

# Psalm 73: Clarity

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Have you ever found yourself in a place that you never intended to be? Maybe your GPS stopped working and you have no idea where you are or how to get home? Or maybe you checked your bank account online and realized there was a lot less money that you thought? This happens at times in our spiritual lives as well. We are people of faith who suddenly realize that we have distanced ourselves from our Savior. We have become more susceptible to sin and unbelief and begin to question God in ways we never thought possible.

We find a similar situation in Psalm 73. 1 Chronicles 25:1-6 shows us that Asaph was one of the chief worship leaders who served under King David. He was a man of God. He was a person who the people followed as he led them into the presence of God. He was the type of person that we would think surely wouldn't have any doubts or struggles with his faith in God, but these are his words that have been left behind for us. It is a struggle like many that we will face at different times in our lives. Take a moment and read the verses below and then we will try to understand the type of circumstances that can weaken even the strongest hearts.

<sup>1</sup>*Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.*

<sup>2</sup>*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.*

<sup>3</sup>*For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

<sup>4</sup>*For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek.*

<sup>5</sup>*They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.*

<sup>6</sup>*Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment.*

<sup>7</sup>*Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies.*

<sup>8</sup>*They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression.*

<sup>9</sup>*They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.*

<sup>10</sup>*Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them.*

<sup>11</sup>*And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"*

<sup>12</sup> Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.  
<sup>13</sup> All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.  
<sup>14</sup> For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.  
<sup>15</sup> If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children.  
<sup>16</sup> But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,  
<sup>17</sup> until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.  
<sup>18</sup> Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.  
<sup>19</sup> How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!  
<sup>20</sup> Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.  
<sup>21</sup> When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart,  
<sup>22</sup> I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.  
<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.  
<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.  
<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.  
<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
<sup>27</sup> For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.  
<sup>28</sup> But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

Asaph states what he knows for certain. "God is good to Israel and to those who are pure in heart." Jesus said the same in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Amen. But who is really pure of heart? None of us. Only Christ in us allows God to relate to us as pure of heart. This was the fact the Asaph claimed, but in the very next verses he shows how his faith began to struggle.

It did not make sense that the godless could experience the "good" things of this life while the pure in heart were suffering and experiencing hardships. It affected Asaph to the point where his desires were being drawn away from God and towards the things of the world. Asaph says, "my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

In the following verses Asaph describes all the envious characteristics of the lives of the godless.

You are familiar with the feeling. You honor God by keeping your body pure, only to see the ungodly find their mate first. You are ethical at work and do your best, but still have not gotten the promotion. You are the obedient Christian teenager, but all the "wild kids" are the ones having all the fun. You are trying to follow the legal process to receive your residency card with no results, while others are using illegal methods and getting their papers quickly. It seems so unfair.

This was the situation as the reader comes to verse 13 and hears Asaph's desperate statement. *"All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence."* He begins to see holiness as a futile act.

So why do we live a holy life? The wicked are wealthy and powerful, and we have nothing. What good is this faith? It looks like they are blessed, we are not, and they don't even believe in God? This attitude was the central idea in the mind of the writer. Everything had been turned upside down. The things that were truly important seemed to be worthless and forgotten, and the things that were of little value showed themselves to be utterly priceless.

Until . . . he came into the sanctuary and the presence of God. It was only then that he saw things as they really were.

Being in the presence of God changed everything. But how was a man of God even susceptible to these thoughts? The same way that we are. At times, we neglect God's Word, prayer and fellowship with God's people. As we distance ourselves from the resources and relationship of God we find ourselves in a less protected place, more prone to attack or temptation. Like a young child who wanders away from his or her father, the child becomes more susceptible to danger and fear.

When in this type of spiritual wilderness, we see others that seem to have the security, peace or joy that we long for, and we start to want what they have. We are tempted to leave the way of patience, and obedience, and purity. We want our desires to be met immediately. We look to the easier way and covet those who have the "good life." In that moment their lives look better, until we come into the presence of God and begin to see things from an eternal perspective. In the true light of God, we see things as they truly are. The things that seemed important show themselves worthless, and the things that seemed of little value show themselves to be utterly priceless.

As verse 18 tells us, it is the godless who are truly slipping and about to fall to ruin. It is they who are mistaken.

Yes, we are often angry or frustrated at God and treat Him with sinful disrespect and unbelief, but praise God that He holds on to us (v. 22). It is like a young child and their father as they are walking down stairs. The father holds on to the youngster's hand and wrist in such a way that even if the young child's grip slips, the father stills holds him firmly. So it is with our God who holds us fast. Even in our faithlessness He shows Himself to be faithful.

In those moments God calls His children back to Himself (1 John 2:15-17):

*<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For everything in the world —the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does— comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

As we realize the truth of the situation God draws us back to the truth and the fact that we begin to see, *“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”*

It is the eternal versus the temporal perspective. It is the perspective of God versus the perspective of man. What seems to matter today will be but a mere vapor in the future. The purity of heart seems to be a waste of time with no benefit, but it alone bears eternal fruit and presents blessings in the midst of life’s struggles.

God’s ways are slower, humbling, and at times more difficult. They will not make you great in the eyes of the world, but will make you honored in the eyes of eternity. May we be a people who seek the things that truly matter. May we choose the life of simplicity, selflessness and sacrifice. In this place we will find the true riches that can never be taken from us.