

## Psalm 73

### Introduction

1. Do you ever find yourself envying others? Ever wonder why God others have it so good and you don't, especially unbelievers?
2. We're going to talk about envy today through the eyes and words of one man who struggled with envy
3. Author: Asaph:
  - a. He was a Levite and as such served in the tabernacle/temple
  - b. He was an important man in Israel because he was one of three "Levitical singers" or choir directors (Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun; 2 Chronicles 5:12)
  - c. He was appointed to this role by David himself (1 Chronicles 6:31-43) and his descendants are often referred to in the OT as singers in the temple.
  - d. 2 Chronicles 29:30 also refers to him as a "seer" which was a prophet
  - e. He continued his service into King Solomon's reign
  - f. He wrote 12 of the psalms (50, 73-83)
4. Category: personal lament with ethical overtones
5. Poetic Elements:
  - a. Typical parallelism
  - b. Word Pictures:
    - 1) "My feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped" (3)
    - 2) "their body is fat" (4)
    - 3) "their tongue parades through the earth" (9)
    - 4) "washed my hands in innocence" (13)
  - c. Simile:
    - 1) "like a dream when one awakes..." (20)
    - 2) "I was like a beast" (22)
  - d. Tension/resolution: see "but as for me" in vs. 2 and 28
6. Structure:
  - a. We are going to throw out whatever divisions you have in your version of the Bible this morning because they are all different
  - b. Instead, we are going to rely on one very simple Hebrew word to show us where the sections are
    - 1) It's the Hebrew word *ak* which is translated as "surely" in the NASB and NIV ("indeed" in the CSB, "truly" in the ESV; "certainly" in the NET)
    - 2) It's a common word and used in a variety of ways, but one of those ways is to assert or emphasize a truth or **perceived** truth
    - 3) Asaph uses it this way three times in this psalm (vs. 1, 13 and 18):
      - a) In the first section (1-12), he asserts that God is good to Israel and those pure in heart, but finds himself struggling with this assertion because in the world the wicked often appear to be rewarded

- b) As a result, in the second section (13-17) he asserts that maybe a life of holiness and purity is a waste of time, but he then begins to struggle with that as well
- c) Finally, after he comes to his senses, in the third section (18-28) he asserts that God will destroy the wicked and surely good to Israel and the pure in heart

A. Asaph struggles with the assertion that God is good to His people (1)
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1. Asaph begins his song with a simple yet profoundly Biblical statement: **“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart!” (1)**
2. There’s a problem, however: at a point in his life he wondered if that was really true and he came close to rejecting it: **“but as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped.” (2):**
  - a. He is sharing a personal struggle with us
  - b. Notice that he says he came **“close”** to stumbling, that his steps had **“almost”** slipped—he didn’t quite fall but came close
  - c. In the end (and we’ll see it in the 3<sup>rd</sup> section), he came to his senses
3. He began to struggle when he became envious of the prosperity of the wicked: **“For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (3)**
  - a. Asaph lived in a world just like we do, where bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people
  - b. As Asaph looked at the wicked people around him and saw their prosperity:
    - 1) That the wicked had material wealth (3)
    - 2) They died a painless death (4a)
    - 3) They had plenty of food (4b)
    - 4) They faced no trouble in life (5)
  - c. He then looked at who they were and how they lived:
    - 1) They were prideful and violent (6)
    - 2) They were gluttons (7a)
    - 3) They did whatever wickedness their imaginations could dream up (7b)
    - 4) They would mock and oppress others (8)
    - 5) They would even boast against God (9-11)
  - d. This caused him to wonder, is it really Israel and the pure in heart that experience God’s favor and goodness? **“Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth.” (12)**
  - e. In his eyes, from his worldly perspective, the wicked prospered, maybe even more so than Israel and God’s people
    4. Have you ever found yourself in that place, questioning whether God is really good to you, maybe because you haven’t been blessed in a material sense as much as others?

My envy of Mark—scuba diving and skiing all over the world, semi-retired at 50, new home in the mountains of Montana, brand new snow-mobiles, big RV, no worries
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B. Asaph's considers the assertion that devotion to God is worthless (13-16)

1. As Asaph continued to focus on the prosperity of the wicked, he began to entertain one very simple question—"Is my faith in vain?"
2. His second assertion is found in verse 13: **"Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence;"**
  - a. Asaph's struggle became so real that it caused him to seriously consider whether his devotion to God was really worth it; Was it all a waste of time?
  - b. He looked at the wicked doing whatever they want, getting away with it and ultimately prospering, and contrasted it with a life devoted to God in which he is disciplined for righteousness sake : **"For I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning."** (14)
  - c. Envy is like that--It can cause one to wonder if God really is good, or at least is He as good to me as it appears He is to others—if God lets good things happen to the wicked, then why not so much more to me, one who loves Him?
3. Ultimately, however, Asaph came to his senses:
  - a. He realized his thinking was in error: **"If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children"** (15)
  - b. However, it wasn't until he found himself back in the sanctuary of the Lord that he realized his error: **"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."** (16-17)
    - 1) So, what was it about God's sanctuary that changed Asaph's thinking?
    - 2) It's where God's presence could be found
    - 3) It was the central place of worship, reading of the Word of God, singing, prayer, and also sacrifices
    - 4) Basically, when he was re-exposed to these things they exposed his faulty thinking and revealed it for what it was
    - 5) This reminds me of something the author of Hebrews said: **"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."** (Hebrews 10:23-25)

C. Asaph confirms the assertion that God is indeed good to His people (17b-28)

1. Asaph realized that while the wicked may prosper now, in the end they will be judged and destroyed by God (18-20):
  - a. He makes his third and final assertion: **"Surely You set them in slippery places; you 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, You will despise their form."**
  - b. Notice throughout these verses that Asaph puts their destruction squarely in the hands of God:
    - 1) Asaph originally assumed the wicked would go unpunished, because their earthly lives seemed to suffer no consequences—in fact, they prospered
    - 2) This faulty assumption caused him to wonder what real value or reward was offered for serving God

- 3) What he learned here is that while the wicked may prosper now, in the end they would ultimately be judged and destroyed by God
2. Asaph realized that his envious and bitter heart caused him to be senseless and ignorant (21-24): **“When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.”**
  - a. In spite of this, God delivered him from his ignorance: **“Nevertheless, I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand.”** (23)
  - b. He would also continue to guide Him into eternity: **“With your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory.”** (24)
3. Most importantly, however, Asaph realized that devotion to God is not in vain and the nearness of God, not material prosperity, is the ultimate goodness of God (25-28):
  - a. In contrast to his earlier assertion that his loyalty to God was in vain, here he declares his devotion to Him: **“Whom have I in heaven but you? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from You will perish. You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.”** (26-27)
  - b. Also in contrast to his earlier struggle with whether God is indeed good to his people he declares: **“But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.”** (28)

Conclusion
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Focusing on earthly things will prevent us from seeing the real goodness of God. Asaph described this as “the nearness of God.” Jesus described it as an eternal and abundant life with heavenly, rather than earthly, rewards.