

DON'T ENVY THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED (Psalm 73:1-12)

INTRODUCTION: I daresay most of us have *asked*—or at least *thought*—“*Why* is this happening to me?” Asked with the *right* attitude, it is actually a *good* question—and one that God *encourages* us to ask!

--**Haggai 1:5-7** “Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; **Consider your ways**. Ye have sown **much**, and bring in **little**; ye **eat**, but ye have **not enough**; ye **drink**, but ye are **not filled** with drink; ye **clothe you**, but there is **none warm**; and he that **earneth wages** earneth wages to put it into a **bag with holes**. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; **Consider your ways**.”

--In essence, God is saying that He allowed disappointments...and dissatisfaction...and lack of results...and unmet needs to get their attention and cause them to “Consider their ways!” In these instances, then, it is a good thing to ask, “*Why* is this happening to me?”

Sometimes—maybe *more often* than we care to admit—we have the *wrong* attitude when we ask the question. Instead of having an attitude of *humility*—and wanting to *be corrected*—we are really saying: “God is not fair” or “If God were fair, He *would not* let this happen to me!” Do *we feel* that way sometimes? If we are honest, I believe *we all* have probably felt that way one time or another. And *God knows* we feel that way sometimes because *one of the men* God used to write the Bible felt *the same way*—and God had him *write about it!*

But he didn’t *just write about* having a “This isn’t fair” kind of attitude, he also wrote about *how he got* this attitude in the first place—and the thought-process that *led him out* of this mindset into having the proper perspective. This morning we’re going to begin a mini-series from *Psalm 73* entitled, “Getting Back a Proper Perspective.”

For those of you with good memories—and were here then—I preached a *two-part* sermon from this Psalm in *October of 2017*. We also looked at it during an afternoon service *in April of 2024*. *Why* do I bring this up? To demonstrate that this is indeed one of my *favorite* Psalms! *Why* is it a favorite? Because it is a *deep mine* with a lot of *treasures* to dig out—so much so that I’m expanding a *two-part* sermon into *three* parts!

If you’re not there yet, please turn to Psalm 73 and follow along as I read verses 1-12. This morning—as you already know from your outline—we are going to be looking at this thought: “Don’t Envy the Prosperity of the Wicked!”

1. Asaph—the human author

Who did God use to write this Psalm? I just told you, right—his name is *Asaph!* And if I *had not* told you—or had not had it on your outline—those of you with a study Bible would have *seen that anyway!*

Who was Asaph? There are actually *two men* named Asaph in the Bible.

--This Asaph was a Levite...and gifted musician...and a singer that was appointed by King David to oversee the music in the temple.

--His sons followed in his footsteps and also served as musicians in the temple.

--And he is obviously the *author* of this Psalm! But he also wrote Psalm 50—and Psalms 74-83.

Now, let’s notice verse 1. Here we have... **2. Asaph’s B-L-U-F**

So what do I mean by B-L-U-F? Am I suggesting Asaph *wasn’t telling* the truth? *No*; that’s not what I’m saying! Back in my military days, we were taught to use the acrostic B-L-U-F. *What* did it *stand for*? “Bottom Line Up Front.”

The idea behind the B-L-U-F was to *get to the main point right away* so the readers could decide for themselves if they needed to read the whole thing or not!

--*King Solomon*, in end of Ecclesiastes, referred to it as “the conclusion of the whole matter.”

--Along the same lines, some commentaries refer to it as a *summary* of what Asaph believed about God.

So what leads me to say this was Asaph's "bottom line up front?"

--Notice again what Asaph says in vs 1: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." What is Asaph saying? 'God is **good** to Israel—His people—but **especially to those** who are striving to have a clean heart and live a holy life!' Stated another way, Asaph declares: "**It pays** to live for God!"

--Now look at vs 28—the **last verse** in this Psalm! "But it is **good for me** to draw near to God..." In other words, 'It is to **my advantage**—it is **beneficial for me**—to draw close to God.'

So the idea, once again, is: "**It pays** to live for God!"

--But **why** would Asaph make that statement? Isn't it "common knowledge" that there is "blessing" in obedience? There are a number of verses that teach this truth; I gave you **three** on your outline:

--**Josh 1:8** "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, **that thou mayest observe to do** according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy **way prosperous**, and then thou shalt have **good success**."

--In **Luke 11:28**, Jesus says "...Yea rather, **blessed** are they that **hear** the word of God, and **keep it**."

--**Romans 8:28** "And we know that all things work together for good to them **that love God**, to them who are called according to His purpose."

Do **all things** work together for good **for everyone**? **No**—this promise is for those who **love God**! How do we **demonstrate our love** to God? Jesus said by **keeping His commandments** (John 14:15). So these verses—and several others—remind us that there is **blessing in obedience**!

So **why** did Asaph "state the obvious" in his "bottom line up front?" Because he **didn't always feel that way**—and he was **honest** enough to **admit it**! And we see—in verses 2-3... **3. Asaph's honest admission**

First, he admitted that... A. His feet were slipping

--Vs 2. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped."

What is Asaph saying? 'I know—in my head—that God is good! I also know—in my head—that God will bless me when I obey Him and try to live a life that is pleasing to Him. But my belief in that truth started to slip! Doubts crept in and I began to wonder, Is it really worth all the work trying to live for God?'

Am I **reading too much** into this? I don't think so—and here's why! Look at verse 13: "Verily [truly] I have **cleansed my heart in vain**, and washed my hands in innocency." In other words, 'Me trying to do right—and live a clean and holy life—**hasn't paid off**! It is vain...it is empty...it hasn't done me **one bit of good**!'

Pretty major "foot-slippage," isn't it? And let's not forget, this was a man who **served God in the temple**—and led the people in **singing praises** to God!

What about us? Can our feet "slip" in our walk with God? Can we entertain thoughts of 'living for God is hard—and it doesn't seem to be paying off!' We can, can't we? If that's you—if your feet are slipping and you're starting to wobble in your walk with God—can I encourage you to **do what Asaph did**?

What did Asaph do? He **admitted that he was struggling**! Don't give up...don't just walk away! We've had some people do that since I've been here and that saddens me. I'm not saying that I could have for sure helped them "get back on track," but I certainly would have liked to try!

That's not all Asaph admitted, though. We see another thing in verse 3... B. He was envious of the wicked

--Verse 3: "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

--**Who** was Asaph envious of? The **foolish**!

--**Why** was he envious? Because he saw the **prosperity** of the **wicked**!

Is Asaph talking about **two** different groups of people? No; he's using "foolish" and "wicked" interchangeably!

--**Why**? Because the foolish are wicked—and the wicked are foolish!

Psalm 14:1 "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God."

Is it good to be envious of the foolish and wicked? **Obviously not**! **Spurgeon wrote**: "It is a pitiful thing that an heir of heaven should have to confess 'I was envious,' but worse still, that he should have to put it, 'I was envious at the foolish. Yet this acknowledgement is, we fear, due from most of us.'"

(*Treasury of David*, Volume I, pg 1307-1308). What about **us**?

Do we sometimes **envy the wicked** as Spurgeon suggested most of us do? It certainly is a tendency, or God wouldn't have **warned us** about it! And this is not **the only warning!**

--Psalm 37:1 "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, **neither be thou envious** against the workers of iniquity."

--Proverbs 23:17 "Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

--Proverbs 24:1 "Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them."

--Proverbs 24:19 "Fret not thyself because of evil men, **neither be thou envious at the wicked:**"

Why did Asaph envy the wicked? Because he looked at—and focused on—the **wrong things!** And that brings us to... **4. Asaph's Faulty Focus**

What did Asaph focus on? The first thing he mentions is at the end of verse 3: "when I saw the **prosperity of the wicked.**" So he focused on...

A. The abundance of the possessions of the wicked

--Vs 3 says they were prosperous

--The second half of vs 7 says "they have more than heart could wish." In other words, they **lack nothing** because they **have whatever they want**. Money is not an issue for them! **Spurgeon wrote:** "...they call for **water**, and the world gives them **milk**; they ask for **hundreds**, and **thousands** are lavished at their feet."

--Vs 12. "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches."

Interesting, isn't it? What was true in Asaph's day—roughly 3000 years ago—is still true today! We can get ourselves in trouble by generalizing too much, but I don't believe I'm going out on a limb to suggest that the majority of the "super rich" are **more ungodly** than they are **godly!**

The **abundance of the possessions** of the wicked wasn't the only thing Asaph focused on, though. Asaph also focused on... B. The absence of problems for the wicked

--Vs 4. "For there are no **bands [pains]** in their death, their strength is firm." Hebrew scholars disagree as to what exactly this verse means. One man wrote "they don't pine away with long and tedious sickness; they live in pleasure and die in ease."

What does it mean to "die in ease"? It means to die **peaceably**—meaning **without fear**—at least **outwardly**. **How** can the wicked die **without fear**? Because their pride has lulled them into believing false things about God like we'll see in just a minute in vs 11.

Of this verse, **Matthew Henry** wrote: "Men may **die like lambs** and yet have their place for ever **with the goats.**" (*Treasury of David*, Volume 1, pg 1321). Your **demeanor as you face death** is not nearly as important as your **destination** after death!

--Vs 5. "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are thy plagued like other men." No problems...no trouble...no trials—everything for them seems to be pain free and trouble-free! What a life! Everything they touch "turns to gold"—and life for them is nothing but "flowery beds of ease." Sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

Except it's not! It seems to me that God has **stopped confronting them** and is letting them have what **they desire—a life without Him!** But sadly, as we'll see later in this Psalm, this life is the only "heaven" that the ungodly will enjoy—and their "problems" will be never-ending in the hell that awaits them!

Lastly, let's consider... **5. Asaph's perplexity over their pride**

Before we do that, though, let's review Asaph's **progression of thought** so far. Asaph admitted that his feet were slipping—that he was struggling with an attitude that God isn't fair. Not only that, he was beginning to question whether it "paid" to live for God! "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain!" (vs 13)

Why did he feel this way? Because the wicked had an **abundance of possessions**—and an **absence of problems!** He on the other hand, had an **absence of possessions**—and an **abundance of problems!**

We see that in verse 14 "For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." Adding to his confusion and doubts and struggles was this observation: the wicked spoke openly against God and seemed to be getting away with it! In fact, he talks about **their pride** more than their **prosperity!**

First... A. They display their pride

--Vs 6a. "Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain." The idea here is that they are so proud that they wear their pride like a necklace!

--Vs 6b. "...violence covereth them as a garment." Violence and pride often go hand-in-hand, don't they? The proud believe **their** way is the **only** way—and will resort to violence to **get their** way! And this attitude of **getting what they want**—even if it means **harming others**—is so obvious in their lives that it is like a piece of clothing!

Second... B. They delight in their pride against men

--Vs 8. "They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily."

--"Corrupt" means rotten or bad—and people who have the wrong view of God certainly tend to be **corrupt!** Ps 14:1—a verse I gave you earlier—and Ps 53:1 both say that the fool says in their heart, "There is no God!" And both verses also mention that those who say this are "corrupt."

--Most commentators point out that "corrupt" may not be the best translation. The idea behind the Hebrew word is to "mock" or "scoff"—and the proud certainly do that.

--They also "speak wickedly *concerning* oppression..." Notice that the word "concerning" is in italics—meaning it was added by the translators to hopefully provide clarity. I'm not sure that it does, though, because the idea here is that they are in favor of oppressing others—and wickedly boast about how they are doing it!

--To speak loftily means either to speak "arrogantly and proudly"—or to speak from a high place; a position of power and authority.

This describes the **pro-abortion** crowd quite accurately, doesn't it?

--They certainly are corrupt! How can you be anything but evil if you think it is okay to destroy an innocent human being?

--They speak loudly—and proudly—their slogan of "My body, my choice!"

--And they speak loftily—highly—like they are in a position of authority—and despise those who disagree with them! Much more could be said, but you get the point!

Where we really see their pride, though, is in verses 9 and 11 where... C. They declare their pride against God

--Vs 9. "They set their mouth against the heavens..." It's one thing to set yourself **against men**—but quite another to set yourself **against heaven**. And when you set yourself against **heaven**, you are setting yourself against the **God** of heaven. And it wasn't something they were **secretly** doing in **their hearts**—they were **declaring it** with their mouths! I couldn't help but think of Psalm 2 where we have the same **attitude** of pride on full display—and that their pride also came out in **their words!**

--In Psalm 2:2, we see **their pride**: "The kings of the earth **set themselves**, and the rulers take counsel together, **against the Lord**, and **against His anointed**, saying,"

The Lord, of course, is God; God's Anointed is a reference to Christ!

--In Psalm 2:3, we see—and hear—**their words**: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." What are they saying? 'God's commandments...and rules...and ways are unacceptable to us—we are going to break off these restraints and cast them aside so we can do **what** we want...**when** we want... to **whoever** we want...and in the **way** we want!'

God's response to those who **set themselves** against Him? Psalm 2:4 "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." Simply put, God will be the One mocking and scoffing—not them!

--Now vs 11. "And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?" Once again to **think** this way is one thing, but to **say it** is quite another! They did **both**—and lived their lives as if God had no knowledge!

"How doth God know?" Because He **created** knowledge—and **taught man** knowledge! Ps 94:7b "...He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He know?" How foolish to think that the **Creator** of knowledge—and the **Teacher** of knowledge—doesn't have knowledge!

Asaph was perplexed! The wicked had an abundance of **possessions**—and an absence of **problems**. Not only that, they **displayed** their pride like jewelry and clothing...and **delighted** in oppressing men...and **declared** their mockery of God by questioning if the All-Knowing God knew anything!

And because of this, Asaph began **to question** if it paid to live for God! And the same thing will happen to us if we have the **wrong focus**! If we focus on the **wrong thing**, we'll come up with the **wrong conclusion**—just like Asaph did!

How did Asaph “snap out of” this kind of thinking? Vs 17 gives us the answer: He went into the sanctuary of God where he was reminded of their end! We'll talk about that more next week, but I want to close with some **truths** I believe God would have us ponder:

- The abundance of possessions is temporary. You can't take them with you, and they won't buy you heaven!
- The absence of problems doesn't mean God's blessing. It may mean God is letting you “have it your way” — which is not a good thing!
- People can have outward prosperity—but inward poverty. What does that mean? All the riches in the world do not give you peace of heart! “There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22)
- We live in a sin-cursed world, so life isn't always fair. Don't be surprised by that! In other words—being a bit blunt—get used to it!
- God is all-knowing and perfectly just; rewards will be rightly distributed in the end.
- And rest assured, it will be worth it all, when we see Jesus!