

## Opening Words

Here's a reason why we get into trouble - we make decisions based on partial information, rather than the whole story. How can we stop doing this? Today we will learn how.

## 217 SS Psalm 73 – Part 3 – Asaph's Victory

We have been looking at Psalm 73, a psalm written by David's chief singer and musician, Asaph. It is one of the greatest psalms in the Bible, and we have discovered that it deals with a godly man who was discouraged. He looked around and saw the wicked prospering. They were proud. They were vain. They were oppressive, and they didn't seem to be bearing any consequences for their sin. They seemed to get wealthier, stronger, happier, and on top of their sin they were influencing God's people to join them in their rebellion. Asaph was tempted to give in and give up.

But then in verse 15, Asaph does something. He starts talking to God, and the turning point in his ordeal takes place. Let's see what he said. I'm reading from Psalm 73:15-17.

If I had decided to say these things aloud,  
I would have betrayed Your people.  
<sup>16</sup> When I tried to understand all this,  
it seemed hopeless  
<sup>17</sup> until I entered God's sanctuary.  
Then I understood their destiny.

Isn't that good? Asaph was right on the verge of saying out loud, "Oh, what's the use. The wicked always win, and there is no point in my staying faithful." But he didn't say it out loud. He kept his mouth shut because he knew that if he were to verbalize his discouragement others would hear and be discouraged, and it would be easier for them to give in and give up. Asaph knew others were standing firm, and he did not want to betray them. Asaph wanted to be faithful to God's people. Asaph chose to identify with the people of God who were suffering in those difficult days.

He reminds me of Moses. The writer of Hebrews said, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter <sup>25</sup> and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the short-lived pleasure of sin. <sup>26</sup> For he considered the reproach because of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since his attention was on the reward." Identifying with the people of God. That is what kept Moses. That is what kept Asaph. That is what will keep you and me as we are tempted to give in and give up. Others may be counting on us. Others may be looking to us. We need to side with God's people and not the wicked.

After Asaph made his decision to stick with the people, he went into the temple. He was still troubled and he said, "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight." Asaph has decided to remain faithful to God's people. Perhaps he was on his way to his assigned singing role in the tabernacle but his insides were still in turmoil. Have you experienced that – you are troubled on the inside yet you still meet with God's people? Your heart is aching but you have

decided to follow the Lord and to meet with God's people. I want you to know that whenever you do that, you have made the right decision. The wrong decision is not to meet with God's people. Too many Christians do that today. They are discouraged because there are so many problems and injustices in the world, or they have their issues they are dealing with. But the worst thing any of us can do is to stay away from God's people. The best thing we can do is to go into the Temple, so to speak, even if we don't fully understand and even if things are troublesome in our hearts.

And here is the reason – God will speak to us when we gather with his people. Listen to verse 17 of Psalm 73. "I came into the sanctuary of God and then I perceived their end." When Asaph made his decision to remain faithful, he walked into the sanctuary and then he saw clearly what was he needed to see. Asaph says, "I perceived their end."

Asaph had been operating on partial information. Asaph had been troubled because he had not read the end of the story. He did not have the big picture of how everything would end. That's why we get into trouble - we make decisions based on partial information. We get into trouble because we make decisions when we are in the middle of the story, and we can't trust God to work everything for good and bring us to the blessed end of the story. Do you want to see the blessed end of the story? Meet with God's people and let God speak to you.

How did God speak with Asaph? We don't know. There are three possibilities – first, it is possible that another priest came up to Asaph and had a direct word from God for him. It could have been something like, "Asaph, I know you have a troubled heart but hang on. Don't give in. Trust me. The wicked will not continue forever as they now are. It is worth it to follow me." If it happened that way it is also possible that Asaph might have said to his priest friend, "how did you know I was going through this?" And his friend would have said, "I didn't, but God did and he sent me with this word to encourage your heart." That would have made a big impression on Asaph.

A second possibility is that during the services in the tabernacle on the day that Asaph entered, a priest could have given a message, a teaching from the Law of Moses on the exact subject Asaph was troubled with. It would not be a direct revelation from God, but a general teaching to everyone which spoke directly to Asaph's heart. But that would have been enough. I am sure you have sat in a service, and the preacher has shared a message and you felt like he was talking right to you. That's the work of the Holy Spirit and that may be what happened to Asaph.

The third possibility is that Asaph had a vision and he saw the judgment that was coming on the wicked. We don't know which of these three it was, and it doesn't really matter. God can use various means to communicate important truths to his people. But the most important thing is that we make a choice to put ourselves in the position to hear from God. That's what Asaph did and that is what we must do.

Well, what was it that Asaph saw or heard. This is what verses 18-20 are about. Let me read them for you.

Surely You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.  
<sup>19</sup> How they are destroyed in a moment!

They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!

<sup>20</sup> Like a dream when one awakes,

O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.

The positions have been reversed! In verse 2 Asaph said he was slipping. But in verse 18, the wicked are in slippery places. In verse 6 mankind is plagued. In verses 18-19 the wicked are destroyed. In verses 4-9 the wicked are fat and getting fatter, which in the ancient world was a good thing. In verse 20 God despises their form.

Asaph continues his prayer and he sees the end of the wicked and says, “O Lord, I was senseless and ignorant like a beast before you.” Asaph is confessing to God. He is saying, “O Lord, when I was in my despair I was just like an animal, like a brute beast. I had no sense. I was completely ignorant.” But now Asaph sees four new things.

First, he sees that he is continually with God. He sees that he did not stray from the path, that he really could not stray from the path and that even though he sometimes thought and did foolish things, even though he did have dark moments, he was still with God. God had not rejected him and Asaph was still allowed to come into God’s presence.

Second, Asaph says, “You have taken hold of my right hand.” I get the picture that Asaph was starting to wander or that he had stumbled and was on his hands and knees. God came along and picked him up and took hold of his hand and brought him into his presence. God is like a shepherd finding lost sheep. Asaph was wandering. God found him and brought him back. God is the same with us. We wander. We stumble, but our faithful God will come looking for us and will take hold of our hand and lead us back into the center of the path he has for us to walk.

Third, Asaph says, “With your counsel you will guide me.” God not only brings Asaph back to the path, God not only takes him by the hand, but he also counsels him. He answers his questions. He gives him words of wisdom. He gives him the perspective that he needs to continue strongly in believing and doing what is right.

Fourth, Asaph says, “Afterwards you will receive me to glory.” Asaph saw the end of the wicked. Their end was destruction. He also saw his end – glory! He saw that it would be worth it to be faithful to the Lord God of Israel.

Those are four important truths for us to know when we encounter similar trials. We must know that even though we are in trials, we are still in the presence of God. God doesn’t cast us out because we are confused or hurting or troubled by what we see in the world. We are still with him. Don’t believe the lies of the evil one that you are not good enough. Believe the truth of God’s word that nothing can separate you from God’s love. We must know that God is intimate with us. He holds us by the hand. We must know that God will speak to us and counsel us. We must know that the end awaiting us is a glorious end.

Asaph concludes this very emotional psalm with some of the most beautiful words of praise found anywhere.

Whom have I in heaven but You?

And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.

<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 will perish;

You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.

<sup>28</sup> But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;

I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,

That I may tell of all Your works.

Friends, is this not what we want? Desiring God above all else, finding God to be our strength when our flesh and heart fail, experiencing the nearness of God and telling others of his greatness. How can we experience this? We must go into the presence of God and let him speak to us, and when we do this will bring us true soul satisfaction.