

FBC POWELL, 5-7-17 AM NOTES
"When Good Things Happen to Bad People"
Psalm 73:1-28
13 in Series, "Psalms: Medicine for the Soul"

Job 10:2-3 "I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me; let me know why You contend with me. Is it right for You indeed to oppress, to reject the labor of Your hands, and to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?'"

Jeremiah 12:1 "Righteous are You, O Lord, that I would plead my case with You; indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?"

Habakkuk 1:13 "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?"

Psalm 37:9b "...those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land."

Psalm 73:16-17a "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God..."

I. The Dilemma Stated (vv. 1-2)

II. The Dilemma Studied (vv. 3-16)

2 Corinthians 10:12b (NKJV) "But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*

- William Cowper

A. The Prosperity of the Ungodly (vv. 3-5)

B. The Pride of the Ungodly (vv. 6-9)

Psalm 73:6-9 (ESV) "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."

C. The Popularity of the Ungodly (vv. 10-12)

D. The Pain Caused by the Ungodly (vv. 13-16)

Jeremiah 12:1b-2 “Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease? You have planted them, they have also taken root; they grow, they have even produced fruit. You are near to their lips but far from their mind.”

Job 21:7-9 “Why do the wicked still live, continue on, also become very powerful? Their descendants are established with them in their sight, and their offspring before their eyes, their houses are safe from fear, and the rod of God is not on them.”

Psalm 73:16 (NIV) “When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply”.

III. The Dilemma Solved (vv. 17-28)

Psalm 73:16b-17a (HCSB) “...it seemed hopeless until I entered God’s sanctuary...”

A. God’s Perspective (vv. 17-22)

John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

B. God’s Presence (v. 23)

C. God’s Protection (v. 24)

D. God’s Person (v. 25)

“He who has God and everything has no more than he who has God alone.”

- C. S. Lewis

E. God’s Provision (v. 26)

Conclusion (vv. 27-28)

Psalm 73:28b “... I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.”

First Baptist Church Powell 05 7 17 AM

Chapter 13: When Good Things Happen to Bad People

Psalm 73:1-28

I love the Psalms, first because they are inspired by God, but also because they deal with the most important issues of life. Not only do the Psalms deal with the issue of, “Why do bad things

happen to good people,” they also tackle the problem of “Why do good things happen to bad people?” I am thankful that God allows us to ask questions. Job asked lots of questions! Job 10:2-3: “I will say to God, ‘Do not condemn me; let me know why You contend with me. Is it right for You indeed to oppress, to reject the labor of Your hands, and to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?’” Jeremiah 12:1: “Righteous are You, O Lord, that I would plead my case with You; indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?” Habakkuk 1:13: “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?”

Most of our questions come when it seems to us that God is unfair. It doesn’t seem fair that people who love the Lord and desire to please Him suffer illness, financial collapse, and being passed over for promotions. On the other hand, it doesn’t seem fair that so many ungodly people *seem* to be successful and happy, and their sinful ways seem to just be overlooked by the Lord. By the way, “fairness” the way we tend to define it, is not one of the attributes of God (more on that in a later message).

What I have just described to you is exactly what the Psalmist is dealing with in this 73rd Psalm. The Psalmist, the man God used to give us this precious and comforting psalm, was a musician named Asaph. We don’t know a great deal about him, but he is referred to in some other passages. From 1 Chronicles 16:5 we learn that Asaph was a Levite and was one of the three chief musicians appointed by David to preside over the choral services of the sanctuary. He was selected by the Levites to lead the music when David brought up the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:16-19). Asaph was asking a question that people are still asking 1,000 years later.

In Psalm 37, David dealt some with the question Asaph is dealing with in Psalm 73. Their answers do not contradict; they complement each other. The bottom line in Psalm 37 is *wait*. Psalm 37:9b: “...those who *wait for the Lord*, they will inherit the land.” The bottom line in Psalm 73 is *worship*. Psalm 73:16-17a: “When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God...” In Psalm 73, we have the privilege of traveling with Asaph as he goes from questioning to worshipping.

I. The Dilemma Stated (vv. 1-2)

In a sense, verse 1 is the key to this Psalm. Even though God’s goodness to His people is questioned, Asaph gives the bottom line of this whole Psalm in the very first verse. The word translated “surely” means “after all.” We might put it like this: “After all is said and done.” Our problem is that we have such limited vision; we cannot see the whole picture. We are chained to the present and in the present, even for God’s “pure in heart” people, it doesn’t seem that “God is good” to His people. In the trials of life, we need to be reminded over and over that God is good. We need to confess (even if it is through clenched teeth) that God is good! This is what real faith looks like. It is easy to confess that God is good when the cancer test comes back negative, when we get the news that we got the promotion, when our children are honored for their character and academic performance, and when we hit a home run. But in reality, God is good when the test comes back positive, when another gets the promotion, when a child rebels, and when with our best effort we strike out. Most Christians (at least in the Bible belt) know the little ritual that can be rather trite when one believer says to another believer, “God is good.” The other says, “all the time.” The little ritual continues when one then says “all the time” and the answer comes

“God is good.” The problem is that we don’t often go through that little ritual when we are told that our job has been eliminated and in thirty days we will be unemployed.

After making the opening statement in verse one, the Psalmist, Asaph, states his dilemma in verse 2. His dilemma was that those that were not “pure in heart” seemed to be doing better than those who loved and sought to please the Lord. This was a serious problem! I appreciate the transparency of Asaph. He is open with the fact that he struggles with the seeming prosperity of the wicked. He even goes so far as to say that his feet came close to stumbling and his steps almost slipped. That is a description of a faltering faith.

II. The Dilemma Studied (vv. 3-16)

Asaph is open with the fact that he was actually envious of the wicked. Asaph was discovering the truth that we always get in trouble when we start comparing ourselves with others. 2 Corinthians 10:12b (NKJV): “But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” Our God does not deal the same way with all of His children, and He certainly doesn’t deal with His children like He deals with those who are not His. For His own children, His specific plans are different and He knows exactly what we need to go through to prepare us for the work He has for us to do. From our standpoint, God’s ways are often mysterious. I am really blessed by the hymn written by William Cowper entitled *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*. One of my favorite verses of that hymn written in 1774 says,

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*

Let’s examine the specific things that Asaph was struggling with.

A. The Prosperity of the Ungodly (vv. 3-5)

The specific dilemma that Asaph was struggling with was being envious of the *arrogant* and the *wicked* as he saw their seeming prosperity. That word translated “arrogant” refers to those who boast in themselves. In the context, it is probably referring to those who think they are controlling their own lives and bringing about their own “successful” outcomes. The word “prosperity” in verse 3 refers to peaceful circumstances, more than enough material things, good health, and a generally pleasant life without significant struggles. With every believer, every person who desires to please and obey the Lord, there is a temptation to be envious of the arrogant wicked who seem to be prospering.

The Psalmist’s first example of the wicked prospering is in verse 4. The ungodly don’t seem to be at all concerned with or struggling with the fact that they will one day die. Verse 4 is translated in the NIV “They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.” Death doesn’t seem to even be on their radar. In verse 5, it seems that they just really do not have any problems. Again the NIV says “They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills.” Their money and influence seems to exempt them from common problems the godly seem to struggle with.

B. The Pride of the Ungodly (vv. 6-9)

There doesn’t seem to be a cloud in the sky of the ungodly. They give God no glory, and yet there seems to be no consequences. The ungodly have pride as their necklace and violence against the godly as their garment. In their pride, they believe that they are self-made people. They just leave God out of their life. What a graphic description of human pride and arrogance. The

question of the Psalmist is, “Why does God allow this?” They wear pride like a decorative chain; they respond with violence to anyone who challenges them; they have all they want to eat (a sign of being blessed) – In a world filled with hunger, they are so fat their eyes bulge out of their sockets; they are full of boasting and arrogance. In other words, in their pride they gloat over their ignoring of God, and nothing seems to happen to them. Verse 9 means that they scoff at having to give an account to God for their pride filled life.

C. The Popularity of the Ungodly (vv. 10-12)

The world admires these ungodly people. Often the world worships their wealth and power. Verse 10 means that those of the world drink up everything the ungodly say and do. We see that with the movie stars, the athletes, the rock stars. The sense of verse 11 is, “We are prospering and increasing in riches in this world and we are doing it without God’s help. We have no need for God!”

D. The Pain Caused by the Ungodly (vv. 13-16)

The Psalmist was in emotional pain and he complains to the Lord. What he is saying is, “the wicked wake up with abundance and I wake up feeling chastened by the God I serve.” The Psalmist gives a good summary of his struggle in verse 16. Psalm 73:16 (NIV): “When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply.”

Thank you for hanging with me through this troubling passage. It sounds bleak, but if you have been a believer very long, you probably can relate to at least some of it. When we get our eyes on the ungodly and how they appear to be prospering and we are struggling, we can fall into this disappointment with God’s ways. But now we are going to see the rest of the story. What seems to be the prospering of the ungodly is not true prospering at all.

III. The Dilemma Solved (vv. 17-28)

Look at the last of verse 16 and the first line of verse 17. Psalm 73:16b-17a (HCSB): “...it seemed hopeless until I entered God’s sanctuary...” Now Asaph’s focus completely changed. What was it about the sanctuary of God that changed the Psalmist? It was *worship*. Worship at its essence is setting our focus on, and rejoicing in, God and His attributes and His ways. In the sanctuary, as the worship began, his perspective changed immediately.

Exactly what did Asaph see in the sanctuary? God gave him five things that completely changed how he looked at the wicked who seemed to prosper.

A. God’s Perspective (vv. 17-22)

God didn’t change Asaph’s circumstances; He changed his perspective. Seeing the end of the ungodly puts everything here in perspective. He saw the entirety of the ungodly person’s life. All of the things they had here on earth – the riches, the seeming prosperity, the indulging of the flesh is like a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. An eternal perspective changes how we view everything. There is death and a judgment to come. The *success* of the ungodly person was only an illusion. When Asaph started slipping, he went into the presence of God through worship. His whole perspective was changed. I have never figured out why some people quit coming to church when temporal things get tough and they are hurt by the unfairness of life on this fallen planet. That is pulling yourself away from the only place you are going to get God’s perspective. When you feel your feet slipping, run, don’t walk into God’s presence through worship.

Let me also remind you that even here on this fallen planet, some of the ungodly that seem to have it made, who seem to be prospering, are not as happy as you think. They have no supernatural peace! But if you know Jesus you have peace. John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” We’ve all heard the stories about the rich and famous who were miserable – Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and so many more. It is in the sanctuary – in the place of worship he gets God’s perspective.

In verses 21, 22 Asaph is grieved over his envy and doubting of God. He realizes that he has been thinking more like an animal than a child of God.

B. God’s Presence (v. 23)

This is glorious! While Asaph was questioning God, God wasn’t questioning him. God was holding him even when he felt (in verse 2), “my feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped.” What an amazing and gracious God we have! Today, if you have savingly trusted in Jesus Christ, if you are in union with Him, our God will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). That is true even when you fall into a comparison with those of this world who seem to have the advantage with all of their fame and fortune. I love that word “nevertheless.” What a grace filled word. In some other translations, it is translated “yet.” If you are in Christ, even when you fall into envying the worldly famous and wealthy, nevertheless He doesn’t leave us but holds us with His strong right hand.

C. God’s Protection (v. 24)

God is with us and is guiding us through the slippery places, and He will continue until we are taken into His presence in Heaven.

D. God’s Person (v. 25)

Look at the amazing change in Asaph! He has gone from Psalm 73:2-3a: “But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant,” to “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.” A quote I used last week by C. S. Lewis, “He who has God and everything has no more than he who has God alone.”

No matter what the ungodly possess here on earth, they don’t have God, and all that they have will perish or be taken away. They may be having a comfortable journey on their road of life, but they are going the wrong way and the bridge is out ahead and they will perish. They are like people on the Titanic eating caviar and drinking champagne and thinking how much better they have it than others. They don’t know that there is an iceberg dead ahead.

E. God’s Provision (v. 26)

Even when I don’t understand the pain and the trials and the trouble I am going through, when I turn to the Lord in total trust, He is the strength of my heart and He is my portion forever. That word translated “portion” can also be translated “inheritance.” The Lord Himself is our inheritance.

Conclusion (vv. 27-28)

Many years ago I heard a story from the days when Teddy Roosevelt was President of the United States. President Roosevelt and a large contingent of friends and security people went on a wild game hunting trip to Africa and were on a ship returning to the United States. Also on that ship was a precious elderly missionary couple who had served for many years in a remote section in

an African country. The conditions were primitive and difficult. They had dealt with danger and disease on a regular basis. After many years of faithful service, they had retired and were headed back to the U.S.A. Due to their limited resources, their accommodations on the ship were meager and very plain, while the President and his friends lived in luxury. When the ship docked, the President and his friends received a rousing welcome with large crowds, a brass band and a host of dignitaries. After the President and his part had gone, the elderly missionaries were finally allowed to disembark. There was not one soul to greet them. The husband was deeply hurt. Later he prayed and confessed his disappointment to the Lord. He came from that prayer time with a radiant smile on his face. His wife asked him what he was impressed with from the Lord that gave him so much joy. He said that the Lord impressed on him this message: "Child of Mine, you're not home yet."

This Psalm begins with Asaph's feet almost slipping because of his focus on the wicked and all of the benefits, the fame, and the fortune they seem to have. It closes with the sad, bleak end of the wicked and the ones belonging to God living in confidence and trust in Him. What's the difference? Psalm 73:28b: "... I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works."

