

Psalm 73 "Deconversion Interrupted by Insight"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 2024

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, in your Word, you tell us that your Word is like a sword that can go right into the very center, a knife that can go right into the very center and depths of who we are and can sort of pull things apart and reveal what's there. And Father, we don't always like that process, but we are grateful that your Word is a way for us to not only understand who you are and the wonder of the gospel, but also to see who we really are, who we really are, the person, the man and the woman that Jesus died for. So we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would do many mighty works in our lives this morning, and that your Holy Spirit would allow, help us to allow your Word, that your Holy Spirit would help us to allow your Word to reveal to ourselves what we're really like, and in doing so, that we might know the gospel better and have greater hope. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

Amen. This is a psalm written 3,000 years ago that talks about deconversion and talks about deconstruction of faith. Some of you might know that that's like a very big topic in Christian circles, deconversion and the deconstruction of the Christian faith. Some of you might be quietly, privately, doubting the Christian faith and feeling yourself on the way out. Some of you might be like me, who had, I don't know, four or five, six in the first 15 years or so of my Christian faith, had four or five, six times where I came close to walking away from the Christian faith. But this is a psalm about it. And it's really about not only, it's all about how the person who wrote the psalm, Asaph, began a journey of walking away from the faith, came right to the brink of leaving the faith, and how he came back to re-embrace the faith. And that's what the psalm is all about. It's a very, very profound psalm. It's unsettling. But let's look and see why it's unsettling and why it's profound. If you would turn your Bibles to Psalm 73, that would be great. We always have the words of the text up on the screen, but I just want to encourage you, there's something about bringing your own Bible, especially a paper Bible, to be able to look at these things yourselves and just see what it's saying. Partly, I like you to bring your own Bibles because I want you to be

Bereans. I want you to say, oh, the church, take that out of context. There's, you know, something else going on. And it's just, I just want to encourage you, but the words are on the screen. And here's how it goes. It begins with a postscript, which I don't think is on the screen, a psalm of Asaph. I don't know if I'm pronouncing that correctly because I never hear anybody pronounce his name. So this is significant. Asaph was one of the people designated by David to lead the praises of God in people of the, in the people of God in praising. So it would be sort of a combination of Deborah, Josiah, and me, all sort of rolled up into one. Deborah's our worship leader.

[4 : 45] So today it would be like Emma, Josiah, and me, sort of rolled all up into one, and Monique as well, all rolled up into one. And that's who he was. And here's how it begins then. Verse one, we'll read. Actually, I sort of gave little titles to each of these sections. Verses one to three could be called The Big Picture. The Big Picture. And here's what it says.

Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Now, just a couple of things here about that. The first thing is the word here, the very first thing where it says, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. For those of us reading this text today, what we should do is we should see, when we see the word Israel, we should see God's covenant people. The people that God has called to himself that are in an intimate covenant with him. If you don't know this about the Christian faith, that's a very important part of the Christian faith, is we don't just, Christians don't just sort of believe in God in general, or religion, or spirituality in general. And we don't believe that all views of God are the same. We believe that there is a real, true God. And just as real, true human beings have certain characteristics and characters, etc., God is real. And he's triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God. And this God has created all things, and he's created human beings, and he desires human beings to be in a relationship with him, an intimate relationship of love and affection, where we come to know his goodness, truth, and beauty, and we come to delight in it. And that's what he desires. So when we see Israel, what we see here is God's covenant people. And then another way to look at it as well, and this is sort of important because people don't always get it, just because you go to church or connected to a church doesn't mean you're a Christian.

And it's the same thing, one of the things which is developed all the way through what we now call the Old Testament, and our Jewish friends call the Tanakh, is that there is physical, literal Israel, but what God wants, and that's like the visible church, those who go to churches, but then within that is what God really wants, which is people who actually have emptied into a relationship of love with him in a covenant relationship, acknowledging him as Savior and Lord. And that's described here as pure in heart. Another way to understand it is we are growing in loyalty, exclusive loyalty, in mind and heart and body, imagination to him. And then it described verse 2 how, you know, basically what it's saying here is that he begins now by saying where he stands right now. And by the way, one of the things which is really neat about this is, in a sense, what happened to the psalmist is he's entered into a second childhood. And what I mean is that is, you know, many of us are very impressed with the simple childhood faith of a young child. And then what happens to this man is he obviously had that. He starts to lose it. But what happens at the end of the process when he comes back to faith is, in a sense, a new childhood, a new trusting faith. But it's a different type of faith of a child because it's a faith that's been beaten up and battered and bruised and has been tested.

So that's his height. But he says, listen, I went right to the brink of walking away from God. And then, now this next verse, I might lose people right here. So I don't know if some of you right now are struggling with doubt. Maybe you're on the edge of deconstructing your faith, walking away from the faith. I don't know about some of those who are watching if that describes you. This next line is a very, very tough line. And all week I have thought about it as to whether this described me in my, whatever it was, five or six times when I almost walked from the Christian faith. And all I want to say is this, I'm not making any judgment on you, but it's uncomfortably true. That's what I can say to the best that I can remember, looking back on my life. It's uncomfortably true. Verse three.

[9 : 08] Because here's what it says. Why did he almost walk away from the faith? Why was he going through deconversion and deconstruction? Verse three, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Now I can tell you when I was going through it, I would have thought that I was engaged in an intellectual quest, that I was a seeker after truth, and obviously that was true to an extent. But this is a very, very different type of claim that's being made. And I have to be honest, if I was here at church reading this psalm when I was going through one of these texts, and I saw that text, I don't know if I, I might, it might get me mad.

So all I want to say if it's making you mad is just spend some time with the rest of the psalm. I hope you don't tune out. I was talking to a very wise man by the name of Byron Wheaton this week, just, or last week, by, just by coincidence, or God's providence, I should say. And he had spent a lot of time learning about mentoring. And what he said is that the literature around a good mentor is a good mentor has three characteristics. The first characteristic is that they have a brain that's worth being picked that can be picked. So you don't want to have a mentor who's an idiot, or a fool. You know, if you can find somebody who actually really knows what they're talking about, and they're willing to let you pick their brain, that's the one of the main things about a mentor.

The second thing is a mentor should be a shoulder that you can cry on as you're dealing with your upsetness and heartbreak about not getting promotions or other things not going right. And the third thing he said is that a mentor should be able to kick your butt. And then he said, of course, obviously not all mentors can do all three of those things. Some of them are a bit weak at maybe the shoulder, some a bit weak at the butt kicking. So I guess if you're a bit uncomfortable with verse three, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked, consider Asaph a mentor who's allowing you to pick his brain. And God is a shoulder to cry on. And God can't be God if he never kicks your butt. Do I have an amen?

I know that doesn't sound very Anglican, and there should be some pregnant pause. But it's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord, send me the prayer, let me tell you. I need to have my butt kicked.

So that's the big picture. The second section is verses four to 14. And I guess we could call this what he saw as he was walking away. What he saw as he was walking away. And one of the things which we're going to see about this, and at first it bothered me when I was reading it, but then it made me realize, you know, a lot of times what we think of as thinking isn't thinking. What we really are talking about is that we get insights, or we think we understand something that's going on. And it's like, and, and, and, but it's not really thinking. There was this one particular fellow, I almost said his name, I blurted it out by accident at eight. I don't see him anymore because he moved. And he was a big fan of Christopher Hitchens and Dawkins, and he found out I was a Christian, he'd like to attack me.

[12 : 40] And in fact, he'd like to say things loudly that in, in the, in the coffee shop to embarrass me. You know, like in a loud voice, so, so you believe in hell, like that's really popular in a coffee shop, right? And I'd get all like red in the face. But anyway, one of the things really what he'd always do is he'd say things to me like, there's thousands of religions worshiping hundreds of thousands of gods. Okay. That's true. But, and I say to him, he'd get really bad. I said, but that, like, so, like, what, like that, just because you say that, like, what am I supposed to say? Like, that's not an argument, right? That's just a statement. But for him, it was an insight.

Anyway, we'd go into it. So what, what we see here is that this fellow saw certain things, but remember, he's going to come to the conclusion that he wasn't, that these things that he saw were all seen through the lens of envy.

An undiagnosed envy that he had in his heart. I'll talk a little bit about when ND is in a moment. I have to be careful because we could, you know, you could go on a retreat and you could spend a long time on these, on this list of things. I have to be careful because of my time.

I don't, but, but you can go and spend some time after. And, and by the way, this is a section, verses 4 to 14, that if you have something like YouVersion, it's very helpful to look at this and then look at the NIV and then look at the New Living Translation and maybe look at the Net Bible, Holman Study Bible, or the King James Version. And, and all of them are pretty good because there's just obviously words in the Hebrew that are a bit hard to communicate.

And, and if you look at all of them, it'll really give you some good insight about what's being talked about here. But the first, the first couple of things is, well, look at it. Verse 4, for they have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek.

[14 : 41] So just, you have to all learn, 3,000 years ago, being fat was a sign of great beauty. It meant you didn't have to do hard physical work and it meant you had lots of food. It meant you were rich.

It meant you were healthy. It was viewed as very beautiful. So it, you know, their body, in other words, these are really, really good looking people. They're prosperous. They have money. They're not getting, they're not getting sick.

No pangs until death. That means a pang is like a sharp blow, a sharp pain, either to the body or to your soul or your emotions. That's what a pang is. Verse 5, this is where he seems to look.

He looks around and he sees that the wicked, people who are far from God, and, and they don't seem to have these things that jab them, that cause them pain, all the way up until the very moment that they die.

Even if you just think about that for a second, does it make any sense to say that he died healthy? Well, I mean, on one level it does, but you died.

[15 : 45] Obviously, the end, you died. Anyway, their bodies are, you know, so they're good looking. Verse 5, they're not in trouble as others are. They're not stricken like the rest of mankind. People don't, they just don't seem to have these problems that other people have.

One of the things you have to understand about the word arrogant, arrogant here, he's talking about a person who boasts, who's, who's not only boasting, but they, they're growing in their boasting.

And like a lot of us, our boasting goes on between our ears, on the other side of our eyeballs, in our head. Although people can tell that we're boastful people.

In fact, you know, one of the things that many of us have, it's one of the things that helps to show us that we have an issue with pride, is if we see somebody else and we can tell from them that they think they're, like, they boast that they think they're really something, and we look down our nose at them and despise them, partially that's our pride and our boasting, picking up another person's boasting.

And we say to ourselves, well, they're idiots. Like, they have no right to boast compared to me. So they, they're boasting is, is, is now something, and their pride, and their thinking they're better about something, is not something that they hide, but something that they actually are quite, quite proud of.

[17:18] It's, it's, and, and, and violence covers them as a garment. And what, what's going on here, and this is a bit harder to get at, is that, you know, when you're talking to them and you come around them, that they, they're very good at using their power to get their own way, even if it hurts.

And it's something that if you notice it with somebody you don't like, you don't like it, but you might not notice it around your own circle, so you're with your friends all around having some lemonade on a hot day, and, and your friend starts to, to boast and say how, you know, there's this job at work, and, you know, I, I, I put this word in here, and put this word in here, and this word in here made me look better than I really was, and this word in over a year, I was allowed to, I was able to take credit for something, and this word over here was something that made the other people all look down their nose at this person, and I was able to get the job.

And they'll tell it in such a way that there's lots of laughs and high fives, like, way to go, Bob. Like, way to go, Sue. Right? But what they just did is they, they, they stole credit from others, they put people down, they lied about themselves, they, they did all of these things, and they're really, in a sense, acts of aggression.

And they're proud of it. And their friends give them high fives because of it. And then when it says, verse 7, their eyes swell out through fatness, their hearts overflow with follies.

What this is trying to get at is, well, actually, I'll keep, is, is, that basically, you know, it's as if I have my lane, and there's sort of these natural limits that sort of go along with my life, and, and, and, but my, my boasting, and my desire for more, and my desire to be viewed as more, and all of these things, they keep overflowing the banks of my life.

[19:11] And, and I don't see this as a bad thing, but a good thing. And then there's new banks, but they keep on overflowing like that. Like, it gives you this picture of a person whose, whose appetite and desire for, for being recognized, for being thought of as smart, for being thought of as beautiful, for having money, for all of these types of things, that they keep breaking the limits to have more, and more, and more.

And even if it's just something in their mind that they fantasize about, and they boast about, and they have fantasies in their mind, and how much it comes out, but there's something going on between the ears, and, and, and, and, and, and seen in the body, and seen in their actions, and, and this is the desire of their heart.

And the point about this is, he looks around the world. Asaph is looking, and he sees that, this is what he thinks he sees. He sees people who are far from God, and, and, and, and they're, they're prosperous, and they're good-looking, and they make these boasts, and they, and people, and, and they seem to be successful, and they just seem to be getting bigger, and they seem to be getting bigger.

And verse 8, they scoff and speak with malice. Loftily, they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongues struck through the earth. I mean, I just think for a second, but he said it in a very, very calm way.

I, I know I'm a bit obsessed with this conversation. Not obsessed, but I, there's, you know, I've watched now different accounts and different parts of the conversation between Christopher Dawkins and Ayaan Hershey-Eli in New York.

[20 : 36] The first time the two of them had talked in public about her rejecting atheism to become a Christian. And there's just this cultured English way that he would actually just, like, lean forward and say to her, well, it's all right that you like to go to church, but what about what the vicar says?

It's all nonsense, and I can't put that Oxbridge accent on. It's completely and utterly ridiculous. The born of a virgin miracles, it's completely ridiculous.

And he says it with great aplomb. He says it with smile. He says it with unbelievable confidence, and he says it with an Oxbridge accent. Like, who am I to say anything against him? I'm just a rube in Ottawa compared to him.

Right? But verse 9, they set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongues stretched to the earth. And Asaph admires him. He says, God, like, I wish I had that aplomb.

I wish I had that accent. I wish I had that confidence. I wish I just wore that so effortlessly. Verse 10, and so therefore his people, that's the wicked, turn back to them and find no fault in them.

[21 : 49] And some of them talk about drinking water, but basically people lap it up. They lap it up. And then everybody says, how can God know? Is there knowledge in the most high? Ha, ha, ha. Verse 12, behold, these are the wicked.

Always at ease, they increase in riches. That's sort of the summary. And then we have a bit of psychological insight as this, as Asaph is going to bring, remember I called this section, what he saw as he was walking away.

Verse 13 and 14, all in vain. Vain means it's like, just like an illusion. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

For all day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. My life just sucks compares to theirs. That's how Asaph is understanding his life. Now here's a couple of things about envy.

Envy is looking at somebody else and wanting what they have. But it's not a good thing. It's not aspiration.

[22 : 58] Aspiration. Aspiration is a good thing. But you look at what people have, and on one hand you want it, but it also bothers you that they have it and you don't.

And you want to know one of the ways you can recognize when there is envy? I'll use a minister's example. Some of you are familiar with a man by the name of Mark Driscoll, who pastored a church in Seattle, planted it from nothing, grew to thousands and thousands of people.

He wrote lots of books, spoke in all sorts of conferences. And then he had a massive fall. And the church fell apart, and they've done documentaries on the fall of Mars Hill. That's all about this particular pastor, Mark Driscoll.

If you're a minister or a Christian, and you first heard the news reports of his fall, and you were happy, then you have the sin of envy.

You have the sin of envy. See, that's one of the signs.

[24 : 06] I mean, there's a whole lot of other aspects of it.

But people who are happy that Trump almost got assassinated last night, you have the sin of envy, amongst other sins. That's your sin.

That's your sin. You see, aspiration, using a minister's example, would be, gosh, I'd love to be able to preach even a half as well as Tim Keller could preach.

And I read some books, and I go to conferences, and I maybe get some feedback, because, gosh, I'd love to be able to preach like that. You see, envy is always competitive.

It always makes you unhappy. You, on one hand, want to have that position, but if you realize it, like, you know, in a sense, if I have the sin of envy, and let's say as a pastor, it wouldn't actually make me happy that I could just be the co-pastor of Mark Driscoll's church, because at the end of the day, I would actually want to be over Mark Driscoll.

[25 : 25] That's envy. Aspiration is not competitive. It's not zero-sum. It's just recognizing excellence in the world and saying, gosh, I'd like to be like that.

You know, if you have the gift of hospitality, and maybe you read Rosaria Butterfield's book on Faith Comes with a House Key, and you say, gosh, I wish I could have that type of hospitality and open-handedness. You read about somebody who's very, very generous financially, sacrificially generous, and you say, gosh, I wish I could be generous like them, and you don't rejoice in their fall.

And so you see here in verses 13 and 14 that this, what's going on with the envy, the envy has only made this man completely and utterly unhappy, and it's actually made him dissatisfied with his life.

And it makes him think that God somehow owes him, that God owes Asaph to have these types of positions and all this success and the fatness and all of those other things. And don't take this from this that Asaph's life sucked, because if you go back, Asaph's life didn't suck.

He had a very high position in David's kingdom. I'll use an example once again. I haven't used it for a couple of months. A couple, you know, quite a few years ago in my first church where I was the rector, and there were two women in that congregation, and one woman had grown up very well.

[26 : 45] She had one of the nicest houses in Eganville. I would go in to bring her communion, and she was in good health. She was blessed with marriage. She had lots of financial resources, and she had two daughters who loved her that came and visited her and called on her all the time.

She had grandchildren that loved her. But all I heard every time I visited her was complaints, because she couldn't play that bleepity-bleep piano the way she wanted to.

And I would sometimes, on the very same day, bring in communion, go to visit this other woman. And this other woman had only had menial housekeeping-type jobs her entire life. She had some physical and mental handicaps.

She had never been able to marry. And she lived in... She would have been one of the poorest people in Eganville, and every time I saw her, she had the world's biggest smile.

Only one of them could sing it as well with my soul. So don't take Asaph to mean that his life... You see, one of the things that the devil does with envy is he makes you unhappy amidst your blessings.

[28 : 02] He makes you unhappy in the midst of your blessings. So how does this turn around? We've now reached the bottom point of Asaph's life.

Remember, he's describing what he saw. The next section, I guess, if I was to give it a title, would be Insights on the Way Back. So the first thing is what he saw as he was leaving.

On the Way Back, it's Insights. It has a bit of a preamble or a prelude. Look at verse 15. It's a very interesting thing. He says, If I had said, I will speak thus, like all these things, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

And what it's really saying is that Asaph was having his periods of doubt privately. But what held him back from taking a final step, and what held him back from talking about this publicly, was that he worried how it would hurt the faith of others.

That was true of me. That held me back. And then the next bit is a bit of a surprising thing, because if I look back at my own periods, I tried to do what 16 said doesn't work.

[29 : 17] Look at what 16 says. But when I thought how to understand this, the whole God and deconversion, it seemed to me a wearisome task. In other words, it didn't work.

Now, this isn't an anti-intellectual text. Okay? It's not saying don't think. In fact, if you look at it, this is actually a profoundly thoughtful text. And he has captured, as I said, you could go off on a men's or a woman's retreat or a youth retreat, and you could take that analysis of envy, and you could look at each of these verses, and it opens up a profound world.

Like you could do, if you want to go on a personal retreat to do an examination of conscience, you could take this psalm with you and say, God could help me to understand how this is working in my life, not the lives of others, but in my own life.

And then, and this is the surprising thing, verse 17. That's why I called this section Insights on the Way Back, because you see, sometimes we just get insights. He says in verse 17, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

I had an insight. Now, in some of the times when I was having my doubts, and I did go to ask some other people about it, in my very early, the first couple of bouts of doubt, the people that I talked to just said, oh, George, you just got to pray more and sing more praise songs, and it was profoundly unhelpful.

[30 : 46] And this text isn't just saying, oh, you see, those people were right. You just got to sing more praise songs. You just got to sing more hymns. You just got to pray more. No, it's not that. It's, it's, and this, for some of us, I'm sure many of you, all of you probably have this experience.

Some of the biggest insights in my life came, come about just as I'm doing some normal duties. Like, the insight I had that God had called me to be ordained happened when I stopped and I went to get coffee.

And as I'm getting the coffee, I have this insight. I used to be extremely left-wing. I guess nowadays you'd call me woke.

And the, I had one day on a bike ride to go pick up some bread. I had a series of insights that turned my life around. Like, in heaven I'll find out that some little old lady was praying for me, right?

Or my grandmother was still alive at that time. That my granny was praying for me or something like that, you know? And in this particular case, he just goes to have public worship. And in the midst of that, boom, he has this insight.

[31 : 51] And then, and he starts to give you what some of these insights are. Look at verse 18. 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, it might all of a sudden just make you realize, like, you know, you can think of that whole thing that Johnny Depp went through.

I can't remember the name of the woman. There's all those, like those terrible trials. You know, as one commentator said, their lives are a complete and utter disaster and mess.

Why does anybody look at somebody like that and admire them and want to be like them? And it was, you know, but so maybe it was just an insight about that. You know, rather than just always thinking of the moment, you don't think of Harvey Weinstein.

You don't think of all these people whose lives come crumbling down as they get revealed or something like that. But all of a sudden, amongst other things, and this is, you know, this is one of the hardest things about trying to help people think in 2024 is that people don't want to think about death.

[32 : 54] But if you don't think about death, you can't think. If you don't want to think about death, you can't think. Because you're going to die.

And everything you had is gone. As Flannery O'Connor said, it looks like there's a really interesting Flannery O'Connor movie coming out. She said, you can't be any poorer than dead. Very true.

But whether it's the slippery places, they're falling to ruin, they're destroying a moment, ultimately they're going to die. And then he thinks in verse 20, you know, at the end of the day, look at verse 20, like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you arouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

In other words, like you think about it, God, you know, a human being, I was born at a certain point in time, I'm going to die at a certain point in time. Every human being is like that. They're a long, you know, thousands of years, they didn't exist.

And if Jesus doesn't come back for a while, thousands of years after you live, you don't exist. You're just here for a moment and God endures unchanging on. He exists unchanging on.

[34 : 01] And every human being, even the most powerful, it's like nothing to God. Why did I not think about that? And then look at this, he comes to this insight, is about the fact that envy, you see, envy always makes you unhappy.

Look at verse 21 and 22. He says, when my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant, I was like a beast toward you. What was informing my thinking, my seeing before, was my heart, my soul, my mind, my mind was embittered.

My heart was in pain. Seeing these other people and wishing I could be like them, but at the same time, resenting them and admiring them, but it only made my life sour and embittered and painful.

And rather than me thinking clearly, I couldn't even think like a dog. See, this ancient psalm studies in-depth psychology and social, the sociology of knowledge, those things all come almost 3,000 years downstream from what the psalmist, what Asaph already knew.

If I'm filled with envy, I can't think straight. Doesn't matter if I have an IQ through the rafters. Doesn't matter if I have seven PhDs.

[35 : 33] If my heart is filled with envy and bitter, I can't think straight. That's profoundly humbling. I call the next section, drawing to a close, hope and sanity re-embraced.

Verses 23 to 26, hope and sanity re-embraced. Verses 23 to 26. Nevertheless, I am continually with you.

Verse 23, 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, my heart, my heart, my heart, my heart, my heart, may fail, means he will fail, but God, the triune God, the God of the covenant, the real God that truly exists, he is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

just a couple of things about this. The first thing is that there's a riddle within this text. And it can be seen if you look at all of the Psalms.

[37 : 02] is that for any of us who've had an insight, for any of us who've come to faith, if I look back about how I came to faith, I mean, on one level, I can talk about the things that I did and all, but at the end of the day, there felt like there was a hand that was present.

It felt like I was being pushed into a particular direction. It felt like I was being carried. And so even within all of this, when he's acknowledging God as being God, there's a, on one hand, there's a bit of a sense that obviously he knows his heart can't be completely pure, and that his desire for these things isn't perfect.

So he knows that in the midst of all of that, there has to be some type of grace. You see, that's where you read the Old Testament. It's setting a riddle. It's setting a stage for Jesus.

Because only Jesus is going to be able to make clear what's sort of implied and is there as a riddle in the text. And you can see one of the things which is so profound about why Jesus can be the only Savior.

If one of the deep problems of the human heart is my envy of the proud and the wicked, and that is something which is within me, then in a sense what you can see is that there needs to be something that completely undoes that.

[38 : 18] And then you think of who Jesus is. And this is the wonder of the gospel. This is why only he can be the gospel that can save us. Because God, Jesus, God the Son of God, is the complete opposite of pride and envy.

Philippians 2, 5 through 11, go and read it. God the Son of God has all the splendor and glory and majesty of heaven, and he sets all of that aside.

He doesn't cling to it. And remaining fully God, he sets it all aside, and he descends to take into himself our human nature. God the Son of God dwelling in the throne of heaven, contained as a zygote within the womb of Mary.

That is a complete unwinding of pride. And he so unwinds pride that he shares our human experience, and ultimately on the cross, he takes onto himself our shame and our sin, and then he enters into death.

You can't be poorer than dead, and taste all there is to taste of death. There is a complete and utter unwinding of pride and of envy to the very, very depths.

[39 : 27] And when I put my faith and trust in Jesus, when I have put my faith and trust with him, I have union with Christ, only he can unwind my pride and my envy.

And what we receive when we give our lives to Christ is both a clothing of what he has done for us, because we can't do it for ourselves, and clothed with what he has done.

He says, George, I give you a quest. What is your quest? Your quest is to begin to undo the pride and envy of your life in confidence of what I have done for you on the cross.

That is my quest. That solves the riddle of the psalm. Just in closing, a couple of things.

One of the things that we can take away from this psalm, verse 3, meditate upon verse 3, and ask the Father, God, how big a role is envy playing in my life? Then the devil will start to say to you, oh, think about the envy that your wife has, or your pastor has, or your boss.

[40 : 43] No, no, no. Just say to the devil, shut up. God, talking about me. Don't reveal to me other people's envy. It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord, sending me to the prayer.

Second thing that you can do to take this home is, a very helpful thing would be to take this thing of hope and sanity re-embraced, verses 23 to 26, in your devotions, is to pray it for yourself, that it be true, and to say something like, 23, nevertheless I am continually with me.

Father, help me to know that I am continually with you. You hold my right hand. Father, help me to know that you hold my right hand, that you never let me go. Verse 24, you guide me with your counsel.

Father, help me to hear your counsel, and to heed it, and allow it to guide my life. See how you can pray that? That's a beautiful prayer to pray. And then the other thing which you need to pray is, is the very stark way that the prayer ends, which is the heartbeat of evangelism.

See, one of the things I want to say is, if you've been struggling, deconference, I hope you hear this text, and it's, God kicks you in the butt, so you will come to him. He wants to be in a covenant with you.

[41 : 58] He wants you to know his saving power. He, that's what he wants for you. He takes no delight in you falling from him, kicking you.

He takes no delight. Look at the very stark way it ends. It's a very important thing to pray verses 27 and 28. It's the heartbeat of why I pray that people will come to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Let's close with just looking at it. Verse 27 and 8, for behold, those who are, there's, what I could call it as the way, is that there's the two ways. Verse 27, for behold, those who are far from you shall perish.

You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. That's, all human beings, there's ultimately only two destinations. One of them is verse 27, for behold, those who are far from you shall perish.

You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. Verse 28, 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.

[42 : 58] And that is a profound prayer to pray. But to pray 27 and 28 is to give you a heart to pray for those whom you know who are far from God. And pray that he will give you an opportunity to tell them about Jesus.

Could you please stand? Thank you. Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, as I spent time with this psalm this week, I kept knowing that it was, I should be saying in the words of that old spiritual, spiritual, it's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

And so Father, I ask that you, in your kindness, would help each of us to see, we all don't have the same sins. Some people don't struggle with the sin of envy. Those of us who don't have that struggle, they have a different sin to struggle with, or a group of sins.

But Father, for those of us, we might be blind to how envy is making us unhappy and embittered. And so we ask, Father, that you bring that to our attention so that we can bring it to you and ask for healing and replace envy, Father, with an aspiration to get better and a praying for blessing of others, Father.

And Father, we ask that you help us to bring this word home to us and to just to know your goodness and your guidance. Lord, help us to grow in a humble, trusting, walking, knowing that you are our refuge and fan into flame within us and ever deeper desire that we know you as our chief delight above all other delights, that you alone are the one that in union with you through Christ by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, that we will survive, not just survive death, but enter into the fullness of your kingdom and joy.

[44 : 56] Father, grow that within us and we ask this in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Monique is going to come up to lead us in intercessions, but I'd like to do one intercession before she comes up.

You can come stand beside me. That's fine. I don't bite. And I, you know, I love to hear the prayers of people and I love the prayers of the people, but I think it's important that you hear me pray for what just happened in the United States last night with the attempted assassination of Donald Trump.

And I'm going to ask you to stand in a moment. I wanted to make a separation from the gospel to now. Monique is going to lead us in a longer time of intercessions, but I think it's good for you to hear me pray into that situation.

And it's an important situation that Christians pray into. So if you would stand, I'd like to pray for the American people. Let's pray.

Father, Father, we give you thanks and praise that in your, sorry, just before I pray any further, this isn't a political prayer. If it had been Biden, I would be doing the same thing.

[46 : 03] I don't want anybody to walk away thinking, oh, George loves Trump. That's why he's doing it. No, no, no, no. If this had been Biden, I would be doing the exact same thing this morning. That's, that's what Christians do.

Okay. That's what Christians do. Let's pray. Father, we thank you last night that you spared the life of Donald Trump. Father, we ask for your comfort and peace for the loved ones, the two, the loved ones of the two people who got killed in the assassination attempt.

And for the, for the one who got wounded, at least before this service began, who's still alive, we ask that you would keep them alive, that they would survive. And for all who saw it and witnessed it and were traumatized by it, Father, we ask for your comfort and your peace.

And Father, we ask for the American people. We ask, Father, that you would use this in your mercy to calm the hateful and violent passions that seem to be growing in that nation.

And Father, and Father, to be honest, are growing in ours. And we ask for Canada as well. We ask, Father, that you would quiet the violent rhetoric, that you would turn people's hearts so they do not believe that voting for the other party is a vote for Satan.

[47 : 29] That people would just be quieter and calmer. That we would learn to talk passionately about things but agree to disagree.

And we ask, Father, that you would use this event and this incident to bring a calming of the American people and a calming of those of us who are in Canada and call this our home.

And we ask as well, Father, that you would use this event in Donald Trump's life. We don't know if he is a Christian or not. If he isn't, that you would make him realize that he was spared by you and that you would turn his heart.

And Father, we don't know where Biden is or any key person running in any of these things. And that is our prayer for all of our politicians in the United States and in Canada, for Pierre and for Justin and for Jagmeet, that if they do not know Jesus as Savior and Lord, you would turn their hearts to him, that they would come to a saving faith in him.

And so, Father, we ask at this time for this comfort to the American people and a work of grace and mercy to them. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

[48 : 38] Amen. Amen.