

A Journey Through Darkness (Psalm 73) - Sermon by Kelly Larsen

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Psalm 73 takes us into the heart and mind of Asaph as he contemplates the apparent prosperity of the wicked versus the difficulties and lack of temporal rewards of those who trust in the Lord. He tries to reconcile his view of these circumstances with his trust in the goodness of God, succeeding only when he comes into God's presence. Read Psalm 73.

- Does it seem, at times, as if the wicked live without a care in the world? What are some examples Asaph used of the seeming prosperity of the wicked? (ref Vs. 4-12)

It can be tempting to think that mature believers are not vulnerable to despair as they endure trials and times of suffering; that they aren't tempted to compare their struggle-filled lives to the seemingly carefree unbelievers around them.

- How do mature believers often express their doubt or frustration? How can this unsettle us and even lead us to push them away from us, rather than draw near to them in grace?
- Re-read verse 1. What in this verse would lead us to believe that Asaph is a person of great faith? Why would someone with a strong belief in God's goodness be especially prone to struggle with doubt, despair, or frustration when they see the evil prosper or the good suffer?
- Re-read verses 1 and 13. Was Asaph living in sin such that there was an obvious connection between his sin and his suffering? How do these verses point to the pattern of Asaph's life as being pure and upright?

Asaph took steps onto a path of darkness and despair when he began to focus on several temporal realities. He fixed his eyes on the temporal wealth of the wicked (Vs. 2 & 3) and on the temporal pain of the pure (Vs. 13 & 14).

- Re-read verses 2 & 3. Was Asaph's focus on the vertical (God) or the horizontal (the unjust circumstances around him)? What problems arise when we look at the wicked from our perspective rather than from God's?
- Re-read verses 13 & 14. The Psalmist believed he was living a Godly life, yet was "stricken all day long." He felt that all he experienced was pain and suffering, and he despaired. Do you ever feel like Asaph did, like God is treating you unfairly? Give examples.  
How can we be renewed in our strength by remembering that our pain and suffering are only temporal; that they are realities which are passing away?

The results of turning away (of fixing our eyes on this temporal world) are shown throughout the Psalm:

- Re-read verse 3. What sinful disposition begins to form in our hearts as we become focused on the prosperity of the wicked?
- Re-read verse 16. What is the Psalmist experiencing in this verse? How does the Psalmist's trust in God's goodness and sovereignty further complicate his thinking as he observes the prosperity of the ungodly?
- Re-read verses 21 & 22. What state of the heart was the Psalmist struggling with as he viewed life from the point of view of this temporal world? What is our temptation as we encounter brothers or sisters in Christ who struggle with bitterness? How can we graciously walk beside them and lead them to hope, rather than distancing ourselves?

As the Psalm progresses, the Psalmist shows us how he was able to escape from the despair of darkness:

- Re-read verses 16-20. How can remembering the ultimate end of the wicked help us to escape from the despair of darkness?
- Re-read verses 23 & 24. What help does the Psalmist point to in these verses which God provides to us as we face trials? How can remembering our eternal future help us to escape from the despair of darkness?

Eventually, the Psalmist's eyes were opened to the truth, but only when he entered the presence of the Lord:

- Re-read verses 16 & 17. Asaph went into the "sanctuary of God." What New Covenant truth gives us assurance that we no longer have to go to God in a physical sense (go to the tabernacle or temple), but rather that God has come to us (cf. Hebrews 4:14-16)?  
When trials come and things get difficult, to whom do you tend to go first?  
Having full access to the throne of God through Christ, why do we often fail to go immediately to God in prayer when trials come, but rather look to others for support or comfort?
- Re-read verse 23. In what way does this verse reassure us that we can rely on God's help when we cry out to him for wisdom in our trials?

The Psalmist begins to realize a new joy as he moves his eyes to God's beauty and worth:

- Re-read verses 25 & 26. When God Himself is our treasure and our hope, when He alone is enough, how does our view of earthly trials and suffering change?
  
- What does it mean to "store up treasures in heaven" and how would this shift in priorities change our response when our "earthly treasures" sprout wings and fly away? (ref Matthew 6:19-21)
  
- Re-read verse 28. Asaph is no longer focused on his circumstances, but rather on the beauty of God and on drawing near to Him. How can our focus on the beauty of Christ and His gospel give us joy and help us fight against envy, confusion, and bitterness as we face trials?

**Personal Reflection:**

Are you keeping Christ near to you? Are you allowing His truth to shape your heart and mind? How so?

Do you take your thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ or do you let them run wild? How can you grow in this?

What does it mean to "stop listening to yourself and start preaching to yourself?"