

Psalm 73: From Crisis to Faith

I Wisdom Psalms and Wisdom Literature

- A. Themes that are prominent in wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) include the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, the two ways, practical advice regarding conduct, and the fear of the Lord.

“No ill befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble.” (Prov 12:21)

“The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.” (Pro 22:4)

II. Psalm 73

A PSALM OF ASAPH.

Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
³ For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴ For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
⁵ They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not plagued by human ills.
⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.
¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.
¹¹ And they say, “How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?”
¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.

¹³ [**Truly**] All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.
¹⁵ If I had said, “I will speak thus,”
I would have betrayed the generation
of your children.

¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.

¹⁸ **Truly** you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself,
you despise them as phantoms.
²¹ When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
²² I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.

²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.

²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire
besides you.
²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my
portion forever.

²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you
shall perish;
you put an end to everyone who is
unfaithful to you.

²⁸ 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. (Ps 73)

1. What aspects of “prosperity” does the psalmist observe in the wicked (vv. 4-12)? Was this a hypothetical struggle? Modern day examples?

“There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”

- British Humanist Association (BHA) slogan for ad on 30 London buses

2. Describe the different directions in which the Psalmist is pulled as he observed the prosperity of the wicked (vv. 13-15).

3. What made the psalmist’s observation of the wicked “wearisome” (v. 16)? Where is the turning point? What happened? How often is God mentioned in vv. 1-17? What about vv. 18-28?

4. Did Christ ever have the same struggle of this psalmist? Why or why not?

“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31)

“...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb 12:2)

5. What reversals take place in this psalm with respect to “slipping” and prosperity/plight?

6. What aspect of God’s character and work serves as the Psalmist’s comfort (vv. 18-20)? Is this surprising to you? How should we respond to this?

“The final proof that God is a perfect moral Being, not indifferent to questions of right and wrong, is the fact that he has committed himself to judge the world.”

—J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 143

“This doctrine gives meaning to life.”

—Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment*, 72

“The Lord to whom my conscience is subject will be my witness that the daily meditation on his judgments (i.e., God’s sovereign plan) leaves me so speechless that no curiosity tempts me to know anything more, no sneaking suspicion concerning his incomparable justice creeps over me, and in short, no desire to complain seduces me.” - John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:5)