

Until

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[0 : 00] And verse 17. So Psalm 73, verse 17.

Now hear God's word. And feel the abruptness of the verse as well in many ways. Until. He says, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

He said again, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end. I pray that the word until would stick in your heart and your head as a means of understanding it this evening.

Well, we'll come back to that verse after we have sung this next hymn and the message upon it.

Thank you. Okay.

Psalm 73 and verse 17. There's a few lessons here just about taking a verse all by itself.

[1 : 35] And perhaps we need to cover this one first. And that is whenever you take one verse all by itself, there's a few rules that you have to abide by.

No verse can be taken on its own and then say whatever you like about it. The verse has rules. And one of those rules is that you have to read the other verses surrounding it.

One of the ways to do this is to read a few verses around it. Then read the whole Psalm. Read the whole book of Psalms. And then read the whole Bible as one.

Now, this may seem like an ordeal. It may seem like a lot to do. But it is the very thing that God would have us do. Okay. One of the things that when you read one verse is that as you read this one verse, you have to remember what other verses in the Bible say.

As you read one Bible passage, you have to remember as you're reading that Bible passage what other Bible passages are saying. And the reason for this is because the Bible can't be read like a telephone book.

[2 : 43] Okay. Biblical verses are not ordered like telephone numbers. Where number 178 in a telephone book has nothing to do with number 177 or number 179.

They're independent of each other. If you phone one number, you're not going to be put through to the person above it or below it. They're completely independent.

They're found together. But they're like, if I can put it this way, they're like the bag of marbles that look all the same on the paper. But are all individual. They have nothing to do with each other.

They may be found together on the page. But there's no relation to them. Now, biblical verses aren't like that. Biblical verses is like a grapevine where every branch and every vine is all connected to one another.

So Psalm 73 verse 17 is connected to the rest of the Bible. And that means that as you read one verse all by itself, you have to remember what other verses say that relate to it as you're reading it.

[3 : 45] You can't leave them out. And the reason you can't leave them out is because of the obvious reason of not ending up thinking that the Bible says one thing here and something different over there.

Now, there's plenty of people who will read the Bible that way. Well, God said this. Well, no. God said this in that context. And he says this here. And you've got to harmonize the two.

And so often the Bible can be read sort of like a telephone book rather than like the vine where you understand that it's all joined together. Having said that, the verse alone, Psalm 73 verse 17, there's a few things to notice just about the verse all by itself.

And the first thing you'll notice about the verse is that it's a verse that speaks of change. And it speaks of change in the context of change not happening until something else happens.

Okay? So the word until is a change word. It's a word that is indicating that change is about to happen or change happens here. Okay? So until I went into the sanctuary of God, everything was as it was.

[4 : 54] But when I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end. Something's happened. Something has changed. But it didn't change until he went in. It didn't change until the until.

The moment the until happened and he was in the sanctuary of God, then he was able to understand things clearly. The other thing to notice then is that something happens in the sanctuary that doesn't happen outside.

Okay? This is crucially important. There are things that God does in the sanctuary. There are things that God does in the corporate worship of God's people that he will not do with you outside.

And the most obvious things are the means of grace. The means of grace can only happen in the context of the church. Properly understood. Okay?

You can take part of them out and about. But we must understand where God places things.

Because that's where they're to be found. Where do I find corporate prayer?

[5 : 57] Well, you find it in the church. Where do I find baptism? Where do I find the Lord's table? Well, you find it in the church. These things are to be found in a particular place.

So, this man understands that there's a certain type of change that can only happen in a certain type of place. Okay? And that place is the sanctuary.

Which leads us on to another question. Why? Why does the change need to happen? And why is it necessary for that change to happen? And that's a pretty important question.

Why do you need to change? Or perhaps you think, you don't. I wonder. You know, how much do we need to change? And sometimes, if God is going to change us, then there's one thing we can be certain of.

And that is, it's necessary. It's a necessary change. So, this man understands, just from this one verse alone, there's quite a few things happening. Change is happening, or change needs to happen.

[6 : 59] It can only happen in the sanctuary, or it didn't happen until he went into the sanctuary. And God is the author of change. But what happens in the sanctuary? Well, ultimately, worship. God's people worship God in God's way.

In fact, the church is simply the new Eden. What is Eden? What is the garden? If it's not God's people in God's place, under God's rule, receiving God's blessing.

That's what it is. Almost every well-known theologian would put it that way. Graham Goldsworthy, in particular, argues it that way. Well, the church, what is the church? Well, it's God's people, in God's place, under God's rule, receiving God's blessing.

What's heaven? What's the new heavens and the new earth? God's people, in God's place, under God's rule, receiving God's blessing. So the sanctuary, the sanctuary is not just any old place.

It fits within the biblical narrative. It fits within the grand scheme of what God is doing. It fits within redemptive history. This is about how things are meant to be.

[8 : 11] But this verse also speaks of the man's responsibility. The whole psalm speaks of a crisis in responsibility.

Wherever there is responsibility, sin causes a crisis in our responsibility. You'll notice that when he comes back into the sanctuary, it's not until...

That's an act of repentance. Repentance is an act of change. Metanoia means to change your mind. If you change what you think, you change what you do. It's as simple as that. So the man repents.

He comes back to the sanctuary. And the moment he comes back to the sanctuary, only at that point is he able to discern the source of all his troubles. But up until that point, he's unable to do it. Okay? He stumbles through life. He gets jealous of people in the world, wondering why he doesn't have what they have, and then blames God because God is the giver of all things.

[9 : 14] Why have you given that to them and not to me? It doesn't make any sense. Well, it can't make any sense if you're living in that kind of environment from that kind of worldview.

It can only make sense in the sanctuary. And so you'll notice when he comes back in, he no longer suffers from the problem of verse 16. Verse 16, he says this.

When I thought how to understand this, this is before he comes back to the sanctuary. When I thought of how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. I couldn't figure it out.

I didn't know how to do it. I tried. I tried to figure it out all by myself, why my best atheistic friend drives around with no problems in his life, has a nice car, nice house, nice family, and never seems

to get poorly.

Okay? Goes on holiday two or three times a year. You know, I've tried to figure out why his life is like that, and he's an atheist, and I can't do it. And I've tried to figure out why me, every day I have to repent of my sin, every night I have to repent of the ones that I committed that day, I can't make head nor tail of what's going on.

[10:24] Until I go back into the sanctuary, and then I am able to discern their end. So this man, only by coming back to God, only by coming back into the corporate worship of God's people, only by coming back into the sanctuary, is able to understand things clearly, reasonably.

He's able to see things as they really are. Worship is a vantage point in the world. When you worship God, it is the one place where you're able to see things in the world clearly.

That only in the worship of God can you discern the end of everything. That only in the worship of God can you discern why you're envious of unbelievers.

And then you stop being envious of unbelievers. So only in the worship of God are you able to see things clearly. Okay, it's only there.

So there's a few things then, having read thus far, that we have to consider. Now we have to remember other parts of the Bible as we read verse 17.

[11:38] So other parts would be, I think, Romans 12, Romans 15, 1 Peter, 1, 1 Peter chapter 2.

And why? Because these are images in Scripture of God fulfilling His plan of God's people in God's place, under God's rule, receiving God's blessing. They're in the sanctuary.

They are worshiping God as they were designed to do. And as they worship God, they see things clearly. J.B. Phillips translate Romans 12 verses 1 and 2 as this is your reasonable service.

Okay, you offering yourself to God is reasonable. In other words, it makes sense. In light of the gospel, it makes perfect sense for you to give your whole life to God.

In light of the gospel, it makes perfect sense for you to be found in the sanctuary, worshiping God. It doesn't make sense to be anywhere else. But only in the sanctuary do you have enough sense to be able to figure that out.

[12:41] You know, we've all met the sort of, or perhaps you haven't, but I can remember once, you know, ministering and this little eight-year-old boy came up to me and says, you know, I'm an atheist.

I thought, can you spell it? I don't want to be rude, but come on. You know, there are levels of understanding. There are levels of clarity.

Some come with age and some come with being in God's place, being God's people in God's place. That's not being arrogant. That's simply being what you are meant to be under God.

Another verse, as you read verse 17, would clearly be the verse that points to what does actually God want for me? It's different than what does God want with me, although it could tie in.

But what does God want for me? What does God want for me? Well, in the one verse in the Bible, there are many, but there's one that makes it abundantly clear in Thessalonians, is if you say, what is the will of God?

[13:44] It's answered very clearly. The will of God is that you be holy. The will of God is that you be sanctified. To quote Timothy, and Peter rather, you are to be holy for I am holy, which is quoting the Old Testament.

Be holy for I am holy. That's what God wants for you. Straight out of the mouth of God, God is saying, I want you to be holy. Why? Okay, am I allowed to ask why, God?

Okay, I'm going to. Why? Because I am holy. Right? So, now we know what God wants for us. He wants us to be holy. And we know why he wants us to be holy. Because he is.

What does that mean? Well, he wants us to be like him. God wants you to be like him. So, what is God doing with me? What is God doing with my life? Well, he's making you like him.

Every single day, God takes your life, and little by little, he makes that like him. Little by little, each and every day, you are becoming more like him.

[14:48] God has commanded that you be holy, for he is holy, and that is the work that God is performing in your life. And when you come back, or until you come back into the sanctuary, that is the place where it happens.

The sanctuary is the place where we worship God. The sanctuary is the place where we worship God in spirit and in truth, according to his word, in the beauty of holiness.

It is the place of transformation. It is the place where the means of grace are given in order for us to be transformed. God, you must remember, that God works spiritually through the practical. Okay? Everything is spiritual. Everything which is spiritual is also practical. Okay? Practical things, physical things are equally spiritual. So when this man goes back into the sanctuary, taken there by his own feet, sitting in the very sanctuary that's probably built with physical bricks and mortar materials, okay, all of this physicality around him, he is worshipping God. God can change us wherever he likes, but he decides to do it by bringing us back to the sanctuary. So what do you think happens to you when you're here that doesn't happen to you when you're not here?

[16:09] Any of you, has any of you missed a Sunday? A church on a Sunday? And then you go back two weeks later and you feel something's gone wrong, something's missed.

If you don't feel like that, then we should have a chat. But if you do feel like that, you feel like that for a very good reason. A very, very good reason.

It's because God is doing something in you that he does in the sanctuary. That as we meet together. So there's another thing to consider.

And this is probably crucial as we start bringing these things together in this verse. Until. Until. It's that word until bugs me.

I think it should bug you as well. And it's all about being responsible. When the man decides to go to church, when the man decides to go back to the sanctuary, when the man decides to go back into the corporate worship of God with God's people, he's being responsible.

[17:12] But until he goes back, he's being irresponsible. He's being irresponsible with the life that God has given him for the purpose that it was given.

He's an irresponsible person. There's a crisis in his responsibility. But when he comes back, then he at that point, only at that point, is he taking his life with the deal of responsibility that it should be given.

Only then is he really being responsible before God. He is responsible for returning to the sanctuary. And by returning to the sanctuary, he is treating his life with the responsibility that it deserves.

So this means that there's something else that's worth pointing out. That God is more than happy, probably not more than happy, but God is quite happy to leave you in your miserable condition as long as you want to be there.

He's quite happy to leave this man in his miserable condition as long as he wants to be there until he comes back. Jonathan Edwards put it this way, that God must leave man in his sin long enough so that he can become miserable of it so that he would then repent of it.

[18:41] Okay? Some people, because of their nature, can find that their close and clean relationship with God is being hindered by something, and immediately they're on their knees, and they go straight back to God.

Others can be quite different. And that we've realized that we're slipping from God, but actually we don't mind it. We kind of enjoy the misery, and we don't mind how long it lasts.

We kind of see how long we can actually put up with it until we actually get to the point where we really want to return. It's clear that some people in the world, in Christianity, are quite happy to live in misery, spiritual misery, for quite a long time.

And God will leave you there until, until you take the responsibility that you have been given for your life with the authority, with the desire that it should have.

You are responsible for returning. The man knows where he should have been, and that's why he comes back. And he obviously didn't want to continue in his state of verse 16.

[20:00] It's wearing him out, and he's trying to figure all this out by himself. He can't do it. He's miserable with his condition, but the moment he comes back into the church, Asaph is his name, the moment Asaph comes back into the church, he deals with what?

He's dealing with his crisis of responsibility. Others in the world are being irresponsible, getting away with it, and he's envious of that. And that makes it all the more harder to be responsible.

You know, if they're doing it, why can't I? But it's only when he comes back into the sanctuary of God does he discern their end. Can he really begin to see what that type of life leads to?

Only at that point does he arrive at clarity, and then he sees the folly of his ways. It's also worth noticing that this man does not get to clarity pre-coming back to church.

This man does not get to clarity to reasonableness pre-coming back into the sanctuary of God, into the proper worship. It takes worship to be clear.

[21 : 09] The proper worship of God to see things clearly. There's a crisis of responsibility. I'm going to give you an illustration. And this is a fairly modern day, although it's 10 years old now, believe it or not.

But in 2008, you had the housing crash. Okay? 60 days earlier, you had a previous crash, which nobody noticed, in Brent oil.

Brent oil hit, you know, some over 100 and whatever dollars a barrel. 60 days later, the housing crash happened. There was an issue. One of the biggest countries in the world to be affected by the housing crash was America.

And having read quite a lot about this on my sabbatical, for mission reasons, believe it or not, I came across something really quite interesting. That in America, they had loans called ninja loans. Ninja loans. N-I-N-J-A. Hey, well, didn't I do well? Didn't I do well? Ninja loans. No income, no job, no worries, will give you a loan.

[22 : 15] No income, no job, no worries, will give you a loan. Two people are being irresponsible. The people taking the money who didn't have money to pay it back, and the people loaning the money out who knew that they were loaning the money out to people who couldn't pay it back.

But that's not the interesting thing. The real interesting thing when it comes to the crisis of responsibility was when the bubble actually burst. And as the housing market crashed, and prices went through the roof, and debt repayments were high in what you have, there was a law in certain states in America called a non-recourse loan.

Which meant this, that if you took a loan out for \$300,000, and you didn't have the money to pay that back, and it was a non-recourse loan, then you could not pay it back, and not be held personally liable for it.

Just be wiped off as debt. No black mark against your name. You can be completely irresponsible. And over 60% of loans that actually led to the housing crisis were non-recourse loans.

where people realized that they could not pay it back and not have to worry, because it wouldn't come back on them. It seems as though we live in a world where there is a massive crisis in responsibility.

[23 : 45] And this man here, Asaph, looks out onto that world of people with their ninja loans, and their houses, and their big cars, and being confused is why they can have all of that.

Well, the reason why they can have all of that is because they suffer from a crisis in responsibility. But this man here, when he takes the responsibility that he has for his own life before God seriously, he comes back and is able to discern their end.

He is able to see that there's a crash coming to these people. The very people that he is envious of is the very people who are going to suffer badly. And they're going to suffer badly because they are irresponsible.

They're unrepentant, and they are irresponsible. So the man not only deals with the crisis of responsibility, he also deals with the issue of repentance.

To repent is to change. This man repents. He returns to God. He worships God. He's no longer resistant to change.

[24 : 54] But how long is it that you are resistant to change? Well, quite a long. And people are resistant to change for a couple of reasons. One, I don't know what the change will mean. And two, I'm quite happy with the way things are.

Leave me alone. Okay? I like it the way I am. Okay? I want the Lord to come really, really quickly so that I don't have to change that much between now and then. That's, right, that's the issue.

I want the Lord to come quickly so I don't have to change that much between now and then. Just leave me as I am. But we need to remember what God wants for you. He wants you to be like him. He wants you to be holy.

The change is going to happen. Okay? The change is always going to happen. The person who is repentant is simply going through a process of change.

He is simply becoming like God. God. So when John says, no one who continues in sin is born of God, what do you think he means?

[25 : 55] What do you think is on John's mind? What do you think he has in mind? Well, let me put it this way. There are only two ways to continue in sin. There are only two ways.

The first way is this way. By keep sinning. Sin in the morning, sin in the afternoon, sin in the evening. And tomorrow comes and I'll do the same thing all over again.

And I'm not repentant of any of it. I'm just going to keep sinning. I'm going to sin. I'm going to sin. I'm going to sin. And there. That's one way. But there is another way. And it's the other way which is the area of focus, I think, especially in Psalm 73.

Imagine it this way. There is another way to be unrepentant and that is that it doesn't matter how long ago you committed a sin, whatever the sin was back in the day, five years ago, ten years ago, if you're unrepentant of it, whatever it was, okay, however long ago it was, if you're unrepentant of that sin, you are still continuing in it.

Because you're not repented of it. It is wrong to think that sins expire. Sin never expires.

[27 : 15] It can be forgiven. It can be dealt with by the Lord Jesus Christ. It can be, God can choose to remember it no more. But sin never, ever, ever expires.

And sometimes there are Christians who have committed sin who live in the unrepentance of that sin, thinking that it must have expired by now.

It hasn't. And so there are two ways to continue in sin, by keep sinning or by being unrepentant of past sins. That's a problem.

Because that is a crisis in responsibility. So we must come to our senses and with this we will conclude. When the man comes back into the sanctuary, he comes back out of misery, not out of sensibleness.

He's had enough of it in the world. Okay? This spiritual depression that he's had to put up with, he can't cope with it anymore. And when he comes back, God brings him back to his senses.

[28 : 24] He lifts him out of his spiritual decline. He lifts him out of his depression. And the first thing that God shows him is everything that you thought was true isn't true. Everything that you assumed to be true about the ungodly and the reason why you were envious of it, just let me wipe the dust from your eyes so you can see things as they really are.

And he brings this man to his senses. Why? Well, because it's really important what you believe. It's really important what you fill your mind and your heart with.

Because a person living in sin cannot see that the very sin that they live in blinds them from seeing the folly of living in sin. When a person lives in sin, they cannot see the mistake that they are making because sin doesn't want to show it to them.

But it's only when you come back into the sanctuary and hear God say, repent of your sin, does clarity return. Worship is the only way you're going to be able to see anything clearly in this world. Worship is the only way you're going to be able to deal with your life properly. Worship is the only way for you to receive the means of grace that God wants you to have.

[29 : 42] And he will give them to you abundantly. So here's the exhortation. In the sanctuary, in the place of worship, in the place where you receive the means of grace is the place where you change.

It is the place where God wants to change you. It is the place where God has ordained to change you. And I'm not saying for a moment that God can't change you anywhere else or at any other time. I'm simply pointing out where God does it most of the time and why God does it here.

It's really important that as we change, we change together. One of the things this man points out really clearly is that he doesn't come back into the congregation and tells him of the depression that he's gone through.

And you know why he doesn't do it? Because he's afraid that if he speaks of his weaknesses in the congregation, he'll cause others to stumble. What a wise man.

What a wise... Does he deal with it all on his own? No, he goes to God. What a wise man. See, he recognizes that if he speaks of his weaknesses to others, they might have the same weaknesses and cause them to stumble.

[30 : 55] Because we can't help it but to fall into a memetic pattern. In other words, we're socially conformed. When one person does something, we just follow along soon. One of the best examples I had of this was watching a demonstration of a man who got three people to stand to fill out a clipboard.

Okay? And sent... They were told to stand and they were told to sit and told to re-stand every time they heard a bell ring. And then they sent someone in just to fill out a form who knew nothing.

And guess what they did? They stood up to fill the form in. And when the bell rang, they sat down. Why? They'd never been told to do it, but they did it because three other people in the room were doing the same thing. Okay?

This kind of social conformity happens because we need someone to follow. We need someone to show us how it's done. So you need to be really careful who you're following. And you need to be really careful what you're following.

So here's the conclusion. God wants you to be in church. God wants you to be in the sanctuary.

God wants you to change because it is necessary change, not unnecessary change.

[32 : 03] And what God wants for you is for you to be like him. Be holy for I am holy. So there are a few things to avoid and a few things to do. Firstly, avoid your crisis of responsibility in your responsibility by being responsible.

Secondly, don't continue in sin by continuing in unrepentance. Repent. Repent. And more importantly, return to worship all the time.

Return to the corporate of worship of God consistently that your life may reflect that consistency. Amen.