

Psalm 36: Precious Love

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[0 : 0 0] Well if we could, this evening with the Lord's help, the Lord's guidance, if we could turn back to that favourite psalm, Psalm 36, Psalm 36 and if we read again at verse 5, Psalm 36 and verse 5. Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds, your righteousness is like the mountains of God, your judgments are like the great deep, man and beast you save, O Lord, how precious is your steadfast love, O God, the children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings, they feast on the abundance of your house and you give them drink from the river of your delights, for with you is the fountain of life, in your light do we see light. How precious is your steadfast love,

O God. I don't know about you but I wanted to say that when I come to the psalm I think about when you watch those TV programmes and they show renovation works or upgrades to homes, you know the programmes like DIY SOS or Real Rooms or occasionally I'm enabled to watch when the kids programmes aren't on, you can watch Homes Under the Hammer and I'm sure that you've seen these, all these programmes before or similar programmes to these things and I like watching them because the team on the programme, they take a house or a room or sometimes it's a garden and they completely transform it and they transform it from being this old, outdated and impractical space to something that's new and modern and fit for purpose. But the best part of all these DIY programmes is the very, very end, just before the programme ends. It's just before they reveal to you the outcome of that transformation. They've done all the work through the programme but right at the end they're going to reveal it to you, what the big change that's taken place. But before they reveal to you the change that's taken place, they remind you of what it was like before, right at the very beginning. They remind you of the drab decor and the clutter and all the impracticalities of the house and then they reveal what the house looks like now.

They give you a before and after shot. And as you know, having watched all these programmes, it's a complete turnaround. The room or the house or the garden, it looks completely different to the way it did before. It's a complete transformation. A complete transformation.

And you know, when we come to Psalm 36, I believe that that's the message which David is trying to get across to us. He presents to us the before and after shot of the Christian. That's what he presents to us, the before and after shot of the Christian. He tells us what every Christian was like before they came to know the Lord. And then he tells us what every Christian is like after they have come to know the Lord. And in effect, you could say that David is telling the testimony of every Christian. And by considering the before and after shots, well, we can see the change. We'll see the change as we go through this Psalm. Now, I know that not everyone has a dramatic conversion.

And not everyone can pinpoint a time and a place and a moment when they were converted, when that transformation took place. In fact, most people can't because it's usually a gradual experience, whether it's their conversion was over months or even over years. And some people don't know when they were converted because they can't even remember a time when they didn't love the

[4 : 3 0] Lord or a time when they didn't love the Lord's people or when they didn't want to follow the Lord's people or follow the Lord. And because of that, they can sometimes think that they don't have a testimony to tell. But that's not true because our testimony is not just our point of conversion.

Our testimony is ongoing because as Christians, we are still testifying, still testifying tonight. The fact you came here tonight shows that you are still testifying to the work of God's Spirit in your heart. You're still testifying to the Lord's salvation in your life. And so whether our conversion was gradual or sudden, there is a transformation. It's a transformation which has been from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from lostness to hope. And that's what we see in Psalm 36.

This transformation, the before and after shot. Because at the beginning of the Psalm, David describes what every Christian looked like before they came to know the Lord. And I want to, you

can put it under the heading of that we had embraced prodigal living. But then he says that when we came to the end of ourselves, we embraced precious love. And then having embraced precious love, we now have a personal longing. So there are the three headings this evening. Prodigal living, precious love, and personal longing.

Prodigal living, precious love, personal longing. So we look firstly at prodigal living. Prodigal living. Read again in verse 1 with me. He says, Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes.

For he flatters himself in his own eyes, that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. He has ceased to act wisely and do good.

[6 : 41] He plots trouble while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not reject evil. And I suppose that when we use a title such as prodigal living, we are immediately reminded, are we not, of the well-known parable of the prodigal son. Where the younger son, he asked for the portion of his father's inheritance, which was due to him when his father died. And the younger son, he went off to the far country to squander everything, squander all his inheritance on prodigal living, on reckless and wasteful living. And that's what David presents to us in these verses. He presents to us a mirror image of what we were like when we were still strangers to grace and to God. He reminds us of our spiritual condition before we experienced the transforming power of the gospel in our lives. And you know, it's always good to be reminded of where we once were. Because far too often we can become self-righteous and hypocritical of those who are still outside of Christ. And the reason for that is because we can forget so quickly that without God's grace and without the transforming power of the gospel, that we would be there ourselves. We would still be in that state of darkness and sin ourselves. And so we should never forget that. We should never forget, as Isaiah puts it, I love the way he puts it, never forget the rock from which we were hewn, or the hole from which we were dug. We should never forget that we too came from the fearful pit and from the mighty clay. And that it was only the Lord who took us out and set our feet upon the rock, establishing our way. And so it's good to be reminded and given a before shot, a before shot of what we were like when we were without grace and without hope in the world.

And what a picture it is. Because David says that without grace in our heart, there was no thought of God. With God's word, it wasn't on our heart and on our mind to challenge us and make us think about the way we lived our lives. And instead of God's word being on our heart and in our mind, David says that transgression was there. Transgression. He says, transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. And when you think about it, what a way to begin a psalm. To begin with the word transgression. That's, he's bringing us right to the before shot, right to the very beginning. Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. And the word transgression, it's one of those words in the Bible to describe sin. Because there is transgression, iniquity and sin. We heard that in Bill's prayer. He quoted Psalm 51.

I know Psalm 51 very well because it's my favourite Psalm. But transgression, iniquity and sin. They're three words to describe sin. And transgression, as with all wrongdoing, it has this active desire to have your own way. It's a desire to do what you like doing and doing what you want to do. And it involves making a deliberate choice of your own heart and mind despite knowing the right thing to do. It's a willful and deliberate act of disobedience. Transgression is a violation of authority. Because as with all disobedience, transgression begins with I. I want, I need, I will have. And it all revolves around self. And in comparison to iniquity and sin, transgression is the most outward aspect of wrongdoing. Because it signifies walking across or stepping over the boundary line.

[11 : 09] Where we cross the boundary line which God has set in his word and we commit an act of trespass. And that's what happened in the Garden of Eden right at the beginning when God had set out all the parameters for Adam and Eve to live within. And it's not that Adam and Eve didn't have space to move.

They had all the space they needed. Everything was good for food except the three in the midst of the garden. And God said to them, every three of the garden you may freely eat. But the three of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it. For in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.

So the boundary was set. The parameters were given. The law was given. Adam and Eve knew what they could do and they knew what they couldn't do. But they transgressed the law of God. Adam transgressed.

He crossed the boundary. And David says that that was our starting point in the world. That was our starting point. Because we began life as transgressors. As the Catechism puts it, we sinned in Adam.

And we fell with Adam in his first transgression. And with this David explains that the reason there was transgression at all is because we didn't fear God. There is no fear of God before his eyes. [12:37] Adam didn't fear God. Adam undermined God's authority. If you eat of the tree, you shall surely be like God's. That's what Satan told them. And so they desired to be like God. They didn't fear God.

And this is all interesting because Paul actually quotes the second half of this verse in Romans chapter 3. And in Romans chapter 3, Paul is speaking about our sinful nature, our original state. And he's explaining that the problem of sin is not confined to a certain nation or group of people. He says sin is a universal problem. And a problem that not even Jewish circumcision can cover, he says. And throughout Romans chapter 3, Paul quotes verse after verse from the Old Testament to back up the claim that there is none righteous, no, not one.

And Paul's argument for our sinful nature, it continues all the way through, quoting this verse that there's no fear of God. And then he comes down to one of the most well-known verses in the Bible that affirms our original state. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

And of course, Paul's statement is an illustration of what sin is. Because if transgression is crossing the forbidden boundary line, then sin is missing the mark. That's what sin means. Sin is to fall short of the standard which God has set in his law. It's the image of the archer firing the bow towards the target and the arrow doesn't even reach the target at all. It misses the target completely. It falls short. And so the target which God has set, which is perfection and holiness, he says that we fall short.

Our original state is that we fall short of the mark. We miss the mark completely. We fall short of the glory of God. But you know, David not only describes our prodigal living prior to conversion using the words transgression and sin, we see in the following verses that he uses the word iniquity. He says in verse 2, And when we consider what iniquity means, we have to see that iniquity, it goes deeper, far deeper than transgression and sin. Because transgression is the outward crossing of the boundary line in God's law.

[15:40] Sin is falling short of the law of God. But iniquity, iniquity is this inward reality that there is a crookedness and a perverseness in the human heart. Where our hearts are full of iniquity, they're twisted and bent and perverted because iniquity comes from a heart that is out of alignment with the law of God.

It was Jesus who said, Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

These, says Jesus, are what defile a person. And so in only a few verses, David has described the corruption and depravity of our nature.

That we began life as transgressors. Where we sinned in Adam, we fell with Adam in his first transgression. And because of Adam's sin, we all fell short of the glory of God.

And the result was that we were conceived in iniquity and our hearts were crooked and perverse. But you know, it was Jesus who said that it was out of that crooked and perverse heart that the mouth speaks.

[17:05] But what does the mouth of the unconverted say? What does the heart which is full of transgression, sin and iniquity, what does it say? Well, David says that the mouth of the person without grace flatters self.

Without grace in their heart, they flatter self and deceive themselves into thinking that their sin is not that bad. And therefore, it's not a priority to deal with.

Because without a true relationship with the Lord, they don't view themselves for who they really are. And they don't acknowledge their sin.

Instead, pride and self-sufficiency rule their motives and dominate their character. And because they don't fear God, David says, The words of his mouth are trouble or iniquity and deceit.

He has ceased to act wisely and do good. But more than that, all they think about and all that consumes their mind is their own future in this world.

[18:14] Because he says in verse 4, He plots trouble while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not reject evil.

David says that what fills their thoughts, and what filled our thoughts, when we were without grace and without Christ in the world, what filled our minds was the things of this world.

That's what we filled our mind with. Where we were always planning. Lying on our beds, he says. Planning. Instead of thinking about the goodness of God, and the faithfulness of God, and reading from his word, and seeing the promises of God, while lying in our beds.

David says that when we were without grace, we were just planning for the future. Planning what to do this week, what to do next week, what to do in this coming year. What our next project was going to be.

And these things consumed our mind, because we never had a thought towards God, or eternity, or the things of Christ. And if we did, it was only momentary.

[19 : 26] It didn't last. Because we were content in our sin. We were happy in our condition. Blinded by all the things, and all the people around us.

And continually deceiving ourselves, into thinking that we were better, than we actually were. But it didn't matter how much we deceived ourselves, and others.

The truth was, we were like the prodigal son, in our prodigal living. In our selfish nature, and self-centeredness, we thought we could squander the inheritance, of our heavenly father, and live as we pleased.

But as those who are now sitting in church, on a Wednesday evening, we can see the wonder of his care, and love towards us. That he brought us to the end of ourselves.

He brought us to the end of self. And he made us see our need, and turned to him for help. And like the prodigal, when we sought the Lord, we thought that we could, just like the prodigal did, he thought that in some way, he could repay the debt, that he had accumulated.

[20 : 46] Make me one of your hired servants. That's what the prodigal wanted. But instead, when we returned home, we came to discover, how precious the love of the Lord, really is.

And that's what David describes to us, in the second section. He's described prodigal living, but secondly we see precious love. Precious love.

He says, Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God. Your judgments are like the great deep.

Man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God. The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

And in the parable of the prodigal son, you'll remember that when the prodigal came to the end of himself and he returned home, he was met by the father running towards him.

[21 : 53] That's how Jesus describes it. The father was running towards his son. And even after all that the prodigal had done and the way he had ruined his life with prodigal living, the son was embraced by his father with precious love.

And we read in Luke's gospel, in chapter 15, that when the father saw him and had compassion, he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the father said to his servants, bring out the best robe and put it on him.

Put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf here and kill it. And let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. So the son of prodigal living was embraced by precious love. And as you know, that's the experience of every son and daughter.

Of the father. We have been embraced by the precious love of God. And yes, we're still transgressors and we still commit iniquity and sin and we still faint and fail and we still let the Lord down in so many different ways.

[23 : 11] But what's different? What has caused our transformation in our lives? What has brought us from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from lostness to hope?

What has given to us that before and after shot is that the precious love of the Lord has been revealed to us. And where we once committed transgression and sin and iniquity, when we committed it without, we once committed it without a second thought.

But now we view these things as violations against God, the God we love and the God we worship. Where we once spent our time on selfish things and focused upon selfish gain, flattering ourselves with our own self-righteousness and wisdom, lying upon our beds, planning for the future with no thought of eternity.

But now, now although we are still learning and still being shaped and taught, now things are different. Because we now see that time is precious.

Life is precious. God's word is precious. Jesus is precious. And it's all because the Lord's love has been made precious to us.

[24 : 30] And this is what David affirms to us here. He says, Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God.

Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. And when David speaks here about the love of the Lord and the faithfulness of the Lord and the righteousness of the Lord and the judgments of the Lord and the salvation of the Lord, when he speaks here, he's using the language of covenant.

It's covenantal language. Which means that our salvation and all the benefits of it, they're not a result of our own actions and our efforts.

It's all because God in his love and out of his own good pleasure chose to make a covenant, a binding promise, a promise that was not dependent upon our faithfulness to God but upon his faithfulness to us.

Which means that the covenant which God made with his people, it's unconditional, it's unchanging, it remains constant because he remains faithful. And this is the greatest assurance of our salvation tonight.

[25 : 50] That our salvation is sure not because of what we have done or who we are or how we feel about the Lord or our prayer life or how our walk with the Lord is going.

Our salvation is sure because there is nothing, absolutely nothing we can do to make God love us any more than he already does and nothing we can do to make us, God love us any less.

His love is unchanging towards us. He loves us as much today as he will in eternity. That's a thought.

It won't change. And my friend, our salvation is sure tonight all because God's covenant love has been revealed and demonstrated to us, demonstrated through the death and the resurrection of his son.

And because of who God is and what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, this covenant, he says, it has no boundaries. It has no restrictions.

[26 : 57] It has no limits. It's like God himself, infinite, eternal and unchangeable. And that's what David says. Your steadfast love, O Lord, it extends to the heavens.

Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God. Your judgments are like the great deep oceans. And man and beast, across the breadth and length of the world, you save them.

Salvation belongs to you. There are no boundaries to your love. No limits to your faithfulness. No restrictions to your righteousness and judgments. There are no parameters around your salvation, he says.

Because it extends to the height, length and breadth and depth of this world. And you know, when you read the New Testament, it's amazing how many times Paul is picking up on the Psalms and what the Psalms are saying.

Because when Paul writes to the Ephesians, he wants them to understand the preciousness of God's love for them, even in the midst of trials and temptation.

[28 : 15] And Paul says to the Ephesians, I'm praying for you. I'm praying for you. And you know, it's good to tell people that you're praying for them. If you're praying for somebody, tell them.

It's good to tell them. And Paul was saying, I'm praying for you that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height of God's love and to know that the love of Christ which passes all knowledge, that you may know it and that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

And that's what we have discovered in Jesus Christ. We have discovered the precious love of God. We have discovered the precious love of God. A love that has been demonstrated to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And does it not leave you saying with David, realising what we have in Christ. Does it not leave you saying with David, as he says in verse 7, how precious is your steadfast love, O God.

How precious it is. The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house. And you give them drink from the river of your delights.

[29 : 41] For with you is the fountain of life. In your light do we see light. And you know, it's all a picture of protection and blessing. Blessing upon blessing.

Given to those who have come to discover and confess that the love of God in Jesus Christ is beyond their asking and beyond their thinking. And was that not the illustration which Jesus gave when the prodigal son returned home to the father?

Where the prodigal son he discovered when he came home the unconditional and the undeserved love of the father. And in the father's house the prodigal found protection and blessing. He found refuge and safety in the embrace and the kiss of his father and he found shelter in the shadow of his arms.

But more than that the prodigal experienced blessing. Blessing he didn't earn or deserve. And yet he was as David says here the prodigal was able to feast on the abundance of his father's house and drink from the rivers of his pleasures.

[30 : 59] Because for the son of the prodigal living precious love was displayed. It was displayed to him as the servants then brought out the best robe put it on him.

They put a ring on his hand sandals on his feet they brought out the fattened calf and killed it. And in this act the father he was he was the source of it all.

He was the one who was calling the servants to do it. He was the source of love and forgiveness and protection and blessing which was being shown towards the prodigal.

It all stemmed from the father. And that's what David is saying to us. He says that the source of salvation the source of precious love it's not in himself but in his loving heavenly father.

With you he says is the fountain of life in your light do we see light. And with this there's the contrast between the unbeliever and the believer because the contrast is between light and darkness.

[32 : 09] there was a day in our experience when we were in darkness. We didn't know where we were going. We were walking according to the course of this world and to our shame we loved the darkness rather than the light.

But when we were brought to the end of ourselves when we were made to see the love of God in Jesus Christ we returned to the father. We were adopted in the family.

We were made sons and daughters of the king. Joint heirs and heirs with Christ. And in that moment there was rejoicing. Rejoicing.

And the source of that rejoicing was all because the father had shown his love his forgiveness his protection and his blessing towards the prodigal.

And you know I love that statement in the parable when the father said about the prodigal son this my son was dead but is alive again.

[33 : 11] He was lost and is found. And when a son or a daughter of prodigal living comes to discover the love of the father there is rejoicing.

There's rejoicing in their own heart. There's rejoicing amongst the people of God. but as Jesus says in the parable before the prodigal son the parable of the lost coin there's rejoicing in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents.

And it not only causes the returned and transformed prodigals to confess how precious is your steadfast love.

love. But you know this transformation it reminds the prodigals who returned and were transformed maybe 10 20 30 40 years ago.

It reminds them of how precious is your steadfast love O God. That transformation whenever you see a transformation of darkness to light in someone that's what it always ought to remind you how precious is your steadfast love O God.

[34 : 37] But as we conclude this wonderful psalm we can see that after a prodigal has come to the end of self having been embraced by the precious love of God they now have a personal longing.

And that's what we see in these closing verses David describes what should be the personal longing of every Christian. The personal longing he says in verse 10 O continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your righteousness to the upright of heart let not the foot of arrogance come upon me nor the hand of the wicked drive me away there the evildoers lie fallen they are thrust down unable to rise.

So David concludes this psalm by expressing the personal longing which ought to be in the heart of every Christian because having considered what we once were without grace and without God in our lives having considered prodigal living our prodigal living before the transforming power of the

gospel came into our experience and then having considered what we are now in and through Jesus Christ and the precious love of God which has embraced us and touched our lives David indicates now to us what ought to be our personal longing he presents to us what ought to be the prayer of every Christian oh continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your righteousness to the upright of heart and with this David asks or he directs us to ask the Lord to continue with us to continue with us as individuals and as a body of God's people that we would continue to ask the Lord to draw near to us that we would continue to ask the Lord to keep us close to himself and to keep us clinging to his promises and to keep us laying hold of his word and that the Lord would not forsake us but continually remind us of his steadfast love his covenant love which he has revealed to us so that we would continue to grow in our knowledge of the Lord and our love for him and our obedience to his word and David says that we're to pray like this because all too often and all too easily we can become complacent in our Christianity we can lose sight of what's important and what's of priority and we can take our eyes off Jesus and we can begin to think that well we can go on our own we can go on our own maybe for a few days we can do it ourselves without the Lord just now without depending upon the Lord and asking for his help and we can lose sight of our need for his grace and his mercy and his abounding love and when we do that we're just becoming self righteous we're becoming self righteous and arrogant and proud and that's why David says in verse 11 let not the foot of arrogance come upon me nor the hand of the wicked drive me away there the evildoers lie fallen they are thus down unable to rise and what David is saying is that our personal longing as a Christian should be to ask the Lord don't let me become arrogant don't let me become complacent and take your grace for granted don't allow me to forget your salvation and the pit that you have pulled me from the hole from which you have dug me out of don't let me lose sight of your precious love don't let me think and live like the wicked don't permit me to fall into the trap of the unrighteous don't let me go back to my old ways and my old paths now he's saying no [38 : 52] Lord continue to show me your love every day continue to remind me of your covenant continue to encourage me with your promises continue to listen to my prayers continue to speak to me through your word continue to challenge me and shape me and teach me and mold me and fashion me so that I become more and more like your son Jesus continue to show me your precious love so that I will be enabled to keep going and know that you are with me that you will never leave me that you will never forsake me that says David should be our personal longing oh continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your righteousness to the upright of heart and so what David is showing us in the psalm is a transformation that takes place in the heart of every Christian he's shown us that what we were all like before we came to know the

Lord where we were sons and daughters of prodigal living but after we came to know the Lord we experienced the power and grace of the gospel we were embraced by the precious love of God in Jesus Christ but as David concluded he reminds us as those who have been transformed that the personal our personal longing it should be that we never forget our past of prodigal living and that we will always consider the precious love of the father as something that is so so precious and so our confession knowing that that is the transformation our confession to an onlooking world should always be as it is in verse 7 how precious is your steadfast love

O God may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray Lord oh gracious God we give thanks to thee for the reminder this evening of what we once were and what we now are in and through thy son Jesus we marvel Lord that the transformation took place at all we thank thee that thou art the God who begun that good work in us and has promised to bring it on to completion in the day of Christ Jesus that we are those who were plucked as a brand from the burning that we have been brought from darkness unto thine own marvelous light that we have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious and Lord help us we pray thee in our sojourn here never to lose sight of the preciousness of thy love and the wonder of thy salvation that we would always look at ourselves and say with the psalmist that this is the doing of the Lord and wondrous in our eyes oh bless us Lord we pray remember us in our own souls and in our own homes and our own families keep us Lord we pray thee remember especially those who are struggling those who are weak that thou wouldst lift them up help us to bear one another's burdens help us Lord to remind each other to pray for each other to remind one another of how precious thy love is towards us oh do us good then we pray go before us in all that we say and do and cleanse us and take away our iniquity and receive us graciously for Jesus sake amen we shall conclude by singing in that psalm in psalm 36

psalm 36 we're singing from verse 5 down to the verse mark 9 page 251 the scottish psalter psalm 36 from verse 5 thy mercy lord is in the heavens thy truth doth reach the clouds thy justice is like mountains great thy judgments deep as floods lord thou preservest man and beast how precious is thy grace therefore in shadow of thy wings men's sons their trust shall place down to the verse mark 9 of psalm 36 to god's praise thy mercy thy mercy lord is in the heavens thy truth doth reach the clouds thy justice say what deserve

O How precious is thy grace.

[44 : 35] Therefore in shadow of thy wings, men's songs their trust shall place.

They with the fatness of thy house shall be well satisfied.

From rivers of thy pleasures thou wilt drink to them provide.

Because of life the fountain pure remains alone with thee.

And in the purest light of thy we clearly light shall see.

[45 : 48] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.