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***Our Real Life is not Here – It is
Yet to Come***

March 18, 2018

Sermon Text: Psalm 73

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 2

Mat 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. (14) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Last week we looked at these incredibly important verses and considered *the two ways*. The wide, easy boulevard to destruction, filled with the vast majority of the human race, and the narrow, hard way that leads to life, traveled by just a few. And we were challenged to stop envying the world, to stand against its

efforts to make us conform, and to persevere in following Christ to life.

All of this is related directly to what Jesus said to the devil in the wilderness temptation we have been studying in Matthew 4 –

But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Mat 4:4)

We live by obeying God's Word. Our life is given and sustained by Him, even if we have no bread – no "stuff" the world offers.

This morning I want us to seriously think about our *life* some more. Specifically, I want to show you a trap that Satan uses against us which is in fact the very same snare he pulled on Christ in the wilderness. Here it is-

Satan wants us to think and "live" as if our present existence in this present world is our real and only life. That "what we see now is what we get."

And therefore that if we do not find joy and fulfillment in the circumstances of this present life, we have missed out on life.

This is really what we talked about last week and it is the same philosophy Jesus warned us about in the parable of the rich fool. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in a positive challenge to us:

Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Php 3:19-21)

And again:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col 3:1-4)

Think of all the disappointments in your present life. Is your life turning out the way you thought it would – the

way you wanted it to? Some people can say “yes,” to some degree, but for the most part we would all have to say “no, not entirely. I had a different script in mind for myself.”

This is one major reason people spiral down into depressing “mid-life” or even “old-age life” anxieties. They suddenly realize that their life is most likely half or $\frac{3}{4}$ over and it hasn’t played out according to what they thought it would. So they get scared and often times set out to do crazy things (often sinful things) to “eat, drink, and be merry.”

And often they grow angry with God when it all seems to be falling apart for them.

YOU must never yield to this kind of thinking. It is a trap. It fails to put things in perspective, to stand back and survey the whole big picture. Paul reminds us:

- Do not set your mind on earthly things – don’t consider this present life in this world as the sum and substance of your life
- Your real world, your home, your actual life is not here, it is THERE. With Christ. In the new creation. In the resurrection yet to come.
- Set your mind on these things, not on things here on earth.

- If you are a Christian, you have new life, and though you have already been born again, you still have not yet come into your full new and eternal life and world.

Christian, there is more to the story. And I want to show you a classic example from the Old Testament in Psalm 73 – of how we must get our thinking straight on these things.

“My life has not turned out the way I wanted it to.”

And to this, the Lord says:

“Christian, your real life has not even begun yet. Open your eyes of faith and LOOK at what I have for you.”

The Psalmist – I almost Stumbled

A Psalm of Asaph. 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. (Psa 73:1-3)

I have talked to Christians who were depressed and disillusioned with the Lord. Why? Because, as one lady told me years ago, “ever since I can remember, I wanted to have a perfect home and family. A perfect marriage. Children who were all just great kids

and we would live in a nice house and be a wonderful happy family.” And very, very little of it had come about. Her family and, as she thought, her life – was a shambles.

Wrong thinking and teaching in the church often sets us up for this very kind of fall.

- Here is marriage. Follow the rules. Marry a Christian. God will bless you.
- This is how you raise the children. Do this and this and they will grow up to love the Lord.
- These are the rules for your finances. Follow them and God will bless you.

And so you “do the program.” Religiously. And your marriage falls apart into a living hell. Children rebel and follow the world. And your finances? Well, let’s not even go there.

We expect our present lives *to make sense*, right? We really tend to embrace the false theology of Job’s friends –

After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. And Job said: "Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.'" (Job 3:1-3)

Then here comes his buddy, Eliphaz, with the typical false philosophy we are so often inundated with:

Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.

(Job 4:6-8)

See it? If you are evil, you will reap evil. If you are good, you will reap what is good. Innocent people don't perish. Only the wicked do. That was Eliphaz' worldview, and it is very, very commonly taught in churches today.

If you buy into this *in this present life and world*, you are going to be in big trouble. Because innocent people DO perish. The upright ARE cut off from the land of the living. Those who plow evil and sow wickedness very often reap a huge harvest of wealth and fame and fun times!! Understand? Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes to tell us how meaningless this present life is. How random and unjust.

I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom

under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. (Ecc 2:18-23)

And this is the very thing that the Psalmist is writing about –

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. (Psa 73:1-3)

His faith almost crashed. That is what he means when he says he almost stumbled and slipped. He had become jealous of the wicked because *they were prospering!* He saw the incredible injustice of it all. Listen as he continues-

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. And 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. (Psa 73:4-12)

Can you identify with the Psalmist here? He looks at the wicked and here is what he sees:

- They are the “beautiful” people; healthy
- Their lives are trouble free
- They are arrogant
- They are violent to the innocent
- They oppress others and are proud of it
- They mock and defy God
- Yet they just keep getting richer and happier

Understand? WHERE is the lightning bolt from heaven? Doesn't God see what is going on down here? *Why are good things happening to bad people and bad things happening to good people?* This isn't how it is supposed

to work, right?

And then he says:

All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. (Psa 73:13-14)

This is what he *almost said*. This is what he means by “almost stumbling.” He almost declared that “living for the Lord, walking in His way, is useless. What does it get you in the end? Nothing.” Because his life was anything but trouble-free. “I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.”

But he didn't say it. What stopped him? Listen further as he tells us:

If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children. 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. (Psa 73:15-20)

Asaph (the Psalmist) sees how close he

had come to real disaster. If he had made that declaration of unbelief, he would have been a traitor to all of God's people who came after him and read his words. But he didn't yield. He kept trying to sort it out and make sense of life in this world. And then at some point, whether literally or figuratively, he "went into the sanctuary of God." By this he must mean that he asked the Lord to enable him to understand, and his prayer was answered. Here is what he realized:

"...I discerned their end."

You see how we get it wrong and start to slip? We look only at the NOW. At life in this present world. At how things are now. At how our life and the lives of the wicked appear right now. THAT IS THE WRONG PERSPECTIVE AND IT WILL ALWAYS LEAD YOU TO CONFUSION AND DISCOURAGEMENT!

Instead, we must look at the *end of the story*. At the "then" rather than the "now." And what is the truth about the "end" of the wicked? Or for that matter, what their present seemingly "secure" status is now?

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!

HERE is the true condition of the wicked. They are walking with each step they take on the very, very edge of a bottomless pit, and worse – the edge they are walking along is *slippery*. Think of freezing rain coating everything. They don't walk carefully. They don't even see the cliff or the ice. So they RUN to the evil they are doing.

Think of a movie, for instance, in which some tight-rope performer is walking on a small cable connecting two skyscrapers. Imagine him skipping along, doing handstands, sitting down to eat a meal – how does that make your gut feel? Well, Asaph came to realize that the wicked are in just such a precarious position – only in their case the cable has been *greased!* Oh, people might be applauding them and they may have a smile on their face, but the reality is that the Lord is the one who greased the cable and any second He chooses to do so, He can send a puff of a breeze or a slight shaking of the cable, and into the terror of hell they go. And that is exactly what is going to happen to every one of them.

Listen now as Asaph sums it up and describes the truth WE need to arrive at:

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. (Psa 73:20-28)

Is your soul embittered? Asaph's was. We look, we see injustice, we see our lives here not playing out the way we planned – but the fact is that when we are thinking that way *we are like brutes – more like an animal than a human being!* Because we are acting in ignorance rather than according to the truth God has given to us.

Animals, you see, live for the here and now. They have no concept of God.

Dogs and cats don't pray, in spite of what some radical animal lovers say. They don't establish churches to worship God. Animals have some emotion – dogs certainly love their masters and only a bad one bites the hand that feeds him. But they do not consider the end of things. Animals pretty much live for the *now*. And Asaph confesses here that when he was embittered toward God over the prosperity of the wicked and the oppression of the innocent, he was like an animal because he was only looking at this present time and moment. He was not, by faith, listening to the Lord and trusting in His promises.

His entire attitude changed and the bitterness left when he realized the truth:

- The wicked are on the very precipice of destruction and will indeed be cast into it
- The Lord is right now *holding on to my right hand! So that I cannot slip*
- The Lord directs me with His personal counsel
- My end is the reception into glory by the Lord
- All the junk that the wicked presently enjoy is garbage. I only desire Christ.
- The Lord is my refuge, my fortress and strength, not the “stuff” of this present world.

Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.' For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free.

Then he will say, 'Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!

"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear, As I live forever, if I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh-- with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the long-haired heads of the enemy.'

"Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land." (Deu