

A Right View of God

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[0:01] Well, we can turn back to our reading in the book of Psalms and Psalm 73. We're going to look at the whole of this psalm together. You can just read the first and last verse at the moment.

Psalm begins, it's a psalm of Asaph. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. And then in 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. Very positive verses at the beginning and the end of the psalm, where Asaph sees in verse 1 that God is good.

He is a great God who is good to his people, to those who are pure in heart. And then at the end of the psalm, he's saying, It is good for me to draw near to this God, this God who is good to me.

In so many ways I have found there my refuge, and I will tell of all his wondrous works. You have that at the beginning and the end.

[1:07] But what you see throughout the psalm is a little like what David speaks of in Psalm 39. In that second half of verse 12, There's a lot going on.

There's a lot of challenges, a lot of struggles that he has. And it's a real sense of looking at the Christian's life in so many ways. And what you see in the psalms so often is just that, the reality of life.

One thing you can say about the psalms is that they reflect a real sense of honesty. From the author of the psalm, whoever that is, we know a number of different people wrote the psalms. David, many of them, but here we have another, a psalm of Asaph. And we see that they come across just with that sense of, this is the reality of life. It's Asaph who was one who was a worship leader in the temple.

You read of him in 1 Chronicles chapter 15, where you're seeing an outline of what the community's worship looked like and who was involved in it.

[2:23] And Asaph is there mentioned as one of the worship leaders. And so he was one who led people into that worship in the temple. And part of his task was, it was through song.

It was through music. It was through leading them into the praise of God. But what you see in this psalm and so many others, it's just not always a cheery chorus.

It's not always, don't worry, everything's fine. And there's very much a sense of the reality of all the different ups and downs. And in Psalm 73, Asaph has a lot of these questions of someone who is finding the way difficult, of someone who is looking around, seeing all that's going on around him and wondering, well, we're saying God is good.

But yet how in reality is God good when this is what we're seeing around us? He's in a host of others you find in Scripture who had questions.

You think of Job in the Old Testament and his life and all that he went through in his life. It would be easy to question the goodness of God, easy to question everything that's going on around him.

[3:41] Or many of the prophets, Jeremiah, all the prophets, they all had their own different questions of what was going on. What's happening around us?

How can we see the goodness of God in the midst of this? And yet always, always they were able to come to that point where their focus, their attention comes to the reality of God.

And the reality that yes, God is good. God is gracious. God is merciful. Seeing the fullness of God.

And that's what Asaph does in this psalm. He sees the fullness of God. He sees a right view of God and who he is and all that he does, no matter what's happening around.

And so as we look at this psalm, we see that fullness of God. But how do you see God? Do you see God as good tonight?

[4:46] When you reflect on his word, when you reflect maybe on your own situation, when you reflect on things that are going on around, are you able to say with confidence, God is good.

God is gracious. God, as we sang in Psalm 93, his throne is enduring. His throne is secure. Everything about him is firm.

He is from eternity. He is to eternity. He has all things in his hands. Or do you have the questions? Do you have the niggles? Do you have the doubts?

God is good, but... Well, this psalm, and so many of the psalms, as we say, the whole of Scripture, helps us to find answers to these challenges, helps us to find that confidence that we can have in God.

When we see the fullness of God, not just a part of God, but the fullness of God. One day there was three blind men who were taken to a zoo.

[5:54] They wanted to go and experience the zoo. Even though they couldn't see the animals that were there, they wanted to experience the occasion. They wanted to experience the sounds that they would hear.

And they had a guide with them, taking them around the zoo. And they were hearing all these noises, and the man was describing the animal that was making the noise, their habitat, what they were eating, what they were doing, all of these kinds of things.

But during their tour of the zoo, they came to the place where the elephants were. And because they had a little bit of time, the zookeeper decided that instead of just describing what was in front of them, he would allow them to reach out and touch.

And so one by one, the blind men went up. And being blind, they came to different parts of the animal. The first one reached out and grabbed the tail.

And having experienced other things, he said, it's like a rope. It's not what I expected. It's just like a rope. Second man came and reached out and felt the elephant's leg.

[7:02] He said, it's not like a rope at all. It's much bigger than a rope. It was more like a tree trunk. And the third one walked up to reach out to the animal and just walked into it, into the side of the elephant.

And he said, no, it's just like a huge wall. Just a massive wall. That's the only way I can describe it. It's not like the way you're describing it. They were just seeing, well, they weren't seeing, they were just feeling out in part.

They were describing a huge animal, but only in part. For one, it was just like a small rope. Another like a tree. Another like a wall. They've only got a part description.

And for ourselves with God, that's the way we can be depending on our experience or what we're going through or what we're, the challenges that we're facing.

Maybe we're only just seeing a part of God. And we're not seeing the fullness of God. And that's what leads to our questions. If God is so, why doesn't he do this?

[8:04] We're not seeing the full picture. It's often the question, if God is real, why does he allow suffering? If God could have stopped death, why didn't he?

Why does God allow war? Why does God allow evil? We're seeing God in just our own little box instead of seeing the fullness of God.

The bigger picture. Because when we see the fullness of God, we realize we don't deserve any mercy from him because we are sinners. But he graciously gives us mercy.

And the mercy that he gives, we need to see in finding him and seeing the goodness of God and coming to him and walking closely with him. And so that's what Asaph is doing for us in this psalm.

We are often guilty of not seeing God for who he is. But here we are brought to see, here is the fullness of God who knows, who understands, who takes us, who leads us, and who has great things in store for all of his people.

[9:17] And so we're going to look at the fullness of God as we find it in this psalm in three different ways, taking us on that pilgrim's walk, as it were, when we see, first of all, the toiling nature of the psalm.

And then we see the turning point. And then we see the thrusting. The toiling, the turning, and the thrusting. So first of all, we're going to think of the toiling.

Asaph, he says here in verse 1, truly, God is good to Israel. God is good. And yet as you go on, you see his struggle.

You see how he is toiling. Straight into there in verse 2, but as for me, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped.

But he is, we're not, he's struggling with what he sees around. He's struggling with all that's going on as he sees the wicked, as it says in verse 3, the prosperity of the wicked.

[10:24] And his eyes become envious towards them. How are they getting on so well? Why are things going so right with them?

Is that not just the way that I should go and I should point others to go as well? It takes him down a dangerous part. But his confession of truly God is good, is in light of his own struggles.

You see in verse 1, it's almost like he's standing on that solid ground. And yet as his steps goes on, he's going into the sinking sand. He's starting to flounder.

I was envious of the arrogant when I saw their prosperity. They have no troubles like others do.

They are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

And so he goes on. He's describing them in all these different ways. He even says in verse 9, they set their mouths against the heavens and their tongue struts through the earth.

[11:25] Therefore his people turn back to them and find no fault in them. There's this sense of, why bother? Why bother trying to live a good life in the light of a good God?

What's the point? When we're struggling, when we're having it hard, when things are going against us, and yet these wicked people, they're flourishing, they're prospering, and everything's going right for them.

Why bother? He even goes to the point where he says in verse 11, and they say, how can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?

It's like a sense of mocking against God. How can God know? He's not that good a God. He's not that great a God. So there's a sense of toiling.

There's God who is good. He is questioning. God is good, and this is through Jesus himself. It testifies to that. In Matthew 19, verse 17, there is none good, that is, but God.

[12:37] And so in the goodness of God, why do hard things come our way? Because God is good, there's an expectation that good things will follow.

And you could say, well, that's scriptural, that the Lord blesses his people. And we know that. It tells us in Psalm 84, for example, in verse 11, for the Lord God is a sun and shield.

The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you.

So no good thing does he withhold. So why is there no blessing? Why do people struggle as Christians? Well, because we are sinners.

And you see Asaph's sin here in verse 3, for I was envious. I was envious of the arrogant.

[13:38] Envy comes in. Greed comes in. Jealousy comes in. All of these things. And what does that mean? It means we are not walking uprightly with God, as Psalm 84 says, where he does not hold good from those who walk uprightly.

So we are at fault so often. We cannot blame God, that he is not good. It is us. There are things that come in to our hearts, that mar our relationship, where we end up toiling in our struggles with him.

He had stumbled, it says, and he had fallen because there was sin in his heart. He wanted to enjoy life.

He wanted to have just as they had prosperity and fullness and all of these things. You can almost get a sense here that they were going hungry, as his people, and yet those who were wicked were prospering like verse 7.

Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their heart overflow with follies. There's a sense they're getting on well. Why am I? Why cannot I be blessed and enjoy all of these things?

[15:01] Why should I have all of these struggles? What is the issue here? There is envy, jealousy, all of these things, but the bigger issue, he's looking to the people around him and measuring the goodness of God by them.

His focus is not on God, but circumstances. And that is what so often causes us to toil and to stumble as well.

When we take our eyes off God and just look to the circumstances around us and say, where is the goodness of God? Why isn't he blessing? Why are all these wicked people getting on so well?

Because we take our eyes off God, we stumble. We see this so often in Scripture where a people or individuals looking to God, trusting him, going forward in his strength.

You think of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt on the border of the promised land. They go in and they have a look around. What do they see? They see giants. We cannot defeat them.

[16:15] Their eyes are taken off God. Only Joshua and Caleb say, but we can. They're looking to God. They're trusting God. David and Goliath.

Goliath cannot be defeated because they're looking at the circumstance, not to God, but David looks to God. You think of Peter in the New Testament when he was out in the boat with other disciples and they saw the Lord coming towards them in Matthew 14, verse 28.

He said, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. And Jesus said, Come. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid.

And beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me. And what happened? Jesus reached out his hand, took him, hold him, saying, Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

Took his eyes off the Lord and look to the circumstances. It's what we do so often. Are you doing that? Are you one tonight who is taking your eyes off God and just looking at your circumstances and saying, it's too difficult.

[17:35] It's too hard. Thinking the goodness of God only means blessings and not struggles, while we are wrong. There will be difficulties. And that's the reality of what Asaph shows us here.

There are hard times. There are times when we see what's going on. We take our eyes off God and we start to sink. We start to stumble. We start to toil.

But the second thing we see here is there's a turning. There's a turning. What we see with Asaph in this psalm is a turning point comes.

He has all these questions. Just like we all do. We all want the answers to life's big questions. But we don't have them.

And Asaph certainly didn't feel that he did either. He seemed weary. He seemed to be struggling in this. Look at verse 16. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

[18:42] It seemed to me a wearisome task. How? How am I going to understand this? How can I ever understand this world that we live in? How can I ever understand why the wicked are prospering while I am struggling?

But yet he found a way. It seemed to him a wearisome task. In verse 17, until, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

It's a great thing to be able to draw near to God. To draw near to God and see that God's word gives us answers to all these important questions.

We might not have a full explanation why do wicked people prosper. We don't maybe have an answer to that, but we have an answer to their end. And that's what Asaph sees here.

I discerned their end. And that's seeing things in the bigger picture. That's seeing the fullness of God that it's not just for the here and now, but it's for the whole of eternity that we're thinking of God.

[19:54] I discerned their end. And then verse 18, truly, you set them in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin.

So he was close to stumbling himself until he draws near to God into God's house. Where did he find answers? He found them when he came to look to the fullness of God and discerned their end. Where are you turning tonight for your answers? Where are you turning in your struggles to the wisdom of the world, to the wisdom of others, or to the wisdom of God?

To discern the bigger picture, to discern the fullness of God, that he has a plan, he has a purpose in all things. A slippery place that would lead them to ruin.

Verse 19, you see this, how they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terror. There's a fearsome thing there when you think about it.

[21:08] It's that end for them. It's an eternity in hell. That's what it's telling us here, destroyed. Destruction is their end.

And then you begin to see things in perspective. You begin to see things in the fullness of life and the fullness of God. That God is good. That God is the one who has answers to all of these big issues.

It may seem weedy some, but it says, until I went into the sanctuary of God, until I listened to what the word of God is showing me, until I listened to what the word of God is saying, everything seemed wearisome.

And you see here, he is turning. He is turning to God. He is seeing that, yes, we've got our struggles, but God has answers, answers beyond anything that I can understand by myself.

all I see is a little bit of God, until I come near to him and then I see the bigger picture. Turning it off always reminds me of the prodigal son.

[22 : 22] I mention him often, but when he comes to himself, he says, in my father's house are these hired hands and they have enough to eat, but I perish here with hunger, so I will rise and go to the father.

It's the very same thing here. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, until I came back to God and saw within the fullness of all things, the wisdom that he has, the blessings that he is able to bestow. We're so often distracted in this world. You came in here tonight, you feel distracted. You feel there's so many things going on in your mind. There's so many things just clamoring for your attention, but wouldn't it be great if every time we came to worship God was a Sunday or a midweek or just in our own time, no distractions, nothing to take our focus away from God and just focus on his word.

But the reality is that so often, even this evening, there's so much clutter in our minds. Love to come. Isn't it good to come and draw near to him, to come into the sanctuary of God and to hear the word of God, to see God and the peace that he can give.

God and God and turn to God and turn to himself. But remember what his role was. His role was a leader in worship.

[24 : 04] And so in turning himself, he is also pointing others. That's where it says at the very end of the psalm, that I may tell of all your works. That's what he's doing in this psalm, telling of all the wondrous works of God.

So he's turning himself, he's causing others to turn. So we come here this night to this psalm written so many years ago and we are seeing our need to turn to God, a God who is good.

He's focusing our attention on the fullness of God. If you've ever been on the ferry coming across the mints, you're sitting in any one of the number of places you can sit and there's somebody over at the window looking out.

All of a sudden you start to hear gasps. Oh, they start to look. And all of a sudden people's attention is drawn in that direction. They're saying there must be something of interest over there.

Maybe they're seeing dolphins jumping and all of a sudden people just gathering around wanting to see. How? Because someone was there to see it. Someone was looking in that direction and saw what was happening and starts to exclaim about what is happening.

[25 : 20] Other people come to see for themselves. That's what Asaph is doing here. He is looking to God and he's exclaiming, here is the God who is good.

Will you not come and look for yourselves and see and know of this goodness? Turning, turning to him and seeing the fullness of God, the beauty of God.

That is what we need. That's what he's pointing us towards. Turn, come, draw near. When everything seems wearisome as we see here, there's no answers until I come to God.

So there's a need to come. The third and final thing we see here is where that leads us to and it's a sense of trusting in God.

You see this in verse 23. It's a wonderful verse. Before that you come in verse 21. When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in the heart, I was brutish and ignorant.

[26 : 33] I was like a beast towards you. He's recognizing himself here as one who had looked away from God. I was ignorant. I was brutish.

I was arrogant. I was questioning all of these things. And that's the way we can end up. That's the way we can go ourselves. When we take our eyes off God, we end up brutish, ignorant, arrogant, all of these things.

So what do we need to do? What do you need to do? Well, here are the words of verse 23, where you have this confidence. It's one of these turning points that you so often find in the Psalms.

He's seeing a sin, and yet he realizes God is there. 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. What a sense of trust.

[27 : 37] You see, he has discerned the end of the wicked, their destruction. But yet he looks to God, he shows his trust in him. I am continually with you.

You guide me with your counsel, you receive me to your glory. There is this confidence, this trusting in God, the goodness of God.

So when we draw near to God, we realize just how good he is. From doubting and questioning in verse 16, things that seem too hard to understand, such a wearisome task.

Now I see, now I understand, because I have drawn near to God. I am worshiping God in the fullness of him. What he does is he realizes three things.

He realizes the future of the sinner in verse 17 to 20. Their end is destruction. And he realizes the foolishness of self, of just looking to himself.

[28 : 46] When I was embittered, pricked in the heart, brutish, like a beast, all of these things. He realized the foolishness of that. But then he realizes in verse 23 to the end, the fullness of a saviour.

The fullness of one who is able to save. I am in your right hand. You are guiding me. And you see all his desires, his desires initially, jealousy and envy is towards those who are prosperous.

What does he realize when he sees the fullness of God? In verse 25, whom have I in the heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

There's this wonderful transformation. Envy towards the wicked is now no. Nothing compares to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, as Paul puts it in Philippians.

Nothing in this world compares to you. My flesh and my heart may faint and fail, but you are my strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[30 : 00] Everything here is pointing towards the fullness of God. Understanding that fullness of God is good. And therefore he says in conclusion, it is good for me to draw near to you.

It is good for me to come and worship you. Rather than turning away when I don't have answers, I need to come. To come and see the end of the wicked.

To come and see the foolishness of self and to come and see the fullness of the Savior and offer in Jesus Christ. So that we might understand our end, turn and know the life that we have in him.

And as we turn, he is able to bless. Bless us with that peace, bless us with that knowledge, not always with prosperity and all of these things that the wicked were enjoying, that he was envious of, but blessed with that assurance that you will receive me to glory, that you will hold me, that you will guide me.

All of these things we are blessed. There was a minister by the name of Robert Chapman, a minister in England in the 1800s.

[31 : 24] One morning as he was walking along the street, he was asked by somebody, how are you? And he answered, I'm burdened this morning. And the man who asked the question said, but you don't look burdened, you look as if you're full of the joys.

So how are you burdened? He said, well, I have a wonderful burden. It's an overburden of blessings. And he said, where do you find that?

And he said, well, I find it with God. And I find it in the words of Psalm 68 verse 19, who daily with his benefits as plenteously doth load.

The Lord burdens! But in a way of his daily benefits, who daily with his benefits as plenteously doth load.

That there are burdens beyond describing, burdens beyond numbering. The Lord pours out his blessings on us. And to know them, what are we to do?

[32 : 39] To draw near to him, to come to him and see and understand and discern all that God shows, the end of the wicked, but the blessings that are ours in Christ.

So he goes through this pilgrimage, a time of toiling, a time of questioning, but a turning to the Lord. And then this trust, nevertheless, continually, I am with you.

You do hold me by my right hand. You guide me by your counsel, and afterwards, you will receive me to glory. He loads us with his benefits.

So may we find in all our questions, in all the challenges that we have, the fullness of God, and look to him, and see that in the midst of everything that goes on around us, he shows us the end of the wicked, but the end that is ours who trust in him.

Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, we thank you that you are indeed a God who loads us with your benefits on a daily basis, that you are one who we can come to with all things, all our cares, all our questions, even the questions that feel wearisome to us, and we can find our understanding when we draw near to you.

[34 : 13] And may you guide us, Lord, by your counsel. May you remind us of your continual presence. May you hold us by your right hand, and may you keep us for all of our days and all of eternity.

Lord, we look to you, we seek your blessing, we seek your face, your peace upon us, as all we ask, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to conclude singing some of these verses in Psalm 73 in the Scottish Psalter, page 316.

We'll sing from verse 23 to verse 26. Psalm 73 on page 316. Nevertheless, continually, O Lord, I am with thee, thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me.

We'll sing four stanzas to God's praise. Never the less continually, O Lord, I am with thee, thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me.

The width I can step while I live!

[35 : 59] Let be strong! God can guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide.

! may may may! Besides, to there is none.

My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never.

For of my heart all is the strength and portion forever.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my right. We'll close in the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all, now and forevermore.

[37 : 50] Amen. Amen.

Thank you.