

Psalm 73: Our Unfailing God

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Date: 20 January 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, and as we've been singing, Psalm 73.

Psalm 73, and I'd like us to look at the whole psalm, because you have to look at the whole psalm in order to understand what Asaph is saying. But if we take us out of text, or if we read again at verse 25, Psalm 73, at verse 25, where Asaph says, Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

When you tell a child that they can't get what they want, what response are you usually met with?

Well, in our house, our three-year-old, he struggles to cope with the word no. And he's always responded, he responds to the word no by just folding his arms and then pouting his lip.

And then he says, that's not fair. That's not fair. And I suppose I don't make matters any better. I probably make them worse by telling him, or saying to Daniel, that's life.

[1 : 3 5] Life's not fair. And you know, maybe you think I'm harsh by the reaction of some of you. You probably do think I'm harsh to this three-year-old child. But trying to explain to a three-year-old that you can't always get what you want, and not everything goes your own way, that can be very difficult.

It can be difficult to explain to a child that life is sometimes unfair. But you know, it wouldn't matter what age we are, whether we're three or 63.

It's still hard for us to understand why things don't go our way. It's hard for us to understand the whys of life, and why life turns out the way it does.

And sometimes we wonder, when we look at our own lives, and we think, well, what's going on? Why is this happening? Where is the Lord in all of this? And sometimes our providence, it seems so, you could say, unfair.

Especially when we experience the loss of a loved one, or we go through pain, or we encounter illness, or we're confronted with breakups or breakdowns.

[2 : 4 3] Life, it seems unfair, and to some extent, life seems so cruel. And often the things which come our way, they're often, through no fault of our own, or even anyone else's, we would just say that they're part of life.

They're part of the problems, pains, and partings of life. But of course, the root of all our problems, pains, and partings, the root is sin. But you know, when we think that life's unfair, and that everything's against us, we can often come to the wrong conclusion, that if no one is to blame, then God must be to blame.

Because if God is a good God, but he's failed me, then he either can't be that good, or he's punishing me for something that I've done. And you know, when we come to Psalm 73, that's exactly how Asaph felt.

Because in the opening verse of this Psalm, Asaph affirms that God is good. He says in verse 1, Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

Asaph confesses that God is good to his people. But then Asaph, he's saying, It doesn't seem that God is good to me. God is good to his people, but it doesn't seem that God is good to me.

[4 : 04] And you know, Asaph says this because the problems, pains, and partings of life, they just seem too much for him. There are things going on in Asaph's heart and life.

We don't know what they were. But these things have brought him very, very low. And Asaph was struggling because he could see that God is good to everyone. Even if they love him or not.

Even if they're Christians or not. But as Asaph looks at himself and his own struggles, all he can see is his own pain. He sees his own pain, and then he looks at everyone else, and they're prospering.

And Asaph is asking in Psalm 73, he's asking, Why? Why am I in pain when everyone else is prospering? And Asaph, he comes to the conclusion, he starts thinking, Well, life is unfair.

Life is unfair. But you know, as we go through Psalm 73, and as Asaph will reflect upon his experience, he realizes that life is all a matter of perspective.

[5 : 08] Life is all a matter of perspective. And what Asaph learned, and what I suppose what we have to learn, is that we have to view life with the right perspective.

Even though it's difficult, we have to view life with the right perspective. And so as Asaph walks us through this Psalm, we see, first of all, Asaph's personal problem.

Then we come to Asaph's proper perspective. And then lastly, we're given Asaph's promising perception. So Asaph's personal problem, his proper perspective, and his promising perception.

So we're looking, first of all, at Asaph's personal problem. Asaph's personal problem. Let's read again at verse 1. Asaph says, Now, Psalm 73, it gives us this little window into the soul of Asaph.

And what we see is that Asaph had doubts. He had questions. He had struggles. But the thing is, Asaph, he doesn't doubt the goodness of God. He struggles to understand why God is good to everyone.

[6 : 33] He doesn't doubt God's goodness, but he struggles to understand why God is good to everyone. And his view, his worldview, came from the fact that, as a Jew growing up in a home in Israel, and been taught the scriptures, Asaph would have heard from his earliest years that God is good to his people, Israel.

They are God's covenant people. And Asaph would have heard about this, that God is good to his people. And from the moment Asaph could speak, he would have recited what was and what is, for the Jews, the greatest commandment.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength. And that greatest commandment, it sought to emphasize that God loves his people, and God is good to his people.

Therefore, God's people must love the Lord. God's people must obey the Lord. But you know, as Asaph looks at the world around him, he wonders why God is so good and so loving towards those who don't care about him, and those who don't worship him.

And Asaph, he's puzzled as to why God is so good and so loving towards those who refuse to acknowledge him or worship him. And you know, well, you can look at it in our own context today.

[7 : 55] For many of us here this evening, we were brought up going to church. We had family worship. Many of us, we were taught to read the Bible. We were taught to pray. We were taught that God loves us.

We were taught that Jesus died for us. We were taught that we need to give the best years of our life to following Jesus and living for him. And we were confronted with this teaching everywhere we went.

We were taught it at home. We were taught it in school. We were taught it in Sunday school. But even though we heard it, we knew it, we read it, we grew up with it, we didn't doubt it, but we questioned it.

And for some of you, you remained uncommitted to it. Because even though you knew the goodness and the graciousness of God, God is not your priority.

He's not of the utmost importance in your life because, well, there are too many other things to attend to, whatever these other things are. And whatever they are, well, God is just pushed to the side and he's there if you need him.

[8 : 57] He's waiting in the wings. If there's anything that goes wrong in your life, whether there's a problem, a pain, or a parting, God will be there. But you don't need him just now. And sadly for many people, and maybe for you, you will admit that God is good to you.

But you refuse to acknowledge the goodness of God publicly. And yet here's Asaph. And he knows the goodness of God. He's been brought up with the goodness of God.

He's seen the goodness of God in his own life. And as a result, he's publicly following God. He's a follower of the Lord. He's trying to live according to the Bible.

And he's trying to seek to live a holy and an upright life. Asaph is trying to be a faithful Christian in a graceless and godless world. But it's all becoming too much for him.

Because you know, it seems by this point in his life, there came a day in Asaph's life, maybe more than one, when Asaph looked at the world around him and the community he lived in.

[10 : 05] And he began to doubt God. He even began to question God's goodness and God's faithfulness towards his people. That's why we can say that Asaph, he had this personal problem.

He had a personal problem. And he says himself in verse 2, that he doubted to the point that he almost stumbled in his faith. He says in verse 2, As for me, my feet had almost stumbled.

My steps had nearly slipped. But you know, my friend, the reason Asaph nearly slipped was because he had a wrong view of God. He had a wrong understanding of God.

He had a wrong perspective of God. Asaph thought, Asaph thought that God was only good to his people because they were pure and upright in heart.

Asaph thought that God was gracious and loving towards him because he was obedient, because he kept God's commands, because he walked an upright and faithful life before God.

[11 : 09] And you know, this is why Asaph doubts his faith because he's basing it all upon himself. Even though Asaph is trying his best, he's doing everything he can.

That's what he thinks. And yet God is still being good to those who disobey him, those who defy him, those who deny him, those who don't want to know anything about God. God is still being good to them.

The world is acting in violence and pride and arrogance and blasphemy against God and the people of God. And they openly and willfully reject God. They claim that they don't want him. This is all that Asaph says here.

And yet God is still good to them. And Asaph, he can't understand why. Why is God so good to the wicked? He's saying, I'm the one living an upright life.

I'm the one seeking to honour and glorify the Lord in the way I live. But why is God so good to the wicked? And in Psalm 73, Asaph is pouring out his soul and he says that when he considered the way the world was and how they just got on with life, he was envious of them.

[12 : 22] He wanted what they had. They had this happiness that he didn't have. Asaph, he says in verse 3, I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Asaph looks at the world and he sees their success and their prosperity and he's envious of them. He's envious of them because, as he says in verse 4, they don't fear death.

They don't even think about death. They have their wealth. They have their health. They have their strength. That's everything to them. They seem to be so carefree in life.

They're enjoying life and all the pleasures of life. They seem to be so happy. They're not plagued by disease. They don't struggle with sin. They don't worry about temptation.

They don't have any worries about their soul or thoughts or feelings. They don't have the burden of sin. They don't fight with the flesh. They don't have the temptations from the devil day by day.

[13 : 21] They just seem to get on with life and just keep going. And they keep doing the things they love to do. They keep going to the places they love to go. They keep enjoying the things they love to enjoy.

They keep being with the people they love the most. And because they keep going, they stay focused upon themselves and their own lives. And they continue in their own strength, enjoying all the pleasures of this life.

And as Asaph says, they become proud. So proud, says Asaph, that it's like a necklace that they wear so that everyone will see what they have and how well they're getting on in life.

Where they post, you could say, all the good things and all the great things and all the wonderful things that they have. It's as if they post them all over their Facebook page so that everyone else will see them and be jealous.

They become so proud of self that no one else matters. My friend, as Asaph looked at the world and the community he lived in, he said that their eyes, their eyes bulged with abundance because they have more than their heart could wish for.

[14 : 29] They scoff at others, they speak about others, they gossip about others, they exalt themselves. But more than that, he says, they speak against God.

They speak as if they're in control of their own lives. To the point that they say, as it says in verse 11, and they say, how can God know? Is their knowledge in the most high?

The world is saying, I don't need God. I have everything. I don't need a crutch in my life. I don't need anyone to help me. I don't need the church. I don't need Jesus.

You know, Asaph, he looks at it all and he thinks, well, this is completely unfair. Here's a man who's trying to be faithful to God and yet God is being so good to the wicked.

He's keeping them on mercy's ground. And Asaph, he can't understand why. Why is God so good towards those who have no interest in him? And Asaph, he's struggling with this.

[15 : 29] He's doubting that God is just and God is true. He has this personal problem in his heart to the point that he almost slips into thinking that he would be far better off being like them than following God.

Asaph's personal problem almost made him stumble into thinking that he would be better off being like the world than being a Christian.

But that was until Asaph was given a proper perspective. And that's what brings us to our second point. Asaph's personal problem brought him to see Asaph's proper perspective.

Asaph's proper perspective. Look at verse 12. Asaph says, Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease. They increase in riches.

All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. And you know, as Asaph considers how good God is to those who reject God, he says to himself, Why am I being so faithful?

[16 : 44] Why am I trying to be upright before God? Why do I bother? Why do I bother when the world just lives as they please and they do as they please and they go as they please and yet God is good to them?

Why am I so bothered about my sinful heart? Why do I care about what God thinks of me? When the world, they don't seem to care or even think about sin or their heart or even their conscience.

And God is still good to them. Asaph is saying, Why do I fight against temptation? Why do I struggle to live a pure and holy life before the eyes of a holy God?

When the world, they just enjoy all their temptations. They drink them in and they boast of them and yet God is still good to them. Why am I trying to live honestly, he says.

Why am I trying to be open and faithful to God's word as best as I can when the world, the world doesn't care about God. It has no thought of God's word. They have no conscience towards God or his word and yet God is still good to them.

[17 : 50] Why do I give my time? He says. Why do I give my time to going to church and praying and reading the Bible and worshipping God? By the world, they don't do any of these things.

They never come to church. They never spend their time reading the Bible or praying and yet they do all these other things that make them so happy and yet God is still good to them and Asaph is saying, why do I worry about life?

Why do I worry about my health? Why do I think about death? Why do I think about eternity? Why do I think about my need to stay close to the Lord? When the world, they don't care about death.

They don't think about eternity. They don't think about the Lord. They just enjoy life and live for the moment and yet God is still good to them. And Asaph, he looks at all that the world is and all that the world does and he asks himself, has all this been in vain?

Has all this been in vain? Is what I'm doing completely pointless? Does God actually care whether or not I live a holy life? Does God really care if I honour his word and live according to it?

[19 : 05] Have I been doing this for no reason? Because when I look at all my unconverted family and friends and neighbours and work colleagues, I see them living in sin and going their own way and they have no care or concern for God and his word and they seem to live happy, peaceful lives.

My friend, I don't know if you've ever stood in Asaph's shoes having tried to maintain all the disciplines which you know are fitting and right for a healthy Christian life and yet you feel that you're getting nowhere because you have, well, maybe like Asaph, you have few material possessions compared with others.

You struggle with your work, you have issues in your family, you have health problems, you have worries which seem to be overwhelming while those next door, down the road and across the street, these people who never go to church, they never read their Bible, they mock the things of God and yet they seem to live life trouble free.

And as far as you can see, God is good to them. He's good to them. My friend, have you ever stood where Asaph is standing? Have you ever considered the contrast between the happiness of the world and the struggles of the Christian life?

Well, look at what Asaph says in the turning point in verses 16 and 17. When I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task until I went into the sanctuary of God and I discerned their end.

[20 : 49] Asaph's personal problem changed when he was given a proper perspective because Asaph says that when he came into the sanctuary of God, when he came into church, when he came into church, he says, then, then I understood.

Reasoning and rationalizing all these things in his mind, it hadn't given Asaph this proper perspective. But the house of God did. The house of God did.

Asaph had been trying to understand everything in his going on in his life. He tried to understand it from his own perspective, not from God's perspective. But when Asaph came into God's house, he gained a proper perspective because the proper perspective which Asaph gained was an eternal perspective.

Where Asaph, he suddenly came to this fresh understanding of the ultimate end which is facing those who are graceless and godless. And my friend, Asaph, he ought to be an encouragement to us to be found in the sanctuary of God.

Asaph should be an encouragement to us to be in church whether on the Lord's Day or midweek. Because if we want to have a proper perspective on life, then this is where we need to come.

[22 : 13] If we want to have a proper perspective on the world around us and the way we should live our lives, then we need to be in church. We too must come and stand like Asaph stood in the holy place.

We too must come and worship God because God is a good God. And he's a God who knows what's best for us. He knows what we can cope with.

He knows what our burdens are. He knows what our struggles and our temptations are. He knows everything about us because he's sovereign over all of our lives.

He's in control of every province we go through. He's working all things together for good. But ultimately for his glory. And you know when Asaph went into the sanctuary of God, he was given a proper perspective.

But it wasn't just a proper perspective of the things of his life. It was a proper perspective of the lives of those in his community and the lives of those in the world around him.

[23 : 20] because when Asaph, when he entered the house of God, he left behind all those things that distracted him. All those things that made him doubt.

And when he came into God's house and bowed down before this great God of eternity and worshipped him, it was in that moment that Asaph realised the insignificance, the futility, and the emptiness of the world.

Because when Asaph came to understand that his salvation was of far greater value than all the prosperity, pleasures and pride of this world, that's what he found when he came into God's house.

Asaph had doubted God, but when he stood in the presence of God, he discovered that this world, it is vanity, but this God is from everlasting to everlasting.

Asaph realised that what he already had in his heart as a Christian was of eternal value. And when he had that proper perspective, Asaph knew that the world may enjoy what they have in this life, but it's only for a season.

[24 : 41] Their prosperity, their pleasures, their pride, it will only last as long as they live. It will only last as long as they live.

The goodness of God will only continue whilst they have breath in their lungs. The goodness of God will not continue for the unconverted past the grave.

It will not continue. And you know, that's why the emphasis of the Bible is always seek the Lord whilst you're on mercy's ground. Because the beauty of it is, you are still on mercy's ground.

My unconverted friend, God is so good to you. So good to you that you're still on mercy's ground tonight. And that he calls you to seek him. He calls you to seek him.

But the goodness of God, it will only continue whilst you have breath in your lungs. My friend, when Asaph was given a proper perspective, he understood that God is not only good to everyone, he is also just with everyone.

[25 : 47] Because this good God, he has appointed a day, as Asaph says himself, a day when he will judge the world. And on that day, says Asaph, the world will be destroyed in a moment and swept away in terror.

That's what he says in verse 19. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terror. My friend, you need to have a proper perspective on the things which are of eternal value.

Because it's all about perspective. What is your perspective on life? What's more important to you? This world?

All its pleasures? All the things that you hold on to? I don't even know what you're holding on to. Some of you, I don't know why you're not committed. What are you holding on to?

What is your perspective on life? Surely you can see that this eternal God who gives to us the promise of our sins being forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ.

[26 : 51] Surely you can see that that's what's the most important thing in your life. It's all about perspective. But you know, having a proper perspective also gives to us a promising perception.

And that's what we see Asaph confessing in the conclusion of this wonderful psalm. We see Asaph's personal problem, his proper perspective, and lastly, Asaph's promising perception.

Asaph's promising perception. Look at verse 21. He says, When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in my heart, I was brutish and ignorant.

I was like a beast towards you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold me, you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. And afterwards, you receive me to glory.

And so having entered the house of God, having come to church, Asaph was given a proper perspective. He was given an eternal perspective on the things of life.

[27 : 57] And you know, the first thing Asaph does is confess his foolishness. He confesses his foolishness for being so envious of the world. He confesses his foolishness for being envious of their prosperity and the pleasures that they enjoy.

Asaph confesses that he was completely wrong about his good God and that he had this completely wrong attitude towards him. And in many ways, Asaph confesses.

He confesses that he has failed his good God. He confesses that he has failed his good God. But the wonder of it is that Asaph's God didn't fail him.

And you know, this is what Asaph discovered from his experience and what we see in this psalm. Asaph discovered that despite all his changing circumstances, all his changing situations, despite what the world has and what the world enjoys, despite the fact that he faints and he fails, the God he worships is an unfailing God.

And my friend, that's what we need to be reminded this evening. that the God we worship, our good God, is an unfailing God. And despite all that we go through, despite all that is in our providence, all that is in our cup, our confession should be that of Asaph.

[29 : 26] Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. And afterwards, you will receive me to glory.

my friend, when Asaph had a proper perspective on life, when Asaph had an eternal perspective on life and all its providences, he was given a promising perception.

And you know, it was so promising that he continued in verse 25, he says, whom have I in heaven but you? and there is nothing on earth, nothing in this world that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail and they will fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. And you know, with this, Asaph was reminded that as a Christian, his relationship with the Lord is a beautiful thing.

it's a wonderful thing because he realizes that there's no one else like the Lord. The world may have all their pleasures, they may have all their things that make them happy, but the one thing they don't have is the one thing that's needful.

[30 : 43] They don't have the Lord. Who in heaven is like you? They don't have the Lord. And Asaph is thanking the Lord for his relationship with him.

And he realizes that by trusting in the Lord, he has this assurance that even though he may have to endure trials and temptations in this world, which may seem unfair and difficult to cope with, Asaph knew that the good God who loved him, the good God who watched over him, the good God who kept him, he was the good God who would guide him through all the difficulties of life's journey.

And then afterwards, bring him home to glory. My friend, Asaph's promising perception was that he knew even though his heart would faint and his flesh would fail, he would always faint and fail this good God, but his unfailing God, he says, would remain his strength and his portion forever.

And you know, is that not our hope and confidence tonight? Despite all that we go through in our life, all the problems, the pains and the partings, despite all of it, our unfailing God remains our strength and our portion forever.

Oh, my friend, when Asaph came to understand that his personal problems needed a proper perspective, when he had this proper perspective, he was given a promising perception.

[32 : 20] And you know, when he had it, it was then that Asaph confessed in the closing verses, what was more important to him in life. He says, behold, those who are far from you shall perish.

You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you, but for me, but for me, he says, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works. And that's what he does in Psalm 73. He tells of all his works.

Asaph confesses, and every Christian is confessing that it's better, far better to draw near to God, and to trust in the Lord, than to be far away from God, and cling to all the perishing pleasures of this world.

You know, my unconverted friend, have you discovered, have you discovered what is of the utmost importance in life? Have you discovered that drawing near to our unfailing God, and trusting in Jesus Christ as your saviour, it is the only, the only thing that will provide for you that true, lasting, eternal joy?

[33 : 44] Nothing else will give it to you. Nothing else will satisfy you, apart from this Jesus. Oh, I hope and pray that we will all be like Asaph, that having come into the sanctuary of God this evening, that having come to church, that we will have, or even leave here, we will leave here knowing that our personal problems, that we have them with a proper perspective, and see that by trusting in our unfailing God, we will be given this promising perception of the hope and the glory to come through faith in Jesus Christ.

Oh, my friend, who better to trust in than our unfailing God? May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, may we give thanks to thee for thy house, the house of God that gives to us this solace, a place, Lord, where we're able to come aside and rest a while, where we're able to leave the world and all its pleasures behind, and focus upon our great God, a God who never fails us, who is faithful and who does all more than we could ask or even think.

Help us then, we pray, to confess like Asaph that my flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never. Lord, bless us together, we pray, that we would go into another week, confessing our unfailing God and his faithfulness towards us.

Go with us then, we pray, keep us on the narrow path that leads to life. Do us good, and we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the concluding words of Psalm 73.

[35 : 52] Psalm 73 from verse 23. Psalm 73, page 316 in the Scottish Psalter.

And we're singing from verse 23. Nevertheless, continually, O Lord, I am with thee. Thou dost me hold by my right hand, and still upholdest me. Thou with thy counsel while I live, wilt me conduct and guide, and to thy glory afterward, receive me.

to abide. Psalm 73 from verse 23 to the end of the psalm. To God's praise. Amen. verse 23.

Never the land walk in valley, O Lord, I am with thee.

Thou dost be hold by my right hand, my right hand, and still thou holdest me.

[37 : 05] Thou with my counsel while I live, wilt me conduct and guide, and guide, and to thy glory afterward, receive me to provide.

whom I in the heavens but thee, O Lord alone, and in the earth, whom I desire, thy, beside thee, there is none.

My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never.

For of my heart, God is the strength and portion forever.

For lo, they that are far from thee, forever perish, shall, and that of hoarding from thee, O, thou hast destroyed all.

[39 : 28] all. But surely it is good for me that I draw near to God.

In God I trust that all thy words I may declare abroad.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.