

THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO AMAZING PROMISES (Psalm 73:23-25)

INTRODUCTION: Here we are—**sermon number 3** from Psalm 73! Maybe you remember me saying three weeks ago when we first looked at this Psalm that I was taking a **two**-part sermon and making it into **three** parts—**maybe more**. And the “maybe” is no longer **maybe**—it will be **four**!

I’m not a mind reader, but it is possible that some of you get “annoyed” that I spend so much time “digging into” the text. There is a “method to my madness,” however, and here are a **couple** of things you **are learning** that you may not even realize you are **being taught**!

1) You are learning the importance **of context**. False teachers twist the meaning of Scripture by taking it out of context. By me going verse-by-verse, you are learning that the best way to **interpret and understand** a passage is to see how the verses relate to one another.

2) Second, you are learning **how to meditate** on the Word of God—and **the value** of doing that! **How?** By me **meditating** on the Word of God—and sharing those thoughts with you! Hopefully you see the importance of determining the meaning of words...and how they are used elsewhere...and the importance of slowing down and **mulling over in our minds** what God is saying to us!

So with that as a rather strange introduction to the introduction, please turn again to Psalm 73. Here’s the progression of thought we’ve seen so far from Asaph.

--In **vs 1**, Asaph gives us his “bottom line up front”: that God is good to His people—especially to those who strive to live a holy, God-pleasing life! **Why** did Asaph make that statement?

--Because he **hadn’t always felt** that way—and he said as much in **verse 13**! Notice what it says (read). What did he mean by that? Here’s a paraphrase I’ve given to you a couple of times already: ‘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**!’

Do Christians ever feel that way? I believe they do! Not too long ago, we finished up the book of Colossians. **Colossians 4:14** says: “Luke, the beloved physician, and **Demas**, greet you.” I didn’t elaborate on this at the time, but Paul later wrote in **II Timothy 4:10** “**For Demas hath forsaken me**, having loved this present world...” So a co-worker of Paul’s—a fellow-laborer in the Lord’s work—**stopped** living for the Lord and instead began to **live for** the world. **Why?** Because he **loved** the world—meaning the temporary things **of life**! And if you **love the world**—and live for the “here and now”—your reason is probably because you don’t think it “pays” to **live for the Lord**!

How did Asaph get to this point? By looking at the wicked and the **abundance of their possessions** (vs 3)...and the **absence of their problems** (vs 5)...and their **arrogance and pride** (vss 9 and 11). And after focusing on those things, he came up with the conclusion that **God isn’t fair**—and it **doesn’t pay to try to live a holy life**!

But **unlike Demas**, Asaph **didn’t remain** in this mindset! What **led him** to “snap out of it”? **Verse 17**: “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; **then** understood I their end.” Sobering words, aren’t they?

What was their **end**? From **verse 18**, we see that it was **God-ordained** (“surely **thou didst set** them...”)...and **forced** (“thou **castedst** them”) and “**into destruction**”—meaning **eternal separation from God**!

From **verse 19**, we see that their end was **sudden** (“brought into desolation as in a moment!”) and **terrifying** (“utterly consumed with terrors”). And from **verse 20**, we see that their end was **deserved**. They had **despised God**; God was now **despising them**!

What was **Asaph’s response** to being reminded of all this? In verses 21 and 22, we see **his repentance**. He was **grieved** that he had envied the wicked for their temporary pleasures instead of remembering their eternal end. He was **convicted of his sin** in doubting the fairness and goodness of God. And he **was sorry** that he had entertained the thought that it didn’t pay to try to live for God!

And that brings us to our text for this morning, verses 23-25. Notice what they say. As you already know from your outline, I’ve entitled this morning’s sermon: “The Appropriate Response to Amazing Promises.” Here’s a title that is equally fitting: “Hope of Earth—and Joy of Heaven!”

First, we have...**1. The Promise for the Present**

What was the promise for the present that Asaph realized? It is the promise of God's **continual presence!** We see that in the first part of verse 23: "Nevertheless I am **continually with thee...**"

A. The reality of God's continual presence (vs 23a)

--I think it is noteworthy that the verse **starts** with the word: "**Nevertheless.**" I was surprised to find out that the word "nevertheless" appears **97 times** in the Bible! I knew it was used **a lot**—but didn't think it was used **that** much! But **what** does it **mean**?

--"Bibledictionarytoday.com" says the following: "The word 'nevertheless' can be understood as a **transition or a pivot point** in scripture. It signifies a **turning away from doubt** or despair toward faith and trust in God's promises. It is often used to introduce a statement **that contrasts with what has just been stated**, emphasizing a shift in perspective or action despite difficulties or challenges."

--That definition certainly **fits this verse**, doesn't it? Here is a paraphrase that I believe will help us capture what Asaph was saying: 'Even though I wrongly imagined that you were unfair, God, and even though I felt forsaken and that it didn't matter that I was doing right—in **spite of all this**—the truth I now realize is that I was **with you** the **whole time** because you were **with me** the whole time.'

--And—thankfully—the promise of God's presence **isn't just for Asaph—it's also for us!**

--In **Matthew 28:20**, Jesus ends His instructions regarding the Great Commission with these words: "...and, lo, I **am with you always**, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

--If Jesus is **with us always**—even unto the world—when is He **not with** us? Jesus is "**never** not with us," right?

So if Jesus—the One whose name is "**The Truth**"—says He is **with you always**, He is **with you always**—regardless of the **circumstances** and regardless of how you **feel!**

In **Hebrews 13:5**, we have a similar statement "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: **for He hath said, I will never leave thee**, nor forsake thee."

--**Who** is the "He" in this verse? The context points to it being **God the Father**. Again, if God—the One **who cannot lie** we are told in Titus 1:2—says He will **never leave you**, then He will **never leave you!**

B. The reason for God's continual presence (vs 23b)

Why—in spite of Asaph's doubts and fears—was he **so certain** he was continually with God? Because **God** was the One **holding onto him**—not the other way around! We see that in the **end** of vs 23: "**thou hast holden me by my right hand.**" Asaph's feet were slipping (vs 2), but he didn't fall because God was holding him!

1) The place of holding. **Where** was God holding Asaph? By his **hand!** Not by the **nape** of his neck...or the **sleeve** of his shirt...or the **hair** on his head, but by **his hand!**

And even though I want to be careful not to make **too big of a deal** of this, I find it interesting that God holds Asaph's **right** hand. The **right** hand in the Bible is often referred to as the hand of power and might.

--In **Exodus 15:6**, we have part of the song that was sung after God destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea: "Thy **right hand**, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy **right hand**, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy."

Ps 98:1 "O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things: His **right hand**, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory." **Psalm 118:16** "The **right hand** of the Lord is exalted: the **right hand** of the Lord doeth valiantly." (See also Ps 17:7; 89:13).

And—thinking about the picture a little more—if God is holding **our right hand**—the symbol of power—we would **be weak**—and dependent on God! Not only that, but if God is holding **our right hand**—and is **walking beside us**—He would be using **His left hand**—meaning **His right hand of power** would still be available!

Not sure about you, but I'd much rather have **God's** right hand available than **mine!**

Next, let's think about... **2) The purpose of holding.** **Why** do we hold someone's hand?

There are several reasons, right?

--You hold the hand of **your wife** because you have a **special relationship** with her.

--You hold the hand of **a child** when crossing a busy street because you want to **protect** them.

--You hold the hand of *someone who is "wobbly"* because you want to ensure they *don't fall!*
Why does God hold *our* hand? Because He has a *special relationship* with us...and because He wants to *protect* us...and because He wants to ensure we *don't fall!*

And let's not overlook... **3) The power of the Holder.** *How strong* is the hand of the One who holds our hand?
--Jesus said in **John 10:28** "And I give unto them **eternal** life; and they shall **never perish**, neither shall any man pluck them out of **my hand**."

--And Jesus said the same thing about being in the *Father's hand!* **John 10:29** "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of **my Father's hand**."

So we have the promised presence—and protection—of God because we are secure in the hand of both the Father and the Son!

Next, let's look at... **2. The Promises for the Future (vs 24)**

What promises were Asaph counting on regarding his future? We have **two** in verse 24.

A. The promise of guidance (vs 24a)

--Vs 24a: "**Thou shalt guide** me with thy counsel..."

--It's not a "hoped for" guidance—and not a "probationary" guidance. It was a **promised** guidance — Thou shalt

--**Psalms 48:14** says, "For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our **guide** even unto death."

--**What** did Asaph count on being guided *by?* "**Thy**"—meaning God's—**counsel**.

--**Where** do we find God's counsel? In **His Word**, right?

--**Ps 33:11** "The **counsel** of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations."

Where does God declare "the thoughts of His heart"? In His **Word!**

--**Ps 107:11** "Because they rebelled against the **words of God**, and **contemned the counsel** of the most High:"

Here we see "the words of God" parallel with "the counsel of the most High."

--Here's one more. In **Acts 20:27**, we see some of Paul's words to the elders of the church at Ephesus "For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God**" which is again a reference to the word of God.

So the question is not, "**Will** God guide us?" And the question is not, "Has God **given us counsel?**" The question is, "How **'guidable'** are you?" "How willing are we to take the counsel God has already given you?"
Ps 32:8 "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will **guide** thee with mine eye."

God wants to guide with **His eye**—and with a still small voice. Right after saying God wants to guide with His eye, the Bible says "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding...."

Ever hear me say this before? It is **not a compliment to you** if God needs a 2x4 to get your attention!

B. The promise of glory (vs 24b)

--Vs 24b: "...and **afterward** receive me to glory." **After what?** After the difficulties of **this** life—the chastening and confusion and disappointments and heartaches and health issues and losses and the "unfairness" of this life where the righteous suffer and the wicked seem to prosper—**after all these things** (and more) comes **glory** (meaning heaven). It's almost as if Asaph knew **Romans 8:18** "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Why was Asaph so confident that God would personally **receive him** into heaven? We don't really **know how he** knew—or **what he** was **counting on**.

But **we can know**—for ourselves—because God tells us **how** we can know! Not only that, God **wants us to know!** **I John 5:13** "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life...**"

C. The people that are promised glory

How can we know—with 100% certainty—that we are forgiven...and a child of God...and are heaven-bound?

--**I John 5:11** "And this is the record [the report/testimony] that God hath **given to us** eternal life...."

--Let's stop right there and think about what God through John is saying.

It doesn't say, "We have **earned for ourselves** eternal life!" It says, "God has **given it** to us!" **Gifts** are given—free of charge; **paychecks** are earned!

--Now for the **rest of the verse**: "...and this life [eternal life] is **in His Son**." It **doesn't say**, "and this life is in baptism." And it **doesn't say**, "this life is in a certain church." And it **doesn't say**, "this life is in keeping the 10 Commandments—or the Golden Rule."

--What **does** it say? And this life "is **in His Son**"—meaning Jesus! Eternal life is **in and through** Jesus—and **only** Jesus! **Why** is eternal life only **in Jesus**?

--Because **sin disqualifies** us from heaven—and all of us have sinned! Not only that, we can't **get rid of our sin** or **satisfactorily pay the penalty** that God requires.

--And that is why we need **Jesus**! Jesus was qualified to be **our substitute**—He could pay **our penalty for us**—because He lived a **perfect** life! But Jesus wasn't **just qualified to be** our substitute—He came for the purpose **of being our substitute**! God took the penalty of **our sin**—the penalty **we deserved**—and put it on Jesus!

--We see that in **II Corinthians 5:21** "For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] **to be sin for us**, who knew no sin; that we might be made [become] the righteousness of God in Him."

--**That's not all** we see in this verse, though. Not only is our **sin put on Jesus**, but also the **righteousness of Jesus**—meaning His perfectness—is credited to our account!

--**What** does that **mean**? It means when we **receive Jesus as a gift**—by trusting only in His death to save us from the penalty of our sins—God no longer considers us as clothed in **filthy rags of sin**. Instead, He sees us wearing a **perfect...sinless...spotless robe**!

"His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange! Clothed in my sin, Christ suffered 'neath God's rage. Draped in His righteousness, I'm justified. In Christ I live, for in my place He died."

--And that's why eternal life **is in God's Son**!

Lastly, let's consider... **3. The Proper Response to God's Promises (vs 25)**

--In light of the fact that God is **continually with us** because He holds us by our hand...and that He promises to **guide us** in this life—and **receive us to heaven** in the next life—what should our **response** be? The same response Asaph had as seen in verse 25!

--Notice what the first part of the verse says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" Was Asaph saying he knew of no one that had passed on before him that he would look for in heaven? No; he was not saying that!

--What he was saying was this...**A. God should be the One you long for in heaven (vs 25a)**

--Most—if not all of us—have **loved ones in heaven** we are looking forward to seeing: children, grandchildren, wives, husbands, grandparents, best friends, the list goes on. And there's nothing wrong with that!

--But too many times, I'm afraid, we look forward to heaven because of **the blessings**—like seeing loved ones and having no more death, sin, sorrow, crying, or pain—instead of **the Giver** of those blessings!

--So to help us with that tendency, God led Asaph—one thousand years **before Jesus even came to earth**—to write that the One we should long for in heaven is **God Himself**!

--Is that **your heartbeat**? It was the heartbeat of Paul in **Philippians 1:23** "...having a desire to depart, and to **be with Christ**; which is far better:"

--It was also the heartbeat of Fanny Crosby when she wrote, "But I **long to meet my Savior** first of all."

But that wasn't Asaph's **only** response! Notice the rest of the verse: "...and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." In other words, **B. God should be the One you live for on earth (vs 25b)**

--To which I reply, "Yikes!" We "get it" that **God** should be the One we long for the most **in heaven**! But does God really ask that we make Him our priority on **earth**, too?

--He **certainly does**, and Jesus said that very thing in **Luke 14:26** "If any man come to me, and **hate not** his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

On the surface, this verse seems to **contradict other verses** in the Bible like **Ephesians 5:25** "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it."

--How can I **hate** my wife—and **love** my wife—at the same time? The word “hate” in this context doesn’t mean to be hateful to the members of your family—but it does mean you **love them less** than you love Christ!
--Stated another way, if you have to choose between devotion **to Christ**—and devotion to **your family**—your devotion to Christ must **come first!**
--Is that a **difficult** request? We’d be lying if we said it wasn’t! But it’s not an **unreasonable** one!
--**Romans 12:1** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your **reasonable** service.”

So even though **Romans 12:1 had not been written** yet, Asaph had **presented himself unreservedly**—and whole-heartedly—to God. That is why he said, “there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

What about **you**? Is that **your response**?

--If you are a child of God, God continually **holds your hand**—just like he did Asaph’s!
--And—if you are a child of His, God promises to **guide you** with His counsel—if you want to be guided!
--And—if you are a child of His—God guarantees for you an **“afterward” of glory!**

So the **promises** are the same—but what about **our response**? Have **you** presented **yourself** to God as a living sacrifice? Have you **surrendered your will** to God’s will—or are you living for you?

Kind of sad, isn’t it, that we **trust God** to take away our sins—and bring us to heaven—but we don’t trust Him enough to **surrender our lives and wills to Him!**

If you’ve never presented yourself to God—if you’ve never said to God (and meant it) “Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee”—why not do that today? After all, it is our “reasonable service!”

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

1. First and foremost, do you know—with 100% certainty—that you have eternal life?

--You can know—and God wants you to know!

--Eternal life is found in Christ—period!

--But you must have Him—not just know about Him!

--If you have questions about that—and want to talk more about having Christ and becoming a child of God—please let me know.

2. But what about those that are God’s children? What would God have us do?

First, ask yourself **why you look forward** to heaven. If you are longing to see someone more than Christ, adjust your focus and start thinking more about what Christ did for you and all that you have in Him.

Second, ask yourself **who you are living for on earth**. If your priority is someone other than Christ, repent—and make it by Christ.

--Present yourselves as a living sacrifice to Him—but then renew that sacrifice daily!