

Psalms 73

This evening - we're continuing our overview of the Old Testament book titled Psalms.

With this as our focus - let's open our Bibles to Psalms chapter 73 - and as we make our way to the 73rd Psalm...

...I should take a moment to point out that - this Psalm is the first song - in the third section of this book.

I'll remind you that the book of Psalms has been divided up into 5 sections...

...which are believed to reflect the five books of the Torah - namely...

...Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - and Deuteronomy.

What this means is that - we're beginning the Leviticus section of the Psalms.

With that being the case - it only makes sense that this third section of the Psalms - begins with a song - written by a Levite named Asaph.

Now - Asaph was one of the Levites - whom King David appointed...

...to lead the people of God - in songs of praise - there at the house of the LORD.

Not only that - but - Asaph was also a seer - who prophesied over the people...

...with the songs that he wrote - under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

And seeing how Psalm 73 is the first of 11 consecutive Psalms written by Asaph...

...then - you might like to know that we're going to spend the next three months...

...contemplating the songs of this seer named Asaph.

With this as our focus - let's turn our attention to the lyrics that we find here in the 73rd Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 73:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

Truly God is good to Israel,
To such as are pure in heart.

Psa 73:2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
My steps had nearly slipped.

Psa 73:3 For I was envious of the boastful,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Psa 73:4 For there are no pangs in their death,
But their strength is firm.

Here in the beginning of this song - we find Asaph - confessing the envy that he was struggling with.

And while he prefaced this confession with a proclamation of praise by acknowledging the fact that God is good to Israel...

...he quickly shifted his focus to the envious jealousy that he was struggling with...

...as he considered the prosperity of the proud.

Let's consider how the scholars who created the New Living Translation rendered verses 2 and 3 - they put it like this...

Psa 73:2 ...as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.

Psa 73:3 For I envied the proud
when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.

According to Asaph - he was struggling to stay on the narrow path of righteousness...

...and the reason why was due to the fact that - the wicked who were filled with pride - appeared to be prospering...

...and this - despite the fact that they were living for the lusts of the flesh.

Not only that - but - Asaph also struggled with the fact that - the same sinners seemed to enjoy their lives - without any issues at all.

Notice with me again - there in verse 4 - where he declared...

Psa 73:4 For there are no pangs in their death,
But their strength is firm.

In other words - Asaph was struggling with the belief that - the prosperity of the proud provided them with a pain free life.

And I have no doubt that some of us here tonight have struggled with similar thoughts.

It's not uncommon for believers to see the prosperity of those who are too proud to praise the Lord - - and then begin to wonder...

...IF God is really good - - THEN why does He allow the wicked to become wealthy.

Why does He allow the proud to prosper - rather than bringing them to financial ruin?

With this question in mind - let's consider how Asaph continued to confess his personal struggles with this issue.

Look with me again - there at the 73rd Psalm - let's pick up our study - beginning there at verse 5 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 73:5 They are not in trouble as other men,
Nor are they plagued like other men.

Psa 73:6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace;
Violence covers them like a garment.

Psa 73:7 Their eyes bulge with abundance;
They have more than heart could wish.

Psa 73:8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression;
They speak loftily.

Psa 73:9 They set their mouth against the heavens,
And their tongue walks through the earth.

Psa 73:10 Therefore his people return here,
And waters of a full cup are drained by them.

Psa 73:11 And they say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

Psa 73:12 Behold, these are the ungodly,
Who are always at ease;
They increase in riches.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - continuing to confess his concerns about the prosperity of the proud.

And as we consider the content of these verses - I have no doubt that...

...many of us have struggled with the same questions - about why the wicked seem to succeed.

Let's consider again how Asaph explained it - here in these verses.

Notice with me again - - beginning there at verse 5 - where he declared...

Psa 73:5 They are not in trouble as other men,
Nor are they plagued like other men.

Psa 73:6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace;
Violence covers them like a garment.

In other words - Asaph was struggling with the belief that those who are too proud to praise the Lord...

...appear to be free from the troubles - and the trials of this world.

And rather than clothing themselves in humility - they wear their pride like an expensive necklace...

...while clothing themselves with the cruelty that they use to persecute the people of God.

Not only that - but - it's there in verse 7 - where Asaph described these prideful people - as those who's...

Psa 73:7 ...eyes bulge with abundance;
They have more than heart could wish.

In other words - these people have more than they need - - and yet - at the same time...

...their eyes are bulging - as they look to acquire more and more.

More simply put - these people are never satisfied - nor can they be content.

With this in mind - I can't help but to remember the warning that Paul presented to pastor Timothy.

It's in 1st Timothy chapter 6 - beginning at verse 6 - where Paul declared...

- 1Ti 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.
- 1Ti 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.
- 1Ti 6:8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.
- 1Ti 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.
- 1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Christian - listen - those who love the wealth of this world - will end up being led astray by their covetousness.

And it's sad to say that I've seen the faith of many believers being destroyed by their discontent desires.

And listen - this path of perdition often times begins with a covetous desire...

...to acquire the wealth that worldly people are pursuing.

Please trust me when I tell you that - godliness with contentment is great gain.

That being the case - we can be certain that the Lord will create the conditions in our lives...

...so that we might learn how to be content with less.

The reason why is because - He wants us to become those believers who are rich in faith.

Sadly - there are many Christians who see the prosperity of those who are filled with pride...

...and rather than realizing that godliness with contentment is great gain...

...they pursue their discontent desire to be rich - which leads them down the path of perdition.

And as a result - they stray from the faith in their greediness...

...as they pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

It's for this reason that King Solomon declared...

Pro 24:1 Don't envy the wealth of the wicked or crave their company.

Pro 24:2 For they're obsessed with causing trouble and their conversations are corrupt.

In other words - the believer who becomes envious of the wicked people who have acquired the wealth of this world...

...will end up being led astray - by the corrupt communication that is common among those who are carnal.

And it's for this reason that King Solomon warned us about the troubles that are caused...

...by those who pursue financial prosperity.

This was the point that Asaph was making - here in our text tonight - look with me again beginning there at verse 8 - where he declared...

Psa 73:8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily.

Psa 73:9 They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth.

Psa 73:10 Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them.

From this - we can see that - the prideful people who have acquired the wealth of this world...

...are often times those who are quick to blaspheme the God Who created the heavens and the Earth.

And while this is not to suggest that a Christian can't be wealthy...

...the believer who envies the wealth of the wicked - will often times follow their carnal counsel.

I like the way the scholars who created the New Living Translation rendered the words of Asaph - they put it like this...

Psa 73:8 They scoff and speak only evil;
in their pride they seek to crush others.

Psa 73:9 They boast against the very heavens,
and their words strut throughout the earth.

Psa 73:10 And so the people are dismayed and confused,
drinking in all their words.

Christian - listen - those who seek the financial advice of the
unbelievers - who have made an idol of their wealth...

...will end up receiving counsel that is in conflict with the word
of God.

Let's consider how Asaph explained it - there in verses 11 and 12 - it's
there where he declared...

Psa 73:11 ...they say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

Psa 73:12 Behold, these are the ungodly,
Who are always at ease;
They increase in riches.

In other words - the wicked people who put the pursuit of worldly
wealth - above the pursuit of God...

...will boast about their ability to make money - as they
question the omniscience of God.

What they fail to realize is that - the riches that they
acquire...

...will eventually be a testimony of their ungodliness.

Let's consider how the Lord Jesus explained it - in a parable that we find
in Luke chapter 12 - it's beginning at verse 16 - where He declared...

Luk 12:16b "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

Luk 12:17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do,
since I have no room to store my crops?'

Luk 12:18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

Luk 12:19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." '

Luk 12:20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

Luk 12:21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Here in this parable - we find the Lord Jesus - helping His audience to understand that...

...it's foolish to think that the wealth of this world will save us from the day of judgment.

That being the case - I can assure you that the financial counsel of unbelievers is foolish...

...and the reason why is because - they're goal is to acquire worldly wealth...

...without giving glory to God.

Christian - listen - if you're filled with envy as you consider the financial success of unbelievers...

...then - I encourage you to remember that - the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

And it's for this reason that many Christians have strayed from the faith - in pursuit of worldly wealth.

That being the case - we will do well to maintain a Biblical perspective...

...regarding the riches of this world.

With this as the goal - let's consider how Asaph explained it - here in the 73rd Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 13 - where he declared...

Psa 73:13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain,
And washed my hands in innocence.

Psa 73:14 For all day long I have been plagued,
And chastened every morning.

Psa 73:15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

Psa 73:16 When I thought how to understand this,
It was too painful for me—

Psa 73:17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their end.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - helping his audience to understand how he refocused his faith...

...from the painful concerns that led him to question the goodness of God...

...to the submissive faith that helped him to sing the praises of God.

In order to understand his paradigm shift - we should take a moment to consider the concerns he shared there in verse 13 - where he declared...

Psa 73:13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain,
And washed my hands in innocence.

After seeing the success of those who were serving themselves...

...Asaph began to believe that there was no point in keeping himself spiritually clean.

But then he went into the sanctuary of God - and gained an eternal perspective.

In verse 14 - Asaph confessed his complaint - by declaring...

Psa 73:14 ...all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.

Here we see how Asaph's mind was plagued with painful thoughts that caused him to question the goodness of God.

But then he went to the sanctuary of God - and gained an eternal perspective.

In verses 15 and 16 - we find Asaph - presenting the pain that he felt...

...as he considered how God seemed to be blessing those - who where speaking lies to the children of Israel.

And while it's true that this was painful for him to try and figure it all out...

...it's also true that he finally found relief - after arriving at the sanctuary of God.

It was there where he finally understood the bitter end of the wicked.

Let's consider how Asaph explained it - here in the 73rd Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 18 - where he declared...

Psa 73:18 Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.

Psa 73:19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment!
They are utterly consumed with terrors.

Psa 73:20 As a dream when one awakes,
So, Lord, when You awake,
You shall despise their image.

Psa 73:21 Thus my heart was grieved,
And I was vexed in my mind.

Psa 73:22 I was so foolish and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You.

Psa 73:23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;
You hold me by my right hand.

Psa 73:24 You will guide me with Your counsel,
And afterward receive me to glory.

It was after Asaph arrived at the sanctuary of God - - when he realized that...

...the prideful people who appear to be successful in their sins - - will eventually receive the justice that they deserve.

And while it might seem as if they're living high on the hog - here in this world...

...there's coming a day when the Lord will judge the quick and the dead.

And it's at that point in time when He will cast the unrepentant - into everlasting destruction.

Just to be clear - that word - destruction - found there in 18 - refers to the ruin of desolation.

In other words - Asaph wasn't referring to the annihilation of the wicked...

...no - instead - he was referring to the desolation that results in everlasting ruin.

And in order to grasp the reality of eternal conscious punishment of the unrepentant...

...we should consider the warning that the prophet Daniel presented...

...when He described the judgment that will take place at the end of the tribulation.

It's in Daniel chapter 12 - verse 2 - where he described the day - when...

Dan 12:2 ...many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Now - that word - contempt - can also be rendered - Abhorrence.

The same word is also rendered - shame - in Brenton's English Septuagint.

And as we consider how the word - everlasting - is applied to both - life - - and shame...

...there should be no doubt that the abhorrent shame of those who end up in hell...

...will last for the same amount of time - as the life that is enjoyed by believers.

The Lord Jesus confirmed this - in Matthew chapter 25 - where He described the separation of the sheep - and the goats.

It's verse 46 - where He declared...

Mat 25:46 "...these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life."

Just like the prophet Daniel - the Lord Jesus presented us with this sobering reality...

...by assuring His audience that the goats who reject Him will receive a punishment...

...which will last as long as the sheep are enjoying the afterlife.

And what this means is that - those who are cast into the lake of fire...

...will in fact endure eternal conscious punishment.

Now - I realize that there are those who are trying to convince us that this is not the case.

For example - it was just before Christmas - when Kirk Cameron informed his followers...

...that he no longer believes in the eternal conscious punishment of unbelievers...

...and instead - he believes in annihilationism - which is the belief that...

...those who end up in hell - eventually cease to exist.

Here's how Cameron explained it - and I quote...

“...eternal judgment or eternal punishment doesn't necessarily mean that we are being tormented and punished forever and ever every moment for eternity. It means that the punishment we deserve is irreversible. It's permanent. It's eternal. You're dead. You've been destroyed. You have perished. You're gone. And it's you're never coming back.”

Now - there are many issues with Kirk Cameron's perspective.

This includes his failure to properly define the word - destroyed.

You see - when it comes to the doctrine of eternal punishment...

...the word - destroyed - simply means ruined - NOT annihilated.

And listen - when he assured his audience that...

“...eternal punishment doesn't **necessarily** mean that we're being tormented and punished forever and ever every moment for eternity...

...actually - yes - yes it does - - that's exactly what eternal punishment means.

The apostle John confirmed this - in Revelation chapter 14 - where we learn that...

Rev 14:11a “the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever”

Think about that for a moment - IF the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever....

...then - it only stand to reason that their torment must continue forever and ever.

In other words - the smoke of their torment is a testimony that the torment is still taking place.

It's for this reason that believers should stop envying those who are wicked...

...and instead - we should warn them about the conscious eternal punishment...

...which will be experienced - by those who reject our Redeemer - Jesus.

And in order to maintain this perspective - we should follow in the footsteps of Asaph.

With this as our goal - let's consider the final verses found here in the 73rd Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 25 - where he asked...

Psa 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but You?
And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.
Psa 73:26 My flesh and my heart fail;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Psa 73:27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;
You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.
Psa 73:28 But it is good for me to draw near to God;
I have put my trust in the Lord GOD,
That I may declare all Your works.

Here in the final verses of this song - we find Asaph - singing the praises of the One...

...Who alone was able to encourage his heart - by providing him with an eternal perspective.

And it was there at the sanctuary - where Asaph began to realize that...

...his envy of the wicked was nothing more than foolishness...

...and the reason why is because - those who will not repent...

...will suffer everlasting destruction - as they perish in the pit of despair.

After Asaph realized that his envy was nothing more than foolishness...

...he concluded this Psalm - by assuring his audience that it was good for him to draw near to God.

The reason why is because - those who want to maintain a proper perspective about everything...

...should trust in the One - Who alone is able to save us from the punishment that we all deserve.

Now - as we consider how Asaph received a perspective corrective - there at the sanctuary in Jerusalem...

...I encourage you to realize that - the Christian who wants to maintain a proper perspective on everything...

...should continue to seek the perspective corrective of sound doctrine...

...through the Biblical instruction - and accountability that we receive - in true Christian fellowship.

I like the way that Paul put it - in Hebrews chapter 10 - it's beginning at verse 23 - where he declared...

Heb 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Heb 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

Heb 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Christian - listen - the weekly assembly of the Saints - that we call the local church...

...is the place where we should receive the perspective corrective that we all need from time to time.

And knowing how easy it is for us to get off course - according to the carnal corruption of this world...

...we will all do well to realize that - the Christian who forsakes the assembling of ourselves together...

...will soon find themselves pursuing the sinful pleasures of this world.

With that being the case - we will all do well to maintain a steadfast connection with our Christian congregation....

...so that we can receive the instructions - and the corrections that will help us to stay on course.

And just like Asaph - who received a perspective correction at the sanctuary...

...let's come to church - ready to receive the perspective correction that we might need...

...in order to remember that it's good for us to draw near to God...

...with other believers - who have also put their trust in the Lord our GOD.