

Psalm 36

by Carl Armerding

Psalm 36 reveals God's loving kindness as a heavenly source of faithfulness, righteousness, and judgments, which preserves man and beast and brings them to a place of trust and comfort under God's wings.

Duration: 32:40

Scripture: Psalm 36:1-10, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 25:41, Romans 1:21

Topics: "Psalms"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the behavior of people and asks why they act the way they do. He uses a recent murder in Dallas as an example and emphasizes the need to surrender to God's loving grace. The speaker also discusses God's decisions and judgment, referencing the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. He concludes by highlighting the heavenly source of God's loving kindness and the importance of God's faithfulness.

Transcript

Again, pleased to the Book of the Psalms, and this morning we'll take a look at Psalm 36. Psalm 36. You'll notice that it begins in the title, To the Chief Musician.

This used to intrigue me as a boy, attending the Second United Presbyterian Church in the city where I lived at that time. I remember going to the pastor to ask him, who is this chief musician that we read about so much in the titles of the Psalms, for we sang nothing but the Psalms in that church. Well, he said, your question has two answers, and I had not found anybody with one answer up in Atlanta, but he said to me, you know, we like to believe when we're singing the praises of God that we're singing under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

No heart but of the Spirit taught makes melody to Him. But he said, you know, it's also recorded in the Word of God that our Lord Jesus said, and it was recorded of Him prophetically in Psalm 22, and again historically in Hebrews 2, in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise unto thee. And I think this would lift our singing up to a much higher level if we were aware of this fact.

I'm not denying that there was a human director. There certainly had one, but we must look beyond that to one who guides and directs the praises of his people. In contrast to that, you will notice that the psalmist describes himself as the servant of the Lord.

This is a rather unusual self-description on his part. It's only found once again, and that's in Psalm 18, and the word which he uses is comparable to the one that Paul uses in the New Testament when he calls himself the servant or the slave of Jesus Christ. Now, this man has been making some observations, and it is these observations that we want to look at a little bit this morning, because I think they'll fit right into our modern way of life.

We'll see that these men who observed things 3,000 years ago were actually establishing a pattern, and we'll see how well it fits as we go down through the psalms. The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart that there is no fear of God before his eyes, for he flappers himself in his own eyes until, or even when, his iniquity is found to be hateful. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit, yet left off to be wise and to do good.

He divides up mischief upon his bed. He setteth himself in a way that is not good, he abhorreth not evil. Thy mercy, and this word is rendered loving-kindness in verses 7 and 10, so I'm going to read it that way.

Thy loving-kindness, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains. Thy judgments or decisions are a great deep, O Lord.

Thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust unto the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

For with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light shall we see life. O continue thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart. Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me.

There are the workers of iniquity fallen. They are cast down and shall not be able to rise. In my reading of the word of God, and this has been a great joy and a pleasure for a good many years now, I've noted a most wonderful thing.

That is, that when God had something very, very precious to reveal, he revealed it on a dark background. The very first prophecy in the bible that the woman's seed was to bruise the serpent's head, which of course still waits for its final fulfillment in the book of Revelation. As one has described it, the unforgotten goal of the ages, the triumph of the woman's seed.

But God gave that prophecy, that promise, upon a very dark background. You move along swiftly to the book of Isaiah, where we have the announcement or prophecy of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. To me, one of the most important prophecies in the Old Testament, that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.

We're going to call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us. You look at the setting of that text in the seventh chapter of Isaiah, and again you notice what a dark background it has. We come on to the New Testament, the first chapter of Romans, the latter part of which I want to refer to later this morning.

Probably one of the darkest chapters in the New Testament, such as the latter part of it. It's kind of a chapter we don't usually read in public, and yet in that chapter you get that wonderful verse where the apostle says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it's the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew and also to the Greek. So, therein is the righteousness of God revealed from

faith to faith, and so on.

A beautiful text standing out like a diamond on a piece of black velvet. There it is. So, here it is this morning in this psalm.

God has something very lovely to tell us about his lovingkindness, as we have it there in verses 5, 7, and 10. Three references to the lovingkindness of Jehovah are given to us on a dark background. You notice as the psalm opens up, the psalmist, who has been an observer, he does some reflective thinking about the way men are behaving.

He's asking himself the question, what makes them do this? Have you ever asked that question? When you hear the news over the radio, or read it in the newspapers, so on, see it on television? Have you ever asked yourself the question, why people behave that way? How can people behave the way we've heard of some? Take, for instance, a murder which was committed not very long ago right here in our fair city of Dallas. A woman, 95 years of age, son to death. You ask yourself, how can anyone do it? What moved them to do these things? Well, the psalmist traces it here when he says, in the beginning, he says, the transgression of the wicked says something to me.

What it says in his heart is what he thinks. It says something to me. It tells me that, first of all, there's no fear of God before their eyes.

There's no further reverential awe, there's no respect for his majesty, and I've only to put it that way, dear friends. You will recognize it's one of the symptoms of the age in which we live, that there is no fear of God before their eyes. If they had even the slightest bit of fear of him, if they had even the slightest respect for his majesty, they wouldn't do those things.

They're actually insulting their creator by the way they behave. The psalmist puts it in the fourth psalm. He says, how long are you going to disgrace your creator? This is what they're doing, and you go down the list here, beginning with this giving up of the fear of God in verse one, and then you come to verse two, flapping themselves in their own eyes, even when their iniquity is found to be hateful.

To me, this is a remarkable thing that men should not only do these things, but actually flatter themselves because of it, claiming that they now have victory. They can do this, they can do as they please, this is what they want. They flatter themselves for it.

Then we find out that their speech, likewise, is conformed to this when it says the word through his mouth are iniquity and deceit. He has left off to be wise and to do good. He divides admission upon his bed.

He sets himself in a way that is not good, and the climax of the whole thing is found in here for us, not even. He's no longer shocked by any immorality that men practice, and you know you've got a perfect parallel to this in the first chapter of Romans. I'm going to ask you to keep your bookmark here, please, in Psalm 36, and turn with me to Romans 1, just to show you that a thousand years later, the thing hasn't changed at all.

Let me begin reading at verse 21, Romans 1, 21, because that when they knew God, he's speaking about men, when they knew God, there was a time when all men knew God, but they knew God, they glorified him not as God. See how this lines right up with what we have in Psalm 36? No fear of God before their eyes. Let's go on with this.

Neither were thankful, they become ungrateful. They no longer appreciated the gifts that come from the beneficent hand of him who provides so liberally for us all. Neither were they thankful.

The sin of ingratitude, put here in this black catalog as one of the leading sins of mankind. If men were only grateful for what God is doing every day, they wouldn't do some of the things they do now. But they came vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves were wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like a corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things going down lower and lower and lower. Wherefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lust of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshiped and served the creature more than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

And then we go on to read, and as you read down this chapter, every one of the sins which you're reading about in your newspapers and hearing about over the radio, they're all coming out here in the first chapter of Romans. Homosexuality, lesbianism, all of it's in here, every bit of it. As I said, this is the kind of a chapter we don't like to read very much in public, but there it is.

Yet it's on this dark background, we'll come back now to our psalm, that God gives us this most wonderful revelation of something that stands out in such bright contrast to what we've just been talking about. Thy mercy, verse 5, or thy loving kindness, O Lord. And, once again, we notice how things move downward.

We've seen how things move downward from verse 1 down through verse 4, but notice here again you have a downward movement. Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens. Then thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds, you're coming down to the skies.

Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, you're coming down to the earth. And thy judgments are great deep, and you're going down, down, down. But, oh, how different is this descent, isn't it? It reminds us of the verse in James' epistle that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, whom there is no better than to see the shadow of truth.

Yes, it came down. I was asked one time how I would explain this verse, that thy mercy, O thy loving kindness, O Lord, is in the heavens. I said, I explain it in the language of our own generation that it's out of this world, and it is.

There's nothing like it anywhere in any book that I've ever read, and I've read a few. I've never read anything to compare with this wonderful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven in order to express to us every detail of this loving kindness of Jehovah that we have here. First of all, it's a heavenly source.

The fact that it comes down in faithfulness to us, and there are three great words here, dear friends, which we do well to pay attention to for a few minutes. God's faithfulness. You say, how does that fit in with God's loving kindness? It fits perfectly.

If it hadn't been for God's faithfulness in dealing with a soul like mine, I probably never would have become a Christian, for I was born and brought up in a Christian home. I could pride myself on my conduct, and really stand out in contrast to some of the others in the neighborhood. God had to show me in his faithfulness that my heart was no different than theirs, because as in water faith enters, the faith sows the heart of man to man, and water, you know, is the most perfect mirror you can get.

Glass mirrors may flatter you, but that never does. As in water faith enters, the faith sows the heart of man to man, and this was something I had to learn. God was teaching me in his faithfulness that even my righteousneses were nothing but filthy rags as compared with his glorious holiness.

Yes, that faithfulness, one of the expressions, one of the facets of his loving kindness. Secondly, his righteousness. We have that in verse 6. It's like the great house, God likening his righteousness to something that is stable, something which so far as you and I are concerned is immovable.

There it is, and how this reminds us of a text which we've already quoted in the first chapter of Romans, that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation, because in it, it reveals the righteousness of God. That's one of the facets of God's love, is his righteousness in the gospel. A young Christian asked me some years ago, he said, I just don't fit that word righteousness into the gospel.

He said, to me the gospel is the love of God. I said, yes, but you know, if God had simply said he loved you, and not paid any attention to your sins and the things that now bar you from his presence, you wouldn't enjoy the love of God. But in his great love to you, he provided a sacrifice for your sins, that he might deal with you in a righteous basis so that even Satan himself would never call the thing in question.

And that's a wonderful thing, that Satan himself can't bring a case against a believing sinner in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's cleared of every charge of guilt. Sometimes I hear preachers try to define the word justified, and they say justified never sinned.

It's better than that. It's better than that. If you and I had only been restored to a position where, as if we had never sinned, we'd be in just as precarious a position as Adam was in his innocence.

But God has put me in a better position than that. My position this morning is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's better than Adam in his innocence, for I'm a sinner cleared of every charge of guilt, the righteousness of God in the gospel, dealing with my Savior as I deserve to be dealt with.

And so now, as a believer in him, not even Satan himself can come into the court of heaven to bring a charge against me, and he can't against you if you believe in him. May I digress here for a moment? Actually, it's not a digression. It's right in line with my subject, but it's quite possible that even in this audience this morning, or among some of those who'll be listening to these tapes, there'll be some of you who have heard the gospel again, and again, and again, and you've never trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

My dear friend, what better time to do it than right now? Right now, as you sit there in your seat, or wherever you may be standing, to surrender to him whose loving grace in his heart is with outstretched arms inviting you to come to himself, and offering you something that no money in the world can buy but bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ himself. And that brings me to the third great word here, and that's the word judgments or decisions. Yes, it is God who makes these decisions, and you get a good illustration of these decisions in the 25th chapter of the book of Matthew.

There is a decision which baffles even those who are the subjects, the favorable subjects of the decision. When the Lord, the King of glory, sitting on his throne, said to those on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world forth. I was the hunger, and you fed me.

I was naked, and you clothed me, and so on. They said, Lord, when shall we leave? He says, Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these, my brethren, you did it unto me. He's making a wonderful decision when he says, Come, ye blessed of my Father.

But, in that same chapter, he makes another decision, and mark you, friends, it's not because of what they have done. When he summons the ghost on his left hand and says, Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire. Why? Because I was hungry, and you did not feed me.

I was naked, and you did not clothe me. I was in prison, and you did not visit. All sins of omission, negative.

Yes, dear friends, you can boast as much as you please about the things that you don't do, but remember, here are people who are being judged because of what they did not do. Your sins of omission are just as bad as your sins of commission, and these are at great ease. This is something that the mind of man cannot really fathom, but thank God we can receive it, and you can see that the goal, the objective, and the goal of all of this is expressed for us here in the end of verse 6. Thou preservest man and beast.

This was the objective God had in mind when he started pouring out his loving kindness, which has its source up there in the heavens as we have been seeing, and poured it out, down, down, down, until it reaches the very object of it all, and that is man and even the beast. According to the eighth chapter of Romans, even the lower order of preachers are going to share in the blessings of what Jesus Christ, my Lord, did encounter. For now the whole creation's loneliness and travail has been pained together until now, but then thank God can be delivered into the liberty and the glory of the sons of God, one of us.

You're not surprised that now in verse 7 you have an appreciation of this. You talk about it, and here you can find no better word than to say, how excellent. How excellent is thy loving kindness, O Lord.

And you know when you say a thing is excellent, it means you've made some comparisons. This is what we mean by saying excel. This is better than so-and-so.

There's some things, of course, that cannot be compared, and in a sense the gospel is like that. It's unique. Don't fall into the grammatical error of saying most unique.

There ain't no such thing. If a thing is unique, it's incomparable. That's why we don't have the words uniquer and uniquest in our English language.

The gospel is unique. The Lord Jesus Christ is unique, and for those of you who read, perhaps, French, you will remember that in the gospel of John, chapter 3, where the Lord Jesus is referred to God's only begotten Son, son fils unique, his unique sons. He's in a class by himself.

He's incomparable, but God does allow us to compare his gospel and his loving kindness with other things, and so his son appears to spread his appreciation by saying, how excellent. How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God, and because of this, notice that it doesn't repel men, it draws them. Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow thy wings.

One of the tenderest illustrations that you can get out of nature, one which the Lord Jesus Christ used himself in the 23rd chapter of the book of Matthew, when he says, oh how often when I've gathered you with a hen, gather the chickens under her wings, and ye would not. But Charles Wesley knew what it meant when he said, other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on thee. Leave me not alone, still

protect and comfort me.

All my trust on thee is saved, all my help in thee is found. Cover my defenseless head with the shadow thy wings. Oh how lovely.

Friends, this is some of the emotional part of the gospel, isn't it? When you and I realize what a comforting thing it is. Some years ago, laboring with a very dear friend of mine in the city of Los Angeles, we had a tent down in the southern part of the city, a rather rough neighborhood. In fact, they tried to set it on fire one night, but we had two kinds of fire in that tent.

We had a fire started by a lighted cigarette, but we had the fire of the Holy Ghost as well. And praise God, we saw the workings of God's spirit. My fellow servant was giving an illustration one night of a text like this.

He told of an incident in Saskatchewan where one morning after a prairie fire, he was invited by his host to go out and see what the damage was. That night, his host had had to set some of the grain on fire around the house to keep the fire from coming to the house itself and burning it down. So they went out.

Here was this great expanse of blackened ruins and ashes. They're walking along. His host said to him, Tom, you see that little round mound there? And Tom says, yes, I see.

Would that be a stone? No, he said that you wouldn't find stone like that in my field. Well, he says, I wouldn't know what it is. Well, he says, go over there and touch it with your foot and see.

So Tom went over, and very gingerly, he gave this little mound a kicker with his foot. And as he did so, the charred carcass of a prairie hen turned over, and from underneath, three little chicks emerged alive. Their mother had plucked them into the place of safety while the fire burned her to death.

And what a picture of your Savior and mine who invites us to the shelter of his wing. The storms of God's judgment beat upon his holy head at Calvary. All the fire and wrath of God against your sin and mine poured out upon him.

He referred to it as a cup that he would gladly give up if it were the Father's will. But in dark Gethsemane, he prayed, O Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.

And he said that three times over. Yes, he did that to provide a shelter for you and for me. Oh, how excellent is the loving kindness of Jehovah.

But more than that, you know, this is something more than an escape from judgment. Because, in verse 8, I read, they shall be abundantly satisfied. Not only sheltered, but satisfied.

You know, this is one of those things that I think is the best apologetic for our Christian faith that I know anything about. It's the satisfaction that it gives. Not the kind of satisfaction that comes from a drug that a person may take, and he gets high for a while.

No, this is something that really abides. They shall be satisfied, abundantly satisfied, with the fatness of Zion. And this is something I think we ought to get more evidence of in our Christian living, that we are satisfied.

You know, this is something that the world tries to cash in on this expression. This will satisfy you. This will satisfy.

Our best advertisement is a satisfied customer. Well, dear friends, I believe a good advertisement for our Christian faith is a satisfied sinner. Satisfied with the fatness of God's house.

If you don't believe it, just take the word of one who's done it, who's enjoyed it for over 66 years. It really works. The most satisfying thing I know anything about.

I don't have to take any drugs to keep me satisfied. I don't have to smoke any cigarettes. I don't have to drink any liquor, because I found something really satisfying.

But it's better than that. Look at the next. It says, And thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures.

This last week we had before the verse in 1 Corinthians 12, you know. Well, I think on two occasions we had, we referred to the verse in 1 Corinthians 12, that by one spirit we're all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit. And this is how you get filled with the spirit of God.

And here God says, I want you to drink of the rivers of my pleasures. Well, what are God's rivers of pleasures anyhow? Well, first of all, we begin with his expression of pleasure over his beloved son. You know, every time you and I enjoy the Lord Jesus Christ, we're enjoying what God enjoys.

And that's communion, that's fellowship. When you have communion, it's not taking a wafer or a piece of bread and drinking some grape juice. That isn't it.

Communion is having something in common. And when God says of his beloved son, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased at his pleasure. And when I have pleasure in the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm enjoying what God enjoys.

And that's fellowship, that's communion. Then again, it says it leads God by the foolishness of preaching to save and to believe. Yes, does that have a part in the work of saving souls? Isn't it tremendous? I'd like to take back, some of you probably not very far back.

I remember when our youngest daughter came home. We were making our home in Wheaton at the time, and she was teaching a little class in Chicago, a class of colored girls. And one Sunday, she came home radiant.

She said, I knew it, she got you on there. She's old mummy, what do you think? My mother said, what is it darling? Oh, she said, I had the joy today of leading my first soul to Christ. What a tremendous thing.

She was enjoying the rivers of God's pleasure. And God takes pleasure of the walk of his people. We're told to walk and to please God.

And so we could go on. Beloved, don't hesitate to drink of these rivers. That's real communion.

And now let's for a moment, just look at the source of it all. In verse nine, it says, you see, you're moving up now. We were moving down a little while.

Now we're going upstream, and we're getting right up to the very source of it. For with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light shall we see life. Oh continue, prolong, string it out.

That's what the word in the original really means. Prolong it, more like you never get enough of it. It never falls on you.

Never get tired of it. I think sometimes people say to me, don't you get tired of reading the same book all the time? No, it's because I'm discovering fresh treasures in every day. We're drinking of the fountain that never shall run dry.

It's one of those things we really want to continue, don't we? Yes. Some years ago, when my son, who works up at Wheaton now, was just a little fellow, we were at a Flagstaff conference in Arizona, and it was raining hard and thundering lightning. And he was out somewhere, I didn't know where, but I got out and I called him on top of my voice.

Pretty soon he came running, soaking wet. I was so glad to see him, I clasped my arms, and I used language that I'd only used for his little sisters before that. I said, oh my darling, I'm so glad to see you.

He looked at me as much to say, do you know who you're talking to? I guess in the excitement of a moment, I didn't quite, but I kept him in my arms just to make him feel that I really loved him. And I stroked my hands through his hair until finally he went off to sleep. I thought, now that's good, I'll just lay him down his little cot over here and let him take a sleep.

As I put him down, his big blue eyes opened up and he said, Daddy, why did you quit? Let us pray. Our gracious God, we thank you, we need never to ask thee, why did you quit? Because our Lord Jesus had told us in his words that having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. Oh dear Lord, we pray that this consideration of thy loving kindness this morning may lead all of us to drink deeper this fountain that shall never run dry.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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