Our Bible notes this Thanksgiving season could be entitled "Biblical Realism," (or) "The Spirit's joy available to those who face things for what they are."

May God give us a faith which is known for its *balance*: First, a joy in the lovingkindness of God, and a focus on God's justification of our sins through Jesus Christ. Second, a focus on God's judgments, even when knowledge of those judgments means that we have to stare wickedness in the face, as the Psalmist does in Psalm 36:1-4.

Mon/Tues: Read Psalm 36:1 & Isaiah 41:8 **A Servant's Education**

In his commentary on the Psalms, Derek Kidner points out that the title of this Psalm describes David as "the servant of the Lord." Eventually in Bible prophecy, this title would be applied to **the** Servant of the Lord, whom the Lord would send to deliver His people. Jesus Christ would be that Anointed One, chosen and sent to save His people from their sins. David as a servant-king foreshadowed that greater king who would come after him.

But take this word, "servant," more generally, and apply it personally to all believers – those repeatedly forgiven and restored from our wanderings in sin. Remember Isaiah 41:8, a verse which E.J. Young in his uses to describe the identity which Israel would rediscover in exile.

> But you, Israel, **my servant**,
> Jacob, whom I have chosen,
> the offspring of Abraham, my friend;

> Up to this point Israel had acted in haughty disdain of the true meaning of the covenant … Isaiah's earlier messages (e.g. Isaiah 5) were filled with denunciations of the wickedness and haughtiness of this nation. Israel behaved as though she were the master of her own fate, the arbiter of her own destiny …
>
> A lesson must therefore be learned by Israel. In her there must be inculcated the truth that although the promises had been hers, she was nevertheless but a servant, who must not do her own will but the will of her covenant and electing God. To learn this lesson, she must pass through the humiliation of the exile, from which she would be delivered only by God's grace. EJ Young, *The Book of Isaiah,* pg. 81.

Meditate and Pray: Forgive us, Lord, that we often forget that we are only your servants, "chosen not for good in me," but simply chosen to serve your will and not my own. Sing about such a submissive recognition that the Gospel makes us "love-slaves" to the Lord's will, using hymn # 545 in our red Trinity hymnal:

1 When this passing world is done,
when has sunk yon glaring sun,
when we stand with Christ in glory,
looking o'er life's finished story,
then, Lord, shall I fully know,
not till then, how much I owe.

3 When I stand before the throne,
dressed in beauty not my own,
when I see thee as thou art,
love thee with unsinning heart,
then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how
much I owe.

4 When the praise of heav'n I hear,
loud as thunders to the ear,
loud as many waters' noise,
sweet as harp's melodious voice,
then, Lord, shall I fully know,
not till then, how much I owe.

5 **Chosen not for good in me,**
wakened up from wrath to flee,
hidden in the Savior's side,
by the Spirit sanctified,
teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
by my love, how much I owe.

Weds/Thurs/Fri: Read Psalm 36:1-5 **An Oracle of Warning**

The goal in these notes is to demonstrate that there is a far closer relationship between the conflict with evil described in Psalm 36:1-4 and the restful joy and recuperative power of Psalm 36:5 -- a much closer bond than we often think. Indeed, the argument can be made that we cannot have a real knowledge and experience of God's covenant (hesed) love [Psalm 36:5-9], without having one eye fixed realistically on the enemy [Psalm 36:1-4 and 11-12].

An illustration may help. The word "oracle" (NIV) in Psalm 36:1 is normally associated with prophetic utterance. An oracle historically would proclaim with confrontational realism about some evil present or coming among the people, and yet include comfort for the faithful ones. What the Psalmist is saying in verse 1 is that in his own heart he hears, "transgression personified, speaking with prophetic voice," as *Strong's Concordance* puts it. The 1984 New International Version translates vs. 1: "An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked."

But David does not keep such a fearful prophecy in his own heart. He pronounces what he has heard by the Spirit of prophecy to be an "oracle," with all the divine authority of having come from God. Reflect on John Owen's description of the powerful effect of such an oracle on prophets in the Bible age:

> When oracles came to the prophets, it was not in their power to conceal them, the hand of the Lord being strong upon them. The very individual words of the oracle were to be declared lest, as a fire within them, that word, undelivered, should consume them.

Here is how the Westminster Shorter Catechism describes what should be our attentiveness to the Word of God:

> **Q.** 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effective for salvation?
> **A.** That the Word may be effective for salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

Meditate and Pray: Lord, give us respect for all the Scriptures as we recognize the cost to the prophets to deliver that word to us. Help us to value every opportunity to gather as God's people under that word; to receive that word and cherish it. Most important of all, help us to recognize that in order to have true fellowship with you in your word, we must agree with the powerful way in which Scripture describes wickedness, learning to

hate it as you do, and learning to flee to you for refuge, *away from the wickedness which the Bible describes*. In short, please do not let us be apathetic towards the warning of Scripture. May your portrayal of wickedness sink deeply into our hearts, as it did David's. Amen.

Sat/Sun: Read Psalm 36:1-5 & Jeremiah 20:7-11. **Courageous Realism**

David was not the only prophet to be given "oracles" that warned God's people against the sinful dangers of the human heart (as well as the dread danger of wickedness). Jeremiah, like David, is given an "oracle" to speak at great cost against the wicked:

> For whenever I speak, I cry out,
> I shout, "Violence and destruction!"
> For the word of the Lord has become for me
> a reproach and derision all day long. (Jeremiah 20:8)

But try as he might, he could not hold this oracle within his own heart:

> If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,"
> there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones,
> and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

The result for Jeremiah was great persecution and betrayal (Jeremiah 20:10) and great personal anguish (Jeremiah 20:14-18) where Jeremiah is tempted to wish he had never been born.

But we must end this week's notes by the great comfort which the Lord gives His prophet in the midst of Jeremiah's heart-breaking commitment to the truth:

> But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior;
> therefore my persecutors will stumble;
> they will not overcome me.
> They will be greatly shamed,
> for they will not succeed.
> Their eternal dishonor
> will never be forgotten. (Jeremiah 20:11)

The lesson is that *some of the sweetest fellowship with the Lord* is found for the believer when taking a stand of courageous realism against evil, as Jeremiah did.

Just so with David. The same Holy Spirit who powerfully confronted evil in Psalm 36, the "oracle concerning the wicked," also comfort's God's people in Divine mercy in Psalm 36:5-9. How we should look forward to next week's exposition of those verses which I include below in several translations. Surely these verses would be a great blessing to memorize at Thanksgiving?

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. (v 5-9 ESV)

Thy mercy, O Lord, *reacheth* unto the heavens, *and* thy faithfulness unto the clouds.
Thy righteousness *is* like the mighty mountains: thy judgments *are like* a great deep: thou Lord, dost save man and beast.
How excellent is thy mercy, O God! therefore the children of men trust under the shadow of thy wings.
They shall be satisfied with the fatness of thine house, and thou shalt give them drink out of the river of thy pleasures.
For with thee *is* the well of life, and in thy light shall we see light. (1599 Geneva Bible)

Your mercy, Lord, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness *reaches* to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are *like* the great deep.
Lord, You protect mankind and animals.
How precious is Your mercy, God!
And the sons of mankind take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You allow them to drink *from* the river of Your delights.
For the fountain of life is with You;
In Your light we see light. (New American Standard)

Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.
Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, thou preservest man and beast.
How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.
They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.
For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. (King James)