

Psalm 73

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Preacher: Ben Panner

[0 : 00] Psalm of Asaph. Therefore, pride is their necklace.

Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily, they threaten oppression.

They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore, his people turn back to them and find no fault in them. And they say, how can God know?

Is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked. Always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

[1 : 24] Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end. Truly, you set them in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin.

How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors, like a dream when one awakes. Oh, Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant.

I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. And afterward, you will receive me to glory.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 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 shall perish. You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of all your works.

[2 : 28] This is the word of the Lord. Amen. You may be seated. Well, it's a real encouragement to be here with you this morning.

I just want to take this moment to thank Christ Church Chicago for welcoming me and my family into the life of this church family. If you're new here today, I hope that you will find Christ Church Chicago to be a wonderful church family just as we have and be a blessing to you.

And we hope this morning will be an encouragement. I hope you keep your Bibles open to Psalm 73. That's where we're going to spend our time here. Let me just pray for us before we get started.

Father in heaven, we do ask for your blessing and your help as we come to your word now. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight. Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer, help us by the power of your Holy Spirit right now.

Amen. Amen. Well, it's good to get warnings about slippery places. When steps are icy, it's good to hear a heads up lest you find out the hard way.

[3 : 40] When the floor is wet, it's good to see a caution sign right in front of you lest you find yourself on the ground. And when the roads are under the elements, it's good for my car to warn me about the icy conditions lest my car find itself on the side of the road.

Well, Psalm 73 is like a caution sign, a warning signal about a slippery place for those who are following Jesus. Look at verse 2 with me.

Asaph, the psalmist, he tells us that his feet had almost stumbled. His steps nearly slipped. Asaph found himself on a slippery place.

Not ice, not water, but something far greater with greater consequences. His heart was jealous. Jealousy is a slippery place for the soul.

It is good to get warnings about jealousy lest we slip away from God into ruin. That's the danger that Asaph faced. And by God's grace, though, Asaph didn't slip away from God.

[4 : 55] That's what verse 1 tells us. It gives us his conclusion. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But like Asaph, life gives us many reasons to question if that conclusion is true.

Life throws us curveballs, relational dysfunction, bodily frailties, financial difficulty, spiritual apathy.

The question for us today in the face of all of those things is this, what will keep us from slipping away from God? We get the privilege of journeying with Asaph in Psalm 73 through his struggles with God, but it's going to be very evident quickly that his wrestlings mirror our own.

But fortunately, the help that he finds is available to us today. What will keep us from slipping away from God?

What will enable us to say truly God is good to his people? Well, Asaph helps us by first describing how he almost slipped in verses 4 through 15.

[6 : 15] We see Asaph struggling with God. He moves from jealousy to bitterness to a hardened heart. verses 4 through 12.

They show us what his eyes see and what his heart envies. You see, he's comparing his life with the prospering wicked, those who live a life full of injustice.

And to him, things are not adding up. He's jealous. In verses 4 to 5, he looks like, it looks like nothing is ever going wrong for the wicked. They have no pains in life and they seem to die in peace.

their bodies are fat and sleek. Now let me tell you, fat in that time, that would have been considered good. A sign of abundance, a sign of health.

They don't seem to experience trouble or pain. You could imagine Asaph comparing these folks with some of the faithful people in his own congregation that he knew.

[7 : 20] maybe a loving, godly mother who was facing physical ailments and was struggling to provide for her young kids.

And yet the wicked seem to have no pain, no trouble, just abundance and health. They seem to be immune from the troubles of life.

And in verses 6 to 9, it seems like they do whatever they want at no consequence to themselves. They live in pride. They unjustly use others for their own gain.

They do what they want. They say what they want. They have what they want at no cost to themselves, only the expense of others. Asaph tells us that they live in open rebellion against God.

and their life of injustice has somehow put them in a position of social power. It's seen in verse 10 as those are start, there are people who are starting to follow them.

- [8 : 22] They're impressed by them. They hold them in high regard even though they're living in these ways. Verse 12 is a great summary. The wicked always at ease and increasing in riches.

abundance in health? Check. Power in pride? Check. Influence? Check.

They seem to have it all but it feels like they're doing everything wrong. Asaph is jealous. It's almost as if he's wondering is God withholding from me?

Am I missing out on the good life because I chose to follow God? Jealousy is a slippery place. I wonder if you can resonate with his struggle.

Well, verses 13 to 15, his jealousy leads him into bitterness and his bitterness leads him with a hardened heart against God. He's on the verge of slipping away from God, turning away from him.

- [9 : 37] You see, he looks from the prosperity of the wicked and he starts to look at his own life and again, things are not adding up. He says he's kept his heart clean, he's obeyed God, he's pursued a life of purity and yet he's the one stricken.

His experience is frustration and hardship as he seeks to be faithful to God. It's almost as if he's thinking, I'm doing everything right, they're doing everything wrong.

They have everything, I only have pain. And in verse 15, as the leader of God's people, he doesn't want to give voice to his bitterness, to all that he's experiencing because he knows that his doubt will spread like wild fire.

The bitterness that he is holding onto has hardened his own heart against God. Have you been there? The late Tim Keller, he wrote in his book *The Prodigal God*, he describes musicians from the play *Amadeus*, two musicians, Salieri and Mozart.

Salieri makes a vow to God. He promises to keep his hands off woman. He promises to work diligently at his music. He promises to teach other musicians for free and he promises to take care of the poor.

- [10 : 58] His career is going well until Mozart steps onto the scene and Mozart is far more gifted than he is except Mozart is living a vulgar, self-indulgent life and Salieri is fed up and he says this, it is incomprehensible.

Here I was denying all my natural lust in order to deserve God's gift and there was Mozart indulging his in all directions even though engaged to be married and no rebukes at all and he ends by saying this to God, from now on we are enemies you and I in his mind he was doing everything right and Mozart was doing everything wrong and yet Salieri was far from God.

Jealousy of others leads to bitterness against God that tempts us to turn away from God. I wonder this morning if jealousy and bitterness has crept into your heart.

Maybe you find yourself undergoing hardship. Is God withholding from me? Maybe you've made big decisions in your life with work or with lifestyle because of your desire to follow God but it's brought significant conflict to you.

Is it worth it to keep following God? Maybe you've been committed to the church year after year coming but now you're faced with the prospect of disease or a failing body and life does not seem to match up for you.

- [12 : 39] Why me after my years of faithfulness when others living unjustly are living carefree? And maybe you're still considering if you want to follow God in the first place.

You've tried to live a moral life and you're confused while you're facing challenges while others living immorally are prospering. Life is not giving back what you seem to be putting in.

It's not hard to see how Asaph got to this place because we find ourselves there quickly. Jealousy leads to bitterness.

Bitterness produces a hard heart towards God. So is there any help for those struggling with jealousy wrestling with God?

What will keep us from slipping away? Verses 16 and 17 give us the answer. Can I show you in the song?

[13 : 41] Look at that again with me. Asaph went into the sanctuary of God.

He drew near to God in his place of confusion. In drawing near to God he began to have a restored perspective. Drawing near to God he began to have a transformed heart.

Drawing near to God he began to have a clear vision of who God is. Drawing near to God kept him from slipping away. You see we're moving from this struggle with God to entering into the sanctuary of God.

For Asaph the sanctuary of God was likely the temple the place where God's presence dwelt with Israel. This is where Israel came to worship God.

And so to draw near for Asaph meant that he entered into the place of worship where God's presence dwelt and by faith he depended on God in prayer for help and for strength.

[15 : 05] Drawing near kept him from slipping away. But is the same true for us as it was for Asaph? He went into the beautiful temple.

He went into the place where God promised to renew his people as they turned to him in faith. Yet we don't have a physical sanctuary or temple here on the south side of Chicago.

In fact that temple of the Old Testament was simply a shadow of something greater that was to come. The temple of the Old Testament was always intended to prepare God's people for something greater, something better.

The temple was just a symbol of God's presence dwelling with his people. Later in the Bible in the book of John it tells us that Jesus Christ came into the world the Son of God came to dwell with us and be among us and bring the fullness of God's presence with his people.

And Jesus came and declared that his body had become the new temple, his dwelling place among men. He had become the new way to draw near to God.

[16 : 24] And the book of Hebrews tells us and teaches us that by the shed blood of Jesus on the cross for our sins he's opened up a new and living way to God the very presence access into his presence through faith in Jesus.

Can we draw near to God like Asaph in greater ways? We don't need to travel to the Middle East or to a special place to draw near to God to find help.

We can draw near to God simply by coming to Jesus in faith the true sanctuary of God. What is going to keep us from slipping away from God into ruin drawing near to God in faith in Jesus.

When we pray in faith and we depend on Jesus we're drawing near to the very living God and we can find mercy and grace and help in our time of need.

Drawing near keeps us from slipping away. We can experience the transforming presence of God by drawing near through Jesus.

[17 : 38] Now it's not always an instantaneous transformation but over time continually drawing near God chips away at our hard hearts and restores our vision and renews us more and more each day.

Drawing near to the true sanctuary of God Jesus Christ is like what happens when a blacksmith puts iron in a furnace. Imagine a furnace that's fiery hot and you put the flat black iron that's cold place it in the fire and minutes later that cold iron is now white hot soft and ready to be molded into its new shape.

When we draw near to God through Jesus into the very presence of God God takes our cold and bitter and jealous hearts and softens them so that he can mold them for his new purposes.

This is what happened to Asaph in Psalm 73 and this is what can happen to us as well. He drew near to God so can we.

So at verses 4 to 15 where Asaph struggling with God verses 16 and 17 we see Asaph entering into the sanctuary of God the last part of our Psalm 18 to 28 we see Asaph finding strength in God.

[19 : 12] Asaph draws near He draws near to find strength to keep going and what do we get what happens when we draw near?

Well he tells us we start to get an eternal perspective. When we draw near to God we start to see this life in light of eternity. Look at verses 18 to 20.

You see life without God is not as great as we think it is. God sets the wicked on slippery places that end in ruin eternal ruin and emptiness and judgment.

The unjust may prosper now but in the end it will be all lost. Only judgment before a holy God will remain. My dad often shares his conversion story.

He was a rebellious teenager and college student. He was far from God but a friend brought him to church and his friend told the pastor says pastor I'm bringing a sinner to church and the pastor preached the word with passion and faithfulness and he spoke the penetrating words of Jesus what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet lose his soul?

[20 : 37] Behold the wicked are at ease increasing in riches in this life but in eternity they're losing their soul.

Friend you may be here this morning not struggling with jealousy one bit because your life has been easy and prosperous and you might be questioning if you even need God.

The Bible is reminding us today that God is the just judge against all sin and wickedness. He sees all he knows all he will judge all and each of us have sinned in our own proud rebellion against God and prosperity in this life does us no good before the judgment seat of God.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet lose his soul to eternal ruin? If you've been living in proud rebellion against God today you are invited to draw near to God through faith in Jesus find forgiveness of your sins and your pride and find eternal security for your soul.

You can know the undeserved goodness of God in Jesus instead of the deserved justice that you and I deserve in eternity. Draw near glory to God and when you do and when we do we are kept from slipping away and we gain an eternal perspective.

[22 : 19] But when we draw near we also gain a humble heart. God humbles our hearts. Look at verse 21. Asaph starts to realize that he was full of bitterness and he was ignorant of God.

He was like a beast towards God. He was a fool not living in wisdom. Ignorant and blind to the living God. I mean we talked for a little while about how Asaph's jealousy was understandable isn't it?

We struggle just like him and yet God exposes that for what it truly is. A jealous and bitter heart towards God is ignorant and foolish towards him.

God and as we draw near to him we see our sin more clearly and it should cause us deep humility before the living God. So when you sense jealousy creeping into your heart we are wise to draw near to God and gain clarity about the condition of our own heart.

And yet despite our ignorance and Asaph's ignorance God meets those who draw near to him with his goodness. Look at verse 23 Nevertheless Nevertheless it says God keeps his people God guides his people God holds his people even when their hearts are ignorant.

[23 : 52] God draws his people to himself and he promises to bring them into eternal glory. He does not let his people slip away into ruin.

He keeps them. I think one of the most interesting things about this psalm is that the circumstances of Asaph have not changed one bit.

The wicked have not changed. They're still prospering. His situation has not changed. He's still in pain but his perspective is completely transformed.

As the psalm started he thought the wicked had everything and he had nothing. And as he draws near to God he realizes that nothing compares to the joy of being with God.

There is nothing on earth that he desires more than God himself. Not health not possessions not influence. Though his heart and his flesh may fail God is his strength and portion forever.

[24 : 54] Can you grasp what he's saying in verse 26? The wicked look full on the outside and the godly look empty but God is their portion their abundance and their joy.

Is God withholding any good from us? Friends God did not even spare his own son but gave him up for us.

How will he not also with him graciously give us all things? God secured your forgiveness and mine your eternal future and mine not by withholding his son by giving him up for us.

Oh the goodness of God to sinners like us. It is good to be near God through faith in Jesus and when we draw near we are reminded of God's goodness to us in Christ.

I remember at my previous church I was visiting a dear saint a few weeks before he passed away into glory. His name was Pete Wilson. As he aged he especially toward the end of his life he had many physical ailments many challenges and pains.

[26 : 14] He had lost his hearing in a lot of ways. He was declining very fast. But as I sat down with him every time he would look me in the eyes and he would say God is so good.

God is so good. And this declaration came from a man who knew what it was like to draw to draw near to God in faith time after time after time in prayer and with God's people.

He entered into the furnace of prayer and God was shaping him over years so that in a time of great trial he could say God is so good.

Isn't that what verses 27 and 28 tell us? Asaph started in a slippery place struggling with God his jealousy led to bitterness but he entered the sanctuary of God drawing near into his presence and God renewed him and he found strength in the goodness of God.

Drawing near to God keeps us from slipping away into ruin and friends drawing near is not a one time thing this is a daily thing this is a regular thing jealousy and bitterness do not stop they keep coming and so we need to keep drawing near to the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ and drawing near is not an individual thing only this is something we do corporately as the people of God each Sunday we come together and we worship and we draw near to God through Jesus to hear from his word to find strength in his presence to carry on and to keep going friends draw near so you don't slip away draw near and find strength to continue draw near and taste the goodness of God I looked this week at our family

[28 : 46] Spotify account our music playlist and it showed our top songs of 2024 and one of our top songs was the old theme song from Batman my five year old loves Batman well you know the psalms the psalms are songs they're songs for the church my prayer for Christ Church Chicago is that psalm 73 becomes the number one played song of 2025 draw near to God draw near to God draw near to God may it be so let's pray father in heaven we come before you humbly recognizing our own frailties and weakness even ignorance to you and your goodness we are sorry please forgive us and we draw near to you now only through your son

Jesus Christ by the power of your Holy Spirit and we ask that you would change us help us to taste your goodness help us to find strength to carry on keep us from slipping away and may you receive all glory in 2025 from Christ Church Chicago and we pray this in Christ's name amen