

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 9.22.2024

PSALM 73 - FAITH'S CRISIS, FAITH'S CONFESSION

I. INTRODUCTION

PSALM 73:1-28

- 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.

- In Psalm 73, the psalmist wrestles with his perception of how the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper, and how that led to a personal crisis of faith.
- Asaph, is the author attributed with writing this psalm:
- He was the chief songwriter and worship leader under King David.
- He led the musicians and the temple singers. He was a skilled poet and a prophet. (1 Chronicles 6:31-32, 39; 2 Chronicles 29:30)
- This could be classified as a wisdom psalm; the psalmist is instructing how he came through his period of lament. He wants to help others who are facing the same crisis of faith that he was.
- But Asaph also wrote it to be a strong testimony of praise—“*that I may tell of all your works.*” (28)
- If you have ever had a crisis of faith, struggled with your faith, doubted the goodness of God, doubted the promises of God, struggled with the unfairness and injustice you see in the world and how the wicked seem to always get ahead—this psalm will be a great encouragement to your faith, to lead you out of a crisis of faith and back to a right confession of your faith and trust in God.
- **Main theme: When you are tempted to envy the wicked and doubt God’s goodness, remember that God is always good to his children and the wicked will not prosper in the end.**

II. A MAN-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE LEADS TO A CRISIS OF FAITH

ASAPH’S STRUGGLE: STUMBLING FAITH

- The psalm opens with a powerful confession of faith.
- V1 Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
- Asaph affirms God’s goodness to his covenant people.
- The recipients of God’s benevolent goodness are his covenant people.
- This is the character of God towards those who know Him, and he is especially good to the pure in heart; that is not sinless perfection, but a heart that is wholeheartedly inclined toward God.
- The heart is an important element in this psalm, the heart is referenced six times.

- V2 “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.”
- Asaph is recounting a struggle of faith that almost caused him to slip away from God.
- Some of you can reflect on times when your faith was weak and it felt like you almost stumbled.
- But what was it that led Asaph to come to this point?

- V3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- From Asaph’s man-centered perspective, everywhere he looked, it seemed like the wicked were living it up!
- And Asaph envied the arrogant wicked who seemed to prosper.
- “Prosper” is the Hebrew word, “shalom.” Shalom is a comprehensive term that doesn’t just mean peace, as in the absence of strife or conflict, but it suggests a universal flourishing, blessing, favor, and all that is good.

- Asaph's gaze was set on them for so long, he was so focused on their shalom, that he became envious of the arrogant wicked.
- His warped, twisted perspective became reality for him.
- Envy can mess up your faith in a terrible way.
- Envy is a sinful emotion that is characterized by a feeling of discontent, resentment, discouragement, and depression that is aroused by observing the advantages, possessions or qualities enjoyed by others.
- The intensity of this sinful emotion is described in Proverbs 14:30 as *rotteness of the bones*.
- Envy is malevolent, it is a wasting and self-destructive belief.
- Why does it seem that bad people get what good people deserve?
- Here, Asaph is wrestling with that question.
- *"If God is good to his people, why do the wicked prosper while the righteous struggle?"*
- And he envied the arrogant wicked when he saw that everything was going their way.

THE PROBLEM: THE WICKED HAVE SHALOM

- V4-12 presents a character sketch of Asaph's twisted, man-centered perspective of the wicked's shalom.
- He presents a case that the wicked seem to enjoy God's blessings and none of God's curses.
- V4 They never suffer. They're well fed, their bodies are fat and sleek. They don't go hungry and they always appear to be healthy.
- V5 The wicked seem to escape God's discipline and don't suffer like the rest of mankind. Everything is going well for them.
- V6 They are puffed up with pride. They wear pride like a necklace. They're not ashamed of the wicked things they are doing.
- They wear violence like a garment. They leave behind a trail of violence. Whatever they have they have obtained through lawless means and through scheming and plotting and oppressing the poor.
- V7 They are indifferent to others, they overflow with folly and foolishness, they're full of themselves.
- V8 Their speech reflects how the wicked rule with their tongues.
- They speak with malice, they scoff, boast, threaten, and intimidate, they use their tongues as instruments of evil because that is what overflows from their wicked hearts.
- V9 They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.
- The world is filled with their arrogant, brazen, blasphemous, speech.
- V10 is difficult for translators but the general sense from most commentators is that, due to the prosperity and influence of the wicked, people look to them as examples and follow what they say or do without question.
- V11 the wicked ask two blasphemous questions in their repudiation of God.
- "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
- They defiantly claim that God doesn't even know what they're doing.
- The wicked go about living their lives as if they will never have to give account to God, as if there are no consequences for their wickedness and evil.
- V12 is the summary statement of Asaph's man-centered perspective of the wicked: "Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

THE DILEMMA: A CRISIS OF FAITH

- Asaph’s observation of the wicked led him to experience a deep crisis of faith.
 - V13 Asaph concluded that living a righteous life, pursuing holiness, was all for nothing.
 - V14 The righteous suffer, they are disciplined, they struggle, they are afflicted, while the wicked enjoy prosperity.
 - Asaph knew God’s word, He knew the covenant God made with his people, he knew the promises of the covenant, he assumed that the righteous would experience the goodness of God, but everything he saw around him presented an alternate scenario that became his reality—the godly struggled and suffered while the wicked were living the “good life.”
 - And for us, if we observe this world, not through a biblical lens, but from a man-centered perspective, we can fall into the same ditch as Asaph.
 - We will have a crisis of faith if we put our focus on how the wicked seem to prosper and we begin to envy the arrogant wicked
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- Thankfully, Asaph didn’t give full vent to his crisis of faith, he didn’t say what he was thinking and feeling inside.
 - V15 If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed the generation of your children.
 - He didn’t want to speak out about his internal struggle of faith because it might cause others to doubt God’s goodness if they were suffering.
 - He didn’t want to cause anyone else’s faith to stumble.
 - Everyone thinks that they have to express everything they are thinking and feeling, without even considering how it may affect others.
 - The wise person doesn’t do that. The wise person may be feeling like Asaph, going through challenges of faith, but they don’t tell the whole world about it, they wait to get to the other side of their faith struggle.
 - You should reach out to a mature brother and sister to help you process what you’re feeling or experiencing when you are struggling in your faith—but your first inclination should not be to blast your negative emotions to everyone.
 - Asaph didn’t want to speak out about his crisis of faith so as not to betray God’s faithfulness in the past and cause others to stumble.

III. A GOD-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE LEADS TO A CONFESSION OF FAITH

THE SHIFT: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

- The rest of the psalm expresses Asaph’s shift of perspective even though the circumstances had not changed for him.
- But something changed in Asaph.
- V16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,”
- He tried to reason why things were as he saw them through his distorted perspective, and it wearied him.
- V17, “Until...” Here’s the turning point in Asaph’s life.
- “Until I went into the sanctuary of God...”
- Asaph experienced a change in perspective when he went to the house of God, to the temple.
- Something about being in the presence of God, worshiping God with the people of God, gave him remarkable clarity of perspective.
- The reality of God, the undeniable presence of God, flooded his heart and that became the lens by which he understood himself and processed his experience.
- He experienced a shift from a man-centered perspective to a God-centered perspective.

- V17 then I discerned their end.
- As he meditated on the destiny of the wicked, what dawned on Asaph was the reality that the wicked will not prosper in the end.
- They may prosper now—but they won't in the end.

THE SOLUTION: JUDGMENT AND SALVATION

- V18-20 -- Whereas in v2, he described that his crisis of faith nearly had caused him to slip and lose his footing, he sees that God puts the wicked in slippery places.
- God will cause them to fall to their utter ruin. It will appear as if they are suddenly destroyed and swept away.
- When God moves in judgment, the wicked will be like a bad dream that you immediately forget upon waking up.
- The wicked think God doesn't know, that he's not aware of what they are doing and that he won't judge.
- But Asaph discerned that in the end, the wicked will get exactly what they deserve, and it's not shalom, but just condemnation.
- V21-22 Asaph expressed that his envy led him to bitterness of soul, he was pierced in heart, soured, he acted in ignorance like a brute beast toward God that needed to be domesticated.
- He confesses three powerful truths about God on the other side of his crisis of faith.
- V23 Nevertheless...
- Asaph acknowledged he acted the fool, acted in ignorance, allowed sinful envy to take root in his heart, he had almost slipped and strayed from God, but he realized that God had not left him.
- "I am continually with you; you hold my right hand."
- Asaph confesses that God is faithful.
- Asaph discovered that God was holding him by the right hand.
- V24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory."
- God was leading Asaph, he set him back on the right path, and Asaph is confident once again, that the wicked will not prosper in the end and the righteous will not suffer in the end, there is glory awaiting the righteous.
- His course of life is guided by God, his future is in the care of God, and at the end of his life, the Lord will receive him to glory.
- V25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
- Asaph confesses that God is sufficient.
- God is his all in all. God is everything he needs. God is his fount of all-sufficiency.
- He no longer wants what the wicked seek after. He wants God!
- If we find our enjoyment in God, if he is our supreme treasure, there is nothing else to be desired. God will satisfy every longing of our heart.
- V26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
- His flesh and heart are weak and unreliable, he is mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically drained.
- His spiritual dilemma drove him to the point of exhaustion.
- But though his own heart was spent, God was the strength of his heart.
- He could not strengthen himself, he couldn't muster that from within, the resource that sustained and strengthened him came from the outside. God was the rock of his heart.
- "my portion forever"—this is the lasting promise God gave to the Levites. They would not get an apportionment of the land, they would have God as their portion.

- Asaph gives himself up completely in trust of God's strength and supply for everything that he needs.
- Lastly, Asaph confesses that God is good.
- What Asaph expressed in v1 is undeniably true, God is good to his children, to the pure in heart.
- But now Asaph has grasped this truth on a different level, and his confession of faith teaches us this.
- The goodness of God is not defined by the shalom the wicked seem to enjoy, nor is the goodness of God denied by the suffering of the righteous.
- The ultimate misery is to be far from God. (27)
- And true and everlasting shalom is to be near God. (28)
- V28 But for me it is good to be near God.
- Good is good to his children, to the pure in heart, precisely because he is their God.
- And now, he has made the Lord God his refuge and he is no longer going to recount all of the ways that the wicked seem to prosper, he had kept his doubts silent but he is going to testify and speak out boldly about the goodness and works of God.
- **When you are tempted to envy the wicked and doubt God's goodness, remember that God is always good to his children and the wicked will not prosper in the end.**

CONCLUSION

- There are many points of application we can draw from this psalm.
- We will all have periods in our life where we experience a crisis of faith.
- We all have envied others for the things they have or the things that they enjoy that we don't have and want.
- Envy exposes the hidden idols of the heart.
- We have all doubted the goodness of God in the face of suffering and injustice, we've all questioned why bad things happen to good people, and why good things happen to bad people.
- Take some time to confess envy and any doubts about God's goodness. Positively confess and express your trust in God's faithfulness, sufficiency and goodness.
- We all need fresh reminders that this life that we live out in the context of a broken, sinful and fallen world, is not all that there is—glory awaits the righteous.
- The good news for us is that Christ has made it possible for us to draw near to God.
- Christ has purchased our salvation so that we don't experience the judgment we rightly and justly deserve.
- When we ask the question, "why do bad things happen to good people?," we must remember that there are no good people. There is none righteous, no not one. There is no one who does good. There is no one who seeks for God (Romans 3:10-12)
- No one deserves the goodness of God.
- But the Father in his electing love, did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all (Rom 8:32).
- Those who trust in Christ, will not slip and fall away.
- Those who trust in Christ, will never perish but will taste the glories of the world to come.
- Those who trust in Christ, have been brought near to God by the blood of Christ.
- In Christ, we experience true shalom, everlasting peace with God!

- Truly God is good to his children and the wicked will not prosper in the end!
- Don't ever forget that saints of God.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?