

DOES INTEGRITY MATTER?

Psalm 73

Key Truth:

The good life is found near to God.

My brother in law Josh has done pretty much every job inside of the landscaping profession. He's an experienced, hard, and honest worker.

Josh recently took a job with a company that manages wastewater. When Josh was hired, he was told that he would start as a temporary worker but after six months move into a full time position with better pay and insurance. Josh took the job offered because the reward of being permanent would offset the cost of the six months of temporary work. Very quickly Josh realized that his boss was not a man with integrity. In fact this boss was the exact opposite. He was a bully who ruled with arrogance and threats while always looking out for his own interests.

When the six-month temporary period came to an end, Josh went into a meeting with this boss. Straight faced, the boss told Josh that there was no longer a permanent position available, and that he would have to wait and reapply if he wanted to do another temporary assignment.

Feeling back stabbed, Josh reached out for other opportunities inside the same company and was excited to find out that there was the exact same position with permanent status open at another branch. On paper everything looked perfect.

Unknown to Josh, his current boss and the new one had history, an unpleasant history. So instead of moving Josh over to this new position, his boss drug his feet making it so Josh not only couldn't get the permanent position, but couldn't get any position at all.

So there sat my brother in law, devastated. There was nothing he could do, Josh was thrown under the bus and used by this wicked manager just to get even with a business rival and gain position inside the company. Josh's family was left to struggle while his wicked boss experienced the 'good life'.

My brother in law worked hard for his company, he was honest, followed the rules and was repaid with wickedness. The wicked won the day, the godly lost. How can that be? Where was God? What good did it do my brother in law to be honest, hardworking and kind? Did it pay for Josh to be pure of heart, and to walk with integrity?

WHO WROTE PSALM 73?

The writer of Psalm 73 is a man named Asaph and he struggled with this same issue. Why do the wicked succeed while often God's people are oppressed? Psalm 73 is Asaph's struggle with this question that was as relevant then as it is today.

Picture with me for a moment Asaph standing before a congregation of people outside of the Tabernacle. The crowd quiets as he stands to share a testimony of God's goodness in his life during a time when he wrestled with this very question and he nearly slipped into a trap.

Psalm 73

A PSALM OF ASAPH.

¹ 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 stricken like the rest of mankind.
- 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 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.

ASAPH'S CONCLUSION (73:1)

Asaph begins with his conclusion. God is good to Israel and he is good to those who walk in relationship with him. Psalm 71 is his testimony that God is truly good to those who are pure in heart.

In verse 2 Asaph begins to share his testimony.

ASAPH'S SINFUL PERSPECTIVE (73:2-3)

- 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.

Looking around at the lives of the wicked, Asaph becomes desirous of what they had. In contrast to those who disciplined themselves to live a life pleasing to God, these wicked men and women were thriving materialistically. They were living what seemed in Asaph's mind as the 'good life'.

Listen to Asaph's description.

THE WICKED APPEARED TO BE WINNING (4-12)

- 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 stricken like the rest of mankind.

In Asaph's view, the wicked had the 'good life'. Their bodies were healthy; their tables overflowed with food. Security was not an issue in their lives. If they needed it they would buy it. The wicked didn't have hardships; instead they created them for others.

- 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.

Due to their success the wicked became fountains of hubris and pride. Scoffers, bullies, and slanderers, they strutted around ruling with an iron fist. While the godly seemed to be perishing, the wicked were pillaging.

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.

The picture that Asaph is painting here is one of pure hubris. Puffed up by their ability to manipulate, slander, and threaten their way to success, the wicked now shake a fist at God. "God doesn't even know. God doesn't even care", they say. What's worse is that due to their success, God's people are turning to them as an example for how to live.

Asaph seems to be screaming, "How can this be?" This is where Asaph's fixation on the wicked has led him. He is a man without perspective or peace. His last line presents the wicked on a platter... here they are, the wicked and they are just gaining ground.

WHERE HIS PERSPECTIVE LED (73:13-17)

¹³ 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.

Finally Asaph says that's it! I have strived to live a life pleasing to God, and what has it gotten me? The wicked are living the 'good life' while I am daily getting trampled. At this point his conclusion is that integrity does not matter, because it does not pay. It's the wicked who live the 'good life' not the pure in heart.

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.

Asaph realizes that if he had said what he was thinking out loud, and would have abandoned living a life of integrity, he would have followers. Those who continued to worship at the Tabernacle would have followed Asaph. This would have been devastating and Asaph knew it. So he refrained.

You can see the inner turmoil of Asaph. He is a man ready to abandon his convictions.

Until he does what? He goes into the Tabernacle. He goes to God.

A PERSPECTIVE CHANGE (73:18-26)

I believe that Asaph actually went into the Tabernacle complex. Being a musician appointed by King David himself, Asaph was very familiar with the workings of the Tabernacle and I think he actually enters the complex and meditates on God and His word. He draws near to God and lets God speak and answer his cry.

That is when everything changes. Its as if a dark room suddenly is flooded with light. Now Asaph sees, and his perspective changes. What was once the 'good life' is now a life teetering on the edge of disaster.

- 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.

Notice the complete change in Asaph's heart. He goes from envy to understanding. He now clearly perceives the position of the wicked. What is their position? They are in a dangerous spot. They are like a man walking down a sunny beach with no knowledge that a tsunami is quickly approaching. They are essentially dead men walking.

Their arrogance has led them to a place where they claim that God doesn't exist or that He doesn't care, but the reality is that they are a fraction of a second away from standing in front of him. Then what? Then His anger is roused.

What does God make of their job title, money, awards, status, or position in the community? He regards them as phantoms. Their ill gained success led them to a point where they arrogantly moved farther away from God. The cheating, lying, and manipulating produced nothing but a false reality.

Now what does Asaph realize about himself? He acted like an unknowing, unthinking animal. Ignoring God he instinctively followed the lust of his eyes. He believed that the wicked were winning because they were living the 'good life'. This shows that Asaph wrongly defined the term good. Initially he felt that he had nothing and the wicked had it all. Health, wealth, and money, they had what was good. But look how he begins to redefine 'good'.

- 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.

He says that God is there with him. The God of the universe is present in Asaph's life. Not only is God present, but God is actually guiding and directing his life. Those hardships, and those struggles are real but so is God's help to walk through them. And finally unlike the wicked, Asaph's eternal future is secure. God has provided for his today, his tomorrow and has given him a portion in eternity. That is good. Listen how Asaph says it.

IT IS GOOD TO BE NEAR GOD (73:27-28)

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.

DO THE WICKED WIN?

Lets go back to our initial question. Do the wicked win? Does my brother in laws boss ultimately win? No.

Psalm 73 clearly shows that although the wicked do have earthly success it is temporal. In other words their success is fleeting while their punishment is eternal. Their perceived victory is nothing but a farce, leading them to a cliff where they are certain to find disaster.

Does it pay to live a godly life with integrity? Should Josh continue to live a life of innocence, a life of integrity? Yes.

Not only does my brother in law have an eternal inheritance, but also his earthly struggles are pushing him towards a greater reliance on God. It shows him his true condition and his true need for God. Asaph realized God is his inheritance, God is his shield, and God is his strength. And in the end he realizes what the 'good life' truly is. It's a life lived close to God.

How should we live?

Should we just shrug the shoulders when he sees evil things? Do we just give in to the wicked boss, or stop opposing what is wrong? No that's that what is Psalm 73 is teaching but it is saying that we should live a life with perspective. Heavenly perspective.

Notice that there is no attempt mentioned by Asaph to escape the wicked. There are times when evil thrives and it affects Gods kids, but what are we to do?

Perceiving the end of the wicked we don't live like they do. We don't envy ill gained success. We strive for fruit in our lives that is eternal.

And this Perspective is what ultimately provides Asaph with peace.

Ok How?

HOW DO WE GAIN GOD'S PERSPECTIVE?

1. We go to God for our perspective.

2. We let God define what is good.

3. We model the 'good life'.