

IS IT WORTH IT TO BE GODLY?

Psalm 73

Intro: For the past few weeks we've been reading that wonderful collection of songs written by holy men of God. What I especially like about the psalms is that no matter what circumstance you find yourself in there is a psalm for the occasion.

One of the most encouraging psalms is Psalm 73. It was written by Asaph, a wise man and musician of David's day. And it gives expression to a feeling that a lot of people have at times when life is hard and seemingly unfair. Asaph gives us an honest account of a moment of spiritual discouragement.

In this Psalm we see him:

COMPARING HIMSELF WITH THE WICKED

Asaph begins with the account of an honest moment of spiritual weakness as he contemplated the materially prosperous and comfortable life of the wicked (v. 2-12)

But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men; nor are they plagued like mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of their heart run riot. They mock, and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth. Therefore his people return to this place; and waters of abundance are drunk by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth." (Psalm 73:2-12, NASB)

Asaph could see that these were people who were arrogant and wicked:

The picture is of a people who adorn themselves with the clothes of pride and violence.

They spent all their wealth upon themselves and their imagination to do evil against others was boundless.

They boasted about their mistreatment of others.

They blasphemed God and they spoke as if they were god.

For them there was nothing too sacred to mock; nothing off limits to their abusive tongues.

In their defiance of the Almighty they even questioned whether he even knew what was going on down here on this earth.

But what was particularly troubling to him was the fact that these wicked people seemed to enjoy every physical advantage in life.

They never suffered the deprivation of life. Instead they were “fat” from the abundance of food.

Asaph appears to have placed himself near a copious spring or well that belonged to one of these powerful and wealthy men and notice how all his people came repeated to that place to drink of its abundant water.

They appear to have escaped the trouble that most of mankind had to endure. They had avoided the things with which the rest of mankind had been plagued.

They didn't even suffer in death. They died without pain. And in summary he said:

Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. (Psalm 73:12)

Yet Asaph looked at his own life and that of others like him and he saw a completely different picture

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning. (Psalm 73:13-14)

It was as if Asaph was saying, “Every day I wake up to a new set of problems. It's like a new beating every day!”

And it caused him to say, “What has it all been for? I've tried to live a righteous life; and look at where it's gotten me!”

Did you ever have such moments in your life? Could you relate to what Asaph was thinking? Can you feel his discouragement?

STRUGGLING WITH A DILEMMA

To Asaph it appeared more advantageous to be wicked than to do right! Three times in the psalm he confesses that his circumstances had almost gotten the best of him:

In verse 2 he says, “I almost stumbled”

In verse 3 he say, “I was envious of the arrogant”

In v. 13 he says, “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure”

This was Asaph's dilemma of faith. Weighing it all out, he had decided that maybe serving God wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Maybe, just maybe he would have been better off to have been like everybody else. Have those ever been your thoughts?

GAINING NEW PERSPECTIVE

Let's read v. 15-20.

“If I had said, “I will speak thus,” Behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children. When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one

awakes, O Lord, when aroused, Thou wilt despise their form.” (Psalm 73:15–20, NASB)

Asaph affirms that if he had advocated what he was thinking to others he would have misled them or betrayed them! v. 15

It was only when He came into the sanctuary of God that everything now looked different. He could look at all this from a new perspective.

Here he recalled the destiny of the wicked.

They were not on as solid a footing as it might appear. Instead they were standing on “slippery places;” and they would fall to their destruction. Their day of judgment would be sudden and complete. God would abhor them like a bad dream, a nightmare.

How could he be envious of that?! Could any of us wish to trade places with those whose destination is destruction?

Could we ever truly wish regardless of our lot in life that we could change places with those whose ultimate end is torment?!!!

Here he reassessed his spiritual worth.

What Asaph had to do is evaluate his blessings from a different perspective. He had been looking at everything on the physical level! How easy it is to do that. To think of God's blessings only in terms of money and houses and good health and all those physical things that we desire here on earth. But Asaph admits that to be bitter and sorrowful about those things while neglecting the spiritual riches we have is living at the animal level. He confesses:

When my heart was embittered, and I was pierced within then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before Thee. (Psalm 73:21-22)

A beast can only know his physical provisions. But a spiritual man can see what a beast cannot: His spiritual wealth!

Asaph now enumerates his blessings:

Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. (Psalm 73:23)

I have God's presence--God did not forsake Asaph even in his narrow view of his lot in life!

I have God's help--It is the picture of a Father holding us up and keeping us from falling. Like the Father his little child! v. 23. And as we grow up a little bit, we learn to listen to his advice:

With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, (Psalm 73:24)

And when we have at last walked the last mile:

And afterward receive me to glory (Ps. 73:25)

We have God's eternal reward. When all the wealth and riches of the wicked are burning with fire our inheritance has only begun!

*And it is from this vantage point that he wrote this Psalm to say:
"Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart" (v. 1)*
Asaph's moments of weakness have now been turned around. He has recovered his perspective and now we see him:

RENEWING HIS COMMITMENT

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. (Psalm 73:25)

"I would not worship another God" To have the true God is to have all we ultimately need! A man may have all of this world's goods and be truly poor if he doesn't have God.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:26)

To have God is to have strength to support us when our strength fails. It is to have a portion that can never be taken away from us!

For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; Thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; (Psalm 73:27-28)

Wrapping it up. God will destroy the wicked. That is a fact. But equally important is the understanding that the closer we are to God the closer we are to good!

I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works.

I will find peace and security in that; and I'll tell others about what I have!

Conclusions: Maybe you have had times when you felt just exactly the same way Asaph felt. Let his experience instruct you. Don't allow yourself to be tempted to make a deal with the devil. It's a bad trade. Focus on the spiritual blessings God has given you. Treasure them and don't ever let them go. And remember where the wicked will end up. And remember that one day He will receive you in glory.

Do you have God truly in your life? Have you lived so as to know the blessings of his presence, and strength, and guidance, and the hope of eternal life?