

SBC – July 20, 2025

Psalm 73:15-28 (NKJV)

“Perplexed Over the Prosperity of the Wicked – Part Two”

Psalm 73 (NKJV)

A Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 73-83 (11 successive Psalms) are attributed to Asaph.

Asaph was a Levite. He was a worship leader amongst the people of God in the days of David and Solomon (cf. 1 Chron. 15:17-19, 16:5-7, 25:6). It is also noted in the Scripture that he was a prophet in conjunction with his musical compositions (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1; 2 Chron. 29:30). So he had a high profile spiritual leadership role in Israel.

Slide # 1

Psalm 73

“Perplexed Over the Prosperity of the Wicked”

- v. 1 Premise: God is Good
- vv. 2-3 Almost Stumbled Through Envy
- vv. 4-9 The Apparent “Good Life” of the Wicked
- vv. 10-14 The Doubts of the Godly
- vv. 15-17 A Change in Perspective
- vv. 18-20 The Perilous Place of the Wicked
- vv. 21-24 Confessing Foolishness – Receiving Guidance
- vv. 25-28 The Glory of a Heavenly Hope

The writer begins the Psalm with the premise that God is good to Israel – to the pure in heart. That is the foundational premise of his faith. However, he wrestles with this as he looks at life. It is kind of like Ecclesiastes. When you take your focus off the Lord and put it on the world everything becomes distorted and unclear. And even God’s people are not immune to this happening.

His problem was envy (v. 3). The wicked seemed to have it so good without a care in the world and even seemed to die well (v. 4). In verses 4-9 he focuses on the seeming “good life” of the wicked and very honestly admits his human struggles in verses 10-14.

It got so bad that in verses 13 and 14 he says...

Psalm 73:13–14 (NKJV)

13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence.

14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.

As he reflected on what he saw it seemed as through the life of living for the Lord was counterproductive. It was all for nothing. Well, in this life (if that is all you are looking at) it might seem that way in a certain sense. The wicked had nothing but prosperity but he had nothing but troubles.

Of course, his vision was skewed at this point, but at the moment, this was the vein he was thinking in as he fell into envying the wicked. We pick it up tonight at verse 15.

15 If I had said, “I will speak thus,” Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

He had these thoughts but he realized he dare not voice them, because that would have betrayed all he had been about concerning the faith. It would have served to mislead the next generation following behind.

William MacDonald paraphrases the thought...

Of course, I never shared my doubts and misgivings with other believers. I knew better than to do that. ... So I kept all my doubts to myself, lest I should offend or stumble some simple, trusting soul.

Still, the inner anguish he wrestled with was palpable.

16 When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—

How could one make sense of the prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of those committed to serving God? It seemed backward. He couldn't understand it – and it was too painful for him. Clearly, he was very troubled by this in his own mind UNTIL...

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.

Here is the turning point of the whole Psalm. He was troubled deeply by the prosperity of the wicked until he went into the sanctuary of God. Then he understood their end.

The “sanctuary” is literally “the holy place”. This was either the tabernacle or the temple. This was where Israel met with God for worship in a very special way. This was where the presence of God was found in a very special way.

And it was there he was enlightened. It was there he UNDERSTOOD their end. And suddenly he saw that is the great issue in life. What happens in the end? That is the whole issue! He saw that in the sanctuary.

Spiritual insight happens in the place of worship – in the presence of God!

For almost 40 chapters Job went back and forth with his so-called friends and Job came to demand answers for what was happening to him. He couldn't understand it. It didn't make sense. Then God spoke! Then God revealed Himself to Job which left Job with his hand on his mouth in repentance.

Slide # 2

Job 42:5–6 (NKJV)

5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You.

6 Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes.”

Job got a greater vision of God than he ever had before and it drove him to repentance. No more demanding answers. Seeing the greatness of God was enough! It was enough to know God as God!

As Asaph met with God he gained an eternal perspective that he had been overlooking. Now he saw things from an eternal viewpoint and he understood the END of the wicked! He now saw its all about ETERNITY – not the here and now. That is a life-changing reality!

With this newfound insight Asaph says...

18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.

In verse 2 he wrote that his feet had almost slipped, but in contrast he now says that God has set the wicked in slippery places. They could fall at any moment! And then suddenly they are cast down to destruction! This defines their END – destruction!

Death makes the place where you stand slippery, for it dissolves your life every hour. Time makes it slippery, for every instant it cuts the ground from under your feet. The *vanities* which you enjoy make your place slippery, for they are all like ice which shall melt before the sun. You have no foot-hold, sinner, you have no sure hope, no confidence. It is a melting thing you trust to.” – **Charles Spurgeon**

19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

In their position of strength, the wicked seem to be so self-secured, but then death knocks on their door and they are brought to desolation “as in a moment!” The transition takes place SUDDENLY – in a moment!

Instantly, they are consumed with terrors! Instantly, they go from prosperity, no pangs, strength, no trouble, pride, abundance, no fear of God, being at ease, riches, to “utterly consumed with terrors.” That is the END of the story! This is their destiny – UTTERLY CONSUMED WITH TERRORS!

In a moment, they are brought to destruction, desolation, and terrors never to escape! It is terrifying beyond measure! Instantly they are like the rich man in Luke 16 who upon the moment of death found himself in torment, in the agony of fire desiring even a drop of water for relief, only to find NONE!

20 As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

The wicked live the life of a dreamy mirage, where nothing is real in light of eternity.

When you have a nightmare – what a relief to wake up and discover it wasn’t real. But for the wicked, they will “wake up” in death only to find out their experience on earth was all as illusory as a dream – and then discover their worst nightmare is now a reality for all eternity!

Building on this imagery, Asaph says that when the Lord awakens in judgment of them, He shall despise their image, which is to say God will have no regard for their form, that is, for their illusory existence as self-made people. This is translated various ways...

Slide # 3

Psalm 73:20 (ESV)

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

Psalm 73:20 (NIV)

20 They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

Asaph understood that the good life of the ungodly is really as fragile as a dream, and they will soon wake to the reality of the **destruction, desolation, and terrors** that are their portion.

-David Guzik

And yet another thought shared by Guzik is...

Asaph admitted that it *seemed* as if God were asleep because one could not always see His active hand of judgment against the wicked. Using this idea, Asaph knew that God would not always sleep in His patience toward the wicked, and one day He would **awake** and judge them; He would **despise their image**.

21 Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind.

22 I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

How sad that even God's people can get off track and get to the point where they no longer think spiritually. Carnality thinks very naturally – just like a foolish animal that has no spiritual perception.

This is honest confession. Asaph admits his earthly envious thinking was foolish and ignorant. He was like a beast in terms of reasoning and thinking at this point. Animals don't think spiritually! They have no God-consciousness. They just do what comes naturally!

Carnality functions like this! Just like a beast, they just think and act according to natural inclinations. Spiritually speaking, that is total FOLLY!

It is amazing how many intellectuals call themselves 'agnostics,' not realizing that this is the Greek word for 'ignorant.'

– Richard Wumbrand

People who operate on just a natural level function like mere animals. If it feels good they do it. God and His revelation do not govern them.

Slide # 4**2 Peter 2:12 (NKJV)**

12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption,

Asaph admits that previously he had foolishly just been thinking on a natural plane – and not on a spiritual plane. This defines carnality!

[Asaph] felt **foolish** that he had forgotten the obvious truths of eternity and God's justice. ... Asaph rightly observed that animals seem to have no concept of eternity. They live their lives for momentary pleasures, satisfying natural urges. When Asaph forgot about eternity, he was truly **like a beast before** God. – **David Guzik**

23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand.

Can we sing another round of Amazing Grace? Yes, Asaph went through this period of troubled foolishness and ignorance. Nevertheless he was still continually with God and God was faithfully holding him by his right hand.

God hadn't left him! He had almost stumbled – nearly slipped but he hadn't because of God's hold on him.

A story...

A Little boy & his father were crossing a River. FATHER: "Please let me hold my your hand.." BOY : "No DAD, I want to hold your hand! BOY: "What's the difference?" FATHER: "If you hold my hand and something happens you may let go, but if I hold your hand I will never let you go!

This is our Father God's positon. He holds us by our right hand and He will never let go. We might momentarily let our grip on Him go, but He will never let go of us! Even in our momentary foolish ignorance, we are still continually with Him, and He holds us by our right hand!

That never changes!

24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.

He wasn't looking to be guided by God merely through feelings, circumstances, or experiences, but rather through counsel. God's primary way of guiding us is through His Word! Asaph had absolute confidence that God would continue to guide Him through His Word.

And afterward God would receive him to glory! What a contrast. In verses 17-19 we see that the END for the wicked is destruction, desolation, and terror. In contrast AFTER this life the child of God is received to GLORY! The end for us is GLORY!

With his focus adjusted, Asaph now sees clearly! Living in light of eternity is what it's all about!



25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

This is a beautiful expression of a heart that finds its all in all in God! God is his passion! Having found the answer to life in God's presence this he finds all sufficient and all satisfying. This is both his heavenly hope and his earthly desire. He just wants God!


Slide # 5

"In reality, everything that is truly precious to us as Christians is in heaven. The Father is there (Matt. 6:9). Jesus Himself is at the Father's right hand (Heb. 9:24). Many brothers and sisters in Christ are there, too (Heb. 12:23). Our names are recorded there (Luke 10:20). This is our inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4). Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Our eternal reward is in heaven (Matt. 5:12). In other words, everything we should love everlastingly, everything we rightly value, everything of any eternal worth is in heaven."

John MacArthur

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26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

In our humanness, we fail, but Asaph found God to be the strength of his heart and his portion forever. When God is the strength of our heart, it will never fail! Two great cross references to this verse are found in Isaiah.

Slide # 6

Isaiah 26:3–4 (NKJV)

3 You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

4 Trust in the LORD forever, **For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength.**

Slide # 7

Isaiah 40:29–31 (NKJV)

29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might **He increases strength.**

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall,

31 But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

The priests and Levites enjoyed the privileged status of having the LORD as their “portion” having no other inheritance in the land.

Slide # 8

Numbers 18:20–21 (NKJV)

20 Then the LORD said to Aaron: “You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; **I am your portion and your inheritance** among the children of Israel.

21 “Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the **tithes in Israel as an inheritance** in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

As a Levite, Asaph was in that category. However, Asaph was thinking way beyond God’s provision in this life. He said God is “my portion forever.” He saw God as all he would ever need for all eternity. God was his portion forever!

27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, That I may declare all Your works.

Here is the conclusion of the matter. Verse 27 brings out the destiny of the ungodly. They are far from God and they will perish in their spiritual harlotry – unfaithfulness to God.

God will destroy all those who forsake Him for other lovers! Many are those who exchange God for what they can get out of this life. Really SELF is their God! Their end is DESTRUCTION! They have no hope beyond this life!

In contrast, Asaph says, “It is good for me to draw near to God.” The wicked are far from God, but he draws near to God. Asaph’s visit to the sanctuary of God was life-changing. It brought his whole life back into right focus. It gave him understanding in keeping with an eternal perspective. It showed him that the real treasure in life is God Himself and His presence.

Thus, Asaph declares that he has put his trust in the Lord GOD (Adonia/YHWH) and vows to declare all God’s works. He now saw the goodness of God and that, ultimately, in light of eternity, serving God is the only thing that really makes sense.

The ungodly impress each other and attract admirers, but they don’t have God’s presence with them. The Lord upholds the righteous but casts down the wicked (v. 18). The righteous are guided by God’s truth (v. 24), but the ungodly are deluded by their own fantasies. The destiny of the true believers is glory (v. 24), but the destiny of the unbelievers is destruction (vv. 19, 27). – **Warren Wiersbe**

Folly lives for the moment. Wisdom lives in light of eternity. Folly is envious of the wicked in their momentary prosperity. In contrast wisdom TRUSTS God for time and eternity. As Asaph came to see: “God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (v. 26)

May God continue to guide us with His counsel and afterward receive us into glory. Indeed, God is GOOD to His people!