

“Overcoming the Envy of the World”

Psalm 73

Pastor Danny Lee

November 25, 2012

DECISION POINTS

I recently read through most of George W. Bush’s autobiography of his presidency titled, *Decision Points*. It was written a little different than most autobiographies. In his book, President Bush recounts significant moments and critical decisions he faced during his presidency. He weaves past experiences and influences into his accounts to show and explain why he made certain decisions. President Bush shares regrets over particular decisions, as well as explaining how other decisions were made with present information, not always knowing their consequences.

Decisions don’t get easier as you grow older. Instead, decisions hold GREATER CONSEQUENCE for yourself and those around you. A mark of maturity is the ability to see most of the consequences of your decisions before or as you make them. Wisdom considers the final end of a matter and makes decisions accordingly.

The struggles of life can convolute and impair our ability to think about the consequences of our decisions and to act on wisdom. One such frustrating struggle in life is observing the suffering of innocent people alongside the success of the wicked. Our sense of justice is violated when you see bad things happen to “good people”, and question why evil-doers seem to “succeed”. Our world prizes and exalts the very things God condemns. Sin is not simply tolerated, it is glorified! Evil and injustice appear to be increasing at a disturbing rate making you feel uncomfortable, unsafe and uncertain about your own life.

If you know about God and His truth you might feel confused as to why the ungodly thrive and the righteous suffer. As you struggle to be obedient and faithful to follow God, you feel yourself succumb to the temptation of envy toward those around you. Possibly doubts and jealousy have crept into your thinking, threatening to compromise your faith. The pressure to compromise is great; BUT THE CONSEQUENCE OF COMPROMISE IS EVEN GREATER!

Perhaps you are struggling in your faith or battling doubt and certainty that God is true. Maybe you are feeling it is “NOT WORTH IT” to follow and obey God because it’s too hard and sin is too easy. If so, then you are in need of gaining the RIGHT PERSPECTIVE. You are at a Decision Point this morning and need to reorient your life’s direction to the compass of God’s truth. Your heart is at a critical intersection desperately needing to be steered in the right direction. If this is your experience, you are not alone or left without proper guidance.

PSALM 73

*A psalm of Asaph.*¹

- ¹ 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.

¹ *Holman Christian Standard Bible*

ASAPH, *Worship leader & Psalm writer*

Psalm 73 was written as a PERSONAL RESPONSE to the struggle of why the ungodly prosper and the righteous don't. It was written by a choir director and worship minister appointed by King David. In 1 Chronicles 6:31-32, 39 and 15:16-19, Asaph is listed among the chief song writers and singers for the worship of God. Later in chapter 16:4-7 & 37 Asaph was specially commissioned by David to minister on a daily basis in God's sanctuary.

^{ESV} **1 CHRONICLES 16:37** *So David left Asaph and his brothers there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD to minister regularly before the ark as each day required,*

Later Asaph is found at the dedication of Solomon's temple. As Asaph and the worship team led in special music after the priests brought the Ark into the Holy Place, the glory of God's presence filled the temple halting the priests' ministry.

2 CHRONICLES 5:12 *and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters;¹³ and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud,¹⁴ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.*

From these passages we learn several facts about Asaph:

- 1) He was both King David and Solomon's music-worship leader
- 2) He composed and led the Israelite community in worship
- 3) Ministered daily in the presence of God at the sanctuary; and entrusted with serving the people of God
- 4) Witnessed the presence and glory of God first-hand

As a faithful, godly man who wrote several psalms (Pss.73-83), Asaph faced the same pressure of doubt, compromise and questioning his faith in God as you and I do. Just like Asaph, you might feel envious of the ungodly and doubt your faith. But like Asaph, will you turn into the presence of God to receive your answer? *From Psalm 73, ASAPH RECORDS HIS STRUGGLE AND THE SOLUTION TO OVERCOMING YOUR ENVY OF THE WORLD.*

I. SLIPPERY SLOPE OF ENVYING THE UNGODLY [vs.1-16]

^{HCSB} **PSALM 73:1** A Psalm of Asaph. ¹ 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.

As Asaph began to answer the question, “*How is God good if the wicked are always winning?*”, he begins with the character of God: He is GOOD (lit. “friend”), particularly those who live faithfully before Him. Whenever you question or doubt your faith in God, be careful not to make judgments on God’s character based on the perception of your experiences. Instead, start with the character of God to help you understand the significance of your experiences. Can you say in the midst of your experiences, without exception or qualification, that GOD IS ALWAYS GOOD? That is the test.

Asaph’s eyes wandered off God as he compared his present path of life to the seemingly prosperous path of the ungodly (repetition of “they, them, their” vs.1-12). The lifestyles of the rich and famous make Asaph jealous for their success. He pities himself, calling into question God’s fairness, while feeling resentful over what he was missing out on.

Do you have personal envy towards the ungodly? Do you have doubts, feel robbed or cheated by God for missing out on what the world has to offer? Like Asaph, have you taken your eyes off God and onto the “success” of others? Maybe envy has crept into your thoughts and poisoned your heart against His ways. “*Our problem is envy, and envy is criticizing God. It is a sin.*”² Envy criticizes and blames God for not having what you think will make you happy.

^{ESV} **ISAIAH 55:8** “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*”

Like Asaph, are you envious of the ungodly in the following ways...

YOU ENVY THEIR “EASY” LIFE (vs.4-5)

- “*They have an easy time until they die, and their bodies are well fed. They are not in trouble like others; they are not afflicted like most people.*” – The ungodly do not seem to suffer from the same troubles as everyone else; they seem to live above the frustrations of life while accumulating wealth, health and prosperity.

YOU ENVY THEIR LIFE WITHOUT CONSEQUENCES (vs.6-8)

- “*Therefore, pride is their necklace, and violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge out from fatness; the imaginations of their hearts run wild.*” – They have no regard for God and His commandments; they prize violence, following after whatever their heart desires. They intimidate others through fear, saying and do anything they please.

² James M. Boice, *Expositional Commentary: Psalms, vol.2*, 612

YOU ENVY THEIR GOD-LESS LIFE (vs.9-12)

- *“The wicked say, ‘How can God know? Does the Most High know everything?’ Look at them—the wicked! They are always at ease, and they increase their wealth.”* – They live life without God, even mocking and disregarding Him. They live life responsible to no one and seem to get everything they want.

If you find yourself longing for the lifestyle of the ungodly, guard your heart against such jealousy. Envy of the ungodly is like SLIDING DOWN A STEEP ROCKY HILLSIDE where there is NO SECURE FOOTHOLD and you begin tumbling faster toward the bottom.

^{HCSB} **PSALM 73:13** *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...*

Asaph’s depression deepened as he began to question the value of following God. He questioned the value of living with integrity; obedience to God seemed unattractive and wasted compared to the carefree life of the ungodly. His inward turmoil led Asaph to the PRECIPICE OF FORSAKING HIS FAITH and betraying his testimony.

If not for the GRACE OF GOD, Asaph would have rejected God being overcome with his envy toward the prosperity of the ungodly, and he would also have brought down the people of God with him. Many outstanding and “strong” Christian men and women have stood where Asaph stood. Some have held fast while others have tragically fallen. You hear stories or know someone who once seemed strong and certain in their faith, but who betrayed and forsook their Christian life. The damage done by these “fallen” Christians often leave others in a wave of despair and confusion.

“When you are next tempted, when the devil makes you forget that you are not an isolated case, when he suggests that this is something that concerns you alone, think of the consequences, remember the other people, remember Christ, remember God. IF YOU AND I FALL, IT IS NOT AN ISOLATED FALL, THE WHOLE CHURCH FALLS WITH US.”³

³ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial: Psalm 73*, 41-42

II. SECURE STEP INTO GOD'S PRESENCE [vs.17-28]

^{HCSB} **PSALM 73:17** ...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!

Like a heavy door swinging on its hinges, Asaph's perspective changed when he entered into the presence of God. He went from sliding down his slippery slope to **STANDING FIRM** upon the rock of **GOD'S TRUTH**. Truth is like a cube, and you must see your situation as a whole, viewing it from all sides. When Asaph did this and observed life from **GOD'S PERSPECTIVE**, his worldview changed. Asaph took his eyes off the ungodly and focused them back on God (repetition of "You", "Your" vs.18-25).

A lot could be said about the importance of coming into the presence of God with His church to worship. Simply put, you need to come often into the presence of God to worship Him and gain a right perspective. Both corporate and private worship are **INDISPENSABLE** to your ability to maintain the stability and perseverance of your faith.

*"Worship... Put[s] God at the center of our vision... It is vitally important because it is only when God is at the center of our vision that we see things as they really are."*⁴

Like Asaph, when we step securely into the presence of God we learn...

GOD'S JUSTICE IS CERTAIN (vs.18-20)

- *"You put them in slippery places; You make them fall into ruin. How suddenly they become a desolation!"* – Remember God's justice of the ungodly! The certainty of God's judgment is a reality the ungodly will not escape. The arrogant confidence the wicked have will suddenly be taken away when they stand before God. Their "success" will be forgotten as a dream. What they have and who they are is nothing; they are here today, but gone tomorrow.

^{ESV} **DEUTERONOMY 32:35** *Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.*

LUKE 16:25 *But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.*

GOD PERSONALLY PRESERVES YOU (vs.21-26)

^{HCSB} **PSALM 73:23** *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.*

- *"I was stupid and didn't understand; I was an unthinking animal toward You"* – Asaph confessed his sinful heart attitude which caused him to question his faith and sink into depression. His despair and self-pity made him ignorant of the truth of God; "Sin makes you stupid!"

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms, vol.2*, 613

But where he failed, GOD SUCCEEDED! Left to himself, Asaph would have betrayed his faith and forsaken his God. Yet God CONTINUALLY SUSTAINED him, guiding Asaph safely according to His will and glory. Where his strength failed, God was his stability and personal possession.

What is your hope against falling into these types of sins? Look to God and confess your weakness and reliance upon Him. Living life by your own strength, will fail you. The only hope and power you have to overcome your envy, your doubts of faltering faith is God's preservation of you (GRACE). This is why you need to PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOURSELF EVERYDAY. Your Christian life is not based on how well you successfully perform for God each day. It is a dependent relationship with Him that daily acknowledges His holiness, confessing your sinfulness and embracing His grace and forgiveness to live according to His powerful Spirit dwelling within you.

GOD'S PRESENCE RESTORES YOUR GOOD (vs.27-28)

- *"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."* – Refresh yourself often in God's presence. Your confidence and joy is found in knowing God is preserving and guiding your life. As you fellowship with God, you delight in knowing He provides exactly what you need; nothing can happen outside His control. Even through your failure, God is the One who sustains and preserves you. *"Divine goodness is not prosperity, but goodness."*⁵

CONCLUSION

As you hope in God's goodness, don't become fixated on the prosperity of those around you, particularly the ungodly. Instead, remember their certain judgment before God. It is a fearful place to be far from God; CLING CLOSE to Him. Just as this experience strengthened Asaph's faith and affirmed his trust in the goodness of God, so will your faith mature as you declare how good and fair God is towards His children.

^{ESV} **PSALM 34:8** *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*⁹ *Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!*

⁵ *Word Biblical Commentary, vol.20, p.232*

Overcoming the Envy of the World Psalm 73

SLIPPERY SLOPE OF ENVYING THE UNGODLY [vs.1-16]

You envy their "easy" life (vs.4-5)

You envy their life without consequences (vs.6-9)

You envy their God-less life (vs.10-12)

SECURE STEP INTO GOD'S PRESENCE [vs.17-28]

God's justice is certain (vs.18-20)

God personally preserves you (vs.21-26)

God's presence restores your good (vs.27-28)