

Psalm 73

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[0:00] Okay, good morning. Sweet. Good morning. My name is Caleb Maloney. I myself, my wife, my two kids, and many great men have come before me, and many great men will come after me as well.

This week, it's my privilege to preach to you Psalm 73. If you would like to, you guys can turn there in your Bibles. It'll also be up on the screen. Today, as we work our way through Psalm 73, you will notice many themes that eventually lead to one conclusion.

This psalm reads like a very personal prayer between the chief of worship, Asaph, and God. It will serve as a window into the emotional rollercoaster that we as Christians ride upon.

While living in an increasingly secular world, we struggle to persevere in our pursuit of being Christ-like. Psalm 73 is beautiful in its pure honesty with God, and it is a great model of how we should pray when we are struggling with doubts, and within our hearts and minds.

[1:24] Let's go ahead and read Psalm 73 together. Psalm 74. 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. For they have no pangs in death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are.

They are not stricken like the rest of mankind. 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 to them and find no fault in them.

And they say, how can God know? Is their knowledge on the Most High? Behold, these are wicked, always at ease. They increase their riches. All in vain, I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands of innocence.

[2:25] 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. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a worrisome 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, me with 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.

[3:26] For behold, those who are far from you shall perish. But 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. Heavenly Father, we lift up these words to you. We pray that you open our hearts and minds to what this psalm has for us and its application in our daily life.

We thank you for the psalmist Asaph, and we thank you for the insight into the human heart that these words will provide. We also thank you for your presence in this place, and we just pray these things in your name.

Amen. So, in this first section of the passage, in verse 1, Asaph starts with praise to the Lord.

The praise he gives to God is undeniable truth. God is good to Israel. He is thanking God for all his blessings towards his people. He recognizes the fact that God has lifted Israel up.

[4:37] Israel is a prosperous nation at this time. God has protected them from their enemies, and the people are living good lives under King David and within the nation God has established. This beginning to his prayer is simple, but it shows us his heart strives to honor God.

He understands that God is holy and deserves to be praised in spite of anything he is about to say. He intentionally starts with praise and shows reverence to God, to the God of Israel.

In the next verses, however, he starts to set himself apart from God's people, those he calls the pure of heart. In verses 2 and 3, 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.

The description here is of someone who you can picture is on a journey. You do not stumble or slip or fall unless you are headed somewhere, unless you are reaching for a goal.

Jesus describes in Matthew, the way to eternal life is a narrow and difficult path, kind of like a path through a dense wood with many potential obstacles. If you aren't paying attention to these obstacles, if you aren't looking towards your goal, the path can be very difficult, and it gets very easy to stumble and fall.

[5:58] All it takes is one simple distraction to cause a rock to seem to jump out to you, and the next thing you know, you're falling and your face is in the dirt. Currently, I work at Electric Boat, and I'm a deck plate supervisor in the test department.

Especially in the early phase of construction on submarines, the hazards seem to be everywhere. You're ducking your head to get below hoses and ventilation, and there's people in all nooks and crannies of the boat, and for those of you who serve on submarines, they're tight to begin with, and imagine adding to that and decreasing the headspace and decreasing the amount of space you have to walk through.

It gets very, very difficult at times. And as a test supervisor, sometimes those obstacles are of my own creation. We put a lot of that stuff there, because otherwise we wouldn't be able to get the testing done that we need to do.

When working in and around the tight spaces and construction equipment, situational awareness is key. When you get distracted, you are likely to trip over a hose, hit your head on a low-hanging service. Sometimes these ox... The distraction... Sorry, I got a little off track there. In the passage, the distraction here for Asaph is the prosperity of the ungodly.

[7:29] His envy of the arrogant distracts him from God. His faulty human desires are starting to boil over within his heart as he wishes to possess what the wicked have and do as the wicked do.

In verses 4 through 9, it reads, For 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.

Therefore, pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness and 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. From a human perspective, some of the wicked live life.

They live long lives. They appear to die in peace, not in anguish. They do not starve or worry how they will survive the next day. As a matter of fact, Asaph is saying here, they are fat.

[8:30] They not only live comfortably, but they live in an abundance of excess. The excess causes them to live only for themselves. They think only for themselves, and they do whatever they wish on impulse.

It can be said that the root of living in this modern American culture as well is living in excess. Compared to the rest of the world, we have a lot.

There is a lot of things that compared to the rest of the world, they do not have. We eat as much as we see fit to be filled.

We tend to have money to go consume the products that have been produced. For most of us, we don't worry about where our next meal is coming from.

We have clothes to wear every day. As for me, I tend to enjoy indulging in the newest technology that's out there. I like having a nice computer. I like having a nice phone.

[9:30] But what is dangerous about this prosperity is that it has led to the worship of self. It has distracted us from God, especially some of those who have become rich and popular off things like social media.

Their self is what they sell. That is what they present to everybody, and the rest of the people in this society seem to consume those things. They live and make money off their pride with no care for anyone but themselves.

They make money off those who praise and worship them. Then this causes them to turn their backs from God. In their view, they don't need him. They are the source of their own blessings.

This tends to remind me of what Jesus said in Matthew 6, 24. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. In the same respect, you cannot worship yourself and worship God at the same time. We, as Christians, are not immune to these feelings, just like Asaph from his high position within the Levitical order and the responsibilities that he has was wrestling with these thoughts.

[10:46] As we move on to verses 10 through 15, therefore his people turn back to them and find no fault to them. And they say, how can God know?

Is their knowledge on the most high? Behold, these are the wicked. Always at ease, they increase their riches. All in vain, I have 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. Sorry. The first half of the psalm is truly a confession of the heart.

Asaph is laying it all in front of God. He leaves nothing unspoken and truly expresses the state of his heart. He presents to God that which he is reluctant to say to anyone else.

This is how we ourselves are supposed to come before God. It is often that we might pray things such as, you know what is on my heart or I will leave the rest of these things unspoken.

[11:57] And these aren't necessarily bad things to pray. These are not necessarily incorrect ways to pray. But whether we are saying these things due to feeling rushed in our prayers or we cannot seem to find the words to speak how we truly feel, they may lessen our confession.

When we pray between us and God, if we do not confess all that is in our heart openly, we can build between us and God. Confession is difficult.

confessing actions we have done or thoughts we have had seem to make us look lesser than. It seems to hurt our pride. Our pride gets in the way of our true confession and conversation with God.

If we think we have the answers and wish to look in front, and wish to look good in front of God, we are not opening our hearts to him. Similarly, if we think we can hide our sins from God and or that God cannot forgive us, then we have a false sense of humility that attempts to invalidate all that Christ did for us by dying on the cross.

Psalms 73, verses 1 through 15 shows the importance of being open and honest with God. We have no excuse not to show our whole selves to God, yet he already, yes, he already knows these things, but he wants us and expects us to freely be honest with him.

[13:26] Doing this will only serve to deepen our relationship between us and God. One of the things I do love about the Bible, though, is how it portrays man.

The Bible gives us perfect insight into the human condition. It not only shows God's people in their greatest moments, but it also shows them in times when they messed up. It shows us when they are feeling downtrodden, it shows us when they are feeling hurt.

Even more so, the Psalms are a great depiction of the heart of man. What we have read so far shows a man that is truly struggling with his faith at this time. So much so, he feels that he needs to

devote these things to prayer.

He has lived a strict and clean life that is expected of him as a Levite and as the chief of worship before the Ark of the Covenant. Yet, he has come close to stumbling and abandoning these principles due to the distraction of the success of the ungodly.

The wicked around him seem to prosper and live great lives. This causes them to live even more wicked lives and turn away from God. In watching these things, it has caused God's own people to question and turn from God.

[14:35] What appears to be the point in following God if he allows the rich and wicked to live this way? It can make some of us wonder if God even exists at all.

Just as we are prone to question and doubt as Christians, Asaph is doing the same. He is a lowly human and not some great figure whose example is unattainable. For many of you, he might be a name that you are unfamiliar with.

He struggles the same as we may struggle. And, sorry, moving on to my previous experience in ministry has always been with the youth.

I spent more than 10 years working with teenagers and serving God by serving them. There have been many times where I was confronted with teens questioning, with them doubting.

It's a crucial time for them as they are attempting to deepen their faith. They're trying to figure out what they believe. A lot of times people phrase it as they're making their faith their own, not just faith of their parents.

[15:40] while teaching them, it was not uncommon for me to get the questions like, why should I believe this? Or, why did God allow this to happen?

Or, where is God when X? These questions are really tough to answer. And, honestly, at times, I would not have an answer for them. In verse 15, Asaph, as a religious leader, believes that if he speaks similar struggles that he is having, it would lead others astray.

Due to his status as a Levite and the chief of worship, if he spoke honestly what was in his heart, it is likely that God's people would feel they had permission to turn from God.

If God's chosen doubts his faith or doubts God, what purpose is there for God's people to continue to follow him? Moving forward, we will see a major transition in the mindset of the author of this psalm.

In verse 1, we started with an objective truth about God. Starting in verse 16, he's going to return to these truths. In verses 16 through 20, But when I thought of how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

[16:51] Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end. Oops. Sorry, 16 through 20. 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. Asaph here, as I mentioned before, is on a journey.

This journey is a long and difficult one. At times, it may seem downright impossible. The same is very much true for us as Christians. In our pursuit of Christ, we are traveling to achieve a goal. The goal is a combination of two things. One being life eternally with Christ in the future, and then the other to reflect and present him to the world around us.

When we give in to the distractions or the doubts, we need a way out of it. A way to help us write our course. The next, a way to help us write our course.

[17:55] In this next objective truth that Asaph presents to us, he cannot do it without God. Asaph seems tired and worn out before this.

His life as a Levite comes with a lot of difficulties. As he is struggling with these things, his course changes when he enters into the sanctuary of God. Just to bring a little bit of context into this, we find in Chronicles 16 is where we kind of learn who Asaph is.

So he was appointed by David verse 4. David appointed some of the Levites to be ministers before the Ark of the Lord to celebrate the Lord God of Israel and to give thanks and praise to him.

Asaph was the chief and Zechariah was second to him. It also says here, it presents a few more of the Levites and says that they played harps and lyres and then Asaph would sound the cymbals.

And this was all meant to be done within the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. Part of being the chief of worship was to be in and around the tabernacle.

[19:13] In there, others and him would be playing the harps, the lyres, trumpets would sound, Asaph would be sounding the cymbal and amongst that they would be singing songs of praise and thanksgiving.

It would be this grand experience an announcement that by entering the tabernacle, by entering the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, you are entering the presence of the Lord.

I just imagine that this would have been a very moving experience. Similarly, when I come here on Sunday mornings and we are all worshiping together and singing, following along with what Kent and Allison were doing, so too are we entering into the presence of God.

From these verses, the very real and tangible practice of entering to God's sanctuary, it shows the importance of this corporate worship. When we join together here and we sing our praises, we're not, as we just did, we become one body exalting him, praying to him and reading his word.

This practice can allow us to recenter ourselves, to refocus on Christ and all the blessings he provided. This change in perspective is what is helping Asaph work through his concerns.

[20:31] If we rise above our struggles, whether it be strengthening our faith or conquering our sin, we need God. While Asaph is having these doubts, he seeks God in his sanctuary because he knows he cannot do these things alone.

Through God, his eyes have been opened to that which he did not see before. God has shown Asaph those who are not immune to folly.

They stumble on their paths as well. Their riches can be lost at any moment. Their wealth and overabundance is not built on solid ground. Like a dream, their lives are wonderful one moment and the next moment they can wake up and everything will be ripped out from underneath them.

God does not shield them from the outcomes of their actions. even if it is not in this life, these people cannot take what they have built up with them when they pass.

Then on the last days, God is going to judge all the wicked and their sins will be judged and they will no longer be able to escape the consequences of their actions in their lives.

[21:37] When we continue to get distracted by everything we wish we had, we need to remember how fleeting those things are. we need to shift our perspective eternally toward our future eternity with Christ.

In order to find hope in this truth, we must not close ourselves off to God when we are struggling. Here in verses 21 through 24, 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.

Here Asaph is returning to his prayer of confession. The heart was closed off to God and was not open to seeing the blessings before him. We can often get stuck in these cycles of anger and resentment as well.

I know at times when I feel slighted or angry, both my heart and my mind are just completely shut down. It doesn't matter if I'm wrong. Instead, I act as if there's no other answer than my own.

[22:51] It typically takes some sort of reminder to get out of this funk that I may be riling in. It takes action like praying through my feelings to remind me of the blessings in my life.

My wife and my kids who love me unconditionally, my job that provides enough for us to live a comfortable life. God is the one who has blessed me with these things. Asaph, in the same way, is remembering God in these moments.

God who will never forsake him and will guide him to the answers he requires. As I continued to read through this psalm, I was reminded that in every circumstance, I need to go to God in prayer and lift those concerns up to him, while remembering he is always there.

We are all humans who struggle with our doubts and temptations and sin. Our sinful nature can cause us to hurt those around us and in turn separate us from God.

Left unfettered, this separation would become eternal and our sin would go on to control us. Our doubts can overwhelm us and turn us from Christ. These are the dangers of this journey that we are all traveling on.

[24:06] When we allow the distractions that cause us to stumble, we need a way to get back up. Placing our trust and faith in Christ is the way to get back up. When we place our trust in him, there is always going to be a way out.

He takes the journey with us so that we are never going to be alone. When we go to him, he guides us with his counsel and in turn, our faith in Christ, we have hope to one day live with him eternally. verses 25 through 28. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire beside 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 was good to be near God.

I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works. These last few verses are the summation of everything that Asaph has said before this.

[25:11] As I pointed out in the beginning, Asaph began the prayer with praise of the Lord. Here he is ending his prayer with praise of the Lord as well. He is also weaving into this praise in this prayer the major concerns he has thought throughout it, but it's with a little bit of a twist.

Instead of repeating his confession of the envy of the wicked and what they have, he states there is nothing else on earth that he desires besides God. God is more than sufficient to fill this hole in his life that his human desire and his human nature wishes to fill with something else.

In the perspective of eternity, none of these things are going to last. Also, when we are unable to continue, God will always provide a way for us. God is the blessing in our lives and all other blessings in our lives stem through him.

When we make God the source of our strength and our refuge, we are able to live good, albeit difficult, lives. These lives, in turn, give us the ability to profess God to the people around us.

The book of Psalms is full of wonderful songs of praise to be offered up to the Lord. It is written by multiple authors, each with their own experiences and relationships with God.

[26:26] It is full of language that is meant to set our hearts upon God and shower him with the greatest of praise. We sing many of these Psalms here at Shoreline in our worship to him on Sunday mornings.

I would say this Psalm, however, is in a different category. Compared with many of the Psalms of praise, this would fall into the category of a Psalm of Lament, but even more so than just a Psalm of Lament, it struck me as a prayer from the heart.

This Psalm being Asaph's prayer would, sorry, however this lament is coming from a place of Asaph's prosperity.

This is not a prayer from a place of deep physical suffering. It's not a place that is coming from a place of, it's not a Psalm that is coming from a place of prosecution where he is completely down in the dirt and nobody is around to help him.

At this moment in time, Asaph has not lost everything he has. As a matter of fact, he is in a high position serving within the tabernacle and eventually the new temple.

[27:41] Then here he confesses to God that he has envy of the wicked. He has everything that he could ever wish for. He has all the blessings from the Lord and yet he is still falling into the trap of envy.

This Psalm is showing us that no matter how well we are doing, we can always be tempted to look sideways. Personally, I have a good life. I am living a good life.

But still, at times, I will become envious. When I get Passover of promotion compared to somebody who, in my mindset, is actively making mistakes or actively doing things they are not supposed to do, whereas I have followed all the rules, I have kept myself clean, I can feel that envy starting to follow up because I feel like I deserved more.

When I see coworkers or friends or family going out partying or on vacations full of drinking or exploring with no care to the responsibilities before them, all while I feel like I have been stuck with the weight of being a good husband and then father, working to provide for them.

Like Asaph, I have been prone to struggle or complain from a place of my prosperity, forgetting the true blessings in my life. Yet, even with all that, Asaph was struggling, when Asaph was struggling,

he still returned to God.

[29:05] He praised him for all that he did and he tells us that God is his portion. God is more than enough to fill this perceived hole that we may wish to fill with earthly possessions and experiences.

This is the objective truth of who God is and how he will continually support us when we need him. Psalm 73 serves as the perfect example of how we, as Christians, should pray when we are struggling.

We need to return to him and lay it out all before him. Or if at times we cannot find the words to express how we're feeling, we can pray through this psalm. This psalm can begin as our prayer before the Lord and hopefully then the Holy Spirit may reveal to you what is on your heart and allow you to be open and honest with him.

As Mike comes up here to prepare for the communion, I just want to say that if any of you in this room are struggling with any of these doubts, if you are struggling with envy of, that is turning you away from God, that is distracting you from the journey you're on, you can speak with myself, you can speak with any of the elders of the church and we can pray those things with you.

We can be part of that godly body to recenter yourself and bring you towards Christ. And thank you, Mike.