

## It's A Choice: This or That Psalm 36:1-12

It's been quite an endeavor going through all of Dad's belongings sorting out what to keep, what to give away and what to throw out. Everything has some kind of history or story behind them.

There was a painting done by a friend after Dad spent several weeks in the hospital. He really liked it, so she recreated it on canvas leaving out one detail to avoid copyright infringement.

Most of his books were presents for birthdays, Father's Day, or Christmas.

There was a Bible given to him by his grandmother in 1956, the year before he was saved.

Another Bible was given in 1960 for his birthday by my brothers and me. We were 2 and the youngest at the time was 2 months.

There's the .22 pistol mom got him for a wedding present. Three days after they were married they went to the judge to get it registered. The judge jokingly said "so, married three days ago and now you're buying a gun."

There's the custom built 1894 lever action Winchester rifle that belonged to my great-grandfather.

In a jewelry box that belonged to my mom there was her Youth for Christ pin, a medal from 1955 with her name on it from the Babe Ruth sportsmanship foundation for softball and then there was Dad's wedding ring.

We can look at them and know there was a specific day and reason for them.

These and many more items are time stamps to a past era in their lives providing a window into their history.

But there are things that we have no idea about the why or when behind them. In mom's jewelry box were two small plastic boxes with the word "keepsake" on the outside. Inside each were identical rings. We are clueless as to their significance. We are left to wonder.

As we have wandered through some of the psalms, an inscription at the beginning of many of them provides us with a clue as to the occasion and reason for their writing.

The time David fled from Absalom.

When he got away from Saul and hid in a cave.

When he was in danger at Gath.

When he brought the ark to Jerusalem.

When he confessed his adultery with Bathsheba.

From these headings, we can journey back to those particular events and read about them in I and II Samuel to get the background which provides a clearer understanding of the Psalm itself. We can join with him in feeling his emotions during those trying times. They mirror our own emotions when we are in trouble and help us know how to navigate them by teaching us to trust God and to praise Him.

But the Psalm we will look at today has no such time stamp or specific event in his life for us to better understand the occasion for its writing. It's as if he just looked at culture in general and made a sweeping observation by comparing or contrasting two extremes. On the one hand, there are the wicked and what they are like and how they act. On the other hand, there is God and what He is like in complete contrast to the wicked. It's as if he was laying out two choices: this or that. David gives us generalizations about their respective natures. But again, there is no heading, and neither is there anything in the content or context of the psalm to suggest during what part of his reign it was written.

As we consider **Psalm 36**, we could just as easily conclude that it could have been written at any time in history. The same could have been said a thousand years before he lived, a thousand years after he lived, or even today. The nature of the wicked and the nature of God has not changed.

I can only speak for myself, but in the past as I have read the psalms, I have tended to skip over the headings. They didn't seem to add anything to the body of the text. To me they were like chapter headings which I generally don't pay attention to. And yet, as I have been studying these months in preparation for our messages, I have come to realize the relevance they have for setting the stage for each psalm. And while this particular psalm has no tie to a singular event, the title helps us to better understand the author, which helps us to understand the text. So learn as I have not to skip the heading.

The heading in my Bible reads ***“For the director of music. Of David the servant of the Lord.”***

David is the author and has written this song for the director of music to be sung by the Temple choir.

While that is important, what comes next is of significance: ***“Of David the servant of the Lord.”***

From the Old Testament, we learn that David was a **shepherd**, tending his father’s flocks. We don’t know how many there were. With a bit of sarcasm, his brothers would make us believe there weren’t very many.

We also read that David was a **sovereign** king. Among all the possible candidates in the borders of Israel, it was David whom God selected as king to succeed Saul because he was a man after His own heart. To put it simply, he wanted what God wanted. I think that’s why David could write ***“I delight to do your will, O God”*** or that he took refuge in God. We all know he wasn’t perfect, yet even as king he sought to know and please God. He didn’t let his position go to his head because he knew who was really in control and looked to God to lead him.

The title of this psalm gives us another view of David, that we don’t generally see elsewhere. It describes him as the **servant** of God.

In my devotions this past week I was reading the passage about God’s warning through Samuel what would happen if Israel got what they wanted in demanding a king like the other nations. The king would take some of their land, take some of their crops, take some of their sons and daughters to be his servants: wood choppers and gardeners and herdsmen and cooks and launderers.

I remember as a boy sitting in church during communion. Like ours, the communion table was in the center. There were chairs lined up on both sides where the deacons sat. Behind the communion table was another chair where the pastor sat. Like our church, the deacons were handed a tray, and they distributed the bread and cup. Then they sat down. I don’t remember how they got their elements; I’m guessing the pastor served them. He would then be

seated, and he would say “Deacon so-and-so, would you serve your pastor” and that deacon would get up, take a tray and give the element to the pastor.

Looking back at that, I don’t think he was lording it over the deacon like “I’m the pastor and you need to serve me you lowly deacon.” I believe it was asking the deacon to serve in much the same way as Jesus served the disciples by washing their feet.

As king, I’m sure David had a lot of servants. Yet, here he as king, in a position to order anyone to do anything he asked being described as a servant. A century or so later, his descendant, Jesus, and heir to the throne would say of Himself that He didn’t come to be served but instead to serve and become a ransom for many (**Mark 10:45**). The Creator of the universe was a servant to those He created.

A servant has certain characteristics like humility, dependability, trustworthy, willful obedience, patience, forbearance, awareness, commitment, and stewardship.

Someone described true leadership as servanthood. In the KJV, the word used in **Mark 10:45** is minister. It is translated as servant in other translations and means service given in love. Without love for the object of our service, service becomes a duty or obligation, something that in time may become resentment or bitterness, even hatred or vengefulness, serving because we have to and not because we want to. Instead, Paul will tell us that when we do something, we should do it as if we were serving Christ.

**Is that my true motivation when I serve my spouse, my children, my boss, my co-worker, my neighbor, even someone who is an enemy?**

**So how does this title describing David as the servant of God correlate to the text of this Psalm?**

Let me frame it with something Jesus said and then later stated by Paul.

Jesus said that we can’t serve two masters (**Matthew 6:24**) and later He said that by committing sin, we are a slave to sin (**John 8:34**).

In **Romans 6** Paul said that we ***“have been set free from being a slave to sin and have become slaves of righteousness.”*** When we are saved, the Holy

Spirit empowers us to resist sin and become slaves of righteousness.

In effect, as David writes about the contrast between the character of the wicked and God, he is saying that as a servant he chose to follow God and His righteousness. **So, looking at the characteristics of both, a question as we begin is to ask which one are we serving?**

Notice in **verses 1-4**, the nature of the godless.

## I. THE NATURE OF THE GODLESS – vv. 1-4

In these opening verses, David gives us an overview of the nature of the wicked. He speaks in **verses 1-2** about their attitude within are wicked and in **verses 3-4**, their actions without are wicked.

### A. Their Attitude Within Is Wicked – vv. 1-2

I like how the ESV begins **“Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart.”**

The word speak in other translations is “oracle.” An oracle is a prophetic word given by someone. In the Old Testament, an oracle was generally given by God to a prophet given to a group of people. In this case, David is saying that sin itself is giving the oracle to the heart of the wicked.

There are three terms used in Scripture that are at times used interchangeably, but which actually have some differences.

There is **sin**, which means to miss the mark and is the general term used in Scripture. It is used to describe doing something against God or others, doing something you know is wrong, not doing something you know is right. It generally means to miss God’s standard of what is right. The natural result is a progression of doing wrong. On one occasion Paul referred to his own propensity to sin when he stated **“For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18).**

A second term is **trespass**. Someone has defined it as falling away after being close beside. It speaks of crossing a line we shouldn’t cross or climbing a

fence we shouldn’t climb. Peter committed a trespass in denying Christ.

The third term is the one found in our text. It’s **transgression** and can be defined as rebellion which amounts to being deliberate, willful, arrogant and flagrant in our actions. The person who commits a transgression intentionally chooses to disobey. Knowingly lying or openly disregarding authority are ways we can commit a transgression. When Samson touched the dead lion, he committed a transgression by willfully disobeying his Nazarite vow. David knowingly committed adultery.

**So what is this oracle that transgression is speaking to the heart of the wicked? Verse 1** says their aloofness is evil.

### 1. Their aloofness is evil – v. 1

**“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”**

We are told in Scripture that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (**Proverbs 1:7**) and that to fear the Lord is to hate evil (**Proverbs 8:13**). We are to hold God in awe and reverence for who He is, what He does and what He is capable of doing, especially when it comes to His judgment for sin. But David says the wicked have no fear of God. They knowingly and willingly have no regard for God. They thumb their nose at God daring Him to do something about their rebellion. And when God, from their perspective, doesn’t do anything about their sin, they become even more brazen in their willful disobedience thinking they can get away with it.

We have seen an increase of brazen sin in our country. When pro-Palestinian demonstrators broke into one of the administrative buildings and nothing was done by authorities, demonstrations began on other campuses with greater damage being done.

A friend at the gym where I work out told me that the store where her granddaughter works in Howell was robbed during the day by a bunch of guys who stormed in and looted the place. We are seeing blatant disregard and disrespect for the law across the country. Cities are dropping bail allowing those committing crimes to be back on the street just to do it again.

The illegal immigrant recently involved in the murder of a woman told authorities that he did it because he thought he would get away with it just like back in his home country.

When a person does not fear God, there will be an increase in sinful acts. When that happens, there is no limit to evil.

**Genesis 6:5-6** “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.” They rejected the message of Noah because there was no fear of God.

**Ecclesiastes 8:11** “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.”

Matthew Henry rightly stated that “where there is no fear of God, no good is to be expected.”

The wicked have no concern about God. There is no sense of dread about what He might do.

From the Amplified Bible, **Jeremiah 17:9** is right in saying that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick! Who can know it [perceive, understand, be acquainted with his own heart and mind]?” The heart is desperately wicked.

Without a fear for God, the wicked will commit greater transgression. They don’t care. **Why?** It’s because their arrogance is evil.

## 2. Their arrogance is evil – v. 2

His pride makes him believe that he is accountable to no one. His smugness gives him more confidence to sin, and believes his sin won’t be found out. He has convinced himself that God won’t judge or punish him for his wickedness. They have lost their sense of right and wrong. It is as Scripture says what is good is bad and what is bad is good.

**Romans 1:32** “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these

**very things but also approve of those who practice them.”** They applaud evil.

The Old Testament is replete with examples that no matter how many times a prophet spoke in the name of God against the sins of His people telling them that the continued practice of sin would result in punishment, they just kept right on with their evil. **“There is no fear of God.”**

Where there is no fear of God there is an increase in sin. Where there is no fear of God there is no fear of His punishment.

**Verse 2** says they flatter themselves so much that they can’t, don’t or won’t detect sin or hate the sin they commit. Their attitude within is wicked, which leads to their actions without being wicked as well.

## B. Their Actions Without Are Wicked – vv. 3-4

Jesus said that whatever is in the heart will come out in our words and in our walk. That’s what we see first in **verse 3**.

**1. Their conversation is wicked – v. 3a**  
**“The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise...”**

Where there is wickedness there is always deceit. The wicked will always try to cover up their sin with lying and deception. Deceivers abound.

Several weeks ago some friends from the gym got together for breakfast. One of them was sharing how she had recently switched from an android phone to an iPhone and was having some trouble getting her Facebook account to switch over to her new phone, so she called a number listed as customer service. The person was more than glad to help her get it resolved and needed some information. She was on her computer and he needed her to allow him access through the IP address to see what was going on, so she gave him that information. Next, he needed her birthdate to link with the right account to the new phone. There would be a small fee for services so needed a credit card number. While being helped, her phone rang. It was the fraud department from her bank. The very helpful person had deceived her and made over 100 transactions to various businesses using her information.



David says the deceptive person has lost his wisdom, lost his moral compass when it comes to what comes out of his mouth willingly choosing to lie and deceive, thinking nothing of speaking wicked things because they do not fear God. When we lie or deceive, we have no fear of God and choose to be fools instead. Their conversation is wicked, but then so is their conduct.

## 2. Their conduct is wicked – v. 3b-4

**“The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil, he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.”**

Along with his service at Barakel for 30 years, my Dad also served with the Sheriff’s department for almost 40 years either as a volunteer with the auxiliary team or as a special deputy. One of the things that the Sheriff’s department wanted to do at my Dad’s funeral was have an officers send off following the service. They would stand at attention along the hearse while the casket was loaded and then do the same at the cemetery. Before the service began his pastor wanted to meet with those of us who were speaking to go over the order of service. When the Sheriff mentioned about the officer send off that all the deputies would be in attendance the pastor jokingly asked if crime was going to be put on hold during the service.

Wickedness stops for nothing. It does not sleep. It plots its course of action, scheming about what it will do.

**Verse 4** says he **“commits himself to a sinful course.”**

He has pledged himself to do it. It’s like the 40 men who pledged themselves to ambush Paul and take his life. Instead of meditating on God’s law which provides the correct course of action for one’s life, they lie awake at night thinking about all the wickedness they can do. This kind of Sin is connected with corruption, depravity and lewdness. Again, why? It is because they do not fear God or His punishment.

David paints a very bleak picture of the person who is godless. It is a character or nature that is in complete contrast to that of God’s nature as we see in **verses 5-12**.

## II. THE NATURE OF GOD – vv. 5-12

Where the nature of the wicked is to take whatever they can at the expense of others not caring if their words or actions are evil because they don’t fear God, we see that the nature of God in these verses is to give to others. Whereas the nature of the wicked is reprehensible, the nature of God is righteous. **Out of his nature what does God give us?**

First, we see that from God’s nature, He gives provision for His people.

### A. God Gives Provision For His People – vv. 5-7a, 8-9

These provisions aren’t in the sense of tangible things like food or clothing or shelter. In **Matthew 6** we read that God knows what we need and if we seek Him first then He will provide those daily needs. Instead, David mentions things that are intangible, things that stem from His nature or character. They are things that we can’t necessary see or feel, but rather things that are demonstrated in how He acts towards us. They are things like **His love or mercy (verse 5)**.

Waking up this morning is an expression of His love or mercy.

God not giving us what we deserve is an expression of His love or mercy, something that is new every morning (**Lam. 3:22-23**).

The psalms speak about salvation that comes because of God’s mercy.

**Psalm 51:1-2** reminds us that forgiveness for sin stems from God’s mercy.

In **Psalm 23:6** we are told that God’s mercy follows us all the days of our lives, which we need daily.

And in **Psalm 145:9** we read that His mercies are tender toward all His works.

If there is one thing we can say about the contrast between the wicked and God, it is that the wicked show no mercy but that God extends mercy to those who seek Him. Be grateful that God provides us with mercy. The psalmist says it reaches to the heavens. When we look up into the sky, we are incapable of seeing how far it goes. That’s the height and depth, and width of how far His mercy extends. It is inexhaustible.

Charles Spurgeon writes “**when we can measure the heavens, we can measure God’s mercy.**”

It's the same measurement David uses to describe something else that God provides us with – that is **His faithfulness**, also in **verse 5. Lamentations 3:23** says that His faithfulness is great. Like His other attributes, His faithfulness is unchanging. He can always be counted on to keep His Word. Not one promise will ever fail or fall short.

**Psalm 23** provides us with a summary of God as our shepherd faithfully caring for His sheep.

**Psalm 91:4** says that God’s faithfulness is a shield and protective fortress around us when facing trouble.

A third provision which is essential to the nature of God is **His righteousness**. God could be neither merciful nor faithful if not for His righteousness and He invites us to experience that righteousness through faith in Christ, whose righteousness covers the repentant sinner who admits his sin and need of a Savior. God provides for us a righteousness that we cannot attain or achieve ourselves as **verse 9** tells us that with Him there is this fountain of life. It is the same well of water from which Jesus invited the Samaritan woman to drink from, water that would give everlasting life. Every person is invited to drink from His provision which gives eternal life. The question is whether you will remain parched by drinking from the cesspool of the world that can never satisfy or give what we so desperately need or will we accept His invitation to drink freely of the water of life and receive a righteousness that is not our own but one that is given by God through faith in Christ? Like an unmovable mountain, the righteousness of God is unmovable. It is a righteousness that can never be taken from us.

A fourth provision is **His justice (verse 6b)**. The wicked may believe that God will not act on their sin, they may believe that they are not accountable for their actions. At times we may even wonder why the wicked seem to get away with their sin, but rest assured that God is storing up their wickedness for a day of final judgment, the faithfulness of God assures us of that. There is a day of reckoning, a day when the ledger of God’s justice is opened up and

the gavel of His judgment comes down with their sentence. So when we look around and see that many seem to be getting away with proverbial murder, rest assured that God’s provision of judgment will be meted out. There will be no exceptions, no exemptions, and no excuses. They will be guilty as charged. There will be no slick lawyer in a fancy suit and charismatic personality to sway this judge. God won’t be bribed or bargained with when it comes to His justice. The verdict will be set, the sentence will be swift, and the judgment will be eternal.

David’s words encourage us to look to the judge who is merciful, faithful, and righteous.

Let’s consider one final point about the nature of God seen in these closing verses and that is how God gives protection to His people.

## **B. God Gives Protection To His People – vv. 7b, 10-12**

*This may seem a little ironic, but last week while Robyn was walking around the yard looking at her garden, she was dive bombed by two robins protecting their nearby nest. One came so close she felt the wind from its wings on her shoulder.*

David says that we find protection under the wings of God, an illustration that is repeated in Scripture. The wicked don’t seek to protect anyone but themselves, but even in the end at God’s judgment that will fail them. God on the other hand, protects those that seek Him.

These final verses are a prayer of David asking God to continue to show His love and righteousness to those who seek after Him. He wants protection from those who would attempt to drive him from God. In the end David sees that God will not only have the victory, but He will also vanquish his foes so that they are unable to rise again.

The servant of God is the one who follows God because he knows God’s nature will provide and protect whereas the wicked who have no fear of God will in the end get what they have coming to them.  
**Which nature seems to be the one you would choose?**