

Envy

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Preacher: Andrew Burke

[0 : 00] So that's Romans chapter 8, we're reading verses 18 through verse 30. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

[1 : 37] And he who searches hearts knows what it is, what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Our next reading is Psalm 73.

Psalm 73, which starts on page 582. 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.

But they have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

[3 : 05] 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 their knowledge in the most high?

Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease. They increase in riches. And 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. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

[4 : 04] But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task 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, O 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 towards you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel.

And afterwards, you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

[5 : 11] 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.

Well, good morning. May I add my welcome to you, particularly if you are only recently joined us or visiting.

You are very welcome here. I am a member of the congregation, Andrew, as John was saying. And this morning, we are continuing our series on the Psalms.

And I hope you find this helpful when I find it very helpful myself. When it comes to negotiating, the meek won't inherit the earth.

[6 : 18] So blustering male presenters will always be paid more. That was the headline of an article discussing the BBC pay scandal.

The reporter had been talking to a female presenter who was angry and bitter to find out she earned far less than her male peers.

The article explained that big beasts have a special place in our culture. It's why out of BBC's top presenters, only one is a woman. Big beasts are seen as the leaders of their professional tribes. Another headline said, Totally furious. Make this ready to quit news night. Now, discussing how much people are paid often arouses such strong emotions.

The psalm that we're looking at this morning is so relevant because it warns us of how dangerous envy is. This is a psalm that we can pray when we're envious or when we're tempted to envy.

[7 : 29] Asaph the psalmist describes with wonderful honesty how being envious caused his crisis of faith. He takes us on his journey of faith as he worked through this turning point in his life.

This is a wisdom psalm that tells us how to live God's way. It shows us where the choices we make lead.

What our destiny will be. It encourages us to keep trusting God when other ways of living seem so attractive. Each one of us is making decisions on how we live, what our ambitions and goals are, whether they're big decisions or everyday ones.

You know the issues you're facing at school, at university, career or family. So let's listen to Asaph as he tells us two things.

First, that God is good, so don't envy. And second, that God should be our refuge. And it would be really helpful if you could keep your Bibles open or open them again on page 582 so we can look at the psalm together.

[8 : 42] And if it's, there's also an outline on the back of the service sheets. So first of all, God is good, so don't envy. Asaph starts, truly God is good to Israel.

That's God's chosen people, which through Christ includes us. And to those who are pure in heart, those who live wholeheartedly for God. And this is a truth that Asaph had doubted during his crisis of faith, as we see.

But for me, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped. He was right on the edge, just on the point of slipping.

Imagine walking along a mountain ledge with a sheer drop on one side. The smallest stumble could make you slip to your death. It wasn't mortal danger he faced, but eternal danger.

He was on the brink of abandoning his faith, giving up on God. Why? Envy. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[9 : 59] And in the Bible, the wicked is anyone who doesn't make God their refuge, anyone who rejects God. And you can see why. For they have no pangs until death.

Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are. They're not stricken like the rest of mankind. These were successful people, living very comfortable lives, healthy as well as wealthy.

And we all know such people. We see them idolized on TV or in the papers and magazines. They have so many followers on social media.

Today, as in Asaph's time, success is worshipped. And while they're admired, they're not admirable people. See how they're described.

Therefore, pride is their necklace. That's the jewelry they wore. Violence covers them as a garment. That's our fashion sense.

[11:08] Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily, they threaten oppression. They're the big beasts that the article described.

Proud, self-confident and malicious. Throwing their weight around, bullying to get their own way and be successful. They're so arrogant, they sneer at God.

They say, how can God know? Is their knowledge in the most high? Yet they go from success to success. Always at ease, they increase in riches.

They're praised rather than criticized, we see in verse 10. And as Christians, we live in this same success culture where achievement is idolized.

Are we tempted by what we see rather than trusting God? What are our ambitions? Who do we admire? Who do we listen to?

[12:17] These are constant temptations we face. Do we think success is a sign of God's blessing? Or maybe even that we deserve it because of all we do for God.

And it's not just a prosperity gospel that can make us think like that. Romans 8, 28, for in everything, God works for good among those who love him can so easily be misunderstood because the good that God works for those who love him is not success or an easy life, but being made more like Christ.

As Asaph looked at how successful and comfortable wicked people were, he was tempted to doubt God's goodness. This was his crisis of faith.

All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. He thinks he's wasted his time, perhaps his life, by trying to live faithfully for God.

He was asking, was living for God worth it? What's he got out of living for God? He can see no benefits.

[13:33] For all the day long, I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. And this is a danger that we all face, focusing on what we see and admiring what the world admires rather than trusting God and looking at the eternal perspective.

How different to Paul's perspective in Romans 8. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

This is where he nearly slipped, abandoned his faith. His envy tempted him to chase comfort and success. As a young Christian, I could identify with Asaph.

I felt sorry for myself and envied the comfort other people seem to have. I was asking if it was worth being so faithful to God.

I was on a slippery slope, but God used this very psalm to bring me back to himself. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

[14:48] Asaph realized that thinking and speaking like this dishonors God and undermines the faith of his people. So what saved him? What helped him to move from doubting God's goodness to desiring God above everything else?

Turning from self-pity and self-interest, from resentment and envy to worship. And that brings us to our second point. God should be our refuge.

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

To understand where life focused on success and self-interest led, he needed to draw near to God. So how did he do it? He went into the sanctuary, the place where God's people met to worship.

Now as Christians, we don't need the temple to worship God because we draw near to God through the blood of Jesus. But this psalm shows how important meeting together is.

[15:59] We need God's family to keep us living for God. It was when he was worshipping God with God's people that he 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.

O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. He saw their fate. They had arrogantly rejected God and lived for themselves.

They had selfishly sought success and comfort but would ultimately face God's judgment and destruction. And this is true for anyone who hasn't made God their refuge.

But drawing near to God prompted Asaph to confess his wrong attitude. And that was the way he started to realise how good God is. When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I

was brutish and ignorant.

[17:10] I was like a beast towards you. How honest are we about how we feel towards God? Have we allowed his light to shine into our hearts?

Do we recognise when we envy others? Do we resent making sacrifices for God? Are we service-weary Christians? He had to get this right before he could realise how good God is. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold with me with your right hand. God. Isn't it amazing that when we're absolutely a beastly to God, he holds on to us?

I mean, that's grace, isn't it? Asaph had been on the point of slipping, of turning away from God, but it was God who held on to him. And yet we see in verse 18 that God sets the godless in slippery places.

none of us deserve God's love or his mercy, but that's how he treats us in Christ. He says in Hebrews, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

[18:24] Our perfect heavenly father will never abandon his children no matter how beastly we are to him. More than that, you guide me with your counsel.

We have God's counsel in contrast to the counsel of the wicked we were thinking about last week in Psalm 1. God has given us the Bible to teach, reprove, correct, and train us in righteousness and to equip us in every good work.

And instead of the glory of the world, God offers the eternal glory of being with him forever. And afterward, you will receive me to glory. for in this hope we were saved, as Roman 8 said.

Asaph realises, as Asaph realises God's grace to him, as he thinks about this, acknowledging who God is in worship and what we're like, he saw how wonderful God's grace to him was.

And as he did this, he realised how precious God was. That's why he can turn and say, whom have I in heaven but you?

[19:44] And there is nothing on earth I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. But for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Lord God my refuge. And that's why he can begin this psalm saying, truly, God is good to Israel. I think it's a challenge for us.

Do we take God's grace for granted? It's a tremendous privilege to know that in Christ, God has chosen us and he will hold on to us and guide us and bring us to be with him forever.

As Christians, we are secure in Christ. How different for those who are far from God as we see in 27. for behold, those who are far from you shall perish.

You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. And if you're here today and you feel far from God but would like to know how to be right with God, please speak to John or to me afterwards.

[20:51] So finally, what does it mean to make God our refuge? John started off talking about a place of safety. The building regulations explained that a refuge is a place where you can wait safely in a building to be rescued when there's a fire.

Tragically, as we've seen, there was no safe place to wait in Grenfell Tower. Making God our refuge means trusting God to keep us safe.

And we do that through trusting in Christ. And it's not safe from problems but safe, I think, particularly from temptation, from all the attacks of the evil one, the flaming arrows that he described in Ephesians.

It means trusting God's promises when we're tempted to doubt them. Living God's way, even when we're attracted to success and comfort.

We need to keep thanking God as we remember his grace to us in Christ. Christ. And as we do this, we grow in our insurance and experience that God is good. And it won't just be head knowledge.

[22:05] It will be our heart experience. That is what Asaph had gone through. And like Asaph, we'll want to tell others about all his works. And this must involve sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, of how we can be right with God through Christ.

Christ. So in conclusion, what does this mean for us in practice? We need to believe that God is good to his people, that it is worth living for God and the eternal glory he promises.

We may believe this in theory, but we need to know it in our hearts. We need to learn from Asaph's journey of faith, as his belief in God's goodness was tested when he envied the ungodly and was tempted to seek success and comfort.

We need to recognise when we're envious and resentful and be honest with ourselves and God. If we feel we're service weary as Christians, let's remember 1 Corinthians 15.

Therefore, be immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain. And like Asaph, we need to make God our refuge and worship him, rejoicing in our salvation.

[23 : 23] And as we meet together, let's encourage each other to keep living for God, as it says in Hebrews. And as we do this together, we grow in our appreciation of how good God is.

And we want to share that good news with others. so let's pray. But for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Lord God my refuge. Heavenly Father, we pray that this will be true for each one of us, that no matter what we are facing, what temptations we may be experiencing, we would seek to draw near to you, that we would make you our refuge, that we would know more of your grace and love in the Lord Jesus.

Amen.