

Finding Truth in the Sanctuary

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Psalms

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Bible Text: Psalm 73

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 73. Psalm 73, a Psalm of Asaph. As you turn there, I do want to express my gratitude for being able to share this pulpit with our beloved pastor who we miss, we miss very dearly. If you're visiting, I promise I'm only here once and he'll come back, so if this isn't good, then just stick around, hopefully I don't scare him away as well. I do want to say it's a double honor as well to be preaching the week after my own father, the special special privilege that not many people have but to see the faithfulness of my own father and to see his ministry in my life, and then to hear him bring the word of God faithfully to all of us last week on Father's Day when our whole family was here. It touched me in a very special way, as I know it touched many of you to hear from him, one of our beloved elders, and my father in the faith, and in real life. So I express my thanks to my own father for his ministry and the reason I can be up here today to bring the word of God to you.

Psalm 73, we are going to be looking at the entirety of this Psalm so I have a lot to cover and not a lot of time. We may have to hustle. They didn't give me two weeks so there is no Part 2, this is it. we're gonna have to make it through all of it today. So let's get to it. Psalm 73, A Psalm of Asaph. Read with me. this is the word of God.

1 Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. 5 They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. 7 Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. 8 They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. 9 They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. 10 Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. 11 And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. 13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. 14 For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the

generation of your children. 16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, 17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. 18 Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. 19 How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! 20 Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. 21 When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, 22 I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. 23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. 28 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.

Heavenly Father, you have been so kind to bless us with another day, another day to worship together, to gather in the presence of your word, to join together as the body of Christ to pray to you, to confess our sins to you, and to hear directly from you. I pray you would bless my words now. Help me with my broken tongue to speak the truth of your word and I pray you would be with all of those who are hearing and who are underneath the authority of your word, that we would receive it with all humility and all thankfulness to you. Be with us now, Father. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Bible is very clear that there are two ways to live, there are two ways to think, there are two ways to go about your life. We live in a world that is very much opposed to the binary; they don't like the fact that there is male and female; that there is heaven and hell; that there is a life that honors God and a life that does not; that there is truth and there are things that are not true. We live in a world that likes to muddy the waters and say there are many different ways you can live, and many different ways that you can live your life, but the Bible is very clear, we live in a world where you either honor God or you do not, you either follow God or you do not, you either see things by the light of Scripture and the truth of his word or you live a falsehood and you will not stand in the final days. And this is what we see in this Psalm. It is a Psalm that shows very clearly, it's almost split directly in two, the first half showing there is the way of folly, and the second showing the truth of God's word and how that enlightens our path. This is what we see in the Proverbs, this is what we see in other Psalms; it's very clear there is one way to live and that is the way to honor God. Any other way leads to death.

Now this Psalm is a Psalm of Asaph. It is the beginning of Book Three of the Psalms. Asaph himself was a choirmaster so he was a leader in the worship of the people of God, a leader in the temple, a songwriter, an author of Scripture. He wrote this Psalm as well as the 10 following after. And he was a friend of David. So this was truly a man of

God and a man of God writing this Psalm about his own struggles. I want you to keep that in mind, that as we look, we're about to look at a very hard and devastating struggle that Asaph goes through, but keep in mind that this is a man of God. We like to think that the world suffers and struggles with these doubts but people of God struggle with doubts of God's goodness as well.

Asaph guides us through how to go through this struggle and how we are to truly see our circumstances, and he begins with the conclusion, his introduction to his Psalm is his conclusion and that is this: truly God is good. It can also be translated: God is only good or only good is God. God always is good, everything God does is good, and this is his conclusion, he's going to come to this conclusion but he wants you to know this is the starting point as well. We need to have this underlying thought always that God is good because this is the underlying truth of all reality. Regardless of what we see, regardless of what our eyes tell us, God is always good and he only does good. There is nothing else in God. Though we think that he is evil, though we think he causes evil because of the afflictions we endure, God is always good.

We get one sentence about the goodness of God and then we immediately take a downturn into a dark dark place.. Some of the most beautiful sentences in Scripture are those that say "we are sinners, we are under the wrath of God, but God is good, but God is merciful, but God has saved us." In this case, we see God is good but "as for me." Oh boy, that's a bad place to be; to say God is good and then to follow that with "but as for me," you know he is in a dark dark place.

"As for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped." This leads us right into our first point which is a downward focus. A downward focus. Asaph continues for the next 16 verses talking about this downward focus where he is looking at two things primarily. and that is mankind and the here-and-now. His focus is straight down. He has blinders on and he can only see himself, the wicked people around him, and the only time frame that he has is his life from beginning to end. That's all he can see and he is limited in this focus that looks downward at himself.

He has a man-centered view. He was envious of the arrogant. He has this envy of the people around him because he looks out and sees, what? That the wicked are prospering. He looks around and sees that they are receiving rewards in this life, and he looks at himself, looks at his own righteousness and his own acts of goodness, and says, "All I am receiving is punishment and affliction all the day long." And this leads him to focus only on the wicked, only on the evil, and too long for what they have which is to do whatever they want and to receive whatever they want, to avoid justice and to enact their own will.

Now he rightly lists a lot of evil things and he considers them to be evil, but it's very easy for us to long not only to have the rewards that the evil have but to do the things that they do, and all of these things if you read them it sounds like, "Well, of course, that's evil who would want to do that?" Even in our world today, our society doesn't promote being an evil person, they promote evil but they they hide it under the guise of world peace, of loving one another, of love is love, everything is happy, and we need to be friendly.

Anybody who says, "I want to be an evil person," is typically rejected by society and yet our world is so full of evil and they present it in a way that makes it look enticing. It looks good.

Let's go through some examples, "for they have no pangs until death," verse 4. Do you want to live an easy and peaceful life and die with your friends and family around you? No worries, no stresses?

"Their bodies are fat and sleek," the idea of eating and consuming beyond what you need, having an abundance, having more than enough and being able to not discipline your body but just enjoy consuming. Have you heard of the body positivity movement? You're perfect just the way you are. You weigh 1,200 pounds, that's fine. You're all good. It's beautiful and brave to do whatever you want. The world presents it that way.

"They are not in trouble as others are." The world likes to avoid trouble and avoid, "Oh, maybe we should get rid of the police, or get rid of jails. Let's eliminate capital punishment. Yeah, that sounds so loving and kind. That's good. We need to get rid of people being in trouble, the people that we really disagree with."

"They are not stricken like the rest of mankind." Do you want to live a life where you never get sick? You never have afflictions? You should live a peaceful life. You can avoid it if you do these things. If you just drink alcohol all the time or smoke whatever you want, yeah, you can avoid that pain, that suffering, you can avoid those trials.

"Therefore pride is their necklace," necklace being the item of jewelry that is promoting beauty, that is the gemstone that is there to adorn, and it's pride. That sounds very familiar today, pride. There's, I think it is June still, so pride is very prominent right now. "Be who you are. Be yourself. Just be you. Do what you want. Nobody can tell you that you're not a bad person. Nobody can tell you to change. You are who you are and everyone needs to accept you for who you are." It sounds enticing to the world. And wear that like necklace. Exalt yourself and put yourself out there and say, "This is me. This is who I am and you have to deal with it."

"Violence covers them as a garment." The world says, "If we don't receive universal health care, we will burn down the Supreme Court." That's a very present threat of violence. "If we don't receive the right racial reconciliation, we will burn down our cities." The world, as much as they promote world peace, is all about violence, doing what they want. And it's even in the personal life of violently attacking other people for things they believe, violent words, violent actions. And it covers them like a garment, doing what they want, saying what they want.

Again verse 7, "their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies." We see the eyes and we see the fatness again, it's the idea of the eyes swelling out looking and seeing and wanting and coveting, and the fatness is the result of taking and consuming more than they need, far more than they could ever need, far more than they should. The idea of coveting the things of the world and taking and taking and and never

receiving any sort of correction for it, just taking and feeding. Their God is truly their belly. It is their desire that they continually feed.

"And their hearts overflow with follies." Follow your heart. We know that the heart overflows with follies but the world says whatever comes out of your heart is good and you should follow after it; whatever you see with your eyes that you want, go get it, go get it, go take what you want for yourself.

The next two verses speak about the tongue and about speaking out loud. "They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, their tongue struts through the earth." They say what they want about who they want, speak truth to power, that sounds nice. Speak your mind. Say what's on your heart regardless of what it is, regardless of how offensive it is. Speak your truth. Say what you will. Say what you want. I know there are a few prominent online platforms where people seem to feel they can do this whenever they want. "I can go speak my mind, I could go speak my mind right now about whatever I want, however I want, and I would receive no correction for it." That's how the world operates and this is what he's seeing.

"They set their mouths against the heavens," or the sense here is they're placing their mouths in the heavens declaring themselves to be holy beings and essentially speaking down as though they are God, speaking their truth into existence.

"And their tongue struts through the earth," like a beast roaming around the earth, doing what it wills, going where it wills, so their tongues strut through the earth.

And in verse 12, "Behold, these are the wicked; they are always at ease; they increase in riches." How does the world spin this one? Well, that's not hard. Do you want an easy life? Do you want to never work? Do you want to always get rich and have lots of money? Well, that sounds pretty nice. Have you ever worried about having money or worried about having too much stress in your life? Have you wanted to just have things easier, take things easy or here's 10 steps to make passive income, here's five ways you can retire at age 30, never have to work another day in your life? You can have whatever riches and whatever wealth you want, all of these things can be so tempting and yet they are so evil because this is a fully man-centered view. It is centered on things that do not last, that do not matter, and that are opposed to God.

A lot of these things t's a slight twist on that which is good. It's good to have food and to feed your family and to provide, and it's good when you're blessed with more than enough. It is not good for you to take and consume to the point where you are beyond feeding your family, feeding yourself and what you need, and you are gorging yourself and feeding all of your appetites. It's twisting the goodness of God, but it sounds so enticing, and part of the reason it sounds so enticing is not even as much what they're doing, as it is what the result of this is, and this is where his downward focus, Asaph's downward focus, is looking only at the here-and-now, because these wicked men, it says right there, they have no pangs until death. He's seeing these wicked men, he knows them, he sees their lives progress all the way to death and he's expecting justice will come

shortly, justice will come soon, justice is going to come before they die, they will understand the penalty of their sins, they will understand that they have been wayward, and instead they die in peace and in happiness with those they love around them and in their riches and their wealth, never having seen the judgment of God in this life. And Asaph is wondering, "How is this possible?"

This is even troublesome to the people of God. It says in verse 10 and 11, "Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them." That's also translated more the note in my Bible here is, "the waters of a cup, of a full cup are drained by them," and the idea is they're looking at the wicked and how they are thriving, and they are full of sorrow and they are emptied out in seeing this grotesque sight, and they turn into practical atheists by looking at the atheists. They look at those who elevate themselves as God and they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" The testimony of God, Asaph fears, is being tainted because the wicked are thriving, the wicked are prosperous and he looks at that and he is in despair.

But he's not only centered on himself or he's not only centered on the people around him and on their timeline, he's also focused only on himself and his timeline. In verse 13 he speaks of his own works, "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence." He's speaking of the inward man being clean, the outward man being clean. "That which I desire, I've kept it pure; that which I've done with my hands, the works that I've done, I've kept them pure," and he says, "It's all in vain." He's focused on his righteousness and his works. And the reason he says it's in vain is because he's not only focused on himself but he's focused on his own rewards. What has he received in this life? He's been stricken all the day long, rebuked every morning. He says, "When I wake up, pain. When I go about my day, I deny my flesh and it hurts, and when I go to bed at night, more suffering. All I have is suffering and all I've done is good, and all the wicked do is evil and all they get is good things." This is confusing to him. He sees that he is not getting his just reward and he sees that the wicked are getting something that they do not deserve.

He does say in verse 15, these things he's been thinking, these things he's been struggling with, he did not say them out loud. He says, "If I had said I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children." Part of this means he was suffering through these things alone; this was an internal struggle with him that was raging in his soul. He was encountering these doubts and he did not speak this aloud but it was good for him not to speak this aloud because these doubts he knew were untrue, and he knew if he were to speak them he would betray the people of God. He is betraying the things that the people of God have always stood on, and were he to speak it aloud, he would put a potential stumbling block in front of all his hearers. This doesn't mean there's never a place to speak these doubts, to talk through these concerns, but he was faithful to remain silent on this and to wait on the Lord, and ultimately the Lord did answer him. We'll come back to that.

Some people do speak these doubts freely, like I mentioned there's those couple of different places, outlets online where people can speak whatever they want, and there's a

new trend of ex-vangelicals, that is, people who decide to leave the church and express to everybody that they are out and they tell everybody why, and they express all their doubts online in a public forum, and this is a way of giving the world an opportunity to mock the people of God and it is giving a way for the people of God for themselves to stumble. So those who are presenting these doubts in an open and outward manner, talking to everyone they see, "Yeah, I just don't know if God is good. I just, I don't really even know if he exists right now. I'm just really having a hard time. I felt I would just vent while I'm leading worship." That's not a good place for that because you are taking the truth of God, you are subverting it and you are saying, "I have these doubts and you probably should too."

Asaph is good to keep quiet about this but he still is suffering and struggling, and he's still envious of the wicked. Envy has a way of ignoring what is true. Asaph's focus is not only cut off to only man and only himself and only to his time, but he's also cut off certain realities in that focus that are still true. For example, the wicked do not always receive good. Are there examples in Scripture of wicked people receiving judgment from God in this life? There are. The wicked do not always receive good, they do not always thrive, they do not always come out on top, but perhaps the more grotesque ignorance is that Asaph does not confess any sin of his own but he essentially says, "I have always been good and I only receive rebuke and suffering." He's ignoring the goodness that God has already showed him, and if you had asked him at a certain point former in his life, you said, "Why is it you have joy?" He would have said, "Because the Lord is my Lord and he is my God." But now he's saying, "There's no blessing. I've never received a reward. I don't have anything to show for my righteousness." And he says, "I'm fully righteous." He makes no confession of sin in this. He says, "I have been keeping my heart clean. I have been washing my hands in innocence. It's my work that I've been doing." He doesn't say God gave me a pure heart and God has allowed me to wash my hands in innocence. He says, "I've been doing this work and I've been receiving an unjust reward."

So he's ignoring the truth and envy has a way of doing that. When we begin to doubt, when we begin to be envious of the wicked, it's so easy for us to look at the worst things in our circumstances and the best things in somebody else's and to say, "I have it the worst of all people, and that person has it the best, and that person has it the best, and everybody else out there has the best, and if only I could do what they do, then I would have true joy and happiness." We can so easily fall into this envy like Asaph. We can so easily look around and say, "My life has been terrible. Why have I been striving for holiness?" Now to be fair, Asaph was called to holiness and he was a holy man, so he could say, "I have been keeping my heart pure," but his focus is entirely on himself and this is where the problem lies. His downward focus is focused only on mankind and on the temporal nature of his own life. The end of man, his death, that's the end of everything, that's all that matters is in this life.

When Asaph attempts to understand this, the ESV says, "It seemed to me a wearisome task." Other translations say, "It was too painful for me." How can you equate the goodness of God with the suffering in the world? Have you ever heard that question before? I think it's been posed by just about everybody who's ever thought anything ever.

If God is good, how can there be evil? And so many people take that and they say, "I don't have an answer. I'm just gonna give up on that one. God must not be real or he doesn't love me, or something like that. Or he's weak, or he's just incapable of being able to eliminate evil."

An easy way out, but Asaph knows there's no easy way out of this reality. "God is good but these things. how can I understand them? It seems to me too painful to come to this true conclusion. How can I reconcile these two things? How can I come to the right view? It is painful. It is too hard." And likely you've been in this place before. It's too hard to think through. It's painful. It's wearisome. It hurts. Why is it that I've been suffering? Why is it that my family has been taken from me? Why is it that my kids have left me or my parents they did not respect or honor me? Why is it that I was fired from my job? Why is it that all of these sicknesses have come on me and my family? Why? It hurts to think through but there is a distinct change, there's a specific turning point which is actually our third point, so keep that in mind, I know I'm throwing you off a little bit. We've still got the second point to go but this distinct change is that God provides the answers in the sanctuary of God. He did not understand these things until he went into the sanctuary of God and it was there that he discerned the truth, that he discerned their end. Our second point is: a divine perspective. When Asaph goes into the house of the Lord, he gains a divine perspective. God raises his head and says, "Look up. Take off those blinders and look around. You can see eternity and you can see that everything is centered around God himself." Asaph's view was that what it matters most is mankind, what man does, what I do, and what I get now. And we can get so caught up in that. What are the problems in my life? What are the issues in my life? What am I dealing with? What am I receiving from my works? And we forget that God is the center of everything. There is no area of the universe, there is no part of creation that is not fully centered around God, and when he goes into the place of God, into the sanctuary of God, he discerns that this is true: the world is centered around God and what matters most is the eternal God and his eternal plan of salvation, whereas with his downward focus he was focused, he was man-centered and focused on the present, in his divine perspective he's now focused on God, he is God-centered and focused on the eternal.

It's a stark difference because now he sees the end of all things. "Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin." God is sovereign over the wicked. The wicked men that claim sovereignty over their own lives, the wicked men that exalted themselves as God, God is sovereign over them; whereas it seemed that these wicked men are denying the glory of God and denying his existence and proving him to not be real by exalting themselves, in reality they are in the most dangerous place on earth. They are apart from God and therefore they will not stand because God is sovereign over the wicked. He is sovereign over their destiny. They do not determine where they go. It is God who leads them to these slippery places and it is God who makes them fall to ruin. They set themselves up against God and God is the one who places them there and causes them to fall to ruin. But it's a hard truth because we don't like to think of God being the one that causes the wicked to fall, but he is sovereign over them and he does truly execute justice over the wicked.

"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 you wake up from a dream, your dream is gone completely. It never really existed in the first place. Sometimes you have a dream that feels very real, you wake up and you're all scared like, "Oh, that felt so real." Or something that was nice and you want to go back to sleep but you have to go to work and it's 6 in the morning and you're really tired and really sad. That never happens to me, I don't think. But when he arouses himself the dream vanishes, and their lives are but a dream that they've built on themselves. They believe that they are God and in a moment they are gone.

And now we see the greatest change in perspective. Asaph is repentant of his sin. He is pricked in heart, He says, "When my soul was embittered," other translations say, "my heart is grieved, my heart is grieved, my soul is pricked," essentially saying, "I wanted what the wicked have and now I see what the wicked truly have, and I'm grieving that I ever wanted that, that I ever wanted to be numbered among the wicked, that I ever wanted to stand in the way of sinners and sit in the seat of scoffers, that I ever delighted in the counsel of the wicked. I am appalled."

He says, "I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you." Again, he's confessing his weakness. And the fact that he was like a beast, what does a beast think about? Thinks about itself, and it thinks about what it's doing right now. A beast does not plan for retirement. A beast does not plan to go to college. Your dog is not going to college, and if it is it's because you sent it there and it has no plans of going to college and it won't graduate. I'm I'm sorry to tell, your dog is not going to college. You could try, I don't know, maybe there's dog colleges around. But when he was like a beast he was thinking of himself, he was looking at himself, and what he needed now, what his fleshly desires were saying, "I need this now," just as a beast.

"Nevertheless," in verse 23. This is another one of those beautiful turns. We started off with an ugly turn from the goodness of God to the desperation of the wicked and the envy of the arrogant, and now we get to a turn from him being brutish and ignorant, being foolish, being like a beast, "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." He understands that God is sovereign not only over the wicked but over himself; that it is God who holds his hand and leads him. Though our grip is weak, though we fail in our strength, God is ever with those who put their trust in him, who put their faith in him. It is he who guides us with his counsel and it is he who will receive us to glory.

He recognizes that all he ever needs, all he could ever want is God because everything is centered around God. "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." What else is there but God? We so often think we need something for ourselves, we need to focus on our own lives, what else have you but God? Why is it that we go after earthly things? We forget that all we need is God.

"My flesh and my heart may fail," another confession of his own weakness, "but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." And these last two verses really

conclude and show the distinction between our two views, the downward focus and the divine perspective. The downward focus, "behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you." He used to think that those who were unfaithful to God would succeed and that they would last for the rest of their lives in joy and happiness. Now he sees that is completely wrong and what matters most is that God is sovereign over them and they will perish. And then, "for me it is good to be near God." Before he was doubting whether it was good to be near God, now he knows all he needs is to be near to God, "I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works."

His perspective is completely changed. It is no longer about himself. It is no longer about his acts of righteousness. It is no longer about the success of the wicked. It is no longer focused as though the wicked are the main character of the story. He is focused on God, what he needs is to be near to God and God shows his eternal plan of salvation is still in effect. Asaph doubted that. He doubted that it was still God's plan and that God was sovereign. We can doubt that too. We can look around at our circumstances and at our times and say the wicked are truly thriving. So many people say of this day and age that this is the most rampant wickedness we've seen because we can see everything online, we can see everything around. Let me tell you, the plan of God has not changed from the time of Asaph's day, and it will never change throughout all of eternity.

So often today a problem in our culture is that we do not look at history, we don't look at the grand timeline, we don't look at the lessons of the past so we repeat. That's the saying, if you don't study the past, you're bound to repeat their mistakes. And Asaph's problem is he was not looking at the history of the people of God, he was not looking at the history of the great plan of God, but when he stepped back and he focused on the things of God, it was there that he realized the world centers around God alone, and his life is best when it is found in God.

Now the contrast is interesting between the first and the second because between the wicked he's essentially looking at it, and this is, I want to make this very clear, he looks at the wicked and says the wicked are being wicked and yet they are thriving and prospering, and when he changes his perspective, he sees the wicked are wicked but they are in destruction, right? He sees them as receiving just rewards for their actions and then he sees that in reality they are going to receive truly just rewards for their actions. When he looks at himself, it's a different contrast. He looks at himself at first and say, "I have been righteous and I'm receiving the wrong payment. I'm receiving the wrong reward." But when he understands things in a godly way, he doesn't say, "I am righteous and then I'm going to receive my good reward," he says, "The best thing for me is to be found in God." At first he focuses on himself, and in the second he says, "It doesn't even matter about me. I'm not saved based on my righteousness. I'm not saved based on my works. I'm saved because I'm found in God. It is God who will receive me into glory. It is God who is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. All I need to do is be near to God." His perspective changes so that he's no longer focused on himself. He sees that what matters most is God in all things. His righteousness, he's called to to live a righteous life, you and I are called to live and walk in righteousness, but our righteousness does not

save us and our righteousness does not produce a reward of eternal life. Eternal life is a gift of God that is found by being in God because of his divine salvation and his saving grace.

Now this suffering that he goes through, the first half of this Psalm, don't hear me as minimizing the pain and the suffering and the trials that we endure, we go through incredibly hard things in this life, some of us in here are going through some of the hardest trials maybe we've ever gone through, some of us are suffering in ways unimaginable, and some of us are grieving, some of us are hurting, some of us are caught up in sin, and don't hear me as saying that that does not matter. Scripture does not say that our suffering does not matter, but what Scripture does is it shows our suffering in its proper context and it says suffering is real and it hurts but God is so much better, so much greater that the suffering seems as nothing. Paul writes of this as well. What is he call his incredible and immense and intense sufferings? A light and momentary affliction. That sounds like just getting a splinter, and Paul endured a lot more than a splinter. But in the context of the eternal weight of glory, it is as nothing. And that's what Scripture does here. it doesn't say that the first trial is hard. it says that through the first trial you can know God is so much better. He is truly good all the time. It elevates the goodness of God.

So in your suffering, it's not wrong to think through and to wonder and to ponder why are these things happening, but what you must do is you must turn to God because he is truly good. And that's where we get into our third point which is our application as well, and that is a decisive turn. I would argue that everyone in this room is going to come to a point where we resonate strongly with the first half of this Psalm, and when you are at that point, you have a decision to make. You have two places you can go. The first is the world, turning to yourself, turning to the ways of the world, you endure these strugglings and these sufferings and you're tempted to envy after the world and to act on that envy and to go and sin. "It seems like it's working for them, I might as well try it. I might as well go after their ways and see what that's all about because it looks so much better." But Asaph shows the right response, the proper turning point. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end." The decisive turn is: will you go into the presence of God? Will you go into the sanctuary of God? And I would argue that the sanctuary of God is the presence of God, among the people of God, grounded in the word of God, continually in prayer to God.

In Asaph's time this would have been going into the temple, the house of God where the word of God was kept, where they would have worshiped together, where they would have confessed their sins together, prayed to God together. It was the place where they would have gone to perform sacrifices and to worship God and hear from his word. And many commentators and commentaries when they talk about this sanctuary of God, they say it is primarily just the word of God and being in the presence of God himself. And where are you in the presence of God if not in the church? That doesn't mean in this sanctuary, in this room. You could come in here on a Monday morning and nobody would be in here, that doesn't mean you've gone into the sanctuary of God. You can come in here on a Sunday morning and you can be completely absent from everybody else, that

doesn't mean you have gone into the sanctuary of God. But the sanctuary of God is the place where God dwells among his people in a unique and special way. Go to the presence of God by being a part of the church. Be in the church. We need one another. We show and share the presence of God when we minister to one another and when we worship alongside one another. And it's not just any church that you go into. Be in a church that is grounded in the word of God. Where do you hear from God? His word. Where else would you hear from him? He has spoken to us through his word. So be in a church that proclaims the word of God and submit yourself to the teaching of that word. And how do we speak with God? Through prayer. We are able to boldly enter the throne room of God and lay all our requests, all our thoughts, all our desires, everything at the foot of his throne.

So be in the presence of God by being in prayer. Going to the sanctuary of God means going into the place of God to truly be in the full presence of God. Now in Asaph's day there was one place for that, going to the temple. You prayed facing the temple. You worship at the temple. That was the place you could meet with God. And now there is only one place that you can meet with God and that is in the man Christ Jesus, Christ Jesus who is the body of Christ. We are the body of Christ. The church is the body of Christ. So Christ is all that matters in the church. Be in the body of Christ.

Christ is also the living word of God. If you want to know the word of God, you must see and exalt Christ. Go to the foot of the cross and see him. And how do we pray to God the Father? Because of our great mediator Jesus Christ. He is the one that is praying on our behalf and he is the one that carries our request before God, so when God looks at us he sees Jesus Christ. Going into the sanctuary of God means going through Christ and in Christ to God for all things. It is all centered around Christ and you are either in here and you have prior been to the sanctuary of God, or you have not. If you are not saved, you have never truly been in the sanctuary of God, you've never truly been in the presence of God in a way that Asaph is explaining here, going to understand and know. You do not have the mind of Christ because you do not have the Holy Spirit in you, and you do not have the understanding that only God can give.

So what is the call to you today? Go to the sanctuary of God. If you are experiencing this self-centered downward view of the world, go to the sanctuary of God and there you will see the truth. Go to the word of God, go to the church of God, and be in prayer to God. For those of you who are saved, note that this Psalm was written by a man of God. This is written by someone who had been to the sanctuary of God and who had been in the presence of God, and yet his feet nearly slipped. He was in a place of extreme pain and suffering and trial and temptation, and he was in a place where he had nearly fallen away with the wicked. He was nearly numbered with those whose feet would slip. And so to you, Christian, what do you need to do? Go into the sanctuary of God. Be with the people of God. Be in prayer to God. Be in his word.

It's funny, this seems so basic. Go to church. Read your Bible. Pray. It seems like we hear that all the time. My old roommate and I when we were in our counseling degree at college, a lot of our classes we started studying a higher level, we had taken higher level

counsel classes just reading a ton of counseling books, and it seemed like every case study just became, "Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying? Are you going to church? Alright, that's what you need to do." And it seemed like every single time. We would joke about it all the time because that was how we helped each other too was like we'd go through struggles and we'd be like, "Well, are you praying?" "Well, not really. "There's your problem." And it was every single time, it would be like, "Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying? Are you going to church?" It seems to be the very basic thing that all of us should think of, and yet what do we have the most trouble doing?

My parents used to tell us to sit down and eat when we're at the dinner table. You'd think they'd be the easiest thing you could do is just to sit down and eat food because, you know, when you're a baby that's all you do, so when you're a kid you should just be able to sit and eat, and that was incredibly hard for us to do, to sit still and eat food. All we need is to be in the word of God, to pray to God, and to be in his church. It's so clear and yet we have such a hard time going into the sanctuary but what more do we need? Who have we in heaven but God? Is there anything else on earth that we should desire above God? No.

When you are suffering, when you are doubting, take your concerns to the people of God. It is there that the people of God will minister to you through counseling, through worship together, through teaching and preaching the word to one another, through praying for one another. You must be here, I must be here because it's what you need and it's because it's what your brothers and your sisters need. I need you to do this for me. Each of us needs this for one another. We were given this church for the building up of one another. The word of God is useful and profitable for all things in our life and therefore we must come together because God is truly good. The introduction is the conclusion. God has given us everything we need and he is truly good. He is eternally good. He is forever good. His plan is good. Everything he does is good. God's eternal salvific plan is completely good and everything he does in our lives is good. Once again, this is not the ramblings of somebody who learned this in Sunday school or at VBS, this is the cry of a heart that has learned and tasted and seen that God is truly good. He is always good.

So let us continue to worship him, let us continue to work with one another, to grow in Christ-likeness, and let us pray now that God would let us continually come to the sanctuary that we would continue to worship him with one another.

Let's pray.

Father, we ask that you would move our hearts, that you would expose our sins, that you would show us the error of our own ways and following after our own hearts, the things that the world promotes that we desire, I pray you would help us to see they are foolishness and folly because what matters most is you. I pray, God, that you would give us an eternal focus and a God-centered view of all things. Truly you are good to all who are pure in heart. You are good to those who find their refuge in you. Let us turn to your sanctuary. Let us turn to you and be found only in you. There is nothing of our own that

we can bring, it is only to the cross of Jesus Christ that we cling. Let us rest in you. Let us rest and trust and find peace in you and your word alone. We pray all of these things in the sovereign name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.