

ASAPH'S CONFESSED SPIRITUAL CRISES

Psa.73

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. By way of introduction, in the following manner, we shall set up the Psalm for study before our exegeses section by section.
2. Psa.73 contains the record of Asaph's own confessed spiritual crises, which by his own admission was due to his own ignorance and doubts in misunderstanding God's moral government of the world relative to the prosperity of the wicked rich.
3. John Phillips, *Exploring The Psalms, Vols One And Two*, Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1988, says: "With Psalm 73 we cross into the third book of psalms – psalms which have to do with the sanctuary. We note that this is a psalm of Asaph, who wrote a dozen psalms. He wrote Psalm 50 in Book Two and the first eleven psalms in Book Three (Psalms 73-83)."
4. He further observes: "In Psalm 73 the psalmist returns to the problem which vexed David in Psalm 37 and which puzzled the anonymous author of Psalm 49. It is the age-long problem of the seeming prosperity of the wicked and the equally vexing and parallel problem of the suffering of the godly. The problem is taken up in each of the first three books of Psalms. Here it is finally resolved."
5. C.H.Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, "...this Seventy-third Psalm corresponds in subject with the Thirty-seventh...The theme is that ancient stumbling-block of good men...; viz. – the present prosperity of wicked men and the sorrows of the godly. Heathen philosophers have puzzled about this, while to believers it has too often been a temptation."
6. *Pulpit Commentary*: Psa.73 has for its subject the well-worn problem of the prosperity of the wicked. The writer in time past had been troubled with respect to it, and had well-nigh fallen away from God in consequence of it (v.2). But reveals that after a severe struggle his eyes had been enlightened on the subject, preventing him from making the mistake of publicly speaking out about his doubts to the detriment of others (vv.13-20). Then he contrasts his former foolish state of doubt, temptation, perplexity and danger with his present state of understanding, trust, and confidence (vv.21-24). He concludes the psalm

expressing an unqualified trust in the ultimate salvation of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked (vv.25-28).

7. In the first few verses of the psalm we see the psalmist as he describes the serious problem he had experienced as he moved from strong, confident faith in God and his goodness through doubt and envy due to his foolish failure to properly understand God's moral government of the world relative to the prosperity of the wicked rich, which almost cost him his faith in God.
8. With this we begin our exegeses of the Psalm.

II. DISCUSSION

A. **The general proposition stated in V.1 reveals that the psalmist had confidently recognized that the Divine administration is favorable to virtue, or that there is a God in heaven who presides in the affairs of men.**

1. Truly, God is good, only good, nothing else but good, to his own covenanted people.
2. He has not forgotten them; he does not abandon them; he is not indifferent to them.
3. He cannot act unjustly or unkindly toward them.
4. His goodness to them is beyond dispute and without mixture.
5. This the psalmist lays down as a fact, as his present and former conviction, of what must be true.

B. **Yet, in meditating on what he had mistakingly thought to be the facts in the case. That is, that while the righteous suffered unjustly, the wicked seemed to be prosperous and happy, to live without troubles, and die without any token of divine disapproval.**

1. It was out of this, his own ignorance and misunderstanding that his near faith-failure, envy, doubts, and painful perplexity, and/or confusion had sprung, and from it his temptations to dangerously publicly reveal his doubts to others arose, which he discusses in Vv.2-16.
2. In V.2, he says, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped."
 - a. Here he begins to contrast himself, when in his state of envy and doubt, with his God who is ever good.

- b. Literally, “And I”, who so confidently now trust in God, and believe that he is good, was formerly in a far different state of mind; I was so hesitating, so troubled, and so doubtful, that I had almost entirely lost confidence in him as a wise and just moral governor.
 - c. “My feet were almost gone” – I was just ready to fall.
 - d. “My steps had well nigh slipped” – as to his faith, he was like one standing in a slippery place, and scarcely able to remain upright.
3. In V.3, here he is as an heir of heaven having to confess to the sin of envy – envy “at the foolish,” or envy caused by the life-style of the wicked.
- a. How foolish it is to envy fools!
 - b. “When I say the prosperity of the wicked” – more literally, “the peace of the wicked,” their supposed freedom from trouble, their calmness in their life-style, their freedom from suffering, etc.
 - c. He saw what he thought was their present; he forgot their future! He saw their outward, public display or comfort, and overlooked their soul’s condemnation!
 - d. He saw and envied the material and temporal; he forgot about the spiritual and eternal!
4. In Vv.4,5 he underscores what to him seem to be two extraordinary facts:
- a. V.4, that the ungodly seem to be free from the terror of death. That is, that they seem to die in peace and at ease.
 - (1) That they have lived in prosperity, and that they die in peace.
 - (2) “But their strength is firm,” or “fat”; that they go down to death without the problems of wasting disease.
 - b. V.5, that they also seem to be free from the troubles of this life as other men.
 - (1) Literally, “In the labor of man they are not,” That is, they are exempt from the common burdens and troubles of humanity in general.
5. According to V.6, it seemed to the psalmist that **vanity** and **violence** are the hallmarks or trademarks of the unrighteous rich.

- a. That they wear vanity as an ornament, regarding it as a better ornament than any gold chain that any jeweler could ever provide them.
 - b. That injustice and cruelty seem to be their very clothing, being destitute of tenderness, sympathy, and sensibility toward others.
 - c. It seemed to him that regardless of the feelings and rights of others, they wanted to have their way, and achieve their own ends, even resorting to violence to accomplish it if necessary.
6. According to V.7, the psalmist had looked at the unrighteous rich, and thinking about how they live in the so-called “lap-of-luxury,” with even more than they could ever hope for, he is touched with envy.
7. In Vv.8,9, he has spoken of or charged them with being “corrupt,” –they rot above ground, as it were; their heart and life are depraved.
- a. “They set their mouth against the heavens;” that is, they are in their blasphemies against God himself.
 - b. The thought that there might be a God in heaven who will call them to account seems ridiculous to them.
8. In V.10 the idea seems to be that the psalmist has claimed that God’s righteous people must return again, and again, to the Lord, seeking his help on account of the persecutions forced to endure under the prosperous wicked.
- a. And by “waters of a full cup are wrung out of them,” he means: though beloved of God, they have to drain the bitter cup; that their sorrows are as full as the wicked man’s prosperity; the very last drop of pleasure of life is wrung out of them.
9. The questions raised in V.11, and the comment of V.12, are evidently those of God’s people of V.10: “And they say...”
- a. The facts that seem to be, as discussed in Vv.4-10, cause them to raise the questions of V.11 in their minds.
 - b. And to have such feelings about the ungodly as per V.12.
 - c. The “they” who thought these things would, no doubt, include the psalmist.
 - d. He continues to reveal his envy and his temptations regarding the problem as he sees it, as if to say: Look!

Consider! Here is the standing enigma! The stumbling block of faith!

- e. Here are the unjust rewarded and indulged; they deserve perdition, but increase in material prosperity!
10. Vv.13,14.
- a. Poor Asaph! He questions the value of holiness when its wages seem to be paid in the coin of affliction.
 - b. He confessed he could not seem to see he had gained anything by living in reverence of God, whereas those who lived without any fear of God seemed to him to have everything going their way.
 - c. It had seemed to him that he had cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocency without profit, because in spite of it, in seeming contrast to the wicked rich, he is plagued and chastened all day long.
11. Here in V.15 he acknowledges how he came face to face with the temptation to publicly voice his doubts to others and of the possible danger of the spiritual consequences to others if he did.
- a. Remember: He is talking about publicly expressing one's doubts such as he has discussed in this Psalm – doubts which he admits to being wrong about; doubts about God's moral rule.
 - b. To publicly express one's doubts about any spiritual concepts is never wise. When we have any suspicion of the possibility of being wrong, we should remain silent; the pulpit or the classroom is never the place or the time to express doubts.
 - c. It can do not harm to remain silent about personal doubtful concerns, and it may do serious damage to spread abroad our hastily formed opinions.
 - d. However, we are never to keep silent when and where and why truth demands that we speak out; it is only about things in which we are in doubt. See Gal.1:10; 4:16; 2Tim.3:16-4:5.
12. As per V.16, "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me."
- a. When I endeavored to comprehend this whole problem, all that was involved in it, "it was too painful for me," (marg. "It was labor in mine eyes"); a burden; too weighty for my weak powers.

- b. The godly suffer. The wicked prosper and seemingly triumph. If God be God, if he be both good and omnipotent, how can it be?
- c. But I dared not publicly voice my doubts! What a burden!

C. Now, in Vv.17-20, he reveals how and when he had come to understand the problem that plagued him and/or how he had ultimately found deliverance from his dilemma: When he took the problem to God!

1. V.17, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."
 - a. When he took the matter to God, as he should have done in the first place, his problem was solved. There is no more doubt, envy or temptation. Now he understands; there is no confusion!
 - b. The difficulty was not to be solved by any mere human reasoning – by the powers of man apart from God; it was to be learned in the presence of God himself in harmony with his Divine plans and purposes.
 - c. In effect the psalmist is saying, "How could I have been so blind?"
2. Vv.18-20.
 - a. Now no envy gnaws at his heart, but a holy horror both of their present guilt and their impending doom.
 - b. Nothing can be argued from their apparent prosperity, for there is no ground of security in that. They are doomed to desolations and destruction due to the righteous judgment of God Almighty!
 - c. As per V.20, their prosperity is like the visions of a dream; where the reality is seen when one awakes from sleep.
 - (1) The idea is not, as our version seems to suggest, that of God's awaking as if he had been asleep.
 - (2) It refers to the dreamer when he shall awake.
 - (3) It is, literally, in the awaking; that is when the dream is over.
 - (4) There is no reality in the dream; in the awaking, the dream and all it visioned will at once vanish.

- (5) In the future world, God will pay no regard to the dreams of human life, to outward show, to the appearance; but the affairs of eternity will be regulated by what is real and harmonious with God will.

D. Then, In Vv.21-24, the psalmist condemns his own folly and adores the grace of God.

1. He had reviewed his inward struggle with doubt, envy, and temptation because of his own ignorance and misunderstanding of what he erroneously thought was God's failure, and awarded himself censure for his folly.
2. His pain had been intense; he says, "Thus my heart was grieved." It had suffered a deep-seated sorrow because of his folly – a sorrow that penetrated his innermost being.
3. He admits to having been foolish and ignorant; that he was as a common beast of the field before God instead of an intelligent human being.
4. According to Vv.23,24 he says:
 - a. In spite of my unworthy views, my envy at the prosperity of the wicked rich, my complaining and doubts about the justice of the Divine administration, I am not driven away from God; I am not banished from his presence, nor cut off from his favor.
 - b. He will now be guided by God's counsel, not his own, and, as a result, afterward be received by God to glory.

E. Finally, in Vv.25-28, he concludes by declaring how he had now renewed his allegiance to, and wholly committed himself to God, whom he had taken afresh to be his portion and delight.

1. V.25, after all my complaining and doubts, there is no one, not even in the heavens, who can take the place of, or be what thou God are to me. And there is no one upon the earth that could possibly be substituted in thy place; my desire and my happiness are in thee.
2. As V.26 suggests:
 - a. His flesh and his heart (referring to the whole man) had failed him already, and he had almost fallen. And if he

- relied upon them again instead of upon God, as he had before, they would fail him again.
- b. His God would not fail him, either as a protection or a joy.
 - c. His heart would be kept by divine love, and filled eternally with divine glory.
3. He readily affirms in V.27 what he is now committed to:
- a. We must be near God to live; to be far off by doubt and wicked works is death.
 - b. We must remember that he is a jealous God, and requires faithful, spiritual chastity from all his people.
4. In V.28 three things are stated. The 1st of which can't be done without the 2nd. And the 3rd depends upon the 1st two.
- a. Had he done the 1st two from the beginning he would not have been immersed in such painful affliction; when he finally did so, he escaped from his dilemma of envy, doubt, temptation, and pain; and if he continued to do so, he would not fall into the same evil again.
 - b. The greater our nearness to God, the less we are affected by the attractions and distractions of the world.
 - c. To be able to declare or teach all of God's works, we must first draw nigh to God and put out trust in him!

III. CONCLUSION

1. General lessons to be learned:
 - a. Beware of the danger of the sin of envy. It was one of the sins that crucified the Lord, Mt.27:18, Pilate knew that for envy they had delivered him up.
 - b. Be careful how we view things. They are not always what they seem to be as the psalmist learned to his sorrow.
 - c. The wealthy wicked are deceived by riches. The Lord speaks of the "deceitfulness of riches," Mt.13:22. Paul refers to the "uncertainty of riches," 1Tim.6:17.
2. The Psalm's fundamental message: It is not only good, but necessary, to be near to God. He must come first in our trust and in our lives. The final glory of the righteous is far more valuable than all the earthly prosperity of the wicked.