

How not to be a fool

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[0 : 0 0] Well, please, if you haven't already, turn in your Bibles to Psalm 53, page 567, I think. 567. Well, let me begin by asking you, well, you might not want to confess this, but I wonder if you've ever said or done something foolish.

Never. Never. That tells me everything. We can all do silly things from time to time. When one of my daughters just started school, they were at Doncaster Gardens and they were learning Mandarin as a second language.

I think someone from church actually said to her, I hear you're learning Mandarin, to which she replied in a rather exasperated voice, no, I'm learning Chinese.

Mandarin is a fruit. Which is true, I suppose. Now, we all misunderstand things or say silly, cute things from time to time, but being a fool in the Bible is something a little bit different.

In the Bible, being a fool is, you know, not saying silly things or not doing well at school, that sort of thing. It's actually someone who denies a reality. Someone who does not live in light of what is true.

[1 : 2 1] Like the builders who installed an ATM machine at this bank in Iran, I think it is, they denied the reality of people's general height. So the poor guy finds it hard to actually get money out.

Being a fool is denying what is a reality, not living in light of what is true. And today, as we come to David's psalm or song, as Clive said to us, and I would have liked to hear you sing, Clive, but anyway, it's about a fool.

And it teaches us, I think, how not to be a fool this year, as well as how to persevere when fools persecute us. That theme will come up again next week.

But it begins with the fool. So point one, verse one. So just have a look at the first two lines. He says, The fool says in his heart, there is no God.

You see, the fool denies a reality, in this case, the reality of God's existence. Like an atheist who denies God's existence despite the evidence.

[2 : 3 1] Evidence like creation, as we heard about in the kids' talk. Even if you go for the Big Bang Theory, someone still had to put the two particles that bang together.

I know that's a very unscientific way of putting it. But it has to be a first cause. Even if you go for Stephen Hawking's Black Hole Theory as the first cause, you still need something that's outside of time to kickstart time.

Someone who is eternal, like God. Or think about our creation as humans. Where did our sense of right and wrong come from? Most atheists are naturalists.

That is, they only go for what is in nature and natural and do not believe in anything supernatural like God. And so everything we are has just evolved from the natural.

But if so, where do the morals come from? Because there are no morals governing nature. The lion doesn't say to the gazelle, oh, I'm sorry to hear you're having a bad day today.

[3 : 32] Look, I'll rest up tonight. I'll come back tomorrow when you can run faster and make it a fair fight. No, no, no. The law of nature is survival of the fittest or fastest. And so where did our sense of morality come from, if not from God?

The point is, as we heard with the kids' talk, creation does speak. It is evidence, not proof, but it is evidence for God. As Paul says in Romans chapter 1, for example, Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, like his eternal power, being outside time to create time, his divine nature, being God, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, created, so that people are without excuse.

Of course, what may be known about God from creation, while as we heard there is a fair bit, like, you know, he's generous to give us so many different kinds of things and so on, it's still limited.

Limited to those things that we can glean on our own observation skills. And so the best evidence we have, as we also heard in the kids' talk, is really Jesus, who walked on earth in history, for whom we have historical evidence for his life, his miracles, his death, and his resurrection.

[5 : 01] Who, as we heard in the kids' talk as well, said, If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. And so we can know a lot more about God, and whose account and life is written for us in the Bible.

Which is why you always want to point people to Jesus in the Bible, so that they can best know God. But the fool denies the reality of all this evidence, and thus the reality of God's existence.

And yet, did you notice in verse 1, this denial is not so much in their head, rather the fool says in his heart. Most atheists I meet just don't want to consider the evidence, because they simply don't want, with their hearts, to believe.

In other words, it's not so much a head issue, usually, it's a heart issue. Which is why, along with pointing to our non-Christian friends and family, pointing them to Jesus in the Bible when we're able, we also need to keep praying for them, that God would soften their hearts.

But this also means that the fool is not just the atheist or the agnostic. It's also those who claim to believe in God with their mouths, but deny God with their lives.

[6 : 23] Because their lives, their actions, actually show what they really believe in their heart, after all. I remember going on a beach mission, and we were going around to the caravan park, the campers, and just inviting them to some Christian events that were running.

And we got chatting to, or the person I was with, got chatting to a couple who were living on site in this caravan park. They had a little unit there. And she happened to mention, oh, I have a Bible.

It's on the shelf just here. And I said, oh, that's great. Do you ever read it? Oh, no, no, no. I just like having it there on the shelf, next to my Koran, and something else, and something else.

They were having an each way bet, you see. They didn't really believe Christianity was true, but just in case. At the point of the story is, their occasional action showed what they really believed in their heart, that God wasn't really true.

Maybe, but maybe not. You see, our heart and actions are connected. Our heart shapes our actions, and so therefore our actions show what's really in our heart.

[7 : 33] Which is why David now moves from what the fool says in his heart to his actions in life. Do you see the rest of verse 1? These fools, well, they are corrupt, and their ways, their actions are vile.

There is no one who does good. The fools corrupt. That is, their ways are not always good. They sometimes do bad, and even when they do good, it's also corrupt, because it's done with mixed motives and the like.

What's more, their ways are vile, we're told. The word vile here often refers to things that are particularly offensive to God. An abomination is sometimes how the word is translated.

Things like serving other gods above God. God. Whether our gods and idols are family, or money, or laziness, that doesn't seem too vile to us, but to put anything above the true God really is a slap in the face.

It really is vile and offensive to him. And so, this is the fool. You know, not this guy, although we think he's very foolish on TV, he does lots of silly things, but this guy, actually.

[8 : 44] Richard Dawkins, who says, there is no God, so he can live his way. And yet, the sting in the tail is it's actually us too.

Because did you notice at the end of verse 1, David says that no one, there is no one who does good. Which leads us then to God's assessment of who's the fool.

Point to verse 2. God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. And what's his assessment? Verse 3.

Everyone has turned away. All have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. And so, who's the fool?

Everyone. Everyone. Everyone has turned away from the reality of God. All people have become corrupt. No one is completely good, not even one.

[9 : 46] These are the verses that we heard quoted in our second reading, where Paul makes the same point from Romans 3, where he says, Jew and Gentile. Remember, Gentiles are just non-Jews. So, you're a Jew or a Gentile, one or the other.

All people are sinners. Everyone's a sinner because everyone has turned away. No one has done good, he quotes Psalm 53 here.

And so, again, who's the fool? Well, at this point, everyone. And yet, no sooner has David said this that he then makes a distinction between fools and God's people.

Have a look at verse 4. He says, Do all these evildoers know nothing? They devour my people, as though eating bread. They never call on God.

But there they are, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread. God scattered the bones of those who attacked you. You put them to shame, for God despised them. And so here, in verse 4, there seems to be a distinction between those foolish evildoers and a group of people who are my people, who are God's people, David's people.

[10 : 59] So verse 4, the fool is the evildoer who knows nothing. That is, who knows nothing about themselves, that they are actually fools who would deny God, facing judgment.

Who knows nothing about God himself. They have no personal relationship with God, don't know him personally. And instead, they attack and devour God's people.

Devour them, verse 4, attack them, verse 5. And they never call on God themselves. And so their destiny is to be overwhelmed with dread, to be put to shame by God's people, and to be despised by God himself.

Just as an aside, this psalm is almost identical to Psalm 14 in the Bible. The biggest difference is verse 5. At this point in Psalm 14, it speaks about the persecution of the poor in particular.

But here in 4 and 5, it speaks about the persecution of all God's people who are attacked by these fools who know nothing. And so while we're all fools in the sense that we've all at some point said in our hearts there is no God, whether we've expressed it verbally with our words like the atheist, you know, overtly, or whether we've expressed it covertly with our actions.

[12 : 18] We've all done that at some point. But there seems to be another group who were once fools but are now part of God's people, who do know God, who have called on God.

But they remain some who continue to be fools because they have not. Instead, they seek to devour God's people now and will face judgment later.

And it's the same today, isn't it? We Christians never claimed to be perfect. You know how some people call Christians hypocrites and they say, you know, you think you're perfect.

Actually, we never claimed to be perfect to start with. We, in fact, confess that we were once fools. And, in fact, sometimes we even fall back into foolish ways by denying God's existence with our actions.

But we have called on God to be saved, saved from being fools who face judgment. And so we can claim to know God. We can claim to be God's people, which is a great act of grace, actually, when you think about it.

[13 : 27] You know, that God would take fools like us and make us his people. Freely for us, but at the great expense of his only son.

And that's how our second reading ended, actually. He says, for we have all fallen short of God's glories. We were all once fools, but he has made us freely, or put us right, or justified us freely by his grace through the redemption that came, not from us, but by Christ Jesus.

And so to go from fools who have fallen short of God's glory to being God's forgiven, precious people at no cost to us, but at the great cost to Christ, well, it's a great act of grace or generosity, isn't it?

But like God's people in David's day, we will sometimes be attacked or persecuted by those who remain fools in our day, whether it's in the workplace, or on social or mainstream media, or in TV shows.

You would notice these days we're on a TV show, if there is a Christian character, a character who's a Christian, are they always presented positively or negatively? You would notice this, they're always an idiot or a baddie or something.

[14 : 50] Someone even said to me after the 9am service that they've noticed that they follow rugby union and some of the union players are Christians, but he's noticed that whenever they go to say something Christian on TV, they're cut off by the cameraman or the channel or edited out or whatever it is.

But here's the thing, they may call us fools for believing in Jesus, but the reality is, sadly, they are fools who know nothing of God nor the judgment they will sadly face.

In the meantime, until God judges and puts all things right, we may well be attacked more and more even here in Melbourne. We've seen it over these past years, haven't we, from the removal of CRE in the school timetable a few years ago to the Essendon saga last year.

And it's not just us here, it's much more severe for people overseas, isn't it? And many Christians are still imprisoned and killed even today. And yet we also know a time is coming, as I said, when God will save us from all these fools and restore this world as well as his people.

And so we are to rejoice. Point three, verse six. David says, Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion. When God restores his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.

[16 : 19] And David longs for salvation to come from Zion. Zion is another name for Jerusalem. It's where God was dwelling in the tabernacle as it was then. The temple wasn't quite built yet.

And so David is saying, Oh, that salvation would come from God for Israel, for his people. And this salvation not only means saving them from being attacked by these fools, but also restoring them, restoring their fortunes, as another translation says, bringing not only peace, but also prosperity, which David is actually confident God will do.

Because you notice there, David doesn't say if God restores his people, he says, when God restores his people.

In other words, he's certain it will come. He just doesn't know when. It's a matter of time. And when it does, let Jacob, another name for Israel, rejoice and be glad. You see, it's about rejoicing at restoration.

But for us as Christians, we can already start to rejoice. Because our salvation and restoration has already begun. Peter writes this in 1 Peter chapter 1.

[17 : 33] He says, though you have not seen Christ, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. I mean, it's a fair bit of joy, isn't it?

Why? Well, for, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Peter says, our salvation is in process.

We are receiving it. Yes, we have been saved already spiritually, but not yet physically. But it's on the way. It's in process. It's like we've got one foot in God's kingdom spiritually.

And the other foot, the physical foot, will follow later. We will definitely enter physically that kingdom when Jesus returns to complete our salvation and restoration, to put this world right where there'll be no more persecution from fools, but only complete peace and prosperity.

But because it's already begun, then our rejoicing can already begin. That's the point. When we're away up in New South Wales, we're catching up with family members, including my sister and brother-in-law, who've just bought a block of land to build their dream house on.

[18 : 54] It's all very exciting. The place they're living at the moment is quite small and he, my brother-in-law, works from home and sometimes my sister had to leave the house so he can take important phone, video calls and things like that.

The kids are living on top of each other, particularly in school holidays. So she's looking forward to the school starting back. But she took us to look at this block, which is a patch of dirt with a retaining wall.

That was it. I had to remind myself to be more excited. But she was filled with a glorious and inexpressible joy because for her this dream house was her salvation, sense of life and it had already begun.

The block was already bought. It was on the way to being fulfilled. I hope you can see the point. How much more so are we to be filled with a glorious and inexpressible joy because our salvation and restoration has already begun in Christ.

It's already in process. And so even if we are persecuted from fools these days, we still have reason to rejoice.

[20 : 08] And so how does this help us not be a fool this year? Well, I've got a few things on your outline there. The first is to call on God to be saved. Otherwise, you will remain fools who deny the reality of God in your hearts.

And so the first question is, have you done that? Have you made that commitment to become a Christian, in other words? Have you called on God to forgive you? Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ to save you?

for us who have, then second, are we still thankful for God's grace or generosity? You know, that took us fools and made us his precious people.

All at Christ's expense, not ours. Are we thankful for his grace that saved a wretch like me, you? Thirdly, and I think perhaps from this passage it's the bigger one, application, as God's people then, don't go back to being a fool.

Don't go back to denying God's existence in your hearts by your words or your actions. Like perhaps with choices you make. Now, do the choices you make show that in your heart you really believe there is a God who is God of your life?

[21 : 32] Or do your actions show that you don't really believe it in your heart? Take choices. I was chatting with a couple of church members last week who moved house yesterday.

Moving house is a big deal, right? I've done it a few times, it's exhausting. And so I said to them, oh, well, look, I might not see you on Sunday because I'm pretty sure you'll be exhausted. To which they reply with a great note of surprise, oh, no, no, we're not going to miss out worshipping together at church will be there.

The thought never entered their mind and they are here in this service here today. You see, for them, meeting with God and his family was much more important than moving house.

Don't mishear me, I'm not saying you can't ever miss church, that's not the point. The point is God, their actions showed that they really believed in their hearts that God was God of their life and so they lived in light of his reality.

Or we can deny God's existence by a lack of our prayer life. It's so easy to forget God during the week and not keep calling on God in prayer. I've done it, I'm sure we all have done it.

[22 : 44] And whether that's calling on God for forgiveness when we do fall back into foolish ways or calling on God for help if it's something we're facing in life or help to follow him as we heard with the kids talk.

And when we do pray it's also so easy to deny his existence in our hearts by falling into the trap of being God ourselves.

You know, when we pray and get frustrated that God doesn't answer my prayer now, how I want, when I want, as though I'm God and he's not. But when we do that with our actions we're really saying in our hearts that he's not God, that he doesn't have the right to decide, that he doesn't have our best interests at heart, that he doesn't really know what he's doing.

Don't go back to being a fool who denies the reality of our good God in our hearts by our actions in our lives. And so if you don't want to be a fool this year, then first make sure you've called upon God to be saved.

And second, be thankful for God's grace that made us fools his people. Thirdly, as his people don't go back to being a fool. Denying God's existence in our hearts by how we live in our lives.

[24 : 00] And fourthly and finally, rejoice that our restoration has already begun. So even when we are persecuted by those who remain fools in our world, we can still rejoice.

Can't we? Let's pray that we would. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder of reality from this psalm that all people, including us at one time, are fools.

Anyone who denies the reality of you is a fool. But we thank you for your amazing grace that took us fools and made us your precious people. Help us, we pray, as your people to not fall back into living foolish ways that deny your existence in our lives by our actions and choices and prayer life and the like.

Help us, we pray, to live in light of your reality, including rejoicing that our salvation and restoration has already begun. Help us in this, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.