

Comfort in the Face of Suicide

Come into the Sanctuary

By Bob Vincent

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Give attention to God's word. We're going to be looking at two passages in God's word this morning as we reflect on Margaret's life and her home-going. We're going to look at Psalm 73, a Psalm written by a man named Asaph who was a hymn-writer, and we're going to look at the words of Jesus in John 10.

I'll begin reading with Psalm 73:1 "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."

May we pray, and as I pray, I want you to pray for me. I am inadequate to bring God's word to you. I am incompetent. The Bible tells me that about myself and so I need you to pray for me. So as I pray out now, I want you to pray in your heart and ask God to speak through his word to the heart of each person here today that we would have an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit according to the truth of God's infallible and inerrant and life-giving word. Would you pray with me?

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we come to you this morning in the name that is above every name, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Now, Lord, you know my inadequacy, frailty and weakness, Lord, we pray for that fresh anointing, that fresh infilling of the Holy Ghost so that, Lord Jesus, you would speak from your heart to the heart of each person here, from the youngest child to the oldest person. And Lord, for those who have never crossed over to know Jesus, that today would be the day of crossing over. Lord, we pray for those who are burdened and confused and angry and hurt and wounded, who know you but feel cut off and bewildered. We pray, Lord, for a word of comfort not from me but from you. Lord, get me out of the way and speak with this mouth to people heart-to-heart. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Psalm 73:1, "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."

Now, the Bible teaches us very plainly that no one in this life has ever been perfect but the Lord Jesus Christ. Only Jesus is perfect. What is this purity of heart? Purity of heart is a description of those who have had a life-changing experience by coming to know the living God. It's another way of saying that somebody's been born again.

What does it mean to be born again? You know, we're born in this world naturally, we are born, conceived in the womb of a mother and then born, we're born once, but to be born again is to experience the power of the Holy Spirit changing us and giving us a new nature.

So the pure in heart are those who have experienced the power of God to change them and so the Psalmist looks at the Lord and he said, "You know, God is good," and he says, "He's good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."

The true Israel of God, that is, those people in the Old Testament who weren't just born physically but who had been born again and spiritually as well as physically had become the seed of Abraham.

But I want you to look at Psalm 73:2, "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. 3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

You see, that's an experience in life that people have, and if we're honest with our own feelings, from time to time no matter how close we are to the Lord, no matter how much we know the Lord and how long we've known the Lord, we all get this feeling at times. We look around us and we look at how well-off certain people are, and we say, "You know, I don't understand it. Here I am, I'm just finishing the last payment on my car and the thing is ready for the junk heap, and look over there at The So-and-so's, they have a brand-new Mercedes Benz or Lexus or Cadillac, and look at them, they've been on a vacation to the Bahamas, and look at them, they're in good health. Here we are struggling with this and struggling with that."

Listen, brothers and sisters, those are experiences that we all have hit us. If we're honest with ourselves, we understand that at times we are assaulted with thoughts like that. We say, "What in the world is going on? Here I have busted myself working hard, sweating hard, toiling hard, I've got nothing the morning before daylight and I've had my quiet time, I've prayed, I've begged God, I've read the Scripture, I've tried to keep my life right with the Lord and look at me, I'm struggling, I can't seem to make ends meet, I've got trouble after trouble after trouble and there are the So-and-so's over there, Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so, and they're doing so well."

And notice the experience of this is the Psalmist, and you know I love the Bible because the Bible's the only honest book I've ever read. It's the only honest book. You read biographies of great people, even Christian people, and there's always a whitewashing in there. Only the Bible tells us the truth.

Only the Bible opens up the heart of man and the heart of God. And so here's the heart of man and he's saying, he's being honest and he's writing and he's pouring out his heart to God and he's saying, "Lord, I don't understand it! Life doesn't make sense!" And he describes it as slipping.

He said, “As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I nearly lost my foothold” (Psalm 73:2).

Why? “Because I started looking at circumstances and I began to lose sight of the promises of God.” Verse 1 is a great promise of God. God’s good but he said, “I began to lose sight of it.”

Then he goes through a description, I won’t read it all with you but starting at Psalm 73:4 he describes what the wicked are like. In Psalm 73:12 he concludes, and he says, “This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.”

But then he comes to verse 13 and this is the heart of the matter. As he looks at life, as he looks at circumstances, as he compares his own experience with what he believes the promises of God should apply in terms of his life, he says in verse 13,

13 “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.” 14 “All day long I have been plagued, I’ve been punished every morning.”

So, notice in verses 13 and 14 as he has taken the promises of God and begun to say, “You know but that’s not working for me. He may be doing this for other folks, but he isn’t doing it for me.”

Then this doubt begins to creep in and he begins to go through and say, “Why did I get up in the morning? Why did I miss that extra 30 minutes of time in order to read my Bible and pray and intercede? Why did I stop what I was doing when I knew it was wrong and say, ‘Lord, forgive me. Give me grace. Help me not to do that again.’ Why did I do that?” Do you see what he says?

Then he goes on further and he begins to think in Psalm 73:15, “15 If I had said I would speak thus, I would have betrayed your children.”

In other words, he begins to reflect. “Man, you start speaking negative stuff on people, you put unbelief in them, you put negativity in them, you put bitterness. Our words sow life; they sow death. And he begins to think, “You know, I know I’m thinking on this stuff. It’s eating me alive,” but he said, “If I start speaking this way, I’m going to be sowing bitterness in other people.” Then he comes back to the Lord and himself in Psalm 73:16, “When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressing to me.”

He can’t make sense out of it. “Here’s the word of God, here’s the promise of God, here’s my life, why are they not connected up?” And he said, “I tried to make sense of it, but I couldn’t make sense of it,” until Psalm 73:17 “Till I entered the sanctuary of God.

What’s the sanctuary of God? For Asaph it was a little sanctuary. For Asaph it was the temple of God built by Solomon in Jerusalem. It was the place where God dwelt, the Shekinah glory of God dwelt inside the Holy of Holies and where God dwelt, inhabited the praises of his people.

As long as he was outside the sanctuary, he couldn't make sense of it.

How does that apply to you and me today? We could say it applies to church, and in a sense that's true. It applies to your quiet time, in a sense that's true. If we want to say in a practical way what it is to go into the sanctuary, it's to get in the presence of God.

It's to get in the place of worship and in the place of worship you've got to come clean, you've got to be honest with God, you've got to say,

“God, I'm having these doubts. God, I'm having these fears. God, I feel this bitterness. God, you know, I said something to Mrs. So-and-so I should not have said. God, I entertained thoughts I should not have entertained. I was jealous. I was envious.”

You see, when you get into the sanctuary of God, it's where you get to do business with the Lord. It's where you say to the Lord, “Lord, create in me a clean heart. Renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

You know, David is a great example of what a person needs to do. David was a believer. David committed a great sin, in fact he committed two terrible sins: David committed adultery, then David committed murder in order to cover up his adultery.

Under God's law in the Old Testament both of those sins were capital crimes and David lives in distance from God during this time.

Then one day God sends the prophet Nathan, who told David a story and said, “Thou art the man” (2 Samuel 12:7). At that point David entered the sanctuary. At that point David got his heart right with the Lord.

So I want you to understand that the Psalmist describes in Psalm 73, an experience that every honest person here has had.

So if you say to me, “Well, I've never known this experience,” you just got out of touch with reality. Everybody who's honest and has lived very long in this world has had thoughts of bitterness come into your mind. I don't care how much you love Jesus, if you're honest with yourself, if you're in touch with reality, you've had thoughts of bitterness come into your mind, and the only way to deal with them is to get into the sanctuary.

We're going to come back to that Psalm in a moment, but I want to turn with you now over to the Gospel of John, John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;”

The ultimate thief in this world is Satan. He comes to, what?

He comes to steal and kill and destroy. He comes to get our mind off of Jesus. He comes to get our mind off of the promises of God. He comes to get us to focus on our problem without looking up. That's how he's able to steal. That's how he's able to kill and that's how he's able to destroy, but look at what the Lord Jesus says,

John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."

Jesus came not only to die on the cross as our substitute to take our sins, our guilt, our shame, the hell that we deserve, and to give to us his perfect life, his righteous life credited to our account, but he also came through the power of the Holy Spirit to give us a new quality of life that he describes as an abundant life.

But dear ones, even though Jesus died and rose again for that, sometimes the devil can block us from getting into the sanctuary, the place of worship where we lay our burdens down, the place of worship where we lay our guilt down so that we don't experience personally, moment by moment, that abundant life. But I want you to see Jesus came into the world to give us an abundant life.

And he goes on and says some other things here.

There are some folks that are not believing what Jesus has said and it's near Christmas time, it's the Feast of Dedication, verse 22, John 10:22, that's the Jewish feast of Hanukkah near Christmas, and he's there and there's some folks really speaking some unbelief and I want you to notice these words, they're very important.

John 10:25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you [and he's the Messiah], but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me," 26 "but you do not believe because you are not my sheep."

I want you to see verse 26, not everybody is one of Christ's sheep. Not everybody. I want you to notice Jesus loves everybody. Christ died for our sins, but not everybody is a sheep. I want you to notice that the people that are challenging Jesus and telling him, "Well, you're not really the Messiah, are you? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." He said, "I did tell you plainly, but you don't believe and the reason you don't believe is you're not my sheep."

I want you to notice these are not my words, these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "You do not believe," verse 26, "because you are not my sheep."

Now listen to what he says about his sheep, John 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:28, "I give them." Who is them? That's the sheep, that's those who've come to a point in their lives where they put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, believers are Christ's sheep. Believers are Christ's sheep. Listen to what he says about believers

because if you will focus with me for a few minutes on the word of God, you will go out of here with a peace and a joy in your heart no matter how you came in.

Look at what God's word says, "I give them," that is, the sheep. Who are the sheep? Believers, those who have come to realize, "I'm not good enough to go to heaven but the Lord Jesus Christ was good enough in my place. It's not my sacrifice that will turn God toward me, it's the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ." You see, being a believer. So listen to what he says about believers, listen to what he says about the sheep, verse 28,

John 10:28 "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

I want you to see that, "They shall never perish." And I want you to see something else, "No one can snatch them out of my hand."

I want you to realize something. I don't know what the future holds, but somebody said, "I know who holds the future."

I don't know what's going to happen to me in my life. My mother was a brilliant woman. She taught at Vanderbilt University briefly. She was a schoolteacher and a nurse, but my mother turned 69, and she began to experience senile dementia. The last eight years of her life were very different than the other years of her life.

I don't know what the future holds for me. I have no promise that says that I won't experience something very difficult, very debilitating. I've not got an absolute promise from God that says I won't go through a period of time with insanity before I go to be with the Lord. I don't have that promise.

Do you have a promise like that? Do you have a promise that says that when you get near the end of life, you're not going to experience dementia? That your forgetfulness will get so forgetful, and you'll get so confused that you've forgotten your own name? Do you have a promise, an absolute promise that says that'll never happen to you?

Well, I've got an absolute promise right here, and I want you to see this absolute promise because this promise is for you, if you will put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and here it is and it's John 10:28 and he says, "No one can snatch them out of my hand."

I don't care what happens to me. I don't care if I become crazy as a pet raccoon. Do you know what? If I have put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, I can't pluck myself out and nobody can pluck me out. I want to give you some assurance this morning, I want to give you assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ didn't just die for us, but he died to keep us and it doesn't depend on us to be kept. I want you to understand that.

"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he," not me, "He is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). I want you to understand that. It's not I that keeps myself saved. It's Christ who keeps me saved. "Be

confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will see it through to the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

So, I don't know what lies ahead for me. Will I go nuts? I don't know. But one thing I know in the words of Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:6, “I know whom I believe and am persuaded that he's able to keep that which I've committed to him against that day.”

Look at what else Jesus says, John 10:29 “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.” 30 “I and the Father are one.”

I want you to see it. Here's the hand of Jesus, he says, “No one can pluck them out of my hand.”

Here's the hand of the Father, “No one can pluck them out of his hand.”

“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). We are preserved in Jesus.

We see in Psalm 73 that a believer can get to a point in life, frustrated with life, with a difficulty, that a believer can make difficult choices that are foolish and sinful. May I say that? Difficult choices that are foolish and sinful.

Believing I'm acting in love, believing I'm serving my family, I take my own life. Is it possible to do that and be a Christian? Absolutely.

Now I'm going to go to meddling. Margaret took her own life. Everybody in the room knows that so I'm not telling you something you don't know, but I'm going to be blunt with you and I'm going to be honest with you because God's called me to be a preacher and that means I can't sugarcoat truth.

I want to tell you something. About a little over two years ago, Margaret experienced a severe physical injury and was left with severe debilitating pain and she tried this and she tried that, and she went to some doctors down at the state capital and she began to be on medicine and that medicine altered the chemistry in her brain, and the result of the altering of that chemistry of the brain, that beautiful experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the joy of the Lord got numbed.

The Jesus that she came to know in 1974 at a crusade in New Orleans as a 14 year-old girl, always with her.

The Margaret that I met about 1987 when she and Eddie moved up here, that vivacious, brilliant, bright, sparkling woman with those sparkling eyes and that brilliant mind and that passionate heart, passionate for Jesus, passionate for people, passionate for those who couldn't help themselves, in a life of severe pain as medication began to dull, there began to be confusion.

This is what I want you to see, Psalm 73:17, “Till I entered the sanctuary of God,” I want you to understand that the medication and the pain were like a roadblock to the sanctuary. She was bright. I knew Margaret well. My wife and I prayed with her many times as many of you have. She never gave up knowing and loving Jesus but the effect of the medication and the effect of the chronic debilitating pain and the suffering, she couldn’t seem to connect.

What I want you to know is this, my brothers and sisters, even though she didn’t feel connected, she was connected. Even though she didn’t feel the presence of God at times because the psychotropic drugs put a barrier between her and the sanctuary, she still was of the Lord. She was still of the Lord.

I want you to understand something, as the Psalmist deals with this business, as he talks about in verse 21, look with me for a moment at Psalm 73:21, “When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,”

Can a Christian get bitter? Absolutely.

Did Margaret get bitter? Yes, Margaret got bitter.

Did Margaret make a sinful choice? Yes, Margaret made a sinful choice.

May I say the truth? I realize I probably run the risk with most sermons I preach of being run out of town on a rail and being tarred and feathered, but I’m going to tell you the truth. She made a sinful choice. She thought she was acting in love, but she made a sinful choice.

But what I want you to know is this: where sin did abound, grace did much more abound. I want you to know that the love of God is greater than our foolishness and sinful choices.

I want you to know that that beautiful life that she lived for the Lord all those years was not forgotten by the Lord. I want you to know that in those last two years of pain and shutting down emotionally and feeling at times cut off from everybody and feeling that illness, does that take God and throw him off his throne? Does that pull Christ off of his cross? Does that put Christ back in the tomb?

I want to tell you that our God is bigger than that and I want to tell you that the love of God is bigger than that. I want to tell you that though we sin

Listen if you understand yourself, everybody in this room has made sinful choices, and I’ll tell you this, the word of God says if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

So, if you’re here today and think that you don’t still struggle with sin and sometimes lose the battle, if you think that’s you, you’re nuts according to the word of God. You deceive yourself.

You see, I stand daily in need of the blood of Jesus. So do you, but I want you to know the blood of Jesus is sufficient, sufficient, it's sufficient. The word of God says, 1 John 2:2, "And he is a propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but even for the sins of the whole world."

I want you to know that Jesus Christ between the hour of 6 and 7 Friday evening, August 1, 2008, was still sufficient, and she was still his little lamb, and he gathered her in his arms on that carport, he gathered her in his arms, the Good Shepherd reached down and took her and brought her home.

Listen to what the Psalmist says, he said, "When I began to get bitter," he says in Psalm 73:22 "I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you."

Look at verse 23, he says, Psalm 73:23 "Yet I am always with you;"

You see, when the Psalmist didn't feel like he was with the Lord, the Lord was always with him. "I'm always with you."

You see, the Lord was with Margaret on that carport. He was with her in the bedroom. He was with her that whole day. He was with her those last two years even though the psychotropic drugs blocked the sanctuary. He was with her. He was with her just as much the day that she first opened her heart to Jesus as a 14-year-old.

What he says finally, Psalm 73:23, "Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory."

I want you to know that in spite of bitterness, God takes his own to glory. I want you to know that in spite of making stupid decisions, God takes his own to glory. And listen to the words of the Psalmist finally in Psalm 73:25:

25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing 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 Those who are far from you will perish [Margaret was never far from God]; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. [But look at the last words.] 28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Margaret is with Jesus. I do not doubt that. Why do I not doubt that? Because the word of God says, Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast."

I celebrate the work, the life of Margaret, a wonderful person, a kind, generous, sharing person but do you know what? If that's all I had, I'd have no hope, but my hope is in the Lord Jesus who loved her and gave himself for her. Jesus loves you.

My challenge to you today is whomever you are, as you sit here, come into the sanctuary. Come into the sanctuary.

You can come to church every Sunday and not come into the sanctuary. You can read your Bible every day and not come into the sanctuary. Would you come into the sanctuary with me as we close?

Would you take the hurt that you're feeling, would you take the anger that you feel, would you take your sense of shame and humiliation that you feel, the embarrassment that you feel, would you take it and will you come into the sanctuary with me and would you lay it before the altar, would you lay it before Jesus feet?

Would you say, "Lord, I can't bear this. Lord, it's too much for me." That anger, the feelings, the guilt. We always feel guilty, most of us do when we lose someone we love because we always remember the words we said and the words we didn't say. That's a common human experience.

Would you take the guilt that you feel and come into the sanctuary with me and put it at the feet of Jesus and then would you believe with me?

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

Would you believe with me, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)?

Won't you come to him? And if you've never come before, won't you come now?

And if you're a believer but you've got this barrier, this roadblock, somebody said something to you, somebody hurt you, somebody wounded you, would you ask the Holy Ghost to remove that roadblock and would you just come into the presence of God and say, "Lord, I've got blood on my hands, I've killed a man. I haven't been able to have real dealings with you for 40 years."

Would you come into the presence of the Lord now? Would you come into the sanctuary and just tell the Lord honestly, "Cleanse me. Take it away." Jesus said, "All the Father gives me will come to me and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37) Jesus will receive you.

May we pray?

Lord, as we remember the beautiful life of this woman who was not only beautiful of face but beautiful of heart, Lord, as we think and celebrate her wonderful life of service to you, and for those of us who knew her well, particularly her own family, Lord, intimately, the difficulty and pain that she went through the last two years, would you give us to remember that beyond all that there is a faithful Savior who at the cost of his own blood

has fully paid for all our sins and he has welcomed her and he will welcome us. Lord, comfort us.