:18 to show us that this is a universal problem for all humanity:

There is no fear of God before their eyes.

This is a massive problem, and this lack of fear leads us on a downward spiral in vv. 2-4. Look at what David says in v. 2.

*For he flatters himself in his own eyes
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.*

Verse 2 begins with self-deception and conceit. Sin blinds people, and they tell themselves that they will never be punished. Many people simply believe they will not be held accountable for their sins.

People think their *iniquity* will not be found out. The Hebrew word *iniquity* means *to twist or distort*. This is what they do. They distort the truth of who they are by flattering themselves and wrongly believe they will escape judgment.

How do people do that? What do they tell themselves? How do they deceive themselves? Well, some people lie to themselves by telling themselves they will have time to repent later. Others, perhaps, believe God will never be angry with them because they're not that bad. They tried to live a moral life. Some flatter themselves by reminding themselves of some big thing they have done for God. They tell themselves that God will be pleased with them because they gave some big financial gift, or they went on a mission trip, or they served in some ministry, or helped a person in need. Some actually deceive themselves because they were born into a family with lots of Christians, and they went to church as a child. Some people believe they will not be judged because they were baptized or had some powerful emotional or spiritual experience, yet they were never truly converted. Some

flatter themselves because they have all of their doctrine worked out perfectly, and they trust in their doctrinal knowledge instead of Jesus.³

Friends, we must beware because we are all prone to self-justification. We minimize our sins. We will compare ourselves to others and excuse what God exposes. We may even tell ourselves we deserve to indulge in a particular sin because of how we have been mistreated by others. Yet, what we need is the standard of God's Word to confront our internal lies and lead us to the truth.

Finally, man goes from self-deception and conceit to being crooked and conspiring to sin. Look at vv. 3-4:

*The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit;
he has ceased to act wisely and do good.
⁴ He plots trouble while on his bed;
he sets himself in a way that is not good;
he does not reject evil.*

Sin moves from the heart to the mouth to the life. What begins as internal rebellion becomes external action. Notice the progression: It begins with self-deception, then moves to corrupt speech, and finally to conspiring to sin.

Here's the bottom line: Sin is never static. Left unchecked, it grows. Private sin becomes public. Hidden rebellion becomes habitual behavior. Sin whispers in our hearts and flatters us, making us believe that our sin is not a big deal to God until we have fallen further than we could have ever imagined.

Ultimately we hit rock bottom. Rock bottom is when you do not reject evil at all; instead, you justify it. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 1 that this is when we call evil good and good evil, and Psalm 1 calls this "sitting in the seat of the scoffer," and "walking in the way of the wicked."

Remember how Psalm 1 lays out two ways to live: *The way of the righteous or the way of the wicked?* Psalm 36 essentially does the same thing, except here David begins with the wicked and then moves to the righteous, but the righteousness in Psalm 36 is seen in God's character rather than man's choice to walk in righteousness.

Both Psalms leave us with a choice. Will we choose the way of the wicked or the way of the righteous? The choice is clear: You should choose to walk in the way of righteousness. So, let's consider the good news in vv. 5-9.

II. You can enjoy in the inexhaustible love of Jesus (vv. 5-9)

The last section of Psalm 36 is controlled by the phrase "*steadfast love*." It is mentioned three times in vv. 5, 7, and 10. Each time the phrase *steadfast love* is used, it begins a new discussion of God's covenant love for His people.

Let's work through vv. 5-9 and consider five attributes of God and four blessings of knowing Him. First, let's consider the five attributes of God in vv. 5-6:

*Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
⁶ Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
your judgments are like the great deep;
man and beast you save, O LORD.*

The first attribute we will consider is God's *steadfast love*. AKA - God's covenant love. We've looked at this attribute in previous sermons because it is a key attribute in all of the Psalms. It is the Hebrew word "*hesed*." It is

³ Ibid, 370-371.

sometimes translated “*loving kindness*,” or “*unfailing love*.” We will find this phrase or these phrases used very often in the Psalter.

Friends, God’s *steadfast love* for His people is seen in the covenant He established with them. One of the best pictures of this covenant and this kind of love is seen in God’s covenant with Abraham, all the way back in Genesis 15. Abraham wanted to know if God would fulfill His promise to Him and God told him to bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, and turtle doves. He cut the animals in half (except the birds) and laid them side by side in a row. Then Abraham fell into a deep sleep, and he had a vision of a smoking censer passing between the carcasses. The smoking censer represented God passing between the animals. This was how they cut a covenant back in those days. Both parties would pass between the animals to cut the covenant. However, here’s the deal: Abraham didn’t pass through them. Only God, represented as the smoking censer, passed between the slain animals.

So, as I said, in a normal covenant ceremony, both parties would pass through the animals. Both parties were saying: *May it happen to me as it happened to these if I do not fulfill my obligations in this covenant*. In other words, if I don’t hold up my end of the covenant, kill me. This was what it meant to *cut a covenant* back then.

However, since only God passed between the animals, here’s what this covenant meant. God was telling Abraham: *May it happen to Me as it has happened to these animals if I do not hold up my part of the covenant*. God was saying, “*I love you so much, and my word is so sure that I will die if I break my promise to you.*” And since only God passed between the animals, Yahweh was saying: “*My love for you is so great that I am going to make good on your part of the covenant, too.*” The whole Jewish sacrificial system, which the Jews later used, attested to this as well.

Listen to me here. Here is the beautiful thing about this covenant and where we see the inexhaustible love of God for us. Are you listening? *Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves*. By our sin, we broke the covenant with God, but Jesus came and died in our place and for our sins to uphold our end of the covenant. This is God’s *steadfast love* for us in Psalm 36, and it is fulfilled in Jesus.

In God’s *steadfast love* for us, we see His inexhaustible love. The next four attributes will amplify the first attribute. Look in v. 5, for David tells us that God’s love extends to the Heavens. In other words, His love takes us into the very presence of Almighty God in Heaven.

The next attribute is His *faithfulness*. God’s faithfulness is utterly reliable. God is faithful, and His word is faithful. His faithfulness extends to the clouds or heavens. God’s *steadfast love and faithfulness* go hand in hand. He makes good on His word by His very nature and life given for us in Jesus.

The third attribute is His *righteousness*. Verse 6 says, “*Your righteousness is like the mountains of God...*” His righteousness means He is always does right in every situation. We may not understand His righteousness in every situation, but He always does what is right.

The fact that His righteousness is like the mountains gives us the picture of the strength, permanence, and immovability of His righteousness. God’s righteousness does not shift with culture or circumstances. It doesn’t grow weak over time.

Just consider that the promise of the Messiah was made in Genesis 3 and fulfilled in Christ. That promise never grew weak, never shifted, and never changed. It stood firm until it was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross for His people.

The fourth attribute is God’s *judgments*. That middle line of v. 6 says “[*God’s*]... *judgments are like the great deep.*” Here’s the deal: God doesn’t make shallow or shortsighted decisions. God’s judgments are deep, thorough, and beyond our comprehension. He sees the bottom of the human heart and knows what each heart needs. He sees the end from the beginning and knows what needs to be worked into every heart and life, and He is able to make that happen.

Now listen to me here: In God’s righteousness and judgments, some of the things God brings into our lives are painful. We hurt, and we struggle. As I look back over my 62 years of life, I scratch my head at some of the things I have done and the things God has brought into my life. I don’t understand it all. I don’t understand most of

the painful providences or even my sin. However, I do understand this. Even when it “*felt*” like God had abandoned me, He didn’t. Even when it hurt horribly, God never left me. His steadfast love held me, and He was faithful even when I wasn’t. He knew what needed to be worked into my heart and life, even when I didn’t. He was doing a thousand different things in every one thing because, as v. 6 says, “*your judgments are like the great deep.*” We won’t understand it all because we can’t. Our finite minds can’t understand the infinite. However, we can understand that He gives us, in Jesus, His steadfast love and faithfulness. We see that on the cross. This leads us to our final attribute.

The fifth and final attribute is that *the LORD saves*. The last line of v. 6 says, “*Man and beast you save, O LORD.*” It is in God’s nature to save His creation. At the end of all things, God’s people and God’s creation will be saved. God’s people will be saved, and His creation will be restored. It will be made new.

Your sin may have ruined your life, but God can redeem it. You may have made a royal mess of your relationships, your marriage, and everything else in your life, but if you will come to Jesus, He will redeem it. He is able to restore it. He will make you new and give you a second chance at life. Jesus died in your place on the cross so that by your faith in Him, you may be given a new heart and a second chance at life.

I want to pull vv. 5-6 together by showing you something you can’t see in the English translation. In the original Hebrew, v. 5 begins with “*O LORD.*” It literally reads, “*O LORD your steadfast love . . .*” and v. 6 ends with “*you save, O LORD.*” Here’s the deal, vv. 5-6 are bracketed by the covenant name of God, “*LORD, (Yahweh).*”

Here’s what the structure of these two verses communicates to us. When we belong to the LORD, our lives are surrounded by God. We get Him in all the fullness of His attributes. We get Him. We get His presence, His steadfast love, His faithfulness, His righteousness, His judgment, and His saving presence. He surrounds us even when we can’t feel it or know it, but by faith, we believe it.

Not only do we find these amazing attributes of God in vv. 5-6 but in vv. 7-9, we see four blessings that flow from these attributes. The first blessing is *protection*. Look in v. 7:

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take
refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

The *steadfast, covenant love of God is precious*. The image of protection given to us through the steadfast love of God is that of a mother hen covering her chicks with her wings. The thing is, we don’t deserve that protection.

For us to have this protection, Jesus had to leave the protection of Heaven, become fully human, live a sinless life, and then, unprotected, He died on the cross for our sins. This is the price of the precious steadfast love of God for us in Christ.

The question now is, will you come to Him, repent of your sins, and by faith trust Him as Your Lord and Savior? When you do this blessing of protection from the coming judgment is yours.

The second blessing, *satisfaction*, we find in v. 8:

*They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the
river of your delights.*

When you come to Jesus, you not only receive His protection, but you are satisfied in Him. Christ satisfies the deepest longings of our souls. He’s not merely a refuge, but He is a feast. The Hebrew word for “*abundance*” means “*fat*.” When we come to Jesus, spiritually we feast on Him by His Spirit. He just doesn’t give us meager rations, but He gives us Himself, the richness of His presence in our hearts and lives.

The third and fourth blessings are *life and light*. Look at v. 9:

*For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.*

This is the climax of Psalm 36's theology. God is: The source of life. The source of truth. The source of clarity. We do not find life apart from Him. We do not see clearly apart from His light. John 1:4 says:

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Verse 9 points us to Christ, for without Jesus, we are only left to the whispers of sin in our hearts. Only the light of Christ and the truth of Christ can set us free from the power of sin's lies and deceptions.

III. Persevere in the Way of the Righteous (vv. 10-12)

Psalm 36 closes similarly to Psalm 1. It shows us the two ways to live.

*Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!*

¹¹ *Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.*

¹² *There the evildoers lie fallen;
they are thrust down, unable to rise.*

We have a choice. We can continue in the steadfast love of God in Christ and His righteousness, or we can succumb to the voice of sin. So, as we look back over Psalm 36, we see the stark contrast between those who know God and those who continue in sin. What will you do? What path will you walk in life?

Remember, Eichmann is in all of us. Will you deceive yourself and flatter yourself, telling yourself that you are okay, or will you flee to Christ? Why don't you choose life and come to Jesus by faith and repentance?