

# PSALM 36

It is uncertain when, and upon what occasion, David penned this psalm, probably when he was struck at either by Saul or by Absalom; for in it he complains of the malice of his enemies against him, but triumphs in the goodness of God to him. We are here led to consider, and it will do us good to consider seriously,

**I.** The sinfulness of sin, and how mischievous it is (v. 1-4).

**II.** The goodness of God, and how gracious he is,

**1.** To all his creatures in general (v. 5, 6).

**2.** To his own people in a special manner (v. 7-9). By this the psalmist is encouraged to pray for all the saints (v. 10), for himself in particular and his own preservation (v. 11), and to triumph in the certain fall of his enemies (v. 12). If, in singing this psalm, our hearts be duly affected with the hatred of sin and satisfaction in God's lovingkindness, we sing it with grace and understanding.

## ~~ERR~~ PSALM 36:1-4

### THE CHARACTER OF THE WICKED

*To the chief Musician. A psalm of David the servant of the Lord.*

David, in the title of this psalm, is styled *the servant of the Lord*; why in this, and not in any other, except in Psalm 18 (*title*), no reason can be given; but so he was, not only as every good man is God's servant, but as a king, as a prophet, as one employed in serving the interests of God's kingdom among men more immediately and more eminently than any other in his day. He glories in it, ~~ERR~~ Psalm 116:16. It is no disparagement, but an honour, to the greatest of men, to be the servants of the great God; it is the highest preferment a man is capable of in this world.

David, in these verses, describes the wickedness of the wicked; whether he means his persecutors in particular, or all notorious gross sinners in general, is not certain. But we have here sin in its causes and sin in its colours, in its root and in its branches.

**I.** Here is the root of bitterness, from which all the wickedness of the wicked comes. It takes rise,

**1.** From their contempt of God and the want of a due regard to him (v. 1): *“The transgression of the wicked (as it is described afterwards, v. 3, 4) saith within my heart (makes me to conclude within myself) that there is no fear of God before his eyes; for, if there were, he would not talk and act so extravagantly as he does; he would not, he durst not, break the laws of God, and violate his covenants with him, if he had any awe of his majesty or dread of his wrath.”* Fittingly therefore is it brought into the form of indictments by our law that the criminal, *not having the fear of God before his eyes*, did so and so. The wicked did not openly renounce the fear of God, but their transgression whispered it secretly into the minds of all those that knew any thing of the nature of piety and impiety. David concluded concerning those who lived at large that they lived without God in the world.

**2.** From their conceit of themselves and a cheat they wilfully put upon their own souls (v. 2): *He flattereth himself in his own eyes; that is, while he goes on in sin, he thinks he does wisely and well for himself, and either does not see or will not own the evil and danger of his wicked practices; he calls evil good and good evil; his licentiousness he pretends to be but his just liberty, his fraud passes for his prudence and policy, and his persecuting the people of God, he suggests to himself, is a piece of necessary justice. If his own conscience threaten him for what he does, he says, God will not require it; I shall have peace though I go on.* Note, Sinners are self-destroyers by being self-flatterers. Satan could not deceive them if they did not deceive themselves. Buy will the cheat last always? No; the day is coming when the sinner will be undeceived, when *his iniquity shall be found to be hateful*. Iniquity is a hateful thing; it is that *abominable thing which the Lord hates*, and which his pure and jealous eye cannot endure to look upon. It is hurtful to the sinner himself, and therefore ought to be hateful to him; but it is not so; he rolls it under his tongue as a sweet morsel, because of the secular profit and sensual pleasure which may attend it; yet *the meat in his bowels will be turned, it will be the gall of asps*, ~~SUB~~ Job 20:13, 14. When their consciences are convinced, and sin appears in its true colours and makes them a terror to themselves — when the cup of trembling is put into their hands and they are made to drink the dregs of it — then their iniquity will be found

hateful, and their self-flattery their unspeakable folly, and an aggravation of their condemnation.

**II.** Here are the cursed branches which spring from this root of bitterness. The sinner defies God, and even deifies himself, and then what can be expected but that he should go all to naught? These two were the first inlets of sin. Men do not fear God, and therefore they flatter themselves, and then,

**1.** They make no conscience of what they say, true or false, right or wrong (v. 3): *The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit*, contrived to do wrong, and yet to cover it with specious and plausible pretences. It is no marvel if those that deceive themselves contrive how to deceive all mankind; for to whom will those be true who are false to their own souls?

**2.** What little good there has been in them is gone; the sparks of virtue are extinguished, their convictions baffled, their good beginnings come to nothing: They have *left off to be wise and to do good*. They seemed to be under the direction of wisdom and the government of religion, but they have broken these bonds asunder; they have shaken off their religion, and therewith their wisdom. Note, Those that leave off to do good leave off to be wise.

**3.** Having left off to do good, they contrive to do hurt and to be vexatious to those about them that are good and do good (v. 4): *He devises mischief upon his bed*. Note,

**(1.)** Omissions make way for commissions. When men leave off doing good, leave off praying, leave off their attendance on God's ordinances and their duty to him, the devil easily makes them his agents, his instruments to draw those that will be drawn into sin, and, with respect to those that will not, to draw them into trouble. Those that leave off to do good begin to do evil; the devil, being an apostate from his innocency, soon became a tempter to Eve and a persecutor of righteous Abel.

**(2.)** It is bad to do mischief, but it is worse to devise it, to do it deliberately and with resolution, to set the wits on work to contrive to do it most effectually, to do it with plot and management, with the subtlety, as well as the malice, of the old serpent, to devise it upon the bed, where we should be meditating upon God and his word, <sup><sup>3111</sup> Micah 2:1. This argues the sinner's heart fully set in him to do evil.

**4.** Having entered into the way of sin, that way that is not good, that has good neither in it nor at the end of it, they persist and resolve to persevere in that way. *He sets himself* to execute the mischief he has devised, and nothing shall be withholden from him which he has purposed to do, though it be ever to contrary both to his duty and to his true interest. If sinners did not steel their hearts and brazen their faces with obstinacy and impudence, they could not go on in their evil ways, in such a direct opposition to all that is just and good.

**5.** Doing evil themselves, they have no dislike at all of it in others: *He abhors not evil*, but on the contrary, takes pleasure in it, and is glad to see others as bad as himself. Or this may denote his impenitency in sin. Those that have done evil, if God give them repentance, abhor the evil they have done and themselves because of it; it is bitter in the reflection, however sweet it was in the commission. But these hardened sinners have such seared stupefied consciences that they never reflect upon their sins afterwards with any regret or remorse, but stand to what they have done, as if they could justify it before God himself.

Some think that David, in all this, particularly means Saul, who had cast off the fear of God and left off all goodness, who pretended kindness to him when he gave him his daughter to wife, but at the same time was devising mischief against him. But we are under no necessity of limiting ourselves so in the exposition of it; there are too many among us to whom the description agrees, which is to be greatly lamented.

## ~~1365~~ PSALM 36:5-12

### THE AMAZING GOODNESS OF GOD

David, having looked round with grief upon the wickedness of the wicked, here looks up with comfort upon the goodness of God, a subject as delightful as the former was distasteful and very proper to be set in the balance against it. Observe,

**I.** His meditations upon the grace of God. He sees the world polluted, himself endangered, and God dishonoured, by the transgressions of the wicked; but, of a sudden, he turns his eye, and heart, and speech, to God “However it be, yet thou art good.” He here acknowledges,

**1.** The transcendent perfections of the divine nature. Among men we have often reason to complain, There is *no truth nor mercy*, (<sup>301</sup>Hosea 4:1), *no judgment nor justice*, Isaiah v. 7. 5:7. But all these may be found in God without the least alloy. Whatever is missing, or amiss, in the world, we are sure there is nothing missing, nothing amiss, in him that governs it.

**(1.)** He is a God of inexhaustible goodness: *Thy mercy, O Lord! is in the heavens*. If men shut up the bowels of their compassion, yet with God, at the throne of his grace, we shall find mercy. When men are devising mischief against us God's thoughts concerning us, if we cleave closely to him, are thoughts of good. On earth we meet with little content and a great deal of disquiet and disappointment; but in the heavens, where the mercy of God reigns in perfection and to eternity, there is all satisfaction; there therefore, if we would be easy, let us have our conversation, and there let us long to be. How bad soever the world is, let us never think the worse of God nor of his government; but, from the abundance of wickedness that is among men, let us take occasion, instead of reflecting upon God's purity, as if he countenanced sin, to admire his patience, that he bears so much with those that so impudently provoke him, nay, and causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall upon them. If God's mercy were not in the heavens (that is, infinitely above the mercies of any creature), he would, long ere this, have drowned the world again. See <sup>308</sup>Isaiah 55:8, 9; <sup>310</sup>Hosea 11:9.

**(2.)** He is a God of inviolable truth: *Thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds*. Though God suffers wicked people to do a great deal of mischief, yet he is and will be faithful to his threatenings against sin, and there will come a day when he will reckon with them; he is faithful also to his covenant with his people, which cannot be broken, nor one jot or tittle of the promises of it defeated by all the malice of earth and hell. This is matter of great comfort to all good people, that, though men are false, God is faithful; men speak vanity, but the words of the Lord are pure words. God's faithfulness reaches so high that it does not change with the weather, as men's does, for it reaches to the *skies* (so it should be read, as some think), above the clouds, and all the changes of the lower region.

**(3.)** He is a God of incontestable justice and equity: *Thy righteousness is like the great mountains*, so immovable and inflexible itself and so conspicuous and evident to all the world; for no truth is more certain nor more plain than this, That the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and that he

never did, nor ever will do, any wrong to any of his creatures. Even *when clouds and darkness are round about him, yet judgment and justice are the habitation of his throne,* <sup><BIB></sup>Psalm 97:2.

**(4.)** He is a God of unsearchable wisdom and design: “*Thy judgments are a great deep, not to be fathomed with the line and plummet of any finite understanding.*” As his power is sovereign, which he owes not any account of to us, so his method is singular and mysterious, which cannot be accounted for by us: *His way is in the sea and his path in the great waters.* We know that he does all wisely and well; but what he does we know not now; it will be time enough to know hereafter.

**2.** The extensive care and beneficence of the divine Providence: “*Thou preservest man and beast, not only protectest them from mischief, but suppliest them with that which is needful for the support of life.*” The beasts, though not capable of knowing and praising God, are yet graciously provided for; their eyes wait on him, and he gives them their meat in due season. Let us not wonder that God gives food to bad men, for he feeds the brute-creatures; and let us not fear but that he will provide well for good men; he that feeds the young lions will not starve his own children.

**3.** The peculiar favour of God to the saints. Observe,

**(1.)** Their character, v. 7. They are such as are allured by the *excellency of God's loving-kindness to put their trust under the shadow of his wings.*

**[1.]** God's loving-kindness is precious to them. They relish it; they taste a transcendent sweetness in it; they admire God's beauty and benignity above any thing in this world, nothing so amiable, so desirable. Those know not God that do not admire his loving-kindness; and those know not themselves that do not earnestly covet it.

**[2.]** They therefore repose an entire confidence in him. They have recourse to him, put themselves under his protection, and then think themselves safe and find themselves easy, as the chickens under the wings of the hen, <sup><BIB></sup>Matthew 23:37. It was the character of proselytes that they came to *trust under the wings of the God of Israel* (<sup><BIB></sup>Ruth 2:12); and what more proper to gather proselytes than the excellency of his loving-kindness? What more powerful to engage our complacency to him and on him? Those that are thus drawn by love will cleave to him.

(2.) Their privilege. Happy, thrice happy, the people whose God is the Lord, for in him they have, or may have, or shall have, a complete happiness.

[1.] Their desires shall be answered, (v. 8): *They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house*, their wants supplied; their cravings gratified, and their capacities filled. In God all-sufficient they shall have enough, all that which an enlightened enlarged soul can desire or receive. The gains of the world and the delights of sense will surfeit, but never satisfy, <sup><357></sup>Isaiah 55:2. But the communications of divine favour and grace will satisfy, but never surfeit. A gracious soul, though still desiring more of God, never desires more than God. The gifts of Providence so far satisfy them that they are content with such things as they have. *I have all, and abound*, <sup><308></sup>Philippians 4:18. The benefit of holy ordinances is the fatness of God's house, sweet to a sanctified soul and strengthening to the spiritual and divine life. With this they are abundantly satisfied; they desire nothing more in this world than to live a life of communion with God and to have the comfort of the promises. But the full, the abundant satisfaction is reserved for the future state, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Every vessel will be full there.

[2.] Their joys shall be constant: *Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures*. *First*, There are pleasures that are truly divine. "They are *thy pleasures*, not only which come from thee as the giver of them, but which terminate in thee as the matter and centre of them." Being purely spiritual, they are of the same nature with those of the glorious inhabitants of the upper world, and bear some analogy even to the delights of the Eternal Mind. *Secondly*, There is a river of these pleasures, always full, always fresh, always flowing. There is enough for all, enough for each; see <sup><468></sup>Psalms 46:4. The pleasures of sense are putrid puddle-water; those of faith are pure and pleasant, *clear as crystal*, <sup><621></sup>Revelation 22:1. *Thirdly*, God has not only provided this river of pleasures for his people, but he makes them to drink of it, works in them a gracious appetite to these pleasures, and by his Spirit fills their souls with joy and peace in believing. In heaven they shall be for ever drinking of those *pleasures that are at God's right hand*, satiated with a *fulness of joy*, <sup><461></sup>Psalms 16:11.

[3.] Life and light shall be their everlasting bliss and portion, v. 9. Having God himself for their felicity, *First*, In him they have a fountain of life, from which those rivers of pleasure flow, v. 8. The God of nature is the

fountain of natural life. In him we live, and move, and have our being. The God of grace is the fountain of spiritual life. All the strength and comfort of a sanctified soul, all its gracious principles, powers, and performances, are from God. He is the spring and author of all its sensations of divine things, and all its motions towards them: he quickens whom he will; and whosoever will may come, and take from him of the waters of life freely. He is the fountain of eternal life. The happiness of glorified saints consists in the vision and fruition of him, and in the immediate communications of his love, without interruption or fear of cessation. *Secondly*, In him they have light in perfection, wisdom, knowledge, and joy, all included in this light: *In thy light we shall see light*, that is,

**1.** “In the knowledge of thee in grace, and the vision of thee in glory, we shall have that which will abundantly suit and satisfy our understandings.” That divine light which shines in the scripture, and especially in the face of Christ, the light of the world, has all truth in it. When we come to see God face to face, within the veil, we shall see light in perfection, we shall know enough then, <sup>(~~REV~~)</sup>1 Corinthians 13:12; <sup>(~~REV~~)</sup>1 John 3:2.

**2.** “In communion with thee now; by the communications of thy grace to us and the return of our devout affections to thee, and in the fruition of thee shortly in heaven, we shall have a complete felicity and satisfaction. In thy favour we have all the good we can desire.” This is a dark world; we see little comfort in it; but in the heavenly light there is true light, and no false light, light that is lasting and never wastes. In this world we see God, and enjoy him by creatures and means; but in heaven *God himself shall be with us* (<sup>(~~REV~~)</sup>Revelation 21:3) and we shall see and enjoy him immediately.

**II.** We have here David's prayers, intercessions, and holy triumphs, grounded upon these meditations.

**1.** He intercedes for all saints, begging that they may always experience the benefit and comfort of God's favour and grace, v. 10.

**(1.)** The persons he prays for are those that know God, that are acquainted with him, acknowledge him, and avouch him for theirs — the upright in heart, that are sincere in their profession of religion, and faithful both to God and man. Those that are not upright with God do not know him as they should.



**(2.)** The blessing he begs for them is God's loving-kindness (that is, the tokens of his favour towards them) and his righteousness (that is, the workings of his grace in them); or his loving-kindness and righteousness are his goodness according to promise; they are mercy and truth.

**(3.)** The manner in which he desires this blessing may be conveyed: *O continue it, draw it out*, as the mother draws out her breasts to the child, and then the child draws out the milk from the breasts. Let it be drawn out to a length equal to the line of eternity itself. The happiness of the saints in heaven will be in perfection, and yet in continual progression (as some thing); for the fountain there will be always full and the streams always flowing. *In these is continuance*, <sup>2345</sup>Isaiah 64:5.

**2.** He prays for himself, that he might be preserved in his integrity and comfort (v. 11): “*Let not the foot of pride come against me*, to trip up my heels, or trample upon me; *and let not the hand of the wicked*, which is stretched out against me, prevail to *remove me*, either from my purity and integrity, by any temptation, or from my peace and comfort, by any trouble.” Let not those who fight against God triumph over those who desire to cleave to him. Those that have experienced the pleasure of communion with God cannot but desire that nothing may ever remove them from him.

**3.** He rejoices in hope of the downfall of all his enemies in due time (v. 12): “*There*, where they thought to gain the point against me, *they have themselves fallen*, been taken in that snare which they laid for me.” *There*, in the other world (so some), where the saints stand in the judgment, and have a place in God's house, the workers of iniquity are cast in the judgment, *are cast down* into hell, into the bottomless pit, out of which they shall assuredly never be able to rise from under the insupportable weight of God's wrath and curse. It is true we are not to rejoice when any particular enemy of ours falls; but the final overthrow of all the workers of iniquity will be the everlasting triumph of glorified saints.