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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

October 15, 2017

Whom Have I In Heaven But You

Psalm 73

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for your grace, I thank you for the work that you are doing in each and every one of us and I pray this morning, Lord, as that work goes forward by opening up your book and learning more about who you are and who we are, by the power of your Holy Spirit. And so this morning, Lord, as we're looking into one of the Psalms, I pray that the author of the Psalm, that is your Holy Spirit, would be here accompanying us, that you'd be guiding us and again of making this of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Anxieties are like parasites. They're kind of like lampreys, you know, they attach themselves to our consciousness and then they suck out our confidence as they accompany us wherever we go. One way to deal with anxieties is to do precisely what God says to do in 1 Peter 5:7. He says: *Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* And one way to cast our anxieties on him is to put our lives into the proper context, and that context is eternity. And that means looking at life and what I do with it as

significant not just for today but for all of eternity. And it's looking to a future that's not measured in years but in centuries. And the ability to do that is tied to a word that many of us are not that familiar with. The word is "consideration." Not the kind that results in thinking about other people, as important as that is, but the kind that takes our lives and our circumstances and places them into a context that gives them meaning and comfort and gives us wisdom especially when our lives don't appear to be working at just the right way at any given time.

You see, even in a church of our size there's going to be a significant number of us who doubt that the good news of life in Christ is really that good. You might look around you and you might see what is obviously an unequal distribution of pleasure and pain, of happiness and sadness, of contentment and discontent. And you may wonder how is this any different from all the other circumstances that life dishes out to virtually everyone? Sure, you can thank God for your salvation and you can thank him for his unconditional love but you can't help but think that that love seems to be distributed in what appears to be the same random fashion that everything else in life is. Some folks seem to get flooded with God's love, others seem to barely get their feet wet, and still others seem to be fated to claw and scratch at the ground looking for a trickle and finding only dust.

I know I'm dating myself but years ago there was a comedy show called The Smothers Brothers. Are you familiar with that at all, the Smothers Brothers? It may be ancient history. Some of us get it. They used to have a comedy routine that they used for years and years and it worked because it was grounded in something that most of us can identify with and that is sibling rivalry. You see, the source of all of Tommy's problems according to Tommy Smothers was that his mother loved his brother Dickie better than him. Well, it's easy to transfer that same kind of thinking right over to God and it's easy to conclude just as Tommy Smothers did that God loves others better than me even though we know that God is no respecter of persons. I mean, such thinking is not bizarre, it's not unusual, in fact I think it's very common. It's just not often brought up in polite evangelical circles. It's just a little too off-putting. But you know the fact is folks have eyes and ears and they have brains enough to see that there's no clear connection between serving God and having an easy life. And you know in our heads we get the sense of that. We understand that we have a need for faith and trust but oftentimes in our hearts, we see this played out just like Tommy Smothers does. God clearly loves others more than he loves me. I mean there's a part of us that wants to shake our fist at God and say that's not the good news that I signed up for. I mean, you see the bad guys get good things and good guys get bad things, you see your neighbor who laughs at God

and at your faith and he's doing quite well, thank you. Maybe you wonder where is God in all of this? Well, trust me, you are not alone. Asaph the psalmist knows exactly what I'm talking about. In Psalm 73 he complains bitterly to God about how unfair all of this seems. This is the first part of *Psalm 73*, we just read it. I'm going to read it again. He says: *Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. They say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hand in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children.*

See, Asaph is about to burst and he's about to burst with anger and bitterness over God's apparent lack of fairness. He says, God, I'm looking at the bad guys and all I can see is that they're doing pretty well. They have no pangs of conscience, they enjoy great physical health, trouble seemed to avoid them, these people are so proud and violent that they laugh and they mock and they spout off not just against me, but against you, God. I mean, they shake their fist at you. He says: *They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.* Asaph goes on to observe what we see all the time. He sees people immensely attractive to success no matter what kind of package it comes in. He sees the wicked having no shortage of people who love them merely because they're successful. He says: *Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them.*

You know, I was reading this, and I couldn't help but think of Harvey Weinstein. I thought of Harvey Weinstein when I read this passage. Most of you know this past week has been a -- he has been at the center of a firestorm. He's a Hollywood mogul even though he's located in New York City, who apparently used his power and influence to sexually assault dozens of women whom he had under his control. I mean he was everybody's darling because he was the epitome of success. And even though his conduct was well known,

folks found no fault in him. And then his story came out, and it was an incredibly repulsive story. You know, he being a Hollywood mogul pulled every string that he could to avoid his downfall and now he's playing the ultimate card, he's flying off somewhere to seek counseling for sex addiction. Well, I was watching the news about Harvey Weinstein and I said to Janice, I said, you know what would be the ultimate revenge here? It would be Harvey Weinstein coming to know Christ as Savior. Because only then, only then by the power of the Holy Spirit would Harvey come to know the full extent of his own wickedness, and only then would he be able to fully address those terrible things that he's done. And only then would he be able to describe that the love of Christ is extended to everyone, including him. So I prayed for Harvey Weinstein. It's amazing to see how people love to build people up but they love even more biting and devouring them on the way down.

Well, our friend Asaph, he's not talking about people getting their comeuppance just yet, he's concerned with the fact that these people seem to be getting away with murder. I mean, time and again they do these incredibly wicked things and God does apparently nothing in response. Verse 11: *And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"* And finally Asaph gets to the heart of the matter, he says: *All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have*

been stricken and rebuked every morning. What he's saying is I try and I try to do things right, I try to lead a life that brings honor and glory to you, God. I try to keep my heart clean and my hands innocence -- innocent and every single day I get mocked for it. He's kept all of these thoughts inside for so long that they're about to burst forth, and he knows it's not going to be pretty. He says in verse 15: If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children. To paraphrase Asaph, what he's saying is, if I say out loud what I'm really thinking in here, you better get your kids away because they're going to be scandalized. But then something happens. Asaph begins to consider God's ways. And he admits at first it's pure struggle. He says in verse 16: But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. But then the struggle gives way to understanding, and understanding gives way to peace. This is the second half of Psalm 73. He says: But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my

right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

So we asked the question, this is the question: How did Asaph move from almost scandalizing the children to saying, *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* Well, Asaph did it and he did it by doing what bewildered believers have done since the Garden of Eden. He considered his God. Listen to the how the Psalms refer to this idea of considering. *Psalm 119: I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. Psalm 77: I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds. Psalm 107: Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD. Psalm 119: Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. Psalm 8: When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place. And Psalm 143: I*

remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. You see, when times are good, we give God praise; when times are tough, we give God consideration. And those aren't my words, those are really God's words. He said in Ecclesiastes 7:14: When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other.

Now one of the things I would like us to consider is the idea of blessing itself. I think we have the whole notion of blessings out of whack. Let me explain by way of illustration that occurred to me just last week. You know Janice and I try to walk and pray every day. We have about a 45-minute walk, we go up the road that's close to us and this one day Janice couldn't make it. I was walking by myself along the road that we always walk and this one time I noticed something a little bit different. Right at the beginning of my walk there was a chipmunk squashed flat as a pancake on the side of the road. Unfortunate but not that unusual. A couple hundred yards later, there's another flattened chipmunk in roughly the exact same spot on the side of the road. Another hundred yards, another flattened chipmunk. I mean this was clearly unusual. You know, I'm always talking to Janice about this road because it always amazes me when I see a dead animal on the road. This is a road that has 10, 20 cars a day that go on it, and I'm

always saying to her, I said, 98, 99.5 percent of the time you can go back and forth on this road with nothing. How is it that an animal picks the time when a car is coming down to dash across the road and get himself squashed? I just don't get it. Of course at this time Janice starts to roll her eyes 'cause she's heard me use this about fifty different times. And so I'm wondering about these squashed chipmunks and I come across another chipmunk, and he's very much alive. And he's on the side of the road and he's feasting on walnuts that have fallen and have been cracked open by cars driving down the road. Now to this chipmunk this is a blessing of epic proportions. Everywhere he looks he sees squashed walnuts. But little does he realize as he's feasting away that he's sitting right in the pathway of the next car. Hence, the squashed chipmunks. So what's the point? Well, it's really the very same point that Asaph got. It's the point that he got when he began to consider God's ways and that is sometimes curses look like blessings and blessings look like curses. You see here's what Asaph discovered about the so-called blessed. He says in verse 18: *Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O LORD, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.* You know what God was telling Asaph here, what he was telling him is that all those fat and sleek mockers, you know the ones with the proud looks and the violent

ways, the ones who scoff and speak with malice and threaten everyone with oppression? What he was telling Asaph is those are the chipmunks and they think they're being blessed when in fact they're being cursed. And the more Asaph considered God's ways, the more times he went into the sanctuary of God, the more he understood the big picture, the more he discerned their end. And the more he did that, the more Asaph understood God's ways and the more he saw himself blessed and the mockers as cursed, because the mockers were the chipmunks feeding on the walnuts who had no idea how slippery their status was. I mean they had no idea that their destruction was going to come suddenly and that in a moment they were going to be swept away accompanied only by terror and that the very God whom they mocked would be their sovereign Judge who would now be full of righteous wrath and who would now despise them as phantoms. You see, Asaph considered his God.

Now do you ever consider God? I mean, do you ever engage like Asaph engaged? I mean do you look around you at all of the fat and sleek neighbors who behave just like Asaph's tormentors did and do you see them like Asaph saw them? Did you ask God the same questions that Jeremiah did? He said this, he said: *Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?* You know, Asaph answered his question by considering God and his kingdom, by connecting his life to eternity, to the kingdom of God

and to the sanctuary of God. And there and only there does the short term injustice we see all around us become the long term justice that separates the cursed from the blessed. And what I want us to see in this this morning is the three different roles in understanding blessing and cursing that Asaph's quandary illustrates. There's the devil's role, there's Asaph's role, and there's God's role. Asaph by considering God and his kingdom got to see all three of those roles and it made a huge difference in his life.

So first let's look at the devil's role in this. Asaph was upset to see the wicked prospering and the faithless living at ease and what he didn't realize until he fully considered God was who was really behind that ease. God tells us in *1 Peter*: *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* And James tells us: *When tempted, no one should say, "God is attempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

Russell Moore has written a brilliant book about temptation. I think we have a copy of it downstairs. It's entitled *"Tempted and*

Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ." And one of the things that he focuses on in that book is how important it is for the devil that the tempted not realize what's going on. He would describe Asaph's mockers as cattle being fattened for the slaughter. In fact he compares the enemy's temptations of us to the latest techniques that slaughterhouses now use to butcher cattle. They're all based on these recommendations of a unique woman who has a Ph.D. in animal husbandry who is autistic but she has brilliant insights into how to deal with animals on their way to slaughter and she's advised many, many different slaughterhouses about how to do this. And writing about this, this is what Moore says. He says: "Workers shouldn't yell at the cows, she said, and they should never ever use cattle prods, because they are counterproductive and unneeded. If you just keep the cows contented and comfortable, they'll go wherever they're led. Don't surprise them, don't unnerve them, and above all, don't hurt them (well, at least until you slit their throats at the end). Along the way, this scientist devised a new technology that has revolutionized the ways of the big slaughter operations. In this system the cows aren't prodded off the truck but are led, in silence, onto a ramp. They go through a "squeeze chute," a gentle pressure device that mimics a mother's nuzzling touch, the cattle continue down the ramp onto a smoothly curving path. There are no sudden turns. The cows experience the sensation of going home, the

same kind of way they traveled so many times before. As they mosey along the path, they don't even notice when their hoofs are no longer touching the ground. A conveyor belt slowly lifts them gently upward, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, a blunt instrument levels a surgical strike right between the eyes. They are transitioned from livestock to meat, and they're never aware enough to be alarmed by any of it. The pioneer of this technology commends it to the slaughterhouses and affectionately gives it a nickname. She calls it 'the stairway to heaven.'

You see, Asaph came into the sanctuary of God and he saw the mockers as they truly were. He said: *Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.* And see, part of considering who God is consists in understanding who we are in God's great plan. See, we are those creatures, those unique creatures that God has made to bear his image, and for that reason alone we are the subject of intense scrutiny by creatures who have studied us 24 hours a day, seven days a week since Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, and they don't have our best interests in mind. In fact it is our utter destruction that is their ultimate goal for us. They can't read our minds but they can certainly know how creatures like us act and behave because we've been the subject of intense study by them, and the one thing they know that is critical for their success and our destruction is that we not realize what

it is they're doing.

Russell Moore goes on to say this. He says: "Forces are afoot right now negotiating how to get you fat enough for consumption and how to get you calmly and without struggle to the cosmic slaughterhouse floor. The easiest life for you will be the one in which you don't question these things, a life in which you simply do what seems natural. The ease of it all will seem to be further confirmation that this is the way things ought to be. It might even seem as though everything is happening exactly as you always hoped it would. You might feel as though your life situation is like progressing up a stairway, so perfect it's as though it was designed just for you. And it is. In many ways the more tranquil you feel, the more endangered you are. As you find yourself curving around the soft corners of your life, maybe you should question the quietness of it all. Perhaps you should listen, beneath your feet, for the gentle clatter of hoofs."

See, the devil's role is not to cast us into destruction. It's to lull us there unawares. It is absolutely critical for his success that we not be aware of his presence. And he is far more clever and far more experienced in dealing with human beings than we are in dealing with demons. And our only hope is to trust in the wisdom that God will give us if we but only ask. Paul made that

clear when he spoke about the importance of forgiveness as he was writing the Corinthian church. He made this statement there, he said: *Anyone you forgive, I also forgive, and what I forgive -- if there was anything to forgive -- I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.* You see, it's only by considering God and his kingdom that we become aware of his schemes. And having understood the enemy's role in this, it's important to understand our role as well. You see, when Asaph considered God he also considered his ways. And the more he understood God's ways, the more he understood how perfectly upside down his reaction was. I mean he thought the fat and the sleek were being blessed by God and that's what upset him so. He quickly came to see that instead of being blessed by God they were being cursed and set up for the slaughter by the devil. And he realized that his understanding of blessing and cursings were perfectly backwards. So how did Asaph do that? Well, only by considering God and his kingdom. Only by thoroughly thinking through what his eyes saw and his ears heard with an understanding that only comes when we enter the sanctuary of God. Only then could he then come up with an alternative way of seeing how life genuinely unfolds.

Let me use another example. Let me make this obvious by going back to our friend Harvey Weinstein. There are many different things

that you can say about Harvey Weinstein at this time, but the one thing that seems very, very obvious when you consider God is that for right now, probably unknownst to Harvey, he's being blessed. I mean in my view Harvey Weinstein has just received the greatest blessing he has ever had in his entire life. God has allowed circumstances to yank the blinders off his eyes and has presented him -- before him in stark and unmistakable terms exactly how deep in sin he really is. I mean, I have no idea if Mr. Weinstein's ever going to avail himself of this blessing; but I can assure you that until he does, he's not going to see this as a blessing, he's going to see it as the ultimate in curses. And that's why I picked on Mr. Weinstein. He's an extreme example but he illustrates exactly how we confuse blessing and cursing just like Asaph did.

I want you to just stop and consider for a minute about those things that we think of as blessings and those things that we think of as cursing. Maybe it's a job we got or did not get, maybe it's a relationship we thought would go one way and it wound up going in another and maybe it's a sickness we either caught or avoided. Understand we here at Grace, we've just witnessed what certainly looked like the curse of ALS and we saw that in reality it was a blessing. I mean we just saw a dear brother succumb to a fatal disease that had every earmark of being a curse and yet, and yet the effect of that disease was to bring him back into the fold, to

have him repent of his life-style and leave this earth fully prepared to meet his Maker. You know maybe we have this idea of blessing and cursing perfectly backwards. I mean why is it that every time we get something that's so thoroughly rooted into this world, we think of it as a blessing. I mean we've been blessed with this new job, with this new house, with this new car, whatever. And I'm not saying it's not, it certainly might be a blessing. But it also certainly might not be, particularly if the God who created and loves us is looking out for our well being not just today but 500 and 5,000 years from now. Wouldn't he have a right to bless us according to what he thinks is best and not us even if those things that appear to be blessings and curses are perfectly backwards.

Scott Dannemiller has a blog called "The Accidental Missionary" and in it he sums up perfectly the problems that we have with this idea of cursing and blessing. This is what he says. He says: "Calling myself blessed because of material good fortune is just plain wrong. For starters, it can be offensive to the hundreds of millions of Christians in the world who live on less than \$1 per day. You read that right. Hundreds of millions who receive a single digit dollar 'blessing' per day. The problem? Nowhere in scripture are we promised worldly ease in return for our pledge of faith. In fact, the most devout saints from the Bible usually died

penniless, receiving a one-way ticket to prison or death by torture. If we're looking for a definition of blessing, Jesus spells it out clearly: "Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'"

Folks, this is God himself. We don't need to ask what does blessing look like, this God himself telling us precisely what blessing is. And it's my guess that for most of us these blessings have all the hallmarks of a curse. Poverty of spirit and mourning and persecution and insults and lies? God says all those who are suffering these things because of the kingdom are in fact blessed.

Clearly God's ideas of blessings and ours are oftentimes polar opposites.

Dannemiller goes on to say of the beatitudes this, he says: "So there it is. Written in red. Plain as day. Even still, we ignore all when we hijack the word 'blessed' to make it fit neatly into our modern American ideals, creating a cosmic lottery where every sincere prayer buys us another scratch-off ticket. In the process, we stand the risk of alienating those we are hoping to bring to the faith. And we have to stop playing that game. The truth is, I have no idea why I was born where I was or why I have the opportunity I have. It's beyond comprehension. But I certainly don't believe God has chosen me above others because of the veracity of my prayers or the depth of my faith. Still, if I take advantage of the opportunities set before me, a comfortable life may come my way. It's not guaranteed. But if it does happen, I don't believe Jesus will call me blessed. He'll call me 'burdened.' He will ask, 'What will you do with it?' 'Will you use it for yourself?' 'Will you use it to help?' 'Will you hold it close for comfort?' 'Will you share it?' So many hard choices. So few easy answers. So my prayer today is that I understand my true blessing. It is not my house. Or my job. Or my standard of living. No. My blessing is this. I know a God who gives hope to the hopeless. I know a God who loves the unloveable. I know a God

who comforts the sorrowful. And I know a God who has planted this same power within me. Within all of us. And for this blessing, may our response always be, 'Use me.'

Well, we've seen the role that the devil takes, I mean, he wants nothing more than to see us as cattle being fattened up for the slaughter, and he fattens us with curses designed to look like blessings. We see Asaph come into the sanctuary of God and we see that's exactly what he saw. He says: *Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.* And having seen the real role of blessings and cursings, Asaph considered his God and then he sees himself. He says in verse 21: *When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*

And finally we look at all of our blessings and cursings by filtering them through our consideration of God and his kingdom. And so we ask have you been blessed of God lately? Have you

considered that those blessings may come disguised as mourning or stress or discomfort or sickness or persecution? Can you see that God's plan for us is to make us less dependent on this world and more dependent on the other one? God's got something wonderful in store for us and that's what he's preparing us for. Have you been tempted by the enemy with curses that look just like blessings? Now I know at this point you can say, well, how am I supposed to tell? I mean that's a fair question. How do you know what is a curse and what is a blessing? How do you determine that? Well, you do what Asaph did. You consider God. Again he says: *But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until, until I went to the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.* You know, God has told us a lot of things in his sanctuary and today the sanctuary of God is his word. And what he's telling us in the sanctuary is that this life is really a race. And furthermore he tells us that we run this race surrounded by a whole cloud of witnesses. This is what he says. He says: *Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* See, God's advice to us in running the race is no different than

the advice he gave to Asaph. We fix our eyes on Jesus. He fixed his eyes on God. And as *1 Peter* says: *We cast all our anxieties on him, because he cares for us.* And that includes the anxiety of seeing the good guys get bad stuff and the bad guys get good stuff. We put everything into the context of eternity and what it is that God wants our lives to be. Jesus Christ took on flesh, he lived the perfect life and then he went to the cross to exchange his righteousness for our sin in order to ransom and rescue individuals from every tribe, tongue, and nation who would glorify God by uniquely representing him. That's who we are. That's what we do. We are here to be shaped and molded into the very image of God's Son and everything that takes place in our life has that goal in mind. So the next time you're feeling either cursed or blessed, just take a moment to consider what Asaph considered. He said: *You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.* Let's pray.

Father, I thank you. I thank you for the sanctuary that we can

enter into every time we open up our bibles. I thank you for the wisdom that pours out of it, the wisdom to be able to discern the difference between blessing and cursing, the wisdom to be able to see our life in context to eternity, to be able to see the things that are going on in our lives which may dismay us for which we might not have answers and put them into the context of what our lives are going to be five years, 500 years, 500,000 years from now. Lord, that's your goal, that's your desire for us. Give us the ability to trust you, give us the ability to put faith in you as we see this process unfold and look to you for the wisdom to decide what is a blessing and what is a cursing, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.