

Nabal's Psalm
Psalm 14 & 53
ABC 6/25/23

A survey by Barna & the Cultural Research Center of AZ Christian University in 2021 found that *...3 out of 4 adults reject the idea that humans are born into sin & need to be saved from the consequences of that ... by Jesus Christ... Complementing that view, 7 out of 10 Americans (69%) maintain that people are basically good.... Most Americans believe in their own goodness & are not overly concerned about the effects of sin.*¹

What about you? Do you believe people are inherently good but sometimes make mistakes? Or do you believe people are inherently bad & need God to rescue them? Our Psalm tells us the answer clearly today & it's actually a 2fer psalm, as Ps 15 & 53 are almost identical. It could be that Ps 14 was written for the comfort of the faithful while Ps 53 is a warning to the wicked.² Both psalms look for the salvation that comes from Zion, when the people of God will be restored & will rejoice. The superscription of Ps 14 reads, *For the choir director. A Psalm of David.* This tells us this is a song for corporate worship & David is the author. Beyond this, we know nothing about when or why it was written.

1. Denial of God 1

What is a **fool**? Our word *fool* comes from a Latin word that means *bellows*, suggesting the fool is a person full of hot air. In the Hebrew language, there are many words for different kinds of fools. *Nabal* is the word used here & it embraces the idea of an aggressively perverse personality. If there's a backstory to Ps 14, Nabal may be it. The superscription for Ps 52 refers to Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam 21–22) & the superscription for Ps 54 refers to the Ziphites (1 Sam 26). In between these 2 accounts of hostility against David, we have the story of Nabal (1 Sam 25). Nabal, a wealthy livestock owner, is respectfully approached by a delegation of men from David. They told him of how they'd protected Nabal's shepherds & herds. When finished, they made a simple request for hospitality. **Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants & to your son David** (1 Sam 25:8). Instead of responding with any hospitality, Nabal was rude & sent them away empty-handed. He ignored their goodwill, scorned their request, & mocked their leader. David's men returned to

¹ www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CRC_AWVI2021_Release05_Digital_01_20210618.pdf

² Allen Ross, *Psalms*, 1:373

David & reported what he had said (1 Sam 25:12). As you can imagine, David was fighting mad. 400 men were told to strap on their swords. Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants ran to tell Abigail, Nabal's wife, of what was happening. The servant begged her, **know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him** (1 Sam 25:17). Nabal was rude & would have been killed by David if Abigail hadn't stepped in. Abigail, talking to David, said of Nabal, **Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name & folly is with him** (1 Sam 25:25). The NIV translates it this way: **His name means fool & folly goes with him.** Nabal died about 10 days later as **the Lord struck Nabal & he died** (1 Sam 25:38). People who say **there is no God** are Nabals, fools. They aren't lacking intelligence but have a moral problem of the heart. Billy Sunday used to say that sinners can't find God for the same reason criminals can't find policemen, they aren't looking!³ Our text quotes the fool as saying, ***There is no God.*** In the Hebrew the words *there is* aren't there. The fool literally says, *No God!* meaning *No God for me!* Not only does he not believe God matters, he acts on that conviction. You don't have to be a famous atheist like Richard Dawkins to qualify as a fool. All you have to do is live as if there is no God to be a fool. The fool is anyone who has no place for God in their life. They don't necessarily deny the existence of God, but they live as if there were no God (Ps 74:18, 22; Is 32:6). They are their own god. Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10) the fool, in denying that God matters, denies wisdom itself which is the epitome of foolishness. Fools are self-righteous & don't want there to be a God. They want to live their own lives the way they please. Their decision to live like there is no god brings consequences in both their character & their conduct. By leaving God out of their lives, they become more **corrupt** in their heart (1), mind (2, 4), & will (3). Why is one who denies the existence of God a **fool**? We find the answer in Rom 1, which is kind of a commentary on this psalm. He's a **fool** because he knows there is a God but chooses to deny it. He knows there is a God & yet chooses to believe & act as if there is none. By abandoning God **in his heart**, he abandons common sense, because there's no other reasonable explanation for how our universe

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*, pp 58–59

& everything in it came into being. In Ps 19 David observes this reality from the natural world: **The heavens are telling of the glory of God; & their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, & night to night reveals knowledge** (Ps 19:1-2). Paul makes a similar observation when he writes:

...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power & divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Rom 1:19-20).

Everyone has the visible evidence of the invisible Creator. There's no excuse for failing to know that God exists. Those who deny God are deliberately & willingly ignorant. How do we know there is a God? Because of God's revelation of Himself in creation. It isn't an extensive revelation. In fact, as Paul states, it consists of only 2 things: God's **eternal power & divine nature** (Rom 1:20). Nothing in nature reveals God's love, mercy, & compassion. But what is revealed is sufficient to prove to any honest person that God does exist. To refuse to acknowledge Him is foolishness. Think about it: The revelation of God in nature is clear to everyone. There's enough evidence of God in a snowflake, a fingerprint, a flower, the human body to lead any honest person to believe in God & know He matters. Every object in creation shouts *God* to humanity. If God's revelation in nature is as clear as Paul says, why would anyone reject it? Why would anyone be so foolish as to say, **There is no God**? Because, as Paul says, people **suppress the truth** about God because of their **ungodliness & unrighteousness** (Rom 1:18). They try to live without God because they don't like Him. Everything about Him is offensive to them. He's sovereign; they are not, though they think they are. He is holy; they aren't & His holiness is a condemnation of their sin. He's omniscient; they are not. They find His knowledge of them to be unsettling. He is love; they're filled with hatred. He is gracious; they're ungracious. He is wise; they're foolish. They're so foolish that they suppress what they know about Him & decide to live as if **there is no God**. The result, as both Paul & David declare, is corruption. Paul unfolds it at length in Rom 1, showing the downward steps in the progressive degeneration & depravity of the human race. David says the same thing, though more succinctly: **They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good** (1). The sad reality is that all have turned aside & are **corrupt**. The word translated **corrupt**

illustrates this because it was used of spoiled milk, milk that should have been drinkable & nourishing but is putrid & repulsive instead, unable to be used for its intended purpose. Their lack of belief displays itself through their actions & behavior. Their depraved character bears the rotten fruit of wicked conduct & **abominable deeds**. What they do flows out of what they believe. The bottom line is that there is **no one who does good**. All humanity, David concluded, lived sinfully, & were **corrupt**. They do things they'd never do had they believed in the existence & reality of God. Think of it this way: How do students behave when the teacher leaves the room? No teacher, no rules! How do you drive when a police officer is nearby? No cop, no rules! When people deny or ignore the existence of God they behave in destructive & repulsive ways. They think there's no accounting to the God who created us. Our actions reveal what we think about God; our behavior reveals our true theology. Your actions are a more accurate reflection of what you believe about God than any amount of words you might say. You can say you love your family, but if you don't spend time with them or treat them with care & respect, you don't love your family as much as you claim. This applies to many situations in life in which our actions don't line up with our words. We say we believe one thing, but our actions disagree. Our actions speak louder or more accurately than our words. Do your daily actions, choices, & habits reveal a strong belief that God exists & that you must answer to Him? Or do they reveal that you don't take God's existence & authority seriously at all? Are you living as though God isn't there? If so, David says you're a **fool**. The remarkable thing here isn't just that anyone would deny the reality of God but that everyone by nature does just that. It's not just a select group of people who reject Him; it's everyone. Everyone, by nature, denies or ignores the existence of the one true God. For that reason, this psalm describes us as being senseless, stupid, & severely lacking in smarts. That's what being a **fool** means. Once we no longer know who God is, we no longer know who we are. We destroy each other & ourselves. If it weren't for God's grace & providence, we'd all self-destruct. **There is no one who does good.**

2. Depravity of Man The psalm now shifts perspective & God is looking down on people from heaven. David is convinced that God isn't a bored spectator. **2**

God may be absent from the human heart, but He isn't absent from heaven. As **the Lord** surveys mankind from above, He searches hearts to determine if there are any who spiritually understand & who seek Him. Sin has devastated them, leaving their mind darkened, their emotions depraved, & their will deadened. All people have rejected the God who created all things in the past, who governs all things in the present, & who will judge & restore all things in the end. He sees **the sons of men**, all of mankind, & none understands or seeks after God. To **understand** means to be paying close attention to the world around you & arriving at the very obvious conclusion that not only does God exist but that you should be seeking seriously to have a relationship with Him. But are people looking for God like He is looking for them? No. **3**

Repeating his initial verdict (1), David states, **There is no one who does good**. The entire world is under sin, which leaves people incapable & unwilling to do good; they are **corrupt**. The all-inclusive words **no one, any, all, no one, not even one** clearly convey the sad, universal reality of man's depravity (Rom 3:10–18).⁴ Not only does God see that no one is looking for Him or wanting to have a relationship with Him, but they're deliberately trying to avoid having any relationship with Him. They're going off in a different direction because they want to abandon the idea of God entirely. God created us to work & reap the rewards of our labor, but we're lazy & steal. God created us to speak the truth, but we tell lies instead. God created us to say good, helpful, encouraging things, but we say hurtful things. We abandon God by doing the opposite of what He made us to do, twisting the good He called us to do into mangled, twisted forms that show we don't take Him seriously. It's kind of like a child giving their parent a drawing which they'd worked hard at, only for the parent to crumple it up & throw it away. It resembles a husband giving his wife some beautiful flowers, only for her to throw them on the ground & trample them under her feet. It resembles a wife working all day to prepare a delicious meal for her husband, but he feeds it to the dog. We are just like that. We **have all turned aside, together we have become corrupt**. None of us **does good, not even you**.

⁴ Steven Lawson, *Psalms 1–75*, p 75

What's remarkable here isn't just the sad, disrespectful nature of our failure but the degree of our failure. David reinforces with intensity the full extent of our problem. We are **all** this way. We are all this way **together**. There is **no one** who does good, **not even one**. So, no, we aren't basically good. No one is basically good. We're all basically bad. This is our nature. This is how we all are as human beings. No one, not even one person, is an exception. We can't understand the plight we're in. We don't understand that education, psychology, social reform, & trying harder aren't enough to change our nature. It can only be done from outside, by a power that's strong enough to break through our foolishness; & that power is the grace & forgiveness of God.⁵ Of course, this doesn't mean that all people are as wicked as they can be or that all are equally bad or that no one can ever do anything good (Lk 11:13). It simply means that we all have a fallen, sinful nature that we cannot change. Apart from the grace of God, none can be saved from eternal judgment. Apart from God's illuminating work in the human heart by means of the Holy Spirit, there is no one who understands spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14).

Having acknowledged the scope & severity of our problem, David continues to marvel that people neither acknowledge the existence of God nor seek a relationship with Him. When people reject God, they mistreat others as well. **4**

The **workers of wickedness**, those who commit **abominable deeds** (1) & those who do no good (3), lack knowledge. As fools they have denied the existence of God & do not seek or call on Him. As David marvels over mankind's foolishness, he calls our behavior **wickedness**, which describes behavior that disregards the law & is unjust. He then identifies 2 lawless, unjust behaviors: mistreating God's people & ignoring God Himself. By mentioning **my people**, David is probably referring to those who've been rescued from their sins & rebellion by God to become His people, people who've turned to God & trusted in Him by faith & therefore have a relationship with Him. He later refers to them as **the righteous generation** (5). Of course, **righteous people** are those whom God has made **righteous** so they may enjoy a relationship with Him & live righteous lives as a result. Have you been made righteous by God through Jesus (1 Cor 5:21)?

⁵ George Angus Fulton Knight, *Psalms*, vol. 1, p 68

These **fools** take advantage of the weak & the poor & they won't call upon the Lord. To **eat ... people as they eat bread** is a biblical metaphor for exploiting the helpless. Instead of praying to God, the wicked *prey* on the godly. When people reject the reality of God they mistreat other people. After all, if there is no God, everyone lives for themselves. A lack of respect for & belief in God reveals itself through not just bad behavior in general but a lack of respect for others. This echoes what Jesus taught, that the greatest command is to **love God** & the 2nd greatest is to **love your neighbor**, which is the logical & necessary extension of the 1st (Mk 12:28-33). The way you view & treat other people, especially people who believe & follow Jesus, is an indicator of what you believe about God. When you believe in the existence & authority of God, you will value other people, especially His own people, & you'll behave towards them in a wholesome way.

3. Destructiveness of Sin 5

David isn't shuddering over this because he knows what **fools** haven't yet learned, that **God is with the righteous generation** & that **the Lord is their refuge** (5–6). David envisions the selfish **fools** who reject God & mistreat God's people as being **in great dread** or **being afraid with fear**. When does this take place? Some suggest this is at the final judgment (Lk 23:30). Others say it's fear brought on by some calamity in this life. While that may be true, I think it may refer to their own deepest thoughts they try to ignore. In Ps 53:5 there's an important addition. After the words, **There they were in great fear**, the words **where no fear had been** are added. In other words, the fear described is an inner fear. To put it another way, no one is threatening them. They seem secure in their disbelief. But in their quiet moments, deep in their hearts, they sense that if there is a Creator, they're guilty of many sins & will undoubtedly suffer for them. They are unnerved by this & fear with great fear.⁶ Those who deny God will find that their denial didn't remove Him nor did it remove His judgment of them. One day they'll all bow their knees to acknowledge His existence & authority (Phil 2:10). Ps 53:5 tells us the reason for the fear is because of God's judgment. **For God scattered the bones of him who encamped against you; You put them to shame, because God had rejected them.** This pictures a battlefield in which God defeats His enemy. No disgrace was considered

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41*, p 119

greater for a military power than to have the **bones** of their defeated army **scattered** across the battlefield rather than buried. This is how overwhelming God's devastating **judgment** of the wicked will be.⁷ **6**

According to David, people who reject God look down on the plans & hopes of God's people. They laugh, mock, & undermine the godly person's life & their belief in God. They make plans & behave in ways that disregard God completely. Peter writes of this saying:

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, & saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago & *the* earth was formed out of water & by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens & earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment & destruction of ungodly men (2 Pt 3:3-7).

According to David, those who trust God find protection & shelter with Him. He is their **refuge**. Even though they can't see Him, they rest in His care even when they're mistreated. God's people are so intimately & inseparably connected to Him that when they're mistreated, He's with them & guarantees to come to their aid because to mistreat them is to mistreat Him.

4. Desire for Salvation If there's going to be any hope or salvation for sinful people such as ourselves, it's going to have to come from God Himself, which is where the psalm ends. David concludes with a prayer for deliverance. **7**

With these closing words, pleads for God to come down to His people & lead them in triumph over the ungodly people of this world. He looks forward to that day when God places His people into a place of blessing & peace in the world, when they'll no longer be marginalized & mistreated but will rule & roam freely. This day will come when God restores the entire creation to perfect order, free from all sin (Rev 21:1-8). David cries out, **Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!** (7). In his day that salvation was still future. This isn't simply a cry for earthly deliverance from other nations. The **salvation** to which David looked was God Himself, particularly the Savior-God whose coming had been prophesied so many times in the OT. That Savior is Jesus. Now we who live on this side of His coming look back to Him as the One who alone delivers us from sin. We

⁷ Lawson, p 278

put our faith in Him & His work, rather than in our own works, as the basis of our salvation. & we look forward to His 2nd coming, knowing that in that day sin will be punished, good will be rewarded, & the folly of those who have lived as if there is no God will be revealed. If you've been living as if there is no God, I urge you to repent of your folly & become wise instead. The person who is wise knows they need a Savior. David's call for **salvation** is fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. As the Lord enters Jerusalem, Matthew quotes Zech 9:9: **Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold your King is coming to you"** (Mt 21:5). **Salvation** comes from **Zion**. When Jesus prayed Ps 53 He understood how **salvation ... would come out of Zion**. He knew that to rescue **fools** He had to become a fool in the eyes of the world. He humbled Himself **by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross** (Phil 2:8). After describing Mount Zion & the Most Holy Place, the author of Hebrews describes Jesus suffering so that **He might sanctify the people through His own blood** (Heb 13:12). Until Jesus came & died on our behalf, no one knew exactly how God's salvation would come out of Zion, but now we do. Jesus experienced denial, abandonment, & wrath in order to rescue & redeem those who've said in their hearts, **There is no God**. Amazing, isn't it?

David prays for the deliverance of the people of God. All hope & expectation can be summed up in the word **salvation**. In Christ we're saved from sin & death, ignorance of truth, bondage to sin, fear of death, & of a meaningless life. We're saved for a purpose: To love God & others as we love ourselves. **Salvation** changes our relationship with God, giving us acceptance with Him, forgiveness, reconciliation, sonship, indwelling of the Spirit, & everlasting life. Salvation changes us emotionally, giving us confidence, peace, courage, hopefulness, & joy. Salvation changes us spiritually, giving us prayer, guidance, discipline, dedication, & service. Salvation changes us personally, giving us new thoughts, convictions, motives, & affections. Salvation changes us socially, giving us a new community in Christ, a compassion for others, & a desire to love as Jesus loves. **Zion**, the City of David, is the place from which salvation comes. When Jesus came He fulfilled & embodied everything about salvation. As Peter said, **there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12).

David promises that the Lord will bring back **His captive people**. **Captive** here means to restore the fortunes, to radically change circumstances from bad to good. The day will come when Jesus will return, defeat His enemies, & establish His righteous kingdom on earth (Zech 10–14). What a time of rejoicing that will be when the prayer, **Thy kingdom come** (Mt 6:10) is fulfilled! This deliverance will result in worship. The psalm concludes with the response to salvation: **Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad**. These parallel clauses call upon God's people to praise Him for His salvation which vindicates Him & exposes the foolishness of the man who says in his heart, **there is no God**.

When we read this psalm, it's easy for us to identify with David & with the **my people** of God who are being mistreated, **the righteous generation**, & **His people**. While this is appropriate for us to do if we've trusted Jesus as our Savior, we must also identify with the **fool** who **has said in his heart, 'There is no God,'** because this is where we've all been. What's fascinating about this psalm is that Paul focuses intently on this detail in his letter to the church in Rome. In Rom 3:9-12, he quotes from Ps 14:1-3 (or 53:1-3) to show that both Jews & Gentiles are equally resistant to the existence & authority of God. This means that even the Jewish people for whom this psalm was originally written were considered foolish & corrupt. This wasn't just a psalm about the sins of ungodly Gentiles. In this psalm we see God's perspective about the condition of all mankind. Though all people turn away from God by nature, those who trust in Him can have hope about the future. Have you admitted your resistance to God & turned to Him for salvation? If so, are you treating other people in a way that reflects a belief in the goodness & greatness of God? Or have you drifted into a lifestyle which fails to acknowledge that God is there, one which treats others badly & enables you to do sinful & ungodly things? No matter how you're living, you can stop being foolish today & acknowledge that God is there & wants to have a relationship with you. He is seeking you though you aren't seeking Him. Will you turn to Him & trust in Him today? Will you live in the reality that He is there & will be there as Judge in the end?

CS Lewis once quipped, *No clever arrangement of bad eggs will make a good omelet*. The same can be said about the total depravity of mankind. No matter how cleverly we may try to arrange our life, we're still inherently evil & incapable of being good on our own. There's only one known

cure for the deadly plague of sin & that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone can remove the heart of stone & replace it with a heart of flesh. Man's problems aren't merely external, the problem is internal, in our hearts. This is why all people must be born again. We need a new heart, a new nature that loves God & seeks to pursue holiness. The only way to authentic, lasting change is through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-5).