

The Cure for the Common Confusion **(Psalm 73)**

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PM)

Introduction

I checked earlier today and Bill Gates, the
2nd richest man, has 79.5 billion dollars.

If that money were all made into dollar bills
and stacked up....

It would reach the moon 7 times and back.

He earns 900,000 an hour.

If he were a country, he would be the 37th
richest country in the world.

Yet, listen to what he said in an interview in
March of this year...

“I agree with people like Richard Dawkins
that mankind felt the need for creation
myths....I think it makes sense to believe in
God, but exactly what decision in your life

you make differently because of it, I don't know..."

Years earlier, he said he takes a "scientific approach to why things happen and how they happen, but I don't know if there is a god or not...."

But he's not alone when it comes to celebrity views of God...

Listen to Jack Nicholson,

"I resist all established beliefs. My religion basically is to be immediate, to live in the now. It's an old saying, I know, but it's mine. I envy people of faith. I'm incapable of believing in anything supernatural. So far, at least."

In 2013, Jack Nicholson had a net worth of \$400 million.

Or listen to comedian George Carlin,

And finally, I've always drawn a great deal of comfort from Humpty Dumpty. The part I like the best? "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty

back together again." That's because there is no Humpty Dumpty, and there is no God. None, not one, no God, never was. In fact, I'm gonna put it this way. If there is a God, may he strike this audience dead! See? Nothing happened. Nothing happened? Everybody's okay? All right, tell you what, I'll raise the stakes a little bit. If there is a God, may he strike me dead. See? Nothing happened, oh, wait, I've got a little cramp in my leg."

Yet, when he died in 2008, his estimated net worth was around 300 million dollars.

How do we as Christians explain this?

When we see evil people do well in life, what do we think?

When you tell your children that it is important to go to church....

And they see all the fun that their friends are having by skipping church?

How do we explain that?

When your neighbors who lives a sinful lifestyle gets the better car, better job and bigger house.....

How do we react?

I mean if you didn't give as much to the church, you could take that vacation...

That your relative got to take because she never gives to God?

How do we make sense of this?

Well, tonight, with the help of the Lord, we will make sense of this.

Because tonight, we will examine another famous chapter in the book of Psalms...

Psalm 73...

So, take your bibles and open with me to Psalm 73....

And we are going to learn from this great psalm an important truth about the world.

The famous saying is that nice guys finish last...

And if we accept that, we must also say that bad guys finish first.

And that is the problem that is facing the psalmist in this chapter.

This is a psalm of Asaph, who most likely wrote this psalm.

And Asaph was simply a music director.

He would lead others to sing other psalms and he also wrote some psalms as well.

And in this psalm, he describes his own struggle within his mind....

When he sees wicked people prosper.

It is the same struggle that Christians often experience when they see how the lives of unbelievers are so nice....

Compared to their lives.

And it is a real hard thing to understand at times.

We obey.

We avoid sin.

We give.

We help.

Then we watch the disobedient get rich.

.....The one living in sin get a new house.

.....The one who is stingy go on vacation.

.....The one who never helps get ahead.

And it can drive us crazy.

Make us lose hope.

Cause us to question our faith.

It can be a source of mental illness.

So, let's look for the cure tonight in Psalm 73..

And there is really only 2 parts to this whole psalm...

And that is how we will divide it up tonight...

The first part is Asaph's Confusion in the first 16 verses...

Followed by Asaph's Comfort in verse 17-28...

And none of you think I can preach 28 verses in one night...

But just watch...

Beginning in verse 1....

Let's first look at Asaph's confusion...

I. Asaph's Confusion (v.1-14)

1 Surely *God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart!*

This is the truth that Asaph knows.

God is good to his people.

This is the anchor of his soul.

Just like anchors are made to keep boats
from drifting away...

Truths about God are the anchors of our life
that keep us steady in the storms.

And look how he defines who are God's
people.

Those who are pure in heart.

And this is a constant truth in the Bible...

A right relationship with God is always a
heart issue...

Rather than an outward display.

Not all Israel were God's people, and not all in the church are God's people.

The sure sign that you belong to God is a heart commitment and obedience.

And this great truth was what led him to the confusion that he expresses in the next 13 verses...

And look how he describes it in verse 2.....

**²But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,
My steps ^[a]had almost slipped.**

The psalmist is saying God is good,..

But me on the other hand....

I am not good, because I can't make sense of something..

And battles in our head eventually go to our feet...

Asaph almost stumbled.

And that is why our thought life is so important...

We must not let our thoughts become actions.

Instead, we take every thought captive in obedience to Christ.

Yet, Asaph had not done that and it led to more trouble.

And what thought had troubled him?

Verse 3..

**³For I was envious of the [b]arrogant
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.**

In the 1700s, king Frederic was having trouble with his eyesight...

And all the doctors were called in to come up with a solution..

Their discussion occurred in the kitchen, and one of the hired servants...

Was listening.

Suddenly, she asked, “Do you want to know what would make the king see better?”

Amused, the doctors said “what?”

To which the servant girl replied, “Jealously. When you are filled with envy, all things seem larger and better to your eyes.”

And that is so true.

Here, Asaph saying that he envies the success of the wicked.

He is so jealous in fact, that he had almost slipped up and decided to join them.

How many of us have had the same thought?

Is all our obedience worth it?

IS our denial of self important?

We see bad people getting ahead.

We watch the disobedient succeed.

And we are tempted to give it all up and join in their fun.

And this is the place that Asaph is at in verse 3.

And then he goes on to describe the wicked's prosperity in verses 4-9.

Verse 4...

**⁴For there are no pains in their death,
And their ^[c]body is fat.**

**⁵They are not ^[d]in trouble *as other* ^[e]men,
Nor are they plagued ^[f]like mankind.**

It would make sense that the wicked should suffer in death, ..

But Asaph writes that that is not always the case.

He sees the wicked die peaceful deaths.

Not only are their deaths pain free, Asaph struggles to understand why their lives are pain-free as well.

Their bodies are healthy, and they even seem to escape the trials of life.

The psalmist says that trouble never even comes their way.

And since they never seem to have problems, they get boastful..

Verses 6...

**⁶Therefore pride is their necklace;
The garment of violence covers them.**

Their confidence is seen from the outside.

Notice that their pride, like a necklace, is meant to be seen.

And they are so confident, that they will be violent if necessary.

Verse 7...

**⁷Their eye ^[g]bulges from fatness;
The imaginations of *their* heart ^[h]run riot.**

The wicked get everything they want, even their faces are fat with prosperity.

And though their mouths are full of every
food imaginable...

They are still empty enough at times, so that
they can speak arrogantly...

Verse 8

**⁸They mock and ^[i]wickedly speak of
oppression;**

They speak from on high.

**⁹They have set their mouth ^[i]against the
heavens,**

**And their tongue ^[k]parades through the
earth.**

We all know people who aren't Christians,
who are still humble people.

But that is not the case with everyone who is
wicked...

Some are so confident and powerful that
they can't wait to tell you about it.

Asaph writes that the wicked even boast
when they take advantage of others.

But even more than that, they boast before God.

And honestly, when I hear that, I become Asaph.

I wonder how God spares their lives.

Yet, he does.

Men will dare him to kill them.

And he won't.

And that is why I can never fully understand the mercy of God.

The truth is that he is allowing more time for repentance.

And Asaph reminds us that their tongue travels all over the place.

Someone said that the mouth of the wicked is like a snail..

Everytime and everywhere the wicked moves his tongue, he leaves behind his slime.

And all this boasting has an effect...

Verse 10..

**¹⁰Therefore ^[l]his people return to this place,
And waters of abundance are ^[m]drunk by them.**

To be fair, there is a lot of disagreement over this verse.

I think Asaph is just saying that God's people are drawn away....

By the mouths of the wicked...

They even go and enjoy the abundance of the wicked..

Even being tempted to the point testing God in verse 11...

**¹¹ They say, “How does God know?
And is there knowledge ^[n]with the Most High?”**

Even God's people begin to question, God's power and care when they see the wicked prosper.

And then Aspah sums up his confusion in verse 12...

**¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
And always at ease, they have
increased *in* wealth.**

The psalmist is puzzled, frustrated, and even tempted to leave...

Here are the wicked and they prosper in two ways, according to verse 12.

Health and wealth.

And we live in a day when those who claim to be preachers of the gospel...

Actually teach a health and wealth gospel...

And they succeed beyond your wildest imaginations.

You know why those churches and ministries succeed?

Because people have a desire for those two things.

They want health and they want wealth.

The true gospel is not the promise of health and wealth on earth..

But health and wealth in heaven.

Yet, people can't wait.

They want those things now, and they will listen to a false teacher and accept a false gospel....

And Asaph was to that point in verse 12...

Maybe, I should join the wicked in their prosperity...

Look at verse 13...

**13 Surely in vain I have ^[9]kept my heart
pure
And washed my hands in innocence;**

The psalmist had kept both his inside and outside holy...

The heart and the hands were clean..

But it all must be worthless when he sees the wicked getting ahead with a dirty heart and hands..

Asaph is not only living righteously, he is suffering too...

Verse 14...

**¹⁴ For I have been stricken all day long
And ^[D] chastened every morning.**

And this creates more confusion.

The sinners are singing

But the saints are suffering.

Asaph's world is so unfair.

Yet, to his credit, he doesn't speak out....

Verse 15..

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

Loose lips sink ships...

And Asaph realizes that he need to keep
silent to avoid more damage.

We all would do well to follow.

If it often said to “sleep on it” before making
any big decision.

And I think it is wise, to sleep on our
tongues at times.

That bit of information that you just have to
share is often not so important in the
morning.

Yet Asaph’s thoughts continue to plague
him.

Verse 16..

**¹⁶When I pondered to understand this,
It was ^[a]troublesome in my sight**

A commentator said about this verse,....

“You can hide a wolf in your garments to keep him from eating your children...

But in the meantime, he will bite you all day.”

And then we get to the turning point of this psalm...

Finally, Asaph's Confusion turns into....

II. Asaph's Comfort

Verse 17...

**¹⁷Until I came into the [r]sanctuary of
God;
Then I perceived their end.**

Like the sunrise, light begins to break
through the darkness...

In Asaph's thoughts..

And two important truths are taught in this
verse...

First, comfort came to Asaph when he got a
proper view of God..

Just like the people who thought that the
earth was the center of our solar system..

That seems natural from man's perspective.

The sun appears to go around the earth.

However the reverse is true.

The earth revolves around the sun.

In Asaph's world, he thought the world revolved around him.

Yet, he sees that the earth revolves around God.

And #2, Asaph was comforted by proper view of death.

There are two kinds of people in the world.

Those who live by what they can see.

Those who live by what they can't see.

Asaph had been basing his way of thinking on what he could see...

The wicked in prosperity.

Their health. Their wealth. Their pleasures. Their success.

But now when he is able to see what their future holds, his attitude changes.

Let us not pursue what we can see, but let us pursue the unseen things.

Lay up treasure in an unseen heaven.

Seek the unseen kingdom of God.

We are at a disadvantage because we can't see it all.

It's like finding the middle portion of a letter on the ground.

If you don't have the beginning and ending, it is nearly impossible to understand it's meaning.

Yet, we have God's word to see the end of the wicked.

May that keep us from the temptation of envying the prosperity of the wicked.

Then Asaph details the end of the wicked...

Verse 18....

**¹⁸Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to ^[s]destruction.**

Though God's valley road may be rough
and rugged...

It provide a strong grip for our feet.

The wicked may stand on the
mountaintop...

But it is covered with ice.

Verse 19...

**19 How they are ^[t]destroyed in a moment!
They are utterly swept away by sudden
terrors!**

In verse 4, Asaph saw no pains in their
death, but the real pain is the suddenness of
it.

Both unbelievers and believers sometimes
suffer through extended illnesses...

And we don't always know the reason
behind it..

But for the unbeliever, it is the grace of God
that he extends the offer of salvation for
months and even years.

However, often times, death is sudden for the wicked without a chance of repentance.

Such is the nature of death in this verse...

Sudden and terror filled.

Then verse 20...

**²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when aroused, You will despise
their ^[u]form.**

When the Lord acts to destroy the wicked, they are forgotten as quickly as a dream.

In fact, their lives are but the most memorable dream imaginable.

Yet, they will crawl out of the bed in a place of torment.

There is not better feeling than waking up from a nightmare in the comfort of your home.

Unfortunately, the wicked will wake up from a dream and be in a real nightmare.

Now that Asaph is getting a right view of the world, he confessed his error.

Verse 21...

**21 When my heart was embittered
And I was pierced ^[v]within,**

Asaph's former attitude had even caused physical suffering.

And jealousy can even do that.

We can literally want something so bad that it physically hurts.

And we get a proper view, we often realize that our jealousy may have caused greater pain had we got what we were jealous of.

Verse 22.

**22 Then I was senseless and ignorant;
I was like ^[w]a beast ^[x]before You.**

Asaph was acting like a beast before.

He was relying on his instincts.

He was measuring the world by what seemed right to him.

And sometimes, our sense of right is the same as God's.

But not always.

And I want you what he said was the reason behind his wrong view.

He was ignorant.

Specifically, he was ignorant of the end of the wicked's life.

But generally, he was ignorant of what God was like.

And I am going to preach here because this is an issue that bothers me when I look at churches today.

And it is this...

They don't value having a knowledge of God.

They think that knowledge of the Bible is not that important.

Now, let me say something, knowledge can be deadly.

The Pharisees knew all about God, but died in their sins.

But on the other hand, ignorance can also be deadly.

If you don't anything about God, you also die in your sins.

And many churches today and even in the last 50 years have valued knowing about God.

Theology is just the study of God, yet many see it as a bad word.

They think that theology is bad because it distracts us from more important issues.

Let me say this, you can't truly worship a God that you don't know well.

And how do we know God better?

Well, we study the Bible.

And I confidently say that the knowledge of the Bible is at an all-time low in the church.

Let that not be said of this church.

Let us not study say that we get puffed up, but let us learn the Bible so that we honor God better in our worship and our witness.

Then verse 23..

**²³ Nevertheless I am continually with You;
You have taken hold of my right hand.**

**²⁴ With Your counsel You will guide me,
And afterward receive me ^[y]to glory.**

Asaph is thankful that the Lord never deserted him in his doubts.

We may prove unfaithful in our thoughts, but God is never unfaithful in his care.

We may take the long way to get to the truth, but God never leaves us to take the shortcut.

Then verse 25...

**²⁵ Whom have I in heaven *but You?*
And ^[z]besides You, I desire nothing on
earth.**

May that be the cry of every heart in here
tonight.

The NT calls us strangers and aliens to this
world.

And that we are.

Nothing on earth can satisfy our desires,
except the Lord.

One of the most beautiful verses in all the
Bible...

And worth committing to memory.

Verse 26..

**²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the ^[aa]strength of my heart
and my portion forever.**

One of the great truths of this psalm is that our judgments are inaccurate at times.

It is only when we base our judgments on the truth of God's word that we find accuracy.

When Asaph relied upon his heart and flesh to understand the world, he failed.

Instead, he learned to turn to God for answers and found success.

Verse 27 serves as a final reminder of the outcome of the wicked....

**²⁷ For, behold, those who are far from
You will perish;
You have ^[ab]destroyed all those
who ^[ac]are unfaithful to You.**

Asaph affirms in his own mind what is the fate of the wicked.

Though the truth may not be pleasant, it is still a source of comfort in his mind.

And then finally, verse 28...

²⁸ But as for me, the nearness of God is

**my good;
I have made the Lord ^[ad]God my refuge,
That I may tell of all Your works.**

Asaph shares a valuable lesson here.

Nearness with God was the cure for his confusion.

And that only comes to us as we read the Scriptures and pray to the Lord daily.

The world will lead us astray in our thinking and eventually in our lifestyle.

Asaph almost stumbled when he listened and looked at the world.

And that is a constant temptation because we must be in the world daily.

We fight that temptation not by becoming hermits and withdrawing from the world.

We fight that temptation by filling our tanks with the truth of the Bible.

Asaph's ignorance almost led to disaster.

It is like the 3 men stranded on a boat in the middle of the ocean.

Two of them encourage the 3rd to drink the ocean water to cure their thirst.

He gladly begins gulping the water until he dies a few days later.

And becomes food for the other two who eventually are rescued a few days later.

May we all drink the living water of Jesus that is found in the Bible...

And cure our ignorance of God...

And avoid a certain death.