

# Envious of Dreams

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, the readings this morning are taken from the Psalms and Luke. We're beginning Psalm 73. I won't read the entire Psalm, but I will read a few verses. So, we're going to read Psalm 73, verses 1 to 3, and then we're going to pick it up in verse 15 through to the end of 17.

So, a few verses, but probably out of all the Psalms, this is no doubt my favorite, if there is such a thing as having a favorite Psalm. So, now hear God's Word.

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. Verse 15, if I'd 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 wearisome task. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

I'd like to turn with me to Luke 22, chapter 22. So, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Luke chapter 22.

So, verse 31 and 32. This is Luke 22, verse 31 and 32 to begin with. This is Jesus speaking to Simon Peter, and he says, verse 31, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

[ 2 : 26 ] Verse 54 through to 62. This is Peter's denial now, beginning at verse 54.

Then they seized him and led him away. This is Jesus. They seized Jesus and led him away, bringing him into the house, into the high priest's house. And Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, this man also was with him. But he denied it, saying, woman, I do not know him.

And a little later, someone else saw him and said, you also are one of them. But Peter said, man, I am not. And after an interval about an hour, still another insisted, saying, certainly, this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean. But Peter said, man, I do not know, what you are talking about. And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he said to him, before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly. Well, we're going to come back to God's word together in a moment. But before we do, we'll give your Bibles in front of you. Please, if you can, remember Psalm 73 and Luke 22, as this is where we're going to be spending our time. Now, most of us here are aware of Peter's denial.

[ 4 : 38 ] It is interesting, however, that when you read about Peter's denial, not once does he ever deny Jesus. I find it quite striking that he never says, I deny that Jesus was the Son of God.

God. He never says, I deny that Jesus did miracles. He never says, I deny that Jesus walked on water, that he healed the sick, that he preached good news. He doesn't deny any of that about Jesus.

In fact, his denial of Jesus is when people say to him, I recognize you as a follower. And Peter says, no, I'm not. It's interesting how Jesus considers denying your identity as a follower of Jesus is to deny Jesus himself. So, it's quite striking that his denial is not, I deny that Jesus is the Son of God, but rather, I don't follow him. So, we're pretty aware of Peter, though we may not be as aware as we might first thought we was. We hear denial of Jesus, and we probably assume that he said, I don't know who Jesus is, which he doesn't exactly do. However, Asaph is sort of less familiar.

He's perhaps less famous. Nevertheless, he has a good lot to teach us, and that is that he says that my foot also slipped from having a good relationship with God. Here I am living my Christian life.

Here I am walking with God. And then, all of a sudden, my feet began to slip, and I don't know how it happened.

That's what effectively he says. In other words, those who backslide away from the faith rarely know that they are backsliding. They don't actually know what's happening to them. And even when you point it out to them, they still fail to see it. And that's what was happening to Asaph. He was slipping, his foot had almost slipped. But in both cases, what we noticed is that they succumbed to the pressure of the crowd. Don't ever think that when a person starts walking away from Jesus, that it's something drastic always. It could just be that they succumbed to the pressure of everyday life, that they succumbed to the pressure of the crowd. They are almost sleepwalking into a backslidden state. And that's exactly what happens to Asaph and with Peter. In both cases, they are saved from falling away by God.

[ 7 : 20 ] One of my favorite lines in Psalm 73 is where Asaph says, my heart failed, almost failed, but God is the strength of my heart. In other words, true security is not in whether or not I can keep my own heart from slipping, but in the fact that God will never allow my heart to fail and to fall away from him entirely. I can fall momentarily, I can fall over a period of time, but I'll never fall away from God forever if I am truly his. So the Word of God is quite clear, both in Peter's case and in Asaph's case, that there is such a thing as a vantage point from which you can see this, and there is such a thing as a blind spot from which you can't see that. And that is that when you succumb to the pressures of the crowd and to life in general, and you don't really have a good understanding of what the Christian faith is, you're even less likely to see how far you have fallen, because you only see yourself having fallen from what you know about Jesus rather than what is true about Jesus. That makes sense? Well, it ought to. In other words, imagine Jesus is a very high mountain, the highest mountain in the world.

And let's just say that your knowledge of Jesus is at its peak, and then you fall to the bottom. Is the fall greater for you than someone whose knowledge and relationship of Jesus is only 10% up the mountainside? Well, of course it is. And so the person who only falls 10% thinks that they're actually not fallen that far. The truth, however, they're neither that close to God either.

People who keep their level of knowledge of Jesus and their relationship with Jesus at an all-time low will never see themselves as falling that far because they're nearer to the bottom than they are to the top.

That's a real reality. There's something that you need to consider as to where you actually are in your walk with God.

And so the vantage point is that it's only when you come back to God, it's only when you start growing in God, you come back into worship and the Word, do you actually begin to see where you are, and you begin to see where you were.

[ 9 : 56 ] It's then that you can see that your feet were slipping. It's then that you can see that you had become envious, as Asaph says, of other people. That, in other words, your following of Jesus was simply wanting what other people had.

You know, why is it that people who belong to God can actually look at other people in the world who don't have God and be jealous?

Is it because we actually don't want God and we want what they have? It's a real challenge to the very core of our heart as to what we actually want.

And Asaph says, you know, I didn't even understand this until verse 16 of Psalm 73, I came back into the sanctuary. I came back into the sanctuary of God. It was not until, he says, and he uses the word until, I came back into the place where worship and the Word is present, that I began to see the condition that I was in.

Verse 17, sorry. It was not until I came back into the worship and the Word of God that I began to see where I was, and actually where other people are who don't belong to God.

[ 11 : 19 ] So how did Asaph drift from his relationship with God, and why are we even tackling this this morning? Well, here's the reason. We keep the Sabbath holy, we come here on the Lord's Day, lest we forget the God who we are to worship.

And those who don't keep the Lord's Day holy, and those who in other ways drift, have actually done so because they have forgotten the God who they are to worship.

See, Asaph says, it's not until, verse 17, I come back into the sanctuary of God, that now I see things clearly. And now I actually see how the world works. I see that clearly.

But how did he even slip in the first place? And this is how he slipped. He actually became envious of somebody else's dream. Now to become envious, Asaph looks at what others have, he wants what others have, and he begins to think that he can have it for himself.

Now, this is how envy works. If you have someone that you know of, but you don't really know, and they succeed in life, you're really not that bothered. Great. Wonderful. Good for them.

[ 12 : 43 ] But when your friend succeeds, and you don't, then envy comes. That bitterness comes. Then you wonder why I can't have what they're having, why I can't enjoy what they are enjoying.

And so jealousy and envy go together in a very particular kind of way. Jealousy is wanting what other people have. Envy is almost a little step further in not wanting them to have it.

So Asaph is in a whole load of trouble. He's got himself to the point where he's not just jealous of what other people have, the wicked have, the people who don't belong to God have. He's not just jealous of what they have, he's actually envious. He doesn't want them to have it. In other words, why should they? They don't believe in God. Have you ever heard yourself say that, at least in your heart? Why is it that unbelievers have everything that they want, and here I am believing in God and I can't seem to even get my prayers answered? And then your attitude is, I don't want them to have it because I can't have it. Well, it is a challenge, a deep challenge to the heart. Envy wounds you. It damages you on the inside. It damages you on the inside. You want what other people have, and you don't want them to have it at the same time. Then Jesus tells us to love our enemies.

Now it's even worse, because the very people that we are told to love have got everything, and we're to tell them to come to Christ, and they just seem to have a carefree life.

You know, I look at my brother, who I can still remember the conversation. I decided to follow Jesus, and now I've decided not to. Well, I could challenge that quite easily, but here he is now, sort of senior manager, owner in part of a company, turns over 14 million pound a year, can have anything that he likes. How so? Well, am I forgetting the God who I belong to? Am I beginning, as I become jealous, as I become envious, am I at the same time forgetting the God who I belong to? And the answer is yes, you are. That's how envy happens. You're forgetting who you have. You're forgetting what you have in God.

[ 15 : 27 ] This is how silly it is. Asaph is effectively saying, I was jealous of the person who dreamt that they won the lottery, because he knows that they don't really have it. I was jealous of the person who dreamt that they inherited a fortune, so much so that I asked them the next day, would they be willing to share it with me? Now, how ridiculous is that? Would you be jealous of someone who won the lottery in their dream? Would you be jealous of someone who won or came into a massive inheritance in their dream? No, of course not. Why not? Because you know that when they wake up, it's not going to be there.

Well, salvation is waking up. Meeting God at the end of your life is when you wake up, and everything that you had in this life is as if you had it only in a dream. It's there, but it's not really there. And so Asaph, from the vantage point of the sanctuary, when he comes back into worship and he comes back and listens to the Word of God, it's then that he begins to realize that he was actually envious of what someone else had, but only envious as in someone in a dream.

Shocking. How could such a person get himself into such a state? Well, such is the temptation that comes with sin. Never forget that there is a particular kind of evil attached to all types of evil. This is how Asaph puts it in 7320.

Like a dream when one awakes, like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

In other words, yet now I begin to see. Now I begin to see that when people don't have God, they don't really have anything that they can keep.

[ 17 : 46 ] That's what he's saying. When people don't have God, they don't have anything that they can be kept by. Now he begins to see. So these people who are jealous, that he is jealous of, he understands that one day they're going to be woken up by God.

And it's called the final judgment. It's called the final day of accountability. Where they realize at that point, and only at that point, unless they realize it earlier in salvation, that actually my whole life was lived as if it was a dream.

I had it, but I didn't really have it. Because now I'm awake. And none of it's there. And now I stand before God.

It takes Asaph almost a very long time before he comes back into the sanctuary of God and realizes that there are no riches outside of a relationship with God.

There are no real or lasting riches outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ. None of it, though it appears real, is real in eternal sense.

[19:00] It comes and it goes until it finally goes. So Asaph says, When I came back into the sanctuary of God, it was only when I came back into worship, it was only from that vantage point, could I then see what was previously my blind spots.

It was only as I engaged in the word of God, it was only as I engaged in worshiping God, that I then began to see the blind spots that I had.

He says in verse 16, that when I tried to understand this on my own, it was a task that wore me out. There are some psalms that bring me great comfort, and there are other psalms that cause me to wrestle with God for months.

None more so than the ones that say, unless the Lord builds the house, those that labor, labor in vain.

Do you know, even though it's God's word, I don't want to use the word hate, but boy, do I struggle with that. Man, is that a hard one to deal with?

[20:18] I mean, if that's not difficult, what is? But here I am, working, trying to work day and night, trying to figure out a future, trying to look at the church, trying to add to what can be done to support missions, trying to add to what can be done to make the church flourish, to try and figure out, you know, my family's future of, you know, all kinds of things.

And I go to bed at night, and I wake up the next day, and nothing's changed. Nothing's improved. Nothing's got better.

And I get to the end of the week, and I'm still trying to figure it out, and I am shattered. I'm weary. I am tired. And then I come back to that verse, that unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor, labor in vain.

I know it to be true, but it's just not coming down into my everyday life. I'm still fighting with it. It is a challenge. So Asaph says that when I come back into the worship of God, now I see. Now I begin to see.

[21:37] I began to see that my foot had almost slit, but God is the strength of my heart. Now I'm in the place of the vantage point, where I begin to see, not just where I am, and where I belong with God, but also how the world really is.

And it's because of this, that Asaph has something to teach us about Peter's denial. You know, I don't want to be too hard on Peter, though I think Peter is the one who does put his foot in it all the time.

You know, perhaps he got a little bit boastful after he was the only one to walk on water with Jesus. I mean, that's something to claim, isn't it? You know, do you know who I am?

I'm one of the, not just any of the disciples, I'm the one that walked on water with Jesus. I mean, if I was Peter, I'd be boasting. Maybe he did, or maybe he didn't. But then he puts his foot in it, where Jesus is saying in Mark 8, into chapter 9, you know, I have to go to the cross.

And Peter turns to Jesus and says, no, Lord. Excuse me? And Jesus turns to him and says, get behind me, Satan, from the highs to the lows.

[22:53] And then poor old Peter denies Jesus. This is how Asaph, I think, leads us to Peter. Peter. If you look at verse 15, which is a crucial verse, he says this, if I had said, in other words, if I had started speaking to people, fellow believers, that I was envious of the wicked, that I was envious of what other people had, if I started sharing that testimony with inside the church, I would have betrayed a generation of your children.

See, Asaph completely understands that when people make decisions, they don't always make decisions because they thought them through. In fact, he understands that most of the time when you make decisions, you have hardly ever thought it through.

See, he knows that by a sheer testimony of, do you know, I am becoming envious of the wicked, I'm, you know, that he will pull other believers away from the Lord in the same way he himself has pulled himself away.

Don't ever imagine that when you speak negatively about the church or about relationship with God or even other people's relationships with God, that it's going to be edifying in any way whatsoever. The only thing that it's going to do is pull yourself away and pull others away with you. Why? Because people don't think things through, they just follow. One of my favorite sayings is this, that sheep follow sheep even when they've heard the shepherd's voice.

[24:37] Let that sink in. That sheep follow sheep even when they've heard the shepherd's voice. People don't make decisions because they thought it through. The reason things become

fashionable and trends is not because everyone's thinking through, well, wouldn't a flowery jacket look nice on me?

They're not thinking about that, they're just thinking everybody else has one, I'm going to have one as well. Like when those big sunglasses came out a couple of years ago for women, these sort of big round ones, no one's thinking, you know, she looks good in them, I'll look good in them as well. They don't think it through, they just think, well, these are the trend, I'll just follow it through. The idea that believers are somehow intellectually better or somehow smarter at thinking things through before they make decisions is just not true.

You make the decisions you do based out of fear, based out of love, based out of a whole load of emotions even before you get to thinking about them.

And I think that that's what leads us to Peter. See, Asaph comes to his senses by coming back to the sanctuary of God, by coming back to worship in the Word.

[ 25 : 56 ] Peter also comes back to his senses, which means what? Well, if you come back to your senses, it means that you are led away by not thinking about it.

Is that fair enough? That if you're having to be brought back to your senses, then that means initially you were led away by not thinking about it. So now we see this in Peter's denial.

Peter in Luke 22 is told by Jesus that Jesus would pray for him, but he will also be sifted by Satan. But his faith will not fail because Jesus will pray that his faith will not fail.

And then Jesus says, when you have turned again, this is Luke 22 verse 32, but when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. And this is what Jesus is saying.

Look, Peter, this night Satan's going to come. There's a particular kind of evil going to be attached to a very normal circumstance. I mean, what's sinful about sitting outside under a light?

[ 27 : 03 ] What's sinful about sitting with other people? There's nothing sinful about it. There's nothing wrong about it. But there was a particular temptation there that was so hidden in its normalness that Peter succumbed to the pressure of the crowd.

But then Jesus says, I'll pray for you that your faith doesn't fail so that when you turn again, you will strengthen your brothers. So Jesus knows that he's going to fall away in one sense, but he also knows that he's going to come back.

Why? Because Asaph, remember Asaph, though my heart may fail, God, you are the strength of my heart. Peter, though my faith may fail, God, you are praying that my faith not fail me.

Okay? So it's the word concerning Peter is the reason why he doesn't fail. It's not because Peter couldn't fail, but it's rather because the word of God said that he wouldn't fail.

It's not that Asaph couldn't fail, but rather the word of God concerning Asaph said that he wouldn't fail, and that's why he didn't fail. That's why it's important to be in the place of worship and the word.

[ 28 : 07 ] So Peter is sat down outside. Jesus has been taken into the house of the high priest, and there are others out there with him, all perfectly normal. And then he's recognized by a servant girl.

He's only recognized by a servant girl. And then he doesn't deny Jesus in that sense, but he denies that he is one who belongs to Jesus.

He's really denying his own identity as a follower of Jesus. Then he's recognized again, this time as a disciple, and he denies again for a second time that he is actually a disciple.

And then thirdly, he is recognized as a Galilean. And that's the worst one of them all. Why?

Because there's something wrong with Galileans?

No. It's a bit like saying, you're not from around here, are you? Right? In other words, the person is saying to him, I notice you don't fit in with the other people.

[ 29 : 15 ] You're not like them. You're a Galilean, and you're not from around here, are you?

Perfectly normal. Well, of course, Peter is not around here, and so for a third time, he denies Jesus.

So what's happening? Well, Peter denies that he is identified with Jesus as a disciple. He denies anything to do with his own discipleship as Jesus is taken off to the high priest.

And then Peter has to go into hiding. And how do you go into hiding in a place full of people? How do you go into hiding in a place full of people?

Well, the only way to go into hiding in a place full of people is to become like them. I'm not a follower of Jesus, like you. See, Peter knows exactly what he's doing in one sense, but he doesn't know what he's doing in another sense.

He goes into hiding by making himself like the people around him. I'm not a follower of Jesus. just like you're not a follower of Jesus.

[ 30 : 30 ] See, the crowd aren't identified as believers. They're not identified as disciples. They're not identified as belonging to Jesus. Peter is. And the only way he can hide from this is to deny that he's anything like them, that even though he is a Galilean and he's not around here, from around here, he's actually more like them than they think.

No, no, no. I'm just like you. In other words, it's only when he denies Jesus does he begin to have a place in the crowd. In other words, you can't actually have a place in the world unless you deny Jesus.

And by denying Jesus, that means deny that you are a follower of Jesus, a disciple of Jesus. A man by the name of Rene Girard died last year.

Very clever man. And Rene Girard says that this is classic scapegoating. And what he meant by that was this, that the pressure of the crowd is such that in order to remove the pressure, Peter turns on the same things they do.

Now, Jesus understands that he would do this. He even foretold it. So, Peter joins the crowd to identify himself with the crowd rather than with Jesus.

[ 31 : 54 ] But by identifying himself with the crowd, he identifies himself with those who are crucifying Jesus. It's the pressure of the crowd.

Here I am, on my own, as a believer, out in the world, and no one else around me are fellow believers. And then someone recognizes me as a follower of this person, Jesus.

What do I do? Do I succumb to the pressure of the crowd? Who knows? But here's something worth considering.

Did Peter actually know what he was doing? Because I don't think he did. Shocking as that may seem, I don't actually think he did. Why? Why? Why?

I don't think he did because it took the rooster to bring him to his senses. Make sense? In other words, it seems, doesn't it, that as Peter was sat there under the pressure of the crowd, that he almost sleptwalked into denying Jesus.

[ 33 : 01 ] that such was the pressure of the crowd, the sort of mimetic rivalry, as Rene Juraiba put it, the idea of becoming like the crowd so that I don't stand out, and having the same enemy as the crowd has so that I appear to be on their side rather than on the side of the one that they are actually against.

As I go through all of that, as I keep all of that in my mind, I am almost sleepwalking into denying Jesus. So did Peter know what he was doing?

I don't think he did. I think he did, but I don't think he did. And I don't think he did because when the rooster crows, he's reminded.

And the first thing he does when the rooster crows is that he weeps bitterly. I mean, he's crying his heart out. He now knows what he's done.

And the question is, well, did you not know what you were doing at the time of doing it? It's as if, it's as if that when the rooster crows, someone has shaken him awake.

[ 34 : 18 ] It's as if that when the rooster crows, someone has come along to him and given him a couple slaps across the face to bring him around. It's as if that when the rooster crows, he is brought back to his senses, finally realizing what he has actually done.

And so the reason we need to be back in the place of worship and the Word is so that we don't sleepwalk into denying Jesus. how easy is it for you to sleepwalk into dying tonight?

Well, it's very easy. It's very easy for you to succumb to the pressure of the crowd. It's very easy for it to happen. Why? Because whether you want to hear it or not, the decisions you make are not well thought through.

The decisions we all make are not well thought through. They have not considered everything. We have been taken away by perhaps our own emotion or our own feeling or the pressure of the crowd and the particular type of evil that goes with that.

So what's the answer? Well, the answer is that every single one of us needs a moment like Peter had where the rooster crows.

[ 35 : 44 ] And God has a particular way of putting those moments within our lives that bring us back to our senses. Perhaps this morning is one of them. Perhaps this morning the rooster is actually crowing for you and you're finally brought back to your senses.

Here's the exhortation and it's with a question. And I pondered this all week because this is how I thought about Peter and Asaph. And the question's this. How can blind men know that other men

see?

What? What? How can blind men know that other men see? In other words, they can't see with their own eyes to prove that other men can see.

They can't verify with their own eyes that they can see the same thing that what somebody else can see. So how do they know? And it seems that there's only one answer to that.

That they have to trust. There is only one way that you have to trust. How can blind men know what other men see?

[ 36 : 56 ] The only way they can know it because they can't verify it for themselves, because they can't see it for themselves, though they can touch and feel, though they can't verify it, though, completely for themselves, they have to trust.

And so this morning, you may actually be sat there, though you're back in the worship of God and the worship of the Word. You may actually be back here, not because you thought it through, as I said last week, but simply because of the pressure of not being here for so many weeks, and now you have to show your face.

In other words, it's not really well thought through. And so you really do need to listen to those who can see.

And those who can see are those who are close in worship and the Word. That's not arrogant. It is just the one vantage point that you need to be in in order for everybody else to see or to trust you that you can actually see.

Asaph couldn't see when he was not present in worship and the Word. Peter couldn't see when he succumbed to the pressure of the crowd. But God has a way of bringing his people back, back into the sanctuary of God, back by the rooster crowing.

[ 38 : 18 ] It's then that you begin to remember what God says. So this is the vantage point from which we see everything in the world clearly. This is the vantage point from which we actually see our own heart clearly.

This is the vantage point by which we see others backsliding and falling away, succumbing to the pressures of the crowd. Can it happen to all of us? Of course it can. It can happen to us really easy because we don't think things through as well as we think we do.

We succumb to the pressure of emotion and feeling and the crowd. There is that rivalry that where we want what they have.

So worship is spiritual, but it's also very practical. And so don't miss worship. Don't miss coming to the sanctuary of God and worshipping him and hearing his Word.

Don't miss that because your very Christian walk is at stake. Don't miss it lest you forget the God who you belong to and you forget the God who you are to worship.

[ 39 : 28 ] Amen.