

## Psalm 73

Of the 5 books that the psalms are comprised of psalm 73 begins book 3. It's a psalm of Asaph. Asaph you recall was 1 of David's 3 chief musicians along with Heman and Jeduthun. And to me it's a very powerful psalm because it deals so directly and transparently with what seems to be a common struggle among the people of God. That being the affluence of the wicked and the affliction of the righteous; even though we've seen other psalms confront this issue it just seems to me that Asaph is the one who was able to get a grip on the emotional aspects of the human heart and place it so eloquently, so poetically yet so plainly in a way that we can all relate *to* it and connect *with* it. We can connect with his struggle, we see him confront the issue, complain *about* the issue, and ultimately come to a correct perspective *of* the issue. We see his struggle come full circle.

As we consider the breakdown of this psalm, how perhaps to best work an outline around this psalm there are so many possibilities it's difficult to single it out. In the 1<sup>st</sup> 16 Vs we have the *problem*, in Vs 17 we have the *pivoting point*, Vs 18-28 he comes to a *proper perspective*. He's perplexed, he pivots, then his perspective is put right. We go from what we might consider *words with out understanding* in the 1<sup>st</sup> 16 Vs, Vs 17 *where he gains understanding*, Vs 18-28 are *words of wisdom* (or understanding). This psalm goes from the way things are *apparently*, to the way things are in *actuality*, from a *circumstantial perspective* to the *eternal perspective*, we see his *grievous conflict* between the *flesh* and the *Spirit*, and then the *glorious conquest* of the *Spirit* over the *flesh*. The *cause* of his problem; *improper* perspective, the *cure* to his problem; the *proper* perspective, and again I'd have you note that the primary battleground of this psalm is in the area of the *mind*, he's thinking about things, trying to gain an understanding of certain things.

Spiritual wars can be fought and won or lost in the realm of one's mind. Which is why the bible places so much emphasis upon our minds, the thoughts that we think, the things we entertain in our mind and the fact that we're to be transformed by the *renewing* of our mind; what we believe will determine how we behave. The actions that we're willing to engage in are a direct reflection of our outlook of such things, and that outlook is determined in the mind, what we think about it will determine how we respond to it. That's why it's so critical that we have the *mind of Christ*, that we walk in the understanding of the word of God, because if we just try to figure things out on our own, make sense of right and wrong based upon our personal perspective or how we *feel* about a particular matter we're setting ourselves up for a rude awakening. The bible says, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*" Prov 14:12

It just really doesn't matter what *seems* right to me, what *seems* right to you, we reason through the lens of a fallen nature that gravitates naturally toward the flesh. What matters is what does the word of God say, what is the mind of Christ in this situation? Let's look together at Ps 73 beginning with Vs 1.

Vs1

I mentioned to you in our time of introduction that in this psalm we get to see Asaph come full circle regarding his struggle. It would seem to me that straight out of the shoot he wants us to know that before he let's in to what was going on in his heart and in his mind that this is the conclusion of the matter. He's not wavering, he's not wondering, he's come to a clear conclusion, "Truly God is good..." He's thought things through, he's pondered both paths and this is the end of it all.

It's like when Solomon pondered virtually every path out there under the sun, when it came to his life he'd been there and done that. There's never been one with more money, or more wisdom (humanly speaking) to ever walk the face of the earth than Solomon and he's very clear that he didn't withhold anything from himself. He wanted to explore every avenue out there and when it was all said and done this is what he said. *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil."* Eccl 12:13-14 That's the bottom line. Regarding the struggle that Asaph went through (which was really a struggle that questioned God's character) this is the bottom line, "Truly God is good..."

Now when we conclude that God is good we have to be careful to understand what *good* is. Because the bible says, *"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly."* Ps 84:11 The question then becomes what does it mean to be *good* and what are *good things*? Is someone good if they give you everything you want, and is everything you want a good thing? Maybe in our *mind* it would be good, but in reality it would work devastation or destruction in our lives. A simple illustration is that my daughter (who will be 2 in a few weeks) would love to play with our kitchen knives, she loves to go for the scissors, in her mind they're a good time, great fun, and she'd have a good time with them for a minute or 2, but in the end they would wreak incredible damage possibly even death upon herself or perhaps others if I gave them to her. So when I withhold them from her, in her mind I'm not good anymore, and I'm withholding something good from her. But I love her enough to let her cry and be emotionally devastated over that because I know that in reality it's good for her if I withhold it from her. Her perspective may be different, she can't see it, the fact is I'm being both good *to* her and *for* her in that situation. God is good; we may not always have the proper perspective or be able to understand why He's withholding certain things from us, the fact is if it's good *for* us, He won't withhold it *from* us.

This is one of those foundational, fundamental truths that we have to have as anchor points for our soul. There are certain things that I need to have resolved in my heart, and in my mind that serve as a safety net for my soul when I'm struggling with things.

I've shared over the yrs that one of those Vs for me is found in the passage of scripture where Jesus has just shared some things that were difficult for the multitudes to take in and absorb regarding eating His flesh, drinking His blood and many left Him at that point and ceased to follow Him. He looked at the 12 and said, "What about you, do you want to leave? Because there are going to be things about following Me that are difficult to absorb, aren't always easy to take in and understand...you'll wrestle *with* them and struggle *over* them." That's when Peter looked at Him and said, "Where else are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life, and we've come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Jesus outside of You there's *no one* and *nothing*." That as served as an anchor for me over the years throughout various storms that life has thrown at me. Where am I going to go outside of Christ? To whom am I going to turn other than Christ no matter how hard it gets, there's no one else, there's nothing else, He's the Christ, the Son of the Living God, He alone has the words of eternal life; there's no where else to go. This is another such anchor. When you're in a swirl, you don't know which way is *up* because everything is crashing *down* remember this; *truly God is good*...

Remember last week, Vs 18 Ps 72; He only does *wondrous* things. I may not understand it, I don't have to get it, I just have to know this, "Truly God is good, and somehow, in some way He's going to cause it to work out for my eternal good, and His eternal glory."

I may not even get the privilege of coming into understanding this side of eternity but I know that God is good.

Is He good to everyone? Well...no, not with in this context, there's common grace in that He gives everyone breath who has it, but He offers no solace, no blessing, no benefit, no eternal assurance to the polluted of heart. He's good to the *pure* in heart. Who are they? They are those who've come *to* Christ, who've been saved *by* Christ, who walk *with* Christ and serve Him. Here's the deal, let this be a little acid test of sorts. If you are saved you are going to *want* to walk with God and fellowship with Him. He won't be a *burden* to you, but a *blessing* to you. You'll want to have a clean heart, a pure heart before Him, if you claim to have come to Christ and lead the same life you did "before" you came to Christ. I would challenge you that you have truly come to Christ, because when you come to Christ He cleans you up, you're forgiven of your sin, washed by His blood and the water of His word, you're sanctified, set apart, walk in the newness of life. Now if your *new life* looks like the *old* life I've got news for you *it is* the old life. You've heard the phrase, "If it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, (by any other name) it's still a duck." When you've been sanctified, you want to lead a life that's pleasing to God, you want to be pure before Him.

That's where Asaph was at, however he had a quandary of sorts, it was a real problem and he was struggling with it. Why do the godly seem to always be suffering affliction while the wicked seem to prosper with affluence and the comforts of life? It's a difficult dilemma to face and one I think we can all identify with. God is good; however (notice) he almost slipped.

## Vs2-3

Vs 3 is the key to his confusion; the things that he saw translated into his heart in the form of *envy*. He's succumbing to a *circumstantial perspective* resulting in a jealous anger in his heart and it almost stumbled him, he almost slipped. He's adding up "circumstantial evidence" which is generally questionable at best and it's pointing him the wrong direction. You know, "He was scene running down the road near a crime scene he must be the criminal." Not necessarily that's circumstantial and it's questionable, signs may point that direction, but it's not necessarily the fact. As a matter of fact it may be completely misleading; such was the case concerning Asaph. What he saw led him to draw a particular conclusion that was false and it almost did him in, he nearly slipped, nearly stumbled in his relationship with God.

What did he see? The prosperity of the wicked, it begs the question, what's the point of being good if a reward of prosperity goes to the wicked? Then when you compound that by feeling like you're being penalized all the time and what you get for righteousness is affliction it begins to eat at you.

## Vs4-9

Translation: "These guys have the easy life, they lead the lifestyles of the rich and famous. They've got more than they could ever want, "there eyes bulge with abundance" they go to all the best places and eat all the finest foods. They get interviewed on nationally syndicated programs, they're heard all over the world both blaspheming God and bad mouthing other people. Yet for all that they're not subjected to suffering, they die in an ez chair, they have people that labor for them, they do what they want when they want and they have enough money to live above the law."

## Vs6

They're proud and arrogant, even proud of their pride; yet for all that they lead life on ez street.

This is the way Asaph is perceiving the ways of the wicked; but is it accurate? No, they succumb to the same diseases you and I do; cancer is no more tolerable for the rich wicked as the poor righteous. Can we relate with Asaph's aggravation? Absolutely, but we realize that it's blown out of proportion, it seems that they have no rules, do what they want when they want, never struggle, never suffer affliction, never have a worry, the fact is that's not true. He carries on...

## Vs10-11

They're on the "who needs God" boat. They take advantage of other people, "drain the waters of a full cup" and say, "How does God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Which is to say that they're translate God's patience for God's approval or even worse as impotence, God doesn't know, or He doesn't care, or He can't do anything about it. Solomon said in Eccl 8:11-13, "*Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.*" There are times when the righteous have inaccurate perspectives of the wicked, however the same holds true for the wicked, they hold inaccurate perspectives of God. They think that God either doesn't exist, or isn't going to deal with what they're doing. They think of God like "Johnny law" and if they can get away from the law, they can get away from God; that's equally untrue. God will deal with the wicked.

## Vs12-14

You can sense the despair in Asaph's heart; "What's the point" is the general crux of his position. What's the value of having clean hands and a pure heart if the reward is affliction if the wicked receive benefits untold? Asaph is leaning toward the "it's apparently a waste of time" point of view. He ascribing to erroneous position purported by Job's friends that if you're a good boy God will reward you and if you're a bad boy you get the proverbial spanking. Yet one of the major points found in the book of Job is that we're not mercenaries; worshipers for hire to the highest bidder. We don't serve God, and worship God to try and stroke His ego so that like a genie He gives us what we wish. We worship and serve Him because He's worthy of our praise, our adoration, our dedication and devotion simply for who He is... Our commitment to God is not circumstantial, "God if you give me what I want I'll worship You, if You don't I won't serve You anymore..." Hey, that's love isn't it? It's a Satanic philosophy that says, "Serve God for what you can get." Who's really the focus at that point? Me, what I get, what's in it for me. "*Your words have been harsh against Me,' Says the Lord, Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the Lord of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.*" Mal 3:13-15

Here's something else to consider; God doesn't owe us *anything*, we should be paying *Him*, we've in no way earned any sort of reward *from* Him. He's paid the penalty *we* owe, and now we want benefits on top of the fact that He hung on a cross for us, did for us what we could never do for ourselves? Listen, God doesn't promise us "payment" on this earth.

He does promise us an eternal inheritance that's incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for us who are kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:4). Jesus told us that we're not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth where the rust and moth destroy, where the thief breaks in and steals, but rather we're to lay up treasures in heaven; our reward is not temporal in this life, but rather it's eternal in the heavens.

#### Vs15-16

When he says that he was thinking about how to understand the things he'd just said what he's telling us is that those words are with out understanding. They're words with out wisdom, there's no understanding in the equation of the words he just said. And he acknowledges that his thoughts were questionable at best if not sinful; he would've been "untrue" to the generation of God's people. There are people that you exercise influence over, and there are certain actions or you activities you engage in, or words that you speak to them that will make a difference for better or worse in their lives. and It seems to be a real problem amongst believers today to divorce themselves from liability when it comes to their impact on another person's life. "Well, they should mind their own business; what they think shouldn't dictate what I can or can't do." Or whatever people will say, the fact is that we have a responsibility to consider how the words that we say and the activities that we engage in will impact people. Asaph realized that if he'd have been spouting off about his thoughts while he was trying to sort through things he'd have done significant damage in the lives of people around him. What's the signal you're sending to people around you as you do what you do? That you love the Lord, want to lead a life set apart to the Lord? Or is it more along the lines of, "Ya know, it doesn't really matter to me what the bible says in *that* area, or what people think about *this*, I'm going to do whatever I want to do." Now if your convictions can be clearly defined biblically, that's one thing if people perhaps don't have accurate understanding. But if you're just blowing off liability that's another thing altogether. Asaph acknowledged his liability, yet he had a real problem, he was perplexed, didn't understand, and to try and make sense of it only deepened the wound; it was painful.

#### Vs17

Here we have the pivoting point, understanding gained, wisdom given, proper perspective obtained. When did he get it? Where did he find it? "In the sanctuary of God." It was when he went to church, when he worshiped the Lord, heard the word of the Lord in fellowship with the people of the Lord that the Lord spoke to him, gave understanding and insight to him that he just couldn't obtain on his own. What does the bible say? Psalm 77:13, "*Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God?*" Psalm 119:130, "*The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.*" There is no denying that there is a dynamic of the Spirit that takes place in the gathering of the body of Christ that simply does not exist in any other arena. There's a reason that the bible exhorts us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. God has ordained the corporate gathering of the body of Christ.

It is healthy for you spiritually to interact with brothers and sisters in the collective gathering, there is an anointing of the Spirit that takes place when we come together in unity. God has this way of speaking to us through the exposition of His word as we gather together that we just don't get on our own. Conversely it's unhealthy for us to avoid fellowship, to try to fly solo, or think there's no real reason to go to church because you don't have to go to church to be saved. That's true you don't but you forfeit mountains of blessing, and walk in open disobedience to the word of God that calls us to the sanctuary. and It was there, in the sanctuary of God, as he worshiped the Lord, and waited *on* the Lord, that he heard *from* the Lord and God gave to him the proper perspective, the eternal perspective.

He says, "Then I (notice) *understood* (listen) *their end*." What's that? Their end, the big picture begins to come into focus, there's more in store for people than what this life has to offer, there is an *end* reserved for the wicked. That's why Jesus shared about the rich man and Lazarus who begged at his gate in Luke 16.

The point being that a day is coming when God will call the wicked to account, the wicked will receive the end of their ways, and the righteous will receive the end of their ways and what this life deals an individual is no indication (necessarily) of God's being for them or against them. Psalm 37:37-38, "*Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; For the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; The future of the wicked shall be cut off.*"

Asaph was learning that if he didn't draw near to God and *stay* near to God that bitterness, cynicism and envy will creep into you and begin to disintegrate your foundation and you will find yourself falling apart. We're to come into the sanctuary, draw near to Him, worship Him and study His word, with His people.

Vs18-20

In other words, they're living in a fantasy land, but like a dream it will all come to an abrupt end. The fact is it'll be but a moment of time and they will be cast down to destruction. Notice that in Vs 2 Asaph felt like he was on slippery ground, now in Vs 18 he realizes that in reality it's the wicked who are on slippery ground. It could all come to a grinding halt in a moment of time. God has no obligation to the wicked whatsoever to keep them alive, or give them an opportunity to repent. Jonathon Edwards used these Vs in his famous sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." He spoke of the slippery, unstable footing of the wicked, that they were always exposed to sudden and unexpected destruction. He said, "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God." They are "set in slippery places, utterly consumed with terrors.

## Vs21-22

“I can’t believe I ever doubted You, God, I was all the more downcast that I would reason in a way that would question You. I was so foolish and ignorant, like a beast before You.” How does one reason apart from the insight and understanding God? Foolishly and ignorantly, driven by the desires of the flesh, like an animal would be.

## Vs23-24

Vs 23, “God I was faithless, but You remained faithful, You stayed *with* me and didn’t let go of me.” Notice, “You hold me by my right hand...” “You have a grip on me *presently*,” Vs 24, “You *will* guide me with Your counsel.” An ongoing *reality* as time goes by, no longer will he rely on the way he sees it, he’ll look to the Lord, trust in the word, let God be His guide. “and Afterward receive me to glory.” I will receive my reward *ultimately, eternally*. You see he’s got his sights in the proper place and on the proper Person (on the Lord).

## Vs25-26

To me this portion of scripture is one of the most beautiful passages in all of the word of God. As Asaph just abandons himself to God, gets his sights *on* God and falls in love all over again *with God*. He’s returning to his 1<sup>st</sup> love. Hey, there may be streets of gold, crystal seas, foundations of precious gems, and gates of pearl, but God *You* are my reward, they can keep that stuff, You’re all that I want. “Whom have I in heaven but You, and there is none that I desire upon the earth but You. My flesh and my heart shall fail; (this body will breakdown and disintegrate) but God is the strength of my heart and my portion *forever*.” The riches of this world are but for a moment, but God is my portion *forever*.

## Vs27-28

Let me just say that its good for all of us to draw near *to* God and to put our trust *in* God. That we might serve Him and give ourselves wholly *to* Him. We’re refreshed by the honesty and transparency of Asaph.

It’s encouraging to realize that we can have the freedom *in* the Lord to voice our frustrations *to* the Lord, and as we come *to* Him, and wait *upon* Him we can experience His gentle, transforming touch upon our lives. God loves you unconditionally, He’s concerned for the details that trouble you *personally*. He invites us to share ourselves with Him that He in turn might share Himself with us. and That’s what we want isn’t it? To hear from Him, to be ministered to *by* Him, that we might walk *with* Him becoming more and more *like* Him as He transforms us from glory to greater glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.

## Prayer Points:

Father truly it is good for us to draw near to You, to place our trust *in* You, now Lord have *Your* way in us. Give us understanding, proper perspective, that we might lead our lives with the eternal in view. Thank You Lord that You invite transparency, that You love us unconditionally...transform us Lord by the renewing of our minds for Your name’s sake and for your glory.