

Making Sense out of Successful Sinners
Psalm 73

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August 19, 2018

Text Introduction: The book of Psalms contains every kind of emotion we experience. We should not be surprised by this. Modern music covers a range of emotions. In Psalms, there are exuberant songs of praise and long laments. There are songs that expose the sometimes raw feelings that we experience in life. And such is the case with the Psalm today.

We don't do this every Sunday, but if you are able, let's stand in the honor of the reading of God's Word.

Text: God is indeed good to Israel,
to the pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet almost slipped;
my steps nearly went astray.

³ For I envied the arrogant;
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴ They have an easy time until they die,
and their bodies are well fed.

⁵ They are not in trouble like others;
they are not afflicted like most people.

⁶ Therefore, pride is their necklace,
and violence covers them like a garment.

⁷ Their eyes bulge out from fatness;
the imaginations of their hearts run wild.

⁸ They mock, and they speak maliciously;
they arrogantly threaten oppression.

⁹ They set their mouths against heaven,
and their tongues strut across the earth.

¹⁰ Therefore his people turn to them
and drink in their overflowing words.

¹¹ The wicked say, "How can God know?
Does the Most High know everything?"

¹² Look at them—the wicked!
They are always at ease,
and they increase their wealth.

¹³ Did I purify my heart
and wash my hands in innocence for nothing?

¹⁴ For I am afflicted all day long
and punished every morning.

¹⁵ If I had decided to say these things aloud,
I would have betrayed your people.

¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this,

it seemed hopeless

¹⁷ until I entered God's sanctuary.

Then I understood their destiny.

¹⁸ Indeed, you put them in slippery places;
you make them fall into ruin.

¹⁹ How suddenly they become a desolation!

They come to an end, swept away by terrors.

²⁰ Like one waking from a dream,
Lord, when arising, you will despise their image.

²¹ When I became embittered
and my innermost being was wounded,

²² I was stupid and didn't understand;
I was an unthinking animal toward you.

²³ Yet I am always with you;
you hold my right hand.

²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me up in glory.

²⁵ Who do I have in heaven but you?
And I desire nothing on earth but you.

²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart,
my portion forever.

²⁷ Those far from you will certainly perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

²⁸ But as for me, God's presence is my good.
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
so I can tell about all you do.

Introduction: I am going to take a risk this morning and tell you something about me that I don't know if I have ever told anyone. I hope it doesn't change the way you think of me.

I talk to myself. A lot.

And I listen. Sometimes what I tell myself makes me laugh. Sometimes it makes me sad. Sometimes I argue with myself. Sometimes I ask myself for advice. Sometimes I listen; sometimes I don't. Really. I don't take my own advice. Sometimes I fuss at myself. I tell myself I should have done better. I could go on and on, but you either get the point or you don't. If you don't, I fear that if I continue, you might call for the Doctors to come.

So, let me just say that sometimes, when I talk to myself, I work things out. I start with a question and work it out. I finally arrive at the answer.

I think that is exactly what Asaph was doing. Asaph, apparently, was one of the chief worship leaders, under David. But, more than just talking to himself, Asaph is talking to God, and we get to listen on this very important and informative conversation. It's important because we have wanted to say the same thing to God but perhaps have been afraid to say the things Asaph said. So, I'm glad Asaph did. It's helpful.

Have you ever wanted to say to God, “I think I’m getting a raw deal here? And, what’s worse, look at that guy...he doesn’t serve You, God, and he looks like he is doing pretty well.”

This morning is my favorite kind of preaching. I am just going to guide you verse by verse through this text.

The Theology of the Faithful (Verse 1)

Asaph’s theology was good. God is good. A few years ago, somehow, it became popular for Christians to recite this to one another. “God is good all the time.” People would repeat back: “And all the time, God is good.” That’s good theology.

That is where Asaph starts and that is a good start, but Asaph recognized a dilemma in his theology. Sometimes it appears that our theology clashes with our reality. As someone stated not so eloquently, “How do you reconcile ‘God is good,’ with ‘My life stinks?’” Asaph admits to God here in song that this is exactly what he is feeling. He admits that he almost lost a grip on his theology. And because we sometimes lose a grip on our beliefs, it is good to consider Asaph’s thoughts. This leads us to . . .

The Temptation of the Faithful (Verses 2-14)

When our theology clashes with our reality, this is what we are tempted to do. We are tempted to . . .

- Envy the Sinner (3)

One of the interesting words here is the word translated “prosperity.” In the Hebrew, the word here is a word you know—shalom. This is what we want.

- Exaggerate the Situation (4-12)

Look at these phrases: easy, well fed, no trouble, etc. This is just appearance. This is not reality. But, because we are tempted to believe that it is reality, we then . . .

- Accuse the Savior (13-14)

I’ve kept my purity for nothing.

The Turning Point for the Faithful (15-20)

But, in his conversation with God, he reached a turning point. His turning point came in just the nick of time. His turning point came before he said it out loud. His turning point came as the result of two actions he was willing to take.

- Consider God
- Consider Godless

The Truth about the Faithful (21-28)

- Relationship and Obedience matter now.

Look at this list in verses 23-28.

- Relationship and obedience matter later.

So What?

So, how do we make sense out of successful sinners? Sometimes we don't, but know this—there are no successful sinners in the end. So . . .

Stay faithful. Don't let the appearance of the world confuse you.

We must love the Savior more than we love the sin.

It's the key to our testimony when the world crashes on those who are without God. ("So I can tell about all you do." Notice how that contrasts with what he was tempted to say about God in verse 15.)