

Lamenting with Psalm 73

By Wendy Wood



Psalm 73 is written by Asaph. Asaph was one of David's musicians in the sanctuary of God. Asaph was a descendant of Levi and therefore one of the temple servants who were known as devoted and godly men. Picture this Psalm coming from one of the worship leaders at your church. Asaph was accustomed to singing God's praises and leading others to do so, too. Yet, in Psalm 73 he laments over the prosperity of the wicked and opens the Psalm struggling with envy and doubt.

Psalm 73 opens with a statement of truth. **"Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."** Asaph knows the truth, yet unbelief gets ahold of his heart. That truth is immediately followed by **"But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."** Asaph knows God is good, but as he looks around at how

life is seemingly playing out, he falls into disbelief. It seems to him that those who are wicked and ignore God, are better off. He's struggling in his life, and those around him seem to have it easy. Asaph is envious of sinners.

“For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are: they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace, violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness, their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens and their tongue struts through the earth.” Asaph is looking at those around him who don't follow God. He is looking at the men who are dishonest and cheat, yet have the promotions at work and a nicer home than him. He is seeing people who live immorally, yet they get married and have more fun than he's having even though he's been faithful to God. Asaph is seeing the person who slandered and bullied him get accolades from others while he is ignored. Asaph is talking to God in his envy. Asaph is telling God, “this seems unfair”. Asaph takes his emotions to God and cries out for understanding.

Asaph tells God, “people are doubting if it's wise to follow you when they see these wicked men prospering”. The world is questioning if God can be all-knowing and all-seeing and still men are getting ahead and being successful in spite of their sin. Essentially, Asaph is saying “is there any point in following God?” **“Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. And they say, “How can God know? Is there any knowledge in the Most High?” Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.”** The wicked are always at ease and increase in riches. Who in your life seems to be doing well in spite of sin? Maybe it is the attitude of ‘I've obeyed God and gotten nothing in return, while others get the job, the spouse, or the recognition that you long for’. Asaph is putting words to this frustration and envy. **“All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every**

morning. If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed the generation of your children.”

Asaph turns the corner in verse 16. He's exhausted and has made his complaint to God. He has expressed his emotions, and now turns toward his faithful, covenant keeping God. **“But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.”** Where does Asaph get clarity on the situation? In God's presence. He most likely goes to the temple to hear the word of God.

Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.”

Asaph knows that God is just. Where Asaph has desired justice, his sense of justice has a selfish motive behind it. God's justice is perfectly holy. Asaph is reminded that God hates sin even more than Asaph does. Asaph finds hope in God's faithfulness to His own character and word.

Asaph knows his attitude has been sinful. His envy and frustration have been sin against God and His sovereignty, goodness, wisdom, and love for Asaph. Asaph repents. **“When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.”** He confesses his sin and then recounts how being a follower of God is a better blessing. **“Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.”** The believer has God's presence, always! The believer is guided by God's infinite wisdom for every step of life. Most of all, the believer will be welcomed into eternal glory when this life is over.

And then, Asaph worships! **“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.” Asaph is fully convinced that life with God is better than any circumstance change here on earth. The benefits that seem good, that he has been envious about, are nothing compared to the beauty of being in a relationship with the Lord.

Asaph now has God’s perspective. **“For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. 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 has lamented well. He has taken his frustration, confusion, and envy to God, and submitted those desires of justice and prosperity to God. He has come to God’s presence and been reminded of the Truth. God is just. God’s law is better than fine gold and sweeter than honey. God rewards those who keep His commands (Psalm 19). Asaph is excited to worship and praise God and declare His faithfulness to those around him.

What confusion or hurt do you need to take to God?