

TEXT SERMON

SERIES: *THE GOD WHO IS*

Message #5

“GOD IS GOOD, BUT...”

Scripture:

Psalm 73

“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.” (vs.1-2)

“It is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD.” (v.28)

Have you had the experience of meeting a friend and greeting them with the words, “Hello! How are you today?” And they responded by saying, “I’m fine!” You continued dialoging and soon they enumerated all the problems they had. They gave you an “organ” recital! However, as you concluded your conversation they added something like this, “But everything is ok now!”

In Psalm 73 we meet Asaph, the writer, and ask him, “How are things?” He replies, “God is good!” Soon thereafter he begins to enumerate the problems he is having. As he concludes his litany of laments we part to go on our way. He looks back over his shoulder and says, “But everything is ok now!”

In the first verse of Psalm 73, Asaph, begins the Psalm with this proposition: “Truly God is good” and concludes with the words “it is good” in the last verse, but in between he characterizes things as not so good! He starts out on the mountain top in v. 1 and ends up on the mountain top in v. 28 but in between he wanders about in the valley of doubt.

We all know something about that same kind of experience in our own lives, don’t we? We start off the day saying, “The Lord is good” and then something goes wrong in our lives and a cloud of doubt passes between us the truth of God’s goodness. We look around and begin to compare our situation with others who seem to be in better circumstances than ourselves. Eventually the doubt-cloud passes and we come back to the truth that anchors us and say, “it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD.” (v.28)

Well, here in Psalm 73, Asaph shows us how to get out of the quicksand of doubt and back on to the solid rock of truth. Let us step into Asaph’s shoes and walk with him on his journey through his valley experience and learn how we can deal with our own perplexities in life. Notice seven phases that he passed through in dealing with his perplexities:

I. THE COMPLEXES THAT HE HAD. v. 1-3

I don’t think that Asaph was a complex fellow but he did have a couple of complexes! He had an:

A. Inferiority Complex. v.1-2

“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.”

Is he saying, “God is concerned about the whole nation of Israel but He has forgotten

me?” He knew that God had been good to Israel as a nation but when he focused upon himself in relation to his circumstances, he was tempted to think that maybe he was getting the short end of the stick. Asaph may have been thinking, “I know God is good to our entire nation, but as for me, when I look around I feel inferior. I am just one among many.

We are programmed to look at things through “big business” eyes; to think that the many are more important than the few; that crowds are more important than the individual. It is rather easy for us to think that God thinks as we do. However, God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

As children of God we must remind ourselves that we are individually equal opportunity beneficiaries of the goodness of God. David did that and he said, “I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.” (Psalm 13:6 NIV)

And then, Asaph had another complex. It was a:

B. Poverty Complex. v.3

“I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” This was his central problem! The wicked appeared to prosper and when he compared his prosperity to theirs, they had more than he did. He said, “They have more than heart could wish.” (v.7) and “They increase in riches.” (v.12)

He got his eyes off of the goodness of God and on to the goods of the godless! Is he thinking, “If God is good, why do I seem to have it so rough while sinners seem to have it so smooth?” Were you ever tempted to think like that?

The “poor me” syndrome is a common malady for all who forget that “this world is not my home, I’m just passing through; my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue” as the old song put it. These were some of the complexes that Asaph had. Do we have them? Why did he, and why do we, have such complexes? The answer in part is seen in:

II. THE COMPARISONS THAT HE MAKES v.4-12

Excerpts from these verses reveal the comparisons he makes. He speaks of the wicked saying, “their strength is firm”; “They are not in trouble as other men”; “Their eyes bulge with abundance”; “they have more than heart could wish”; “they say, “How does God know?” They are “always at ease; they increase in riches.”

When we get our eyes off of God and look at things from the purely human perspective we tend to exaggerate. That is what Asaph did. The grass may look greener on the other side of the fence but it will be harder to mow!

The Apostle Paul warns us about just such an attitude with these words, “We do not

dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.” (II Cor. 10:12-13)

I have long ago determined that I am not living by comparing what wicked sinners have and what I do not have. I’m not looking around to see who may appear to be having it better than I am having it. I am determined to live my life for the One who gave His life for me. He knows what is best for me. He has promised to “supply all my needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Phil.4:19) I am not living for time alone – I am living with eternities values in view! That is the Christian perspective.

III. **THE COMPLAINT THAT HE RECORDS.** v.13-14

“Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

He was living a godly life; he was cleansing his heart; he was avoiding sin; he was meditating on the things of God; he was trying to do right and yet he says, “All day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

He does not tell us exactly what forms the “plagues” and “chastenings” were taking – it may have been sickness, family trouble, financial reverses, etc. Whatever it was he was being tested. Everywhere he turned he was running into cactuses – nothing was turning up roses for him.

All this seems to have forced him to conclude that life wasn’t fair. And he said, “When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me.” (v.16) The wicked seemed to be getting away with their arrogance, wickedness, deceitfulness, prideful talk and blasphemy. He said, “If I talked like they talk I would be considered a betrayer, but they apparently get away with it!” (v.15) “Life isn’t fair, God!”

Have you ever complained to God about the wicked of this world? Have you ever said, “Why doesn’t God step in and do something? Why doesn’t God stop the terrorists? Why does God let the wicked prosper? Why do bad things happen to good people?” God is going to answer all such questions. However, we must keep in mind God’s timetable. He says:

- “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.” (I Cor.4:5)
- “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever.” (Ps.9:17-18)

God’s ultimate purposes will result in the eternal good of His own and the eternal punishment of those who are not His own.

IV. THE CHANGE THAT HE EXPERIENCED. v.16-17

Asaph is about to experience a change of mind. He said, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me - until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end." (vs.16,17)

He wrestled with the seeming injustice of the whole situation. He tried to unravel the conundrum in which his mind was entangled. It didn't make any sense to him. It was oppressive. He was thoroughly perplexed UNTIL "Until I went into the sanctuary" By going into the sanctuary he means he came before the presence of God. The Hebrew word used here for "sanctuary" means, "sacred place, a holy place."

He went to the place where he was accustomed to meeting God. There his focus became vertical rather than horizontal; there he began to meditate upon God's person and contemplate God's promises. It was when he ceased looking around and looked up that he began to see things from God's point of view.

This is the most vital part of this Psalm, in many ways. This is where he began to turn from thinking naturally to thinking spiritually. His problem was that he had been thinking like the ungodly think, that is, within the limits of this life only, considering only the tangible, temporary things of earth.

Therefore, he had gotten himself worked up into a state of frenzy. But now, in the sanctuary, in the presence of God, he said, "I understood their end." (v.17) He saw the big picture. That is the great thing about worship, it focuses our minds upon God and our vision is broadened. We gain His perspective and we see life in the light of eternity and comprehend that which is of true and lasting value. We are no longer governed by emotions but by truth. We realize that the "things of earth will dim and lose their value"; that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15) but in the One Who possesses us! So, Asaph experienced a change of mind. Now notice:

V. THE CULMINATION THAT HE SAW v.17b-20

"Then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image."

He is now back on solid ground. He sees things differently. The destiny of the wicked is determined. Their end is not pretty. Think about it: the only "hellish" experiences the Christian will ever have are on this earth! Life may be rough now but the best is yet to come! The only heaven that the sinner will ever have is on this earth. Life for them may be comparatively easy now but the worst for them is yet to come!

Illust. A pastor read our Lord's parable of the rich man and Lazarus to a youth group. He read to them how Lazarus lay at the gate, the dogs licking his sores, while the rich man ate in splendor in his house. He said to them, "Which would you rather be, the rich man or Lazarus?" They said, "Oh, the rich man!"

Then he read on to where they both died and the rich man was in torment and Lazarus was carried to the bosom of Abraham. He said to them, "Now which would you rather be?" They said, "Oh, we'd much rather be Lazarus; we don't want to be like the rich man." That is what Asaph saw. And as a result, notice

VI. THE CONFESSION THAT HE MAKES. v.21-22

"My heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You."

Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, "He had acted as if he knew nothing, had babbled like an idiot, had uttered the very drivel of a witless loon. He had judged happiness by this mortal life – by outward appearances and fleshly enjoyments. It was but an evidence of his true wisdom that he was so deeply conscious of his own folly." (Treasury of David)

He did not stop with correcting his thinking, he went on to re-evaluate himself and his problem. He honestly faced himself. Now this is a difficult thing to do. He confesses that he was: grieved, vexed, foolish, ignorant, beastly. That is a pretty thorough repentance isn't it?

And then, finally, he comes to a conclusion about the whole experience.....

VII. THE CONCLUSION THAT HE DRAWS. v.23-28

"Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

What a change he experienced in the sanctuary with God! He now has his eyes back on God! He realizes that what he has in God is far better than anything and everything the wicked have. Notice seven eternal assets that he has:

1. He has God's presence - "I am always with you." v. 23
2. He has God's protection - "you hold me by my right hand." v. 23
3. He has God's precepts - "you guide me with your counsel." v. 24
4. He has God's prospect - "afterward you will take me to glory." v.24
5. He has God's person - "whom have I in heaven but you?" v.25
6. He has God's power - "God is the strength of my heart." v. 26
7. He has God's perspective-"For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; you have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works." (v.27,28)

Notice that he says in v.28 "But for me, it is GOOD." He is back on top! He says: "God is good to Israel collectively and He is good to me personally also!" The principle that anchored his soul and restored his spiritual sanity was the truth of God's goodness.

As he looks back now he can say, "I know that I was on slippery ground when tempted to envy the prosperity of the wicked. I permitted the wedge of doubt temporarily to enter my mind. However, I regained my spiritual equilibrium when I got alone with God in His sanctuary and saw things from His perspective. I am on God's side, He is everything to me, therefore, I will draw closer to Him."

CONCLUSION

Some of you may be passing through this kind of experience. Things may seem to be going all wrong for you and you may be having a hard time of it. You have been living the Christian life, reading the Bible, praying, working for Godand yet, like Asaph you say, "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning."

Asaph would tell us all to "never doubt when on slippery ground what you believed when standing upon The Solid Rock!"

And, "When you get down, look up!"

One simple question that I would ask is this: are you able to say in the face of it all, "God is good?" If we have complete confidence in the good God whose will is being "done on earth as it is heaven" (Matt.6:10) we know that "all things work together for *good* to them that love the Lord." (Rom.8:28)

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