

## Psalm 73

### Why do the Wicked Prosper?

#### Intro: I enjoy watching a good movie

A) I like movies where the good guys win, where justice is served and evil is punished.

B) Where good deeds long forgotten are rewarded, and where the right boy gets the right girl.

B) I probably like movies like that for the same reason that most of you do-

1) they provide us with a temporary escape from our CRAZY world

#### A world where Justice is not always served

A) Where evil often wins, where the nice guy gets hurt – and where bad guys get away with murder

B) A world - Where truth seems like it is on the hot seat and evil is on the throne.

1) That unfortunately is the real world we are living in

C) If we are honest life in the real world, often doesn't feel as good as a Hollywood feel good movie.

#### We live in a world where Evil is prevalent

A) Cheaters pass exams, and win world series, where terrorist become folk heroes,

B) Corporate crime gets whitewashed in bankruptcy court

1) Children are abused –

2) and Christians are martyred for their faith

#### Life in the real world is not fair!

A) Morally it is all upside down – the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

B) But this however is not a new or modern day problem. It has been going since the fall of man.

C) Prompting the question of the ages – Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous seem to suffer?

D) This is the struggle on the heart of a guy named ASAPH as he pens Psalm 73

Read V.1-14

#### Before we begin to break down Asaph's words here – let's find out a little about him –

A) According to 1 Chronicles 15-16 He was a Levite who served under the reigns of David and Solomon

B) He was the Choir director in God's house

1) Today we would call him the worship pastor over the church in Jerusalem.

C) He is a godly guy who loves God immensely

#### But he almost completely stopped singing –

A) As life spun him around and he became spiritually disoriented

B) That is an easy thing to have happen – it is more common than you think –

C) When life gets hard – when life doesn't seem fair – when injustice is prevalent

1) Christians can get disoriented in their faith

D) In fact I would venture to say there are many in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ today

1) Who have become Spiritually disoriented who have stopped singing- what is going on in our world

E) At this point let me say: I am so thankful for the honesty of this Psalm

#### When we approach God's word we discover that God doesn't white-wash the struggles of his people.

A) The saints of old are not airbrushed to perfection on the pages of Scripture.

B) Instead each is portrayed in both the good and the bad.

C) Back when Oliver Cromwell has the protector of England

1) a man was hired to paint a portrait of Cromwell.

D) Cromwell instructed the painter in this way "Paint me warts and all"

#### God's word offers a picture of the human experience Warts and all.

A) We see that clearly in the Psalms

**B)Where we consistently find people who have been riddled with doubts, fears, and frustration**

1)And even those who have fallen into despair

**C)In Psalm 73 we have a believer who failed and recovered,**

1)who stumbled and then regained his footing

**D)He wrote to tell us about his experience – so let's see what we can learn from ASAPH**

1)4 points today -

### **Consider 1<sup>st</sup> - Asaph's Reflection**

**A)The Psalm begins with a reflection upon the goodness of God.**

**Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.**

**B)The people of Israel believed in general that God was intrinsically good by nature,**

1)God's goodness was proven time and time again through his many works.

**C)And the people of Israel believed intrinsically that God was JUST**

1)that God was Sovereignly able to bring good out of evil.

**And this guy Asaph believes those things deep in his heart that deep in his heart –**

A)Asaph ends this Psalm in V.28 that he thinks it is good to draw near to God.

**B)That said- Asaph reveals in the rest of the Psalm this truth that God is good and Just will be tested.**

**C)There will be events and experiences in life that will challenge that belief.**

**D)The loss of a child, betrayal, injustice going unchecked, war, poverty, cancer, COVID. -etc**

**But in Those times when God is seemingly silent**

A)Asaph challenges us not to base our faith in our feelings or in what we see –

**B)But in what we KNOW is true about GOD**

**C)NOTE: Asaph's faith has been shaped on the Anvil of affliction**

1)and he is writing from the perspective of one who is looking back

**D)Reflecting on his struggle but ALSO revealing how he ended up in the right place.**

**E)Asaph's Reflection – God is good and Just**

### **Asaph's Remonstrations**

**A)Remonstrations = his complaint of gripe**

2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped.

3 For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

**B)Here we see the sweet Psalmist singing in a minor Key**

1)His faith is struggling and his feet are slipping, and he is losing his will to worship.

**C)See Asaph believed that obedience resulted in blessings from God –**

1)**but that is not what he was experiencing**

**D)And to him it seemed like those who were living in disobedience to God were to ones being blessed.**

**I think we all have experienced that –**

A)You are trying to serve God and honor God – life keeps through curve balls, road blocks & struggles

**B)And You see others who are blatantly disobeying God/ and it seems like they are getting all the breaks**

**C)Their lives look blessed beyond measure. – We think - What is up with that?**

**In Asaph's estimation the wicked seem to be free from the troubles of life.**

A)Notice how he frames it – read some verses again in the NLT – love how this version describes this

They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. (no physical problems -look great guy I know **BB**)

<sup>5</sup> They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.

<sup>6</sup> They wear pride like a jeweled necklace, (such a good description/ **Pride is on display like a necklace**) and they clothe themselves with cruelty.

<sup>7</sup> These fat cats have everything, their hearts could ever wish for! (Not lacking at all- on top of the world)

<sup>8</sup> They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others.

<sup>9</sup> They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth.  
**They are cruel and selfish – no fear of God**

And the people of God are confused – because it looks like the wicked are just getting away with it.

<sup>10</sup> And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words.

<sup>11</sup> “What does God know?” they ask. “Does the Most High even know what’s happening?”

**Asaph says – As we as believers look on we are thinking God do you even see this?**

A) If so how can you let this go on?

**B) I think every single one of us – could testify – yep I have been there before.**

C) Hard to see the wicked prospering - I have felt that before.

C) We can relate to the words of Asaph in V.12-14 NLT - Look at these wicked people— enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.

<sup>13</sup> Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?

<sup>14</sup> I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.

D) Lord I am trying so hard to please you and I am starting to wonder why?

1) What is the point? - Purity ?

“Poor Asaph! he questions the value of holiness when its wages are paid in the coin of affliction. There were crowns for the reprobates and crosses for the elect. Strange that the saints should sigh and the sinners sing.” CHS

E) So that is Asaph’s Remonstrance – His gripe – why do the wicked prosper – righteous suffer

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Asaph’s Restraint**

A) We could assume that it would have been tempting to go public with his questions and complaints

B) Blast it in a FB or IG post or to write a blog –

**C) but Asaph wisely decides to keep his conflict between him and the Lord**

**15 If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people.**

D) Note We are reading this from the vantage point of Asaph looking back

1) and he is telling us how he worked through this struggle

**What he is telling us in V.15 is so important –**

A) Asaph realized that for him as a leader to express his frustration in this way –

**B) Would have been unprofitable for God’s people If I had really spoken this way to others I would have betrayed the generation of your children. **ESV****

C) As a leader, Asaph realized that his words carried weight,

1) and therefore to go public with his doubts would have adversely affected the faith of others

D) So out of wisdom and love for the congregation Asaph – censors himself

**This is so wise! More people need to practice this**

A) Some people are verbal processors – and that can be fine in some areas in some areas –

B) But areas of faith it can be detrimental

**C) I have watched Pastors verbally process their way through struggles in doctrine**

1) Change their mind on what they believe about something 3 times OVER 3 MTHS

D) Result it just leaves the people who are listening to them confused.

**I always encourage Guys to figure out what you believe on something.**

A) Do the wrestling on your own in private –

B) And then tell us why you believe what you believe when you are done.

1) don't take us on the journey of you trying to figure it out – It is just Confusing

C) But pastor Rob aren't we supposed to be authentic – isn't that what people are looking for today?

**Yes – that is why I have told you – I have had many times in my life – been disappointed with God**

A) Many things that I still don't understand

B) But I follow that up with I have been blessed way more than I have been disappointed

C) Sure we need to be authentic – you need to hear that your Pastor and his wife – fight

1) Our kids are not perfect –

**D) We go through the same struggles that you do in your life – WE ARE HUMAN**

E) So yes Authenticity helps us connect with others

**So overall Authenticity is a good thing**

A) But Authenticity without restraint and scriptural context can become a dangerous thing

B) When someone gets up and spills their guts without **any theological boundaries** to govern their experience

1) It can lead others astray, it can hurt people, undermine their faith in God

C) When we are being authentic without restraint our words can become a playground for the enemy to **wreck havoc** in the lives of others

**Asaph does share his struggle here in Psalm 73 but it will come after his victory OVER this struggle.**

A) After he has worked through it

B) Most of the Psalms of lament are written in that way.

1) Theory most songs are not written in one sitting  
Most songs are not written in a day

C) Starts with the struggle & frustration – verse 1

1) And Verse 1 is all despair – no hope

**D) A few days later – get some perspective – the Lord shines his face on the situation – HOPE is seen**

E) They write v.2 – How the Lord works in the times of despair – he is faithful

1) Most of the Psalms of lament follow that pattern

**Asaph understood that there was a time and a place for everything**

A) And at the time of this conflict – he needed to REMAIN SILENT

B) And because of that he is able to later write in a manner that is profitable to others

C) He is able to bring some hope and some perspective and answers to this struggle

1) Why wicked prosper and the righteous seem to suffer

**4<sup>th</sup> Asaph's Recovery**

A) The good news is that although Asaph stumbled and nearly fell over into unbelief

B) He did regain his balance and kept walking with the Lord

C) And according to our text his road to recovery began with a visit to the Sanctuary, the House of God **Read v.16-17**

**When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me— Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.**

A) The Worship of God – caused a paradigm shift in Asaph's thinking

B) He started to see things differently

C) He remembered that he was not on the losing side but on the winning side.

**While in the house of the Lord, praying, singing, meditating on scripture**

A) A transformation took place in his heart

B) Asaph's pain gave way to peace! His vexation turned into relaxation –

## 1) He started to CHILL OUT

Warren Wierbse put it this way: he stopped being a Philosopher and starting being a worshipper.

C) The Change comes when he stops asking questions and complaining and starts offering worship.

1) He gets his eyes off of the Horizontal plain and gets them on the vertical plain.

D) Instead of seeing only the injustice – he is seeing God in the midst of the injustice.

Notice something super important – There is a pivotal shift that happens in the text in v.18

A) Up to this point the dominant pronouns in the Psalm have been **THEY** in v. 3-12 in talking about the wicked

B) And then **I** in v. 13-17 as Asaph has been voicing his frustration

C) But in V.18 the dominant pronoun becomes **YOU** as he begins to talk about the Lord –

D) Asaph is focused on God and not the wicked or even himself – EVERYTHING CHANGES

1) Read V.18-26 once again NLT

<sup>18</sup> Truly, **you** put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction.

<sup>19</sup> In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.

<sup>20</sup> When **you arise**, O Lord, **you** will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.

E) The wicked think they are winning, BUT God is just laughing at their silly ideas –

I like the way that Philip De Courcy explains ASAPH'S change in perspective. "Through his worship, Asaph comes to see the wicked are like passengers on the titanic, totally oblivious to the danger ahead."

In worship Asaph was reminded that God is sovereign, judgment is coming against the wicked

A) And glory awaits the righteous

B) In worship he is reminded -The outlook may be gloomy right now/ but the UPLOOK is GLORIOUS!

C) Now After this revelation – Asaph understandably feels foolish V.21 NLT

<sup>21</sup> Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside.

<sup>22</sup> I was so foolish and ignorant— I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.

D) Lord forgive me for being so stupid – ever have to pray that? – I HAVE – MANY TIMES

What he says next is glorious

A) Although Asaph was losing his grip on God – God did not lose hold of Him.

B) Asaph regains his balance because God was holding his hand

<sup>23</sup> Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand.

<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.

<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.

<sup>26</sup> My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

C) Asaph was falling – but God was not letting go  
1) LOVE IT

D) Walking WITH my grandson –hand in hand – 1 he stumbles – I have his hand – able to keep him from falling

E) Sometimes he doesn't want to hold Popi's hand – he falls – hurt – I have to pick him up  
1) He could have avoided the hurt –

The hand of Jesus is outstretched to you today.

A) Still bears the scars – scars of love – take his hand he is able to keep you from falling

B) Asaph comes to the realization – through all that stumbling -confusion – never lost fully lost it  
1) God had my hand

C) He was with me the whole time.

**This is what this Psalm reminds us**

A)When we see the Wicked prospering – God is still on the throne.

B)The wicked in God’s timing will get theirs – Judgment is coming

D)Janitor and Revelation – Jesus wins

**E)Jesus wins and the righteous are now and will be – Victorious in Jesus**

1)So hang in there- Church

**Notice how this ends**

<sup>27</sup> For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

A)GOOD NEWS - The wicked are not going to Prosper forever

B)Injustice will come to an end –

C)But this is also sobering – see we all know people who are far from the Lord –

1)People who if they died today – would perish forever – rejecting Jesus

That is why V.28 is so important –

<sup>28</sup> But *it is* good for me to draw near to God; Perspective

I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all Your works. – Purpose

**Asaph comes out of this with a changed perspective –**

A)And a renewed purpose

B)People need to hear of the good news of God

C)His love – His grace – the hope we have in Jesus