

We are continuing this morning in our summer sermon series The Power of One Life, looking at the lives of minor Biblical characters whose lives can be preached through in one Sunday. This morning we will be looking at a man named Asaph, who appears in 45 verses in the Bible. The Bible text doesn't tell us much about him, other than that he was a recorder, which was sort of an archivist in the temple, and more importantly that he was a percussionist and writer of Psalms.

1 Chronicles 16:4-6 - He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel: ⁵ Asaph was the chief, Zechariah second, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom and Jeiel. They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals, ⁶ and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God.

As a musician and songwriter, Asaph is someone that we learn about mainly through the songs he wrote, and so I wanted to focus on one of his Psalms this morning, Psalm 73, in which he confesses his struggle with envy and how God helped him deal with it.

Psalm 73:1-28 - A psalm of Asaph. Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" ¹² This is what the wicked are like-- always carefree, they increase in wealth. ¹³ Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰ As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³ Yet I am always with

you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵ *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.* ²⁶ *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* ²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Let me put into my own words the problem that Asaph seems to be experiencing, and then we'll talk about how what he does to deal with the problem and how that relates to us today.

I know that God is good. I know he is faithful, and that he loves us. But what I am seeing with my eyes does not match what I know in my head to be true. What I see is that people who don't care about God or worry about following Him seem to be doing just fine. I feel like they are having a better life than me. They even mock God, and yet nothing happens. I am trying to live for God, and yet my devotion to God does not seem to be resulting in blessing. I am struggling to keep my heart pure, but my efforts do not seem to be paying off with a better life. I know God is good... at least I THINK God is good. I'm just not sure any more. I just don't know if living for God is worth it any more. And my brain hurts just trying to make sense of it all.

Can anyone relate?

You know in your head what you have been taught, or what you have read, but what you see with your eyes does not seem to line up with what your head believes. There does not seem to be a straight line or causal relationship between living for God and experiencing His blessings. And so it is hard not to envy those who do not seem to concern themselves with following God.

*Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For *I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.**

Here you are in church on a beautiful Sunday morning, while your friends are out jetskiing. There was always pressure to keep up with the Joneses. **But in the era of social media, Facebook & Instagram, the Jones, Smiths, Johnsons, and everyone else have a profile, and every day you can see their beauty and love.... their perfect family.... and their beautiful new house.** You're here on a Sunday while they're out

golfing or at the beach. You are trying to keep myself pure. You're serving and tithing and sacrificing, and they're living for themselves. And it seems to be working just fine for them. Remind me again why I'm here?

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children.

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure. The phrase "in vain" suggests that it is not accomplishing the desired results. I am not experiencing the blessings I expected. **Maybe you are single**, and living to honor the Lord, follow the rules, and God has not brought someone into your life yet, or never did. It isn't paying off! Or maybe you're trying to be moral and ethical at **work**, and people who don't care about being moral or ethical seem to be getting ahead, making more sales, being promoted! Or perhaps you're staying faithful in your **marriage**, and what is it getting you? He still won't change. Or she still won't treat me with respect. All of this devotion seems to be in vain.

And so, underneath it all is this nagging question: is God really good?

I believe God is healer, but my loved one died of cancer
I hear God answers prayer, but I've been praying for this situation for years and nothing has changed.

I know that God is my protector and defender, but I feel like I've been unjustly accused of something and no one is sticking up for me.

I know God is provider, but he doesn't seem to be providing for me.

Remember, this is a worship leader in Israel, doubting the goodness of God. But he is afraid to vocalize his doubts:

¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children.

When you look through the pages of the Bible, he is not alone. After all, just go back to **Adam & Eve. Satan was able to make them doubt the goodness of God even in Paradise.** No one to compare themselves too, and they still doubted that God was good, coveting the only thing they could not have! No wonder we struggle to believe what God has said about Himself.

¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me

It can be hard to understand when what we've been taught about God does not seem to line up, when we don't understand God's goodness, when the lives of others seem better than ours. Like Asaph, comparing our lives to others can steal our joy and makes us angry and bitter, proving the words of Proverbs 14:30.

Proverbs 14:30 - A heart at peace gives life to the body, but **envy** rots the bones.

So what helps Asaph in his envy? And what can we do? Go back to verse 16:

*¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰ As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ²¹ **When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.** ²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.*

When he enters the sanctuary, three things happen:

1) He gains an eternal perspective

Over the course of the Psalm, he goes from “they” to “I” to “You” (God). When I begin with what I see out there and compare it to what I have, I envy, I lose, and I am in despair. But when I turn to God, I see the bigger picture.

When he enters the sanctuary, he is reminded that there is a God. There is eternity. There is judgment. This world is not all there is. Asaph realizes that everything in this world is fading away. It's slippery ground. You can't keep anything. It's chasing after the wind, as the writer of Ecclesiastes puts it. And he realizes that God is always with him, and in the end will take him into glory.

Isaiah 40:7-8 - *The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."*

Anything can seem evil and unjust in the short-term, but God is working with the long-term. God can seem absent or unloving in the moment, but the big picture is that God is good, and God is present, and while all the things of this world fade away, we will be with God forever. **So do not trade in God for jet skis**, or a bigger house, or anything else in this world.

Mark 8:35-36 - *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet **forfeit** his soul?*

The things that seem so real will vanish in the light of eternity:

²⁰ *As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.*

When you have a dream, you wake up and what seemed so real now seems so silly. All of this is fading away.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is **seen**, but on what is unseen. For what is **seen** is **temporary**, but what is unseen is eternal.*

And so, we have this conclusion:

Proverbs 23:17-18 - *Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous **for** the fear of the LORD. ¹⁸ There is surely a future hope **for** you, and your hope will not be cut off.*

2) He gains a grace perspective

²¹ *When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*

Asaph realizes that he was senseless, stupid. He didn't deserve any blessing. And yet God does not treat him as his sins deserve, but pours out his grace, never letting

him go. In the beginning of the Psalm, Asaph was full of complaint and envy because he believed that he deserved better than he was getting, that God was holding out on Him and not good, that his devotion to God was in vain and not being rewarded. But as he entered the sanctuary and was reminded of God's holiness, he remembered that God is good, that he was a sinner, and that all he had was a gift from God.

The belief that the righteous will prosper and have carefree lives and the wicked will have terrible lives is not Biblical. Look at Job. Often it is harder being a Christian. There is sacrifice. There is an enemy. And if your goal in life is more blessings, then you will end up like Asaph when things are not going well.

3) He sees that God is what His heart has really been longing for

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

As I reflected on envy this week, I realized that a big part of envy stems from believing that you only live once and you got dealt a raw hand. But in Christ you will live forever, and all that you desire will be yours forever. And so the answer to what you're looking for is not found in another woman, or another house, or another job, but in Christ.

Remember how Asaph had complained that it was surely in vain that he had kept his heart pure. What is in it for me? Not much apparently. But as he enters the sanctuary, he realizes that what he really wants is not the worldly pleasures and prosperity, but the true, lasting pleasure and prosperity that is only found in God. In the beginning, Asaph had been using God as a means to an end – what he really wanted was prosperity, peace, health, comfort. And when God wasn't giving him that, he got angry. But as he came to the sanctuary, he realized that He was using God, and found that what He really had been looking for was God Himself. Not a means to an end, but the end in and of itself. And once he recognized that, he no longer needed anything. Earth has nothing I desire besides you. **Even if I lose all the rest, I have God. Single or married, rich or poor, big house or small apartment, loved or not loved, healthy or sick, I have you and anything that happens to me can only bring me closer to you.** Even the best marriage or job or hobby will not last forever, and is meant to point us to the one who will give us eternal love, joy, and fulfillment. God, you are the one I have been longing for. You are my wealth. You

are my security. You are my love. You are my joy. You are my strength. You are my portion. You are my hope. You are my treasure.

Philippians 3:7-11 - *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Envy reveals that we are looking to something other than God for our joy, for our satisfaction, for our love, for our hope, for our meaning in life. But nothing else will satisfy. You are really looking for Jesus. The love, the joy, the intimacy, the status, the satisfaction, is all found in Him.

Jesus is the only one who perfectly obeyed God, and He was killed for it. He didn't just miss out the jet skis, he lost His Father as well as His life on the cross, out of love for you. He did it so that you could be a son of God, an heir. All you desire will one day be yours. The love, the beauty, the family, the pleasures.

1 Corinthians 2:9 - *However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--*

Jesus is enough. There is nothing that you will miss out on this world that will matter in the slightest when you are with Him for eternity. As Jonathan Edwards put it:

"God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.

Come to the sanctuary and worship Him. He is enough.

Come to worship – Sing again your songs of commitment to Him. Hear reminders of who He is. Remember that all that you are seeking is found in Him, that we will have it all one day.

Come to the community – receive encouragement and reminders of who God is from the people of God

Come to the cross – remember that the love of God displayed in the death of Jesus, the gospel that gives you the love, the hope, the purpose you have been searching for.

Enter the sanctuary with your doubts, come into the presence of God, and be reminded that God is good.