

Yahweh, the Almighty God of Israel, is with us
"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
and shew my people their transgression,
and the house of Jacob their sins." Isaiah 58:1

The Psalms

Study Prayerfully & Study Carefully

Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph

1. Suffering / Well-Being

Human suffering is one of the most difficult things to understand; particularly when it comes to a faithful follower of God. It is not too difficult to accept the suffering of blatant sinners, because everyone instinctively knows that punishment ought to come in the wake of sin. How often have you heard people comment when an extremely evil person suffers: *'They're getting what they deserve. It's divine justice at last.'* But it's quite another matter when a good person is laid low. *'Why him, he was such a good man, loved by the community, spent all his time doing good. Why did God - if there is a God - allow this awful tragedy to happen to him (or her)? Why? Why? Why?'*

The Prosperity of the Wicked

What makes the acceptance of trouble, pain and death even more difficult to understand is when one considers the apparent **well-being and prosperity of the wicked**. Millions of blatantly wicked people live in the lap of luxury, seemingly oblivious to the troubles around them and without a care in the world. Listen to the Psalmist's thoughts on this dilemma. He raises several important issues which sooner or later you will begin to think about.

2. Yahweh's Goodness

Most Bible students know that the LORD God of Israel blesses the upright and punishes the wicked. (Deuteronomy chapter 28) spells out this message again and again in awesome detail. Go ahead and read that chapter. The Psalmist agrees with it when he writes:

Psalm 73: 1: ***"Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."***

3. The Sinner's Prosperity

But a seemingly inexplicable problem then presents itself. The Psalmist now witnesses the **prosperity of the wicked**. Indeed they appear to him to be better off than the righteous. Day after day he notes how that faithful believers suffer poverty, sickness and pain; whilst the blatant sinner grew rich on the spoils of evil. This paradox staggered his understanding. It just didn't make sense. It didn't seem to match the message of (Deuteronomy 28). The good were perishing and the evil were flourishing. What was wrong? The Psalmist almost gave up his faith. Here are his words:

Psalm 73: 2: ***“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.
3: For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4: For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.
5: They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.
6: Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.
7: Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.
8: They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.
9: They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.”***

4. Evil Trend Setters

As if the sinner's prosperity were not enough to doubt the fairness of God or the truth of His Word, the Psalmist considers yet another dilemma, the **fame** and **influence** of evil men. Multitudes follow them. Their wicked deeds are copied by multitudes. No one seems to know - or care - whether the Almighty approves or not. Sin has become fashionable and the path of righteousness has become a social joke! Does God know what's happening? And if He does, can He do anything to stop the evil that is swamping society?

Psalm 73: 10: *“Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.
11: And they say, **How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?**
12: **Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.”***

5. A Difficult Question

And so the Psalmist muses on the dilemma of the prosperity of the wicked on the one hand and the sufferings of the righteous on the other. Where then is the benefit in serving God? Could it be that his faith was a painful, pointless and fruitless exercise? It is a question that staggered the Psalmist - all day - every day. It is a question that puzzles people to this very day. Perhaps even you have wondered about it!

Psalm 73: 13: *“Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence.
14: For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.
15: If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.
16: **When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.”***

6. The Judgment

Then Yahweh opened the Psalmist's eyes; opened them to a stunning fact which no one can afford to ignore. It was this, that what we humans call ‘**prosperity**’ (wealth, fame, popularity, possessions etc.) are not the end-all of human existence. They are transient. There is something ahead awaiting every soul on earth - **the Judgment!** Yahweh led the Psalmist into the **sanctuary**; into the very **courthouse of the universe** and gave him a preview of the approaching **Day of Judgment!** Oh what a fearsome scene was there displayed!

In a flash the psalmist's eyes were opened to a truth which comparatively few people on earth appreciate; that the **Day of Judgment is coming!** And only then will we know the benefits of righteousness and the terrors awaiting the blatant sinner. The Psalmist awakes to this truth as though from a dream; for now he knows why God allows the sinner their short time of enjoyment, vanity and luxury. For soon it will all end. It will end in their total destruction. **They will be utterly consumed with terrors!**

Psalm 73: 17: *“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.
18: Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: **thou castedst them down into destruction.**
19: **How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.**
20: *As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.”**

See **A Voice In The Wilderness - Canada** Lesson on **The Judgment**.

7. Guilty Conscience

When the awful horror of the final **Judgment** burst upon his view, the Psalmist is gripped with a sense of shame at ever having doubted the Almighty's justice. He had acted like a beast of the field which is totally ignorant of its Master's plans. He exclaims:

Psalm 73: 21: *"Thus my heart was grieved, **and I was pricked in my reins.**
22: **So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.**"*

In other words, 'I feel guilty and ashamed of myself. I feel like an ignorant fool, having totally misjudged the issue; having secretly thought that the LORD God was turning a blind eye to blasphemy, disobedience and blatant sin; that He was ignoring the efforts of His true followers to walk in the pathway of righteousness. How wrong was I, how wrong, how wrong!' The message of Psalm 37 (by king David) is exactly the same.

Psalm 37: 1: *"**Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.**
2: **For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb...**
9: *For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.*
10: *For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.*
11: **But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace...**
28: *For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.*
29: *The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever."**

8. A True Ally

Obedient believers are never alone in this world. Friends may forsake them, relatives may forget, hard times may come, poverty may hammer on the door, sickness may sadden, but Yahweh is always close to His children. **He never abandons His faithful servants.** He may allow us to go through the fire, but He is there with us in the flames. And only when the great **Day of Judgment** arrives and the eternal verdict is heard, will the true rewards of the righteous become manifest. We have this assurance on the Word of the Almighty God. It can never fail.

Psalm 37: 17: *"For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.*
18: **The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.**
19: *They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.*
20: *But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away."*

9. Yahweh my Strength and Provider

Oh what divine assurances are contained in the Psalms! Here are faithful sayings which have stood the test of centuries - yea of millennia. Can we add our faith to that of the Psalmist? Are we willing to look beyond our present difficulties and, in spirit, enter the **sanctuary above**? We can, we must and we will. Let all who agree say **...Amen!**

Psalm 37: 23: *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*
24: *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.*
25: **I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."**

10. Conclusion

Psalm 73 began with doubt, but ends with absolute faith. The Psalmist (Asaph) has learned, probably by bitter experience, that the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel is true to His Word. On the great **Day of Judgment** He will reward His faithful followers and He will surely punish the wicked. Let all who hear (or read) take note!

Psalm 73: 23: *“Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

*24: **Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.***

*25: **Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.***

*26: **My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.***

27: For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.

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 thy works.”

Next time you hear of the untimely death of a righteous person, a true believer, a pillar of society, do not wonder, do not secretly question God. **He knows what He is doing.** Next time when you witness, or read about the flourishing wealth and apparent well-being of the sinner, do not behave like an ignorant beast and doubt the existence or the wisdom of God. **He knows what He is doing.** Make the Psalmist's words your very own.

- That the Almighty allows the blatantly wicked to temporarily prosper; but only till the **Day of Judgment**. Then they will meet their end.
- *“That though my flesh and my heart faileth: God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”*

AMEN!

In the Son's Name — For the Father's glory.

Elder: *Max W. Mader*

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