

Psalm 73

Title: The Wicked and Their End

Author and Date: Asaph

Key Verses: Psalm 73:3, 17

Type: Wisdom or Didactic (Instruction)

Outline

- A. The beginning of the psalmist: slipping (verses 1-2).
- B. The beginning of the wicked: success (verses 3-12).
- C. The end of the wicked: sentence (verses 13-20).
- D. The end of the psalmist: strength (verses 21-28).

Notes

Title: "A Psalm of Asaph." Asaph may have been the author or musical performer of this psalm. Asaph was one of three men who led the music in David's day, both singing and playing instruments (1 Chron. 16:5, 7). Asaph was one of three choral leaders among the Levites (1 Chron. 6:39; 15:17-19; 25:6), the chief minister before the ark (1 Chron. 16:4-7, 37), and a seer (2 Chron. 29:30). He served in the time of David (Neh. 12:46). Twelve psalms are attributed to Asaph: Psalm 50 and Psalm 73-83.

Summary: Psalm 73 describes the true feelings of a man who almost loses his faith and falls away from God because he sees the prosperity of the wicked. The psalmist expresses himself with honest candor. He says what some would only think. The psalmist believes that God is good and he opens with praise (verse 1). But, he immediately changes to a note of despair and discouragement when he contemplates the prosperity of the wicked (verse 2).

The psalmist describes the wicked. He says they are prosperous (verse 3), in good health until death (verse 4), without trouble like others (verse 5), proud and wicked (verses 6-9), surrounded by friends (verse 10), blasphemous (verse 11), and rich (verse 12).

The psalmist, while focusing on the wicked, believes that it is vain to be righteous (verse 13), especially if all you get for it is trouble (verse 14). He does not want to tell others of his struggle because of the problems it would cause for them (verse 15). He thinks about his painful problem (verse 16) and finds the answer only when he goes to the sanctuary (verse 17). There, he realizes that the wicked are not as secure as they seem (verse 18) and that God indeed punishes them in a moment (verses 19-20).

The psalmist confesses that he is grieved about the matter, but he is not thinking right (verses 21-22). Nevertheless, he will continue trusting God and gaining strength from him (verses 23-26). He believes those who depart from God will be destroyed (verse 27), but he will make God his refuge (verse 28).

Verse 1: Note the use of “surely” at the beginning of verses 1, 13, and 18. This word is used (like “Nevertheless” in verse 23) to make a point in spite of the evidence to the contrary. Even though the psalmist is struggling, he is committed to God.

Verses 2-3: The psalmist definitely knows what is “good” (God is good, verse 1; and, drawing near to God is good, verse 28). However, in between these statements, he struggles when he sees the prosperity (peace) of the wicked. He is tempted to lose his faith like losing his footing (verse 2). Like Job (21:7-33), the psalmist seeks to answer the age-old question: “Does it pay to be righteous (verse 13) if the wicked prosper also (verse 3)?” Or, “Why does a good God allow the wicked to prosper and the righteous to suffer?” The other verses that speak of the psalmist’s struggle are: 13-16 and 21-22. For similar questions about the wicked, see Psalm 37 and Psalm 49.

Verse 10: “Therefore his people return hither” (KJV). Who are the people referred to in this verse? “His people” may be those who follow the wicked man. “His people” stay with him, drink with him, and benefit from his presence. He is popular.

Verses 13-14: The psalmist believes for a time that it is vain to be righteous if one can live wickedly and still prosper. He tries to live right and still he has trouble (verse 14). Some righteous people think this, but they are too afraid to say it.

Verse 17: This verse is the turning point in the psalm. The psalmist learns to put the whole matter of the wicked in perspective. He goes to “the sanctuary” (Psa. 20:2; 63:2) and looks at the “latter end” (the outcome) of the wicked. He sees God’s eventual punishment upon the wicked. He learns to see the wicked as God sees them. The word “end” (verse 17) and the word “afterward” (verse 24) come from the same Hebrew word (*acharith*). There is a contrast with the “end” of the wicked (destroyed) and the “afterward” of the righteous (received to glory).

Questions

1. Who is God good to (verse 1)?
2. How does the psalmist describe himself as he thought about the wicked (verses 2-3)?
3. How does the psalmist describe the prosperity of the wicked (verses 4-5)?

4. What is the attitude of the wicked (verses 6-7)?
5. How do the wicked use their mouth and tongue (verse 8-9)?
6. What do the friends of the wicked do (verse 10)?
7. What do the wicked ask concerning God (verse 11)?
8. How does the psalmist describe the wicked (verse 12)?
9. What further description does the psalmist give of himself (verses 13-15)?
10. What does the psalmist think about concerning the wicked when he goes into the sanctuary (verses 16-17)?
11. What does God do to the wicked (verses 18-20)?
12. What further description does the psalmist give of himself (verses 21-22)?
13. What confidence in God does the psalmist express (verses 23-24)?
14. What is God to the psalmist (verses 25-26)?
15. What happens to those who depart from God (verse 27)?

16. What does the psalmist do with God (verse 28)?

Applications for Today

1. God is good to those who are pure in heart (verse 1). Who can be in fellowship with the Lord (Psa. 24:3-4)? Who are blessed (Mt. 5:8)? How are Christians to call upon the Lord (2 Tim. 2:22)?
2. Do not be envious of the wicked (verse 2). What advice is given in Psalm 37:1? What do Proverbs 23:17 and Proverbs 24:19-20 say?
3. The wicked do prosper (verses 3-12). What question does Jeremiah ask concerning the wicked and what is the Lord's answer (Jer. 12:1, 14)?
4. God knows what is going on among men (verse 11). What does God know (Lk. 16:15)? What does the Lord know (1 Cor. 3:20)?
5. When we are troubled about the prosperity of the wicked, we must remember their latter end (verses 13-17). What happens in the end to the one who goes to the immoral woman (Prov. 5:8-11)?
6. The wicked seem to be happy and without problems, but God will punish them (verses 18-20). What is God's attitude toward wickedness (Psa. 5:4)? What does God say about the wicked (Psa. 50:21; Isa. 57:21)?
7. The psalmist made the journey from doubt to faith and from despair to assurance. When you are discouraged by all the wickedness around you, continue to worship God (verse 17), follow God's word (verses 23-24), be strong in God (verses 25-26), and trust God (verse 28). Who is the happy, safe, and blessed one (Prov. 16:20; 29:25; Jer. 17:7)? What are Christians to be (Eph. 6:10)?