

Look Up

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Bible Text: Psalm 73
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We come to a wonderful Psalm. Before I even get into it, I just want to point a book out to your attention on Psalm 73. The title of it is "Faith on Trial" by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. It's a multiple chapter book on this single Psalm. It was one of the most influential books in my early Christian life. There is a new addition out with a forward by Kevin DeYoung, and I could not recommend it more highly to you for further study. We're just going to treat this Psalm in kind of a survey fashion this evening. That book would be a great follow-up for you to what we're going to say tonight because in this Psalm we really find a method of thought, a method of approach, to the conundrums of life that will sustain us spiritually and give us a right perspective to deal with most anything that would come to us in life, and I don't say that lightly.

Psalm 73, let's just start with a little bit of introduction, Psalm 73 begins book 3 of the Psalms and in many of your margins you'll see book 3 indicated there, Psalm 73 through some 89, I believe it is, constituting the third book of the Psalms, and why that's important is this, is that last time when we looked at Psalm 72, we saw that book 2 ended with the glory of God's King and it gave us a sense of the majesty that is yet to come when Christ reigns on the earth and it's going to be a glorious reign, a reign of righteousness, a reign of compassion that will cause all nations to come and honor and worship him. So you're at this magnificent high point as book 2 comes to a conclusion and it will be wonderful, we said, to be under the reign of Christ when he reigns on the earth but that's not our present experience right now. In the meantime, while we are waiting for his reign to come, we have a life to live here and the life here is sometimes very difficult and it is sometimes presents us with questions about the nature of God and the way that things work out in life in a way that almost causes us to be undone. The questions are so hard and so difficult to come to grips with and Psalm 73 is going to help us with that.

It's a Psalm of Asaph and the Bible tells us that Asaph was the chief musical leader in Israel, appointed by David to that role. You can read about that in 1 Chronicles 16:4 and 5. For the sake of time, we won't look there and look at that any more closely than that. Book 3 has a large section of Psalms that are attributed to Asaph, this one all the way through Psalm 83. So we are seeing the writings of a different human author here but what I would have you see and be mindful of is the fact that this man was the worship leader in Israel and that's going to be very helpful for us to remember as we go through

this Psalm, is to realize that we are dealing with a man of spiritual prominence appointed by King David himself to the great role of leading the nation in worship.

Now, you might think that a man like that had his spiritual act entirely all together, and there is this false sense that people sometimes have that the people up front are always the ones that have it together but what we see in the life of Asaph is that that was not true for him in a particular episode of his life. And one of the things that we love here about Psalm 73, as we'll see as we go through it here, is that Asaph is writing to teach us a very important principle but he does it in a way, he does it in a way of telling us a story about himself. As it were, he opens the doors to his inner man and lets us come inside and see what he was thinking and the struggle that he had to come to grips with some things.

Now, with that little bit of introduction, this worship leader of Israel has a very basic but a very important principle that he wants to teach us here in Psalm 73 and he starts in verse 1 by announcing what the principle is that this whole Psalm is about. Verse 1 tells us what this whole Psalm is about in a summary fashion. Look at it there with me when he says in verse 1,

1 Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!

That is fundamental and essential for you to remember as you read through this Psalm and as we study it together. He is teaching one single basic principle here in this 28 verse Psalm, as we have it in English, he is teaching us that God is good. That is his point. That's what he wants to communicate to us and as we go through the Psalm, we'll see that he ends where he begins. Look at verse 28, at the very end of the Psalm and you can see how these things all fit together. Psalm 73:28, he says, "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good." So at the beginning of the Psalm and at the end of the Psalm in verse 28, he is making statements about the goodness of God. So that works like a laser beam, that works like spiritual radar for us to understand what it is that he intends to teach us here.

Now I said that, a moment ago, that he opens the doors of his heart and he lets us in. Understand why he's doing that. This is not a man who is putting himself on spiritual exhibition, it's not that he would draw attention to himself even though the Psalm talks about what was going on in his inner man. He is teaching a greater principle about the goodness of God. Now, you could learn a lot of things about teaching from that. You know, we're used to men who maybe tell stories about themselves even from a pulpit but the overarching goal here is not that Asaph would say, "Oh, look at me. Look at my struggle," as people sometimes do when they talk about their struggles, they really just want to talk about themselves. Asaph's point is to talk about God here and his personal struggle was merely a means to that greater end.

Now, one last thing by way of observation here just to kind of help orient you in your thinking about this. There is a wonderful diversity to the Psalms that we have gotten to enjoy over the years that we've been going through them and we're kind of used to thinking about the Psalms as being prayers to God and that's certainly true for many of

the Psalms, if not a significant majority of them, but this Psalm is not written in the form of a prayer to God. There is a little section of prayer in it but primarily this Psalm is written to men. It's form is as an instruction to men who are listening to instruct them about God rather than praying to God in a different form. That doesn't mean that this Psalm is not the word of God. This Psalm is inspired by the Holy Spirit as is the rest of the 66 books of the Bible. I just want you to be mindful that what we have here is a man, a spiritual leader, coming alongside us in order to instruct us how it is that we should think about God and how that proper thinking will enable us to find our way through some of the most difficult challenges that we could have in our heart in our spiritual life. So he's going to teach us about the goodness of God by telling us a story about himself. It's a wonderful Psalm on so many levels and we're going to enjoy it now as we turn to it in greater detail.

You could split this Psalm in half, verses 1 to 14, verses 15 to 28, is one way to structure and that's how we'll do it here this evening. First of all, he's going to tell us about his earthly jealousy on his way down. He fell into a trap in his thinking, or he almost did, and at the root of the trap was earthly jealousy, and as a result of his earthly jealousy, he went into a spiritual downturn. He went into a spiral that was going down like water swirling down the sink getting ready to go down the pipe. That's where his spiritual life was at one point, he tells us. So we're going to look at his earthly jealousy on his way down and then later we'll see the eternal perspective on his way back up. Earthly jealousy on the way down, the eternal perspective on the way back up. That's what we're going to look at as we look at the Psalm all too quickly here this evening.

One of the things about having Martin Lloyd-Jones as one of your primary men that you've been shaped by is that whenever you treat a long passage in a single message, you feel a little bit like you are letting him down because he spent like what, 12 messages on this Psalm? He had a gift for that that I don't have and so here we go.

Earthly jealousy on the way down. He is teaching us that God is good to Israel to those who are pure in heart, to those who are sincere. You know, we often think about purity in the realm of sexual morality or having a pure heart in the physical realm, and while that might be included in the broad scriptural idea of purity, he's teaching us something, when he uses purity here, he's using it in a much broader sense. He's talking about those that are sincere in their devotion to the God of the Bible, to those who are his people and they are sincere and unmixed in their desire for him. It's not that they're sinless. That's not the point. As he's going to show us here, he himself was not sinless but rather there is at the core of the man a desire for the glory of God, a desire to honor God, that is the dominating priority and passion and principle that animates his inner being. "Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!" To those that are like that. Here in New Testament times, we could say that surely God is good to his people who have put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation. This is a principle that applies not only to the Old Testament saints in that dispensation, it applies to all those that belong to the true God through faith in Christ. So what we see here in Psalm 73 is a realm of thinking, a manner and a pattern of thinking that applies and helps us today even though we are on the other side of the cross.

So he says God is good and God is always good to his people. Surely this is true. Surely we can count on this principle never to be violated no matter what happens on earth. I'll say it again: we can count on the fact that this principle is always true no matter what happens on earth. That is the cornerstone of right thinking for the Christian man, for the Christian woman. That's his principle that he wants to teach us but here's the thing, as we start to follow Asaph in his thinking: he nearly stumbled in the past over the very point that he wants to teach now. He nearly stumbled over this very basic fundamental principle that God is good, he said, "I nearly tripped over this." How did that ever happen?

Look at verse 2. He says,

2 But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped.

He says, "God is good but as for me, I nearly blew it. I nearly lost sight of this. I nearly stumbled over that very point." And the question is, "Asaph, how could you miss that? You're the choir director. You're the music leader in Israel. How could it be that you would stumble over that point?" Well, he goes on and he tells us and we appreciate the humility of a man that you and I can identify with because you and I have stumbled, haven't we? You and I stumble sometimes over trusting God when things don't go our way. You and I stumble in the midst of our trials. We murmur. We doubt. We question. What was it that prompted Asaph to a point that he nearly slipped? You know, you think about the situation where you are walking in the winter and you take a bad step on a sheet of ice and your foot starts to go out from you and you don't go all the way down but there is that moment where your physical balance is at stake and you might go down. Spiritually speaking, that's what he describes. He says, "I stepped on spiritual ice. I nearly slipped. I nearly went down on this very point." So in humility, he opens up his heart and he tells us what his problem was and through it he instructs us so that we would not slip.

How did he ever get into such danger? Well, look at verse 3. He says,

3 For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

He said, "I was jealous in my heart. I lost sight, I nearly lost sight of the goodness of God because I was envious of the people that reject him and don't follow him." Wow. Really? How could you ever think that? How could the music leader for Israel be envious of the wicked? How in your position of prominence and the spiritual benefits and riches that have been entrusted to you, how could you be jealous of those that were outside the faith? That seems strange. But he walks us through it. He says, "I was envious of them because I saw their prosperity. I saw that they had a good life in an earthly sense."

Look at verse 4. He says, "Just walk through it with me and you'll see where I went wrong." He says,

4 For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like mankind.

Now in the 21st century, we may not think that having a fat body is a benefit. I get that. But in those times, a well-rounded person, you might say, gave evidence of the fact that they were prosperous and they had plenty to eat and it showed that they were doing well, it was shown by the fact that they could eat what they wanted. There were no pains in their death. Their body was fat. They go through life having what they need, what they want, and they are not troubled by a whole lot because their earthly prosperity shields them from so much trouble that other people experience. So he says in verse 5, "They are not in trouble as other men nor are they plagued like mankind. They have ease in life." And there is a consequence to that in the way that they interact with men and the way that they think about themselves.

Look at verse 6,

6 Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them.
7 Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of their heart run riot. 8
They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high. 9
They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth.

Here they are, they are prosperous and they are proud. They are arrogant and they go through life boasting about their prosperity, boasting about their position, talking down to people who do not have the good things that they have, and as they go on by every earthly appearance they are getting away with it. They have what they want. Not only do they not consider the needs of others around them, they oppress the people that are under their power and they are doing fine. There is no difficulty in their life. Wicked people doing well and lording it over others. So the psalmist, Asaph, was looking upon them and he saw that they had the upper hand in earthly prosperity; they arrogantly talked down to men; and not only that, not only that, they are boastful toward God himself.

Look at verse 10. He says,

10 Therefore his people return to this place, And waters of abundance are drunk by them.

It's a statement that they have earthly influence; that people gather around them to drink in their words. And in that position of influence, they say in verse 11, he quotes things that,

11 They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?"

They are boasting against God and they are denying with their words the fact that he is omniscient; they are denying that God intervenes in human affairs; they are saying that,

"We are independent of God and that he has no reign and he does not even see what we're doing." So from this position of practical atheism, of defiance toward the revelation of God, of arrogance and boastfulness toward men, you would think, you would think that if God was holy and God rewarded the righteous and judged the wicked, that they would be struck down, but he says, "My life experience is telling me something different. They have it good. They prosper. They have prominence and they have influence." And he looks at that and he draws a conclusion about them in verse 12. He says,

12 Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth.

Remember, this is a godly man in a spiritual slog at the moment as he describes what was happening to him in the past, but here's a man of spiritual prominence looking at wicked people and drawing a conclusion that they have it easy, they are increasing in wealth, this is the nature of their life and they've got it pretty good. He was jealous of them in their earthly prosperity.

Now, we can relate to that, can't we? We can relate to the fact that it's the wicked people in our own world that are flourishing in Hollywood, that flourish in politics, that flourish in other earthly realms, who would mock us for gathering together on a weeknight to study God's word together. They would speak down to us. They would mock our God. They would mock Christ. They would want nothing to do with the Gospel. And in comparison to the way most of us live, they've got a much broader lane on Easy Street than any of us do. So we can relate to Asaph. We can understand that. So he has drawn this conclusion that this is how life is for them. They have it at ease. But then he goes further as he looks back on this spiritual experience he has. He goes a step further and this is where he really steps his foot on the spiritual black ice and is about to lose it. He goes a step further and he draws a conclusion about himself and his pursuit of a godly life; he draws a conclusion about himself in light of what he sees going on in the lives of the wicked around him.

What does he conclude? Look at verse 13. Oh my. Oh my. You almost want to grab him and say, "Oh Asaph, don't go there. Don't go there. Don't say what you're about to say." But he said it in his heart and he tells us about it later on after the fact. He says in verse 13,

13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; 14 For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning.

What's he saying there? He is saying, "In light of the ease and prosperity of the wicked, I look at my life which is difficult and sad and I endure chastening and trial after trial hits me as though there is no relief to be had from them, what can I conclude," he said to himself in the midst of that, "what can I conclude except they've got it right and I've got it wrong. I am wasting my time being a man of faith. I am wasting my time in the service of God because the result of this for me has been sorrow and chastening while those who

reject God have prominence, ease and prosperity." In his mind, in his carnal thinking, the conclusion is inescapable.

So what he's doing here, he's ruminating in his mind. He's weighing these things over. He's tossing these things around in his mind and he says, "There are the wicked. Look at them. You can see it." Watch any Hollywood awards show and see all the beautiful people in their godlessness, and there they are at ease, defying God, mocking the people of faith, violating every possible principle that we would hold dear and they've got it good. And Asaph says, "And here I am suffering hardship while I am seeking God. What gives with this? What's wrong with this picture?" he says. And he asks the question, "Why then am I troubling myself with godliness if the outcome is going to be the opposite of what I think it should be? This is unthinkable. What is the value of salvation, then, if this is the way that life is going to turn out?"

Well, let's step back for a moment and just consider what we've seen in the first half of the Psalm here as we've seen his earthly jealousy on the way down. He has fallen into a double trap in his heart. First of all, he is evaluating life solely on the basis of present circumstances and, secondly, he's full of self-pity and envy, of jealousy. His inner man has strayed, has betrayed him. He is jealous. He is envious even though Scripture says in the 10 Commandments, "You shall not covet." He was coveting what these people had and that he did not and he felt sorry for himself and, "Woe is me!" All based on what he saw going on around him in the moment, trusting in, you might say, trusting in the powers of his own perception and diagnosis about what reality is in that episode in his life. He says, "I can see this. I feel like I'm being cheated. I can see what's going on here and they have it easy and I have made a great mistake. I have given my life over to the service of God and I have done so for vain and empty reasons. I am wasting my life here."

Beloved, I would not be a very good preacher or pastor if I didn't somehow ask you whether you've had some of those own thoughts in your own mind at times, whether you've felt envious toward the unsaved and the godless who prosper with their millions, with their billions. "Oh, if I could just have a taste of their life." Envy after that. Forgetting that they are godless and deniers of Christ in the midst of that. Has your heart ever strayed into that yourself?

Well, what we need to see is that that's not a place where we should go and so Asaph, think about a steel trap that has just kind of snapped around him and has him by the leg and won't let go, he is in a trap of bad thinking, of self-pity and jealousy, and he has gone all the way down in his heart and mind. How did he start to escape that trap? How did he get out? Because, I mean, let's just look at something really basic, the Psalm doesn't end at verse 14, does it? That's not the end of the story. There must be something more to what's going on here and there must be something more to his spiritual experience. He has spoken to us very honestly and very candidly about his thought processes and how he fell into that trap of sin and envy in his heart but the Psalm isn't over. Apparently he got out of it. Remember, after all, what we said at the very start, here we are at the very bottom in verse 14, we are at the very bottom but we step back and remember what is the

principle that he is intending to teach us. He's intending to teach us that God is good and so even here at this point in the Psalm, at this pivot point in the Psalm, there is this tremendous tension that you feel. "I know he's teaching me about the goodness of God," but that's not where he's at. That's not where his mind is. That's not what he is expressing in verse 14. And not only that, he has described things which we ourselves have seen in our own experience and say, "Yeah, that is true. Wicked people do prosper and a lot of the time righteous people suffer, have it difficult, and they find themselves walking a narrow way filled with many tribulations." How can we avoid a conclusion that says, "We've got it wrong and the wicked, the godless, have it right"? How did he start to escape that trap?

Well, let's go to our second point here this evening where we see the eternal perspective on his way back up. We saw his earthly perspective, now we're going to look at things from the eternal perspective and, beloved, what I want you to see, what I want you to remind yourself of in verses 2 through 14, everything that he described was based entirely on his perception of earthly life as he saw it at the time. After that opening verse that states the theme of the Psalm, there is nothing that points to anything of an eternal perspective here. He's viewing things from an entirely earthly way of thinking.

How did he escape the trap? Well, here we can see what he says about his eternal perspective on the way up. He was in a spiritual freefall but it stopped with a most surprising thought. It stopped with something that I would venture to say that most of us would never have suspected. He says in verse 15, look at verse 15. He says,

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.

Wow, is that ever a big deal what he just said there. Notice that he says, first of all the, "If I had said, 'I will speak thus.'" He hasn't verbalized these thoughts. These were all things that were going on in his inner man but he had not articulated it. He had not verbalized it. He hadn't said these things to others when he was in the midst of his bad thinking, but he was thinking about it. It was right on the tip of his tongue, you might say, and then he stopped and said, "What would be the consequences of me talking like this? Of me expressing what's on my mind? What would the consequence of this be for me, the choir director of the nation, what would be the consequences if I spoke that way?" And he says, "Behold," look at verse 15 with me again, "I would have betrayed the generation of Your children." What's going on here? He recognized that if he said – oh, beloved, hear me out on this, this is so very important – he recognized that if he said what he was thinking in the first half of the Psalm, he would have hindered other believers. He loved the people of God enough not to do that to them. He recognized that whatever his internal struggle was, that was not the only consideration in what he did with it. He said, "I am part of the believing people of God. There are people that rely on me. There are people that trust me. There are people who look to my example and if I say what I'm thinking, if I tell them that faith is a waste of time, I'm going to devastate them. I am going to put a major stumbling block in their path." He said, "I can't do that. I love the people around me and the community of God enough not to do that."

Beloved, what Asaph is saying and what broke his spiritual freefall was this: he realized that he had responsibilities beyond himself. He realized that he had loyalties beyond himself. The mere fact that he was in a struggle, the mere fact that his thinking was difficult and he was troubled by what he said did not – oh, my goodness, would you please hear me on what I'm about to say – that did not give him license to simply say whatever vulgar ungodly thought was on his mind. We live in an age in our culture where we just think that everybody should immediately say whatever is on their mind and social media just feeds that. "Whatever I think, I will say, consequences be forgotten." Asaph, and by extension godly people, realize that that's not the thing to do. Godly people realize that their words have consequences and godly people remember that what they say is going to have an effect on their brothers and sisters in Christ. Godly people realize that the things that they do with their life are going to have an effect on the people around them and that shapes and influences and changes the way that they live and the way that they talk because Asaph and godly people who follow in his footsteps realize, "This isn't all about me. It's not just what about my life. It's not just about what I think. What I do impacts other people." And Asaph, recognizing that principle, says, "I can't say what's on my mind. I need to keep my mouth shut because whatever else I do, I love these people around me enough not to betray them, not to be treacherous to them. Even if I'm having my own internal spiritual crisis, I'm not going to infect others with my spiritual germs. I will put my hand over my mouth and not spread my spiritual germs to others."

And that illustrates an important principle of spiritual life. Asaph hasn't figured it all out yet. He hasn't resolved anything about the questions that he has in mind here, but he recognizes that there is something that breaks his fall, there is something that stops the downward spiral. And when you are in a downward spiral like that, beloved, you can use anything that breaks the downward momentum. Find something that will restrain your panic, your doubt or your fear. It doesn't have to be the highest and most godly and most biblical of thoughts, sometimes it's just the practicalities of life that will restrain you from running even further away with your emotions and your bad thinking. Asaph here says, "I can't let this go on any further. I can't say what I'm thinking because I'm going to hurt people that I care about and people that I have responsibility to."

You don't have to solve everything immediately, just do something that buys some time in your thinking, and for Asaph, now he's stuck, so to speak, between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, this problem of his envy of wicked people, is pressing in on him from the left, kind of like those old TV shows where the walls are coming in and pressing a guy together. On the left, a wall is coming in about the prosperity of the wicked, on the other is coming in and pressing him in on this is, "I can't say what I'm thinking. My life responsibilities won't allow me to do that." So he's still troubled.

Look at verse 16. He says,

16 When I pondered to understand this [when I considered the spiritual predicament that I found myself in], It was troublesome in my sight.

It was a hard piece of labor for me. So he's still troubled and he's got nowhere to go with it. But then something else happened and now he starts to share with us in verse 17 what it was that delivered him from this spiritual dilemma that he found himself in. Verse 17 he says,

17 Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end.

Oooh. What did he do? He returned to worship. He returned to vertical thinking. He returned to responding to his Maker, responding to his God, responding to the God of Israel. And what happened when he was in the sanctuary of God? Somehow he came under the sound of truth that he had forgotten in his self-pity and envy. Somehow being in the context of worship, being under the truth, being under the music that surrounded the people of God, all of a sudden it gave him a completely different perspective that changed everything that he was thinking about. What happened was this: he saw through with the perspective of biblical truth now in his mind, he looked again at the prosperity of the wicked and he saw this, he saw that it was a complete mirage. It was not real. It was not permanent. It was not an expression of reality.

Look at verses 18 and 19. He says, "Here's the reality of it. I perceived their end. I saw what the outcome of all of this is." And what happens at the end of a wicked life, beloved? What happens at the end of the godless man's prosperity? What is the outcome of it? Where does it end up? He says it in verses 18 and 19. Now he's speaking to God and he says,

18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!

What he's saying is this: he says, "God, judgment awaits them at your hand at the end of their earthly prosperity. Their prosperity could last for decades but it ends in destruction. There is nothing to be jealous of here. I know what the outcome is for the wicked and it is judgment and destruction and hell, and when the inevitable outcome occurs to them, they are no longer going to be arrogant and boastful. They are no longer going to have prosperity. They are no longer going to be in the possession of oppressing men. Rather what's going to happen to them, what their experience is going to be is that they are going to be suddenly struck with terror that they never saw coming. They are the ones who are actually on the black spiritual ice but they are going down. They're on a slippery spot and you will cast them down to destruction, O God. They will fall hard in judgment like a man falls on the winter ice and cracks his head open, only for them the consequences will be eternal."

And he illustrates what their position is like in verse 20. He says,

20 Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.

He says, "God, when your time comes, you will show that you never approved or tolerated their wickedness. You never accepted it. It was a parenthesis in time and your justice was never violated, it was only delayed for just a little while, and you will carry out what is right in the end. You will set things straight and everything will be reversed," like the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus who had his good things in life and he wakes up and he finds himself in Hades suffering, begging for a drop of water to cool his flaming tongue. And father Abraham tells him, "Friend, you had your good things in life and now you are bearing the consequences of it." And then at that time, everyone is going to know, particularly the wicked themselves, that they made a bad bargain; that they traded that which they could not keep for something that would bring eternal destruction on their heads.

Asaph says there is nothing to be jealous of here. There is more than this parenthesis of life to consider. It's what the outcome is and the outcome for them is unspeakably bad, and he compares their situation to a dream. Again, I mean this in a very positive way, using a homely example, homely in the sense that it's something that everybody can understand. You know what it's like. You wake up from a dream. What is it about dreams? They have a temporary sense of reality about them, don't they? They have a sense of reality about them when you are asleep, that it seems like this is what's really happening when you have a pointy hat on your head and you are riding an elephant through downtown New York, "Wow, this is weird but this is real." I've never had a dream like that. That just popped into my mind, again. But when you wake up, you say, "Oh, that wasn't reality. Now I'm in the realm of what's real. Now I'm in the realm of truth." And the moment you wake up, that puff of seeming reality is gone and you are back to what's real. Asaph says, he says, "This is exactly what the prosperity of the wicked are. It's not real. It's not lasting. It's not permanent and one day they will wake up and find that everything that they had built their life on was an illusion and now they are going to face the real reality and from their high position of arrogance and oppression, they will be terrorized in a way that they never dreamed possible. There ease was only temporary. Fearsome judgment awaits. There is nothing lasting in their condition. That is their path that they are on." And now that he understood that in light of the presence of God, now that he understands that, he starts to rethink and he realizes that he had been foolish to ever envy them, to ever look on the riches of the Forbes 500 and think that we were missing out on something.

Look at what he says in verse 21. Now he condemns his prior thinking. He condemns what he was expressing in the first half of the Psalm when he says in verse 21,

21 When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within, 22 Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

Now he's expressing his repentance over his prior spiritual attitudes and he says, "God, I was so wrong. I should have known better. And when I was thinking like that, when I was jealous in the first half of this Psalm, when I was jealous as I looked on the wicked, O God, I was a fool. I was ignorant. I was senseless. I was like a brute beast rather than

what I should have been, a thinking man of God." So now having repented of that, instead of envy, he sees his God with the new humility and gratitude.

Look at verses 23 and 24. He says in verse 23

23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;

That word "nevertheless" is a wonderful wonderful word in this context. He says, "God, I was like that. I was thinking these things about the wicked and I was making accusations, veiled though they may have been, against you. And I was wrong and I was sinful to be like that. And yet, God, nevertheless, you never left me. I was continually with you."

You have taken hold of my right hand. 24 With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory.

He says, "God, you took me and made me your own. God, you guide me in this life and God, one day I will be with you in glory." And when he sees things clearly he says, "How good is that, that this great God of glory has dealt with me graciously even when I was questioning him? He did not cast me away. He did not give me the discipline or judgment I deserved. Instead he brought me even closer to himself." And all of a sudden you enter into the reality of the principle that he's trying to teach, "This God is really good, to be so kind to such an unworthy servant as me."

He is looking ahead to glory and, beloved, I want you to see something here. I'm not going to look into some of the cross-references that I have in my notes. I want you to see something here. In verses 23 and 24, you have an Old Testament picture of the entire nature of biblical salvation. In verse 23 he says, "You have taken hold of my right hand. You have saved me and brought me to Yourself in a past moment of time." In verse 24, from that moment of time until death, what does God do? He guides us with his counsel. "With Your counsel You will guide me." Then when our time, our appointed time in this life is over, what does he do? He receives us into glory. Justification, sanctification, glorification in two magnificent Old Testament verses.

Beloved, mindful of the sorrows that have packed many of our lives in recent weeks and months, recognizing from my own sad past experience that trials like that can tempt you to questions, to doubts, even to accusations against God, "Why, God? Answer me, God!" When you find yourself in that realm, take a deep breath and do this: look up. Look up. Look up and remember your God. Whatever your earthly trials and disappointments and sorrows may be, no matter how men have betrayed you and dealt with you treacherously, beloved, look up. Your God, if you are in Christ, has taken you by his hand. Your God through all of the uncertainty of life, is guiding you providentially with the counsel of his word. And your God when it is all said and done, will receive you into glory. You belong to the King of Psalm 72 and he has made you one of his own.

Look up and see it from an eternal perspective. Look up! Look up! Look up! Look up!
And see your God lofty and exalted and reigning from heaven over all. Look up and see

your brother in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, bearing your name in the wounds of his hands before the holy Father and declaring for all time, for all eternity, "That one belongs to me." Look up and remember what real reality is and bend your knees and worship because when you remember those things, then you come to a conclusion very quickly, "My God is good. Measured by the price of blood at Calvary, my God is infinitely good."

So look up. And how do you respond to this good God? You worship. Look at verse 25. Asaph says,

25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.

Beloved, can you say that? Do you so see the excellencies of our God? Do you so see the excellencies of Christ that everything earthly fades by comparison into nothingness, into a mist being driven by the wind away? Think about it this way, I'm going to make a comparison to the Transfiguration. You remember how Jesus took Peter and John up and he was transfigured before them and they saw Jesus and Moses and Elijah for a period of time and Peter says, "Let's make three tabernacles." Then the cloud comes and God speaks to them and says, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." And they looked and they saw Christ alone, Christ high and lofty and exalted. Do you see that when it's all said and done Christ is all that matters and Christ is sufficient and Christ is enough so that you could gladly and truly say, "I desire nothing on earth because I see in my Lord the loveliest rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley. I see the greatness of Christ and that is enough."

How do you respond to a good God? You look up and worship. How do you respond to a good God? You look up and you discern life. Verse 27, he says,

27 For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.

Beloved, there is nothing to be jealous about what we see going on in the world around us in the lives of the unsaved. There is nothing to envy in them at all because they are headed for destruction. They will perish. Their riches will not last. Why then are you envious of them? There is nothing to be jealous of. It comes out bad for them. It comes out good for us, whatever may happen in the meantime.

How do you respond to a good God? You look up and then you declare him. Verse 28,

28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works.

Sinclair Ferguson says this, he says, "Asaph learned that his problem could only be resolved by remembering who he was," who Asaph was, "a creature with limited understanding yet one who belonged to a God of infinite understanding who could be trusted to fulfill his own perfect purposes." He goes on to say, "The worship of God

provides the true scales on which to weigh up the experiences of life. In his presence alone can we answer the questions: what is this really worth? Where will it really end?" Only when your eyes are focused on Christ, Christ at the cross, Christ resurrected, Christ ascended into glory, Christ returning to bring you home, only then can you accurately assess anything in life, and when you belong to Christ, you find in him far more than earth could ever give you.

So, beloved, where we come out is this, what Psalm 73 lovingly graciously teaches us is this: stop comparing your life to what you see in earthly men. Look up. God judges the wicked but he is good, he is good to his people. And beloved, if you are in Christ, that is more than enough. That is everything.

Father, we all struggle in these areas in one way or another. Forgive us of those times where we have shared in the sin of Asaph, full of jealousy, wishing we had a different life, wondering about your goodness, questioning it. Father, give us a clarity of mind, a clarity of heart vision to see Christ and Christ alone; to see the wonder, the glory, the exclusivity, the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge; and to realize that the eternal Son of God has set his affection on us, has shed his blood for us, and intends to return for us that we might be with him forever in the place that he has been preparing for us. O God, it comes out so good for us in the end. We thank you in advance before we see it. We thank you on the basis of your word.

Father, these things and the outcomes are so certain we could speak of them as though they were past events because they are that certain to occur. I pray that by your Spirit you would come alongside those that are struggling and sorrowing here that are with us today. I pray, Father, that these words would be a balm to their souls and that you would remind your children of the great inheritance that has been bestowed upon them in Christ, and in Christ they would find that that is enough; that in Christ we have more than we need, we have all that we could ever want and far more beside. Yes, Father, take us by the hand and having taken us by the hand with your counsel, guide us. And when it's all said and done and our appointed days come to the conclusion, Lord, receive us as you have promised into glory. We pray these things in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

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