

Making Sense of Life

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon explores how entering God's presence can transform our understanding of life's challenges and injustices.

Duration: 18:00

Scripture: Psalm 73:13-14, Proverbs 3:11-12, Isaiah 55:8-9, Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:14-15, Romans 8:28, Hebrews 12:6

Topics: "Daily Problems"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on a particular psalm that highlights the struggle of maintaining perspective and not getting discouraged in life. The psalmist expresses his frustration and temptation to lose faith when observing the prosperity and success of the wicked who do not love or care about God. The psalmist questions the purpose of living for God when it seems like the wicked are better off. However, the psalmist realizes that his perspective was distorted and that true understanding comes when he gets alone with God and sees the bigger picture of eternity.

Transcript

One of the Psalms that I want you to think about today is unlike any other Psalm. I want to do a short exposition of it, just point out some things, because it reminds us how easy it is, even if you love God, that you get bent out of shape, and how easy it is to lose perspective in life. I guess my own need for this truth has made it very precious to me the last couple of days, and I want to share it with you.

The psalmist who wrote this obviously was a very excellent man of God, but he admitted, this psalmist is like no other, he admitted to a problem that almost threw him for a loop. He started to lose it, because he lost perspective. And while we were praying today from 12 to 1, and by the way, for all of you, we're praying here every day from 12 to 1, there's no sermon, no teaching, no anything, we're just here from 12 to 1. And you can come and wait on the Lord as we did, and then maybe be prayed for at the end.

I thought of just being in God's presence, and what it can do for us. So let's look at this Psalm. Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I had nearly lost my foothold. Why? Why? Why did you start to lose it, and your faith got shaken, and why did you get into a slippery place? Why? Because I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

They have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong. Notice here that the blessing of money and prosperity comes to people who are wicked.

So the people who teach that if you just serve God, you're going to have a lot of money, and then the wicked don't have it, because he made us the head and not the tail. That is not the teaching of the New Testament, or the Bible. Sometimes the godliest people have hardly two sticks to rub together, and the people who have lots of money are arrogant and wicked, as the psalmist was noting.

Then we find out in verse 5, they are free, these rich people, from common human burdens. They are not plagued by human ills. He's talking generally now.

Therefore pride is their necklace, and they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts come iniquity. Their evil imaginations have no limits.

This is a wicked group, and he was watching them. They scoff, and they speak with malice, and with arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.

What the psalmist is saying here was, I almost slipped. I almost lost it, because when I watched the wealthy people who don't love God, don't care about God, take advantage of other people, get over on everybody, con everybody, they're proud, they're boastful, and they act like, you know, they're God. When I was watching all of that, and then on top of that, because of their money, they don't go through a lot of troubles that other people go through, and I'm just watching them.

They made me sick, and I got thrown off by them. Because the more I studied them, it's like, what am I living for God for? Why am I resisting temptation? What am I going through all these changes for? Look at these other people. They have more than I do.

Their houses are nicer. Their clothes are more expensive. This is what the wicked are like, always free of care, and they go on amassing wealth.

I just got laid off, and they made even more. The Bible is real talk, isn't it? Because the Bible tells it the way it is, and here's a psalmist who is opening up and telling the truth. He was going through changes as he studied this thing.

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I've been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments. What's he speaking of there? Probably the chastenings of the Lord.

In other words, I just step out a little bit and get out of line, and the Lord chastens me. Anybody know what that's about? Whom the Lord loves, He also chastens. So I just get out of step a little bit.

I get chastened. The Lord breaks me inside. I weep over my sins.

I lament how I acted, and these other people, they curse God, and they go from, it seems, glory to glory, and they don't care about anything. They're not repentant about anything. They increase in their iniquity.

So how do you make sense of all of this? Now, if I had spoken out like that, if he had been thinking it, he didn't say it, I would have betrayed your children, God. That's what the your is. When I tried to understand all of this, it troubled me deeply until I entered the sanctuary of God.

Then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground. You cast them down to ruin.

How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors? They are like a dream when one awakes. When you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant.

I was a brute beast before you. In other words, he's looking back now and saying, I couldn't make head nor tail of this until I got into your presence. That's what it means to go into your sanctuary.

I got alone in your presence, and as I waited in your presence, I started to see things in your presence that these eyes were not seeing. When you get into God's presence and you wait on him, he opens the eyes of your heart, and now you start to see spiritual things. With your physical eyes, you can only see physical things.

But when you get in God's presence, the Holy Spirit begins to show you what the final picture is going to be like and where these things end up. But while I was going through that, while I was chafing under what I saw as being so unfair, you ever see somebody so mean to you or mistreat you, and it just aggravates you, and you just want to lose what little sanctification you have? And then he said, if I would have spoke like that, I would have been like an animal. I would have been like a senseless brute.

I would have been talking wild out of my mind, but I was feeling it. I love the Bible because it tells you what people go through. How many have ever been through some stuff in your own life, right, where you try to make head nor tail of this and like, what's going down here? What is this about? But as for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge. I will tell of all your deeds. But as for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge. I will tell of all your deeds. So what this psalm is about is about the fact that if you just look with your eyes and I just look with my eyes and we try to figure out things with our brains, you can really get frustrated and you cannot add up and figure out what God is doing because the godly sometimes go through all kinds of suffering and the people who curse God, they don't seem to get sick.

And if they do get sick, they have the best doctor and you end up in a clinic waiting on a line in emergency. Am I right or wrong? So if you just analyze that with the natural mind, but there's more than that. There are things that you go through in life that you can't understand.

Have you ever gone through things in life? Can be attacks of the enemy, but you don't see it as an attack of the enemy. In other words, our vision gets out of whack and we can't read what really is happening. See, when he got in God's presence, he said, what was I envying them for? God is one day going to stand up and go and they're gone.

But the righteous will endure forever. Putting that together with New Testament teaching, what would it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his soul? In the Old Testament, they saw through a real glass darkly. They didn't see much about eternity.

You don't find much writing about that. In the New Testament, we see it a lot clearer. So what the writer is saying, when I got alone with God and I quieted my chafing down and my fretting, my emotions.

Oh God, in your presence, I really saw it different because I saw how the thing ends. See, with the natural eyes, we don't see how it ends. And we don't understand what God is doing often in our lives when we just look with our natural eyes.

Maybe you're going through something today in your family. Maybe God is breaking you, testing you. I was thinking the other day, saw it on TV, how they get this one family that's famous for diamond cutting.

They had a huge diamond they found somewhere. And the guy who's the master jeweler, they study the diamond like for months. And they measure it and study it.

And with microscope, they study it. And then to bring out the luster of the diamond and to make it the most valuable diamond, because it's kind of in the rough, this guy who's a master at it, he has drawn lines on it. They use computer imaging, every kind of thing you can imagine.

And then they go, and by cracking it, it reveals the diamond of the diamond. It brings out the radiance that you don't see when it's in rougher form. And if you saw the guy do it, you say, stop, don't break that diamond.

But he's, no, no, no, no. You don't understand. Now it's going to really be valuable.

It doesn't become valuable until I break it a little bit. Isn't that the way with our lives? For God to bring out what he wants to bring out in our lives, has he not brought us through some trials? But if you go through the trial and you don't get in his presence, you don't see it. You chafe against it.

I have chafed against many things in my life, painful things, things I didn't think I could make it through. And until I get in God's presence, and God begins to open my eyes, I don't see what he's doing. You just see what is happening.

You see what people are doing, or your own failures, or you see this and that. But when you get in God's presence, you can get quiet. And this is, you know, I'm all for noise.

I'm all for praising God, make a joyful noise. I know all of that. But there's also that verse that says, be still and know that I am God.

And the Psalmist said, look, I was going to go crazy. I was going to wacko until I went into the sanctuary. And then, oh God, what was I envying them for? I pity them now.

The people who used to get me angry and I was jealous, now I feel bad for them because in a second they'll be gone. But only God can show you that in his light. And you could be going through something today and God's got, he's weaving this beautiful tapestry.

So, you know, he's making the diamond shine, but the cracking is not so nice. Someone once told me when I was going through something, Jim, got to remember this, whatever God blesses, he breaks. When he took the loaves to feed the multitude, he blessed it and then he broke it.

I like when he blesses, it's the breaking part I don't like so much, until you go into sanctuary, because in his presence you stop fighting. When I first went in the ministry, I was telling somebody in an interview

today from Canada, getting their degree from a seminary up there, and they asked to be interview me on the phone. So they said, what was the most discouraging thing about that you went through when you first went and became a pastor? And I said, there were a lot of discouragements, but one of the biggest ones to me was I felt so ineffective and I felt so frustrated because I never went to Bible school or seminary.

And I would argue with God and be frustrated and say, God, if you wanted me to be a pastor, why don't you let me be trained? I mean, that makes sense, doesn't it? The guy's going to be a pastor, train him to be a pastor. Send him to seminary. I was going to regular college playing basketball.

I didn't think about being a minister one day, that was the furthest thing from my mind. So I used to fight, feel frustrated, feel inferior when I got around any minister types and preachers, especially if they acted like preachers. You know how preachers can act? And I was just talking like I talk now, and they were like, bless God, praise God, hallelujah.

And I was like, well, I don't know what that's about. I don't know how to do that. I didn't understand it.

And then one day in God's presence, he showed me that I should stop complaining and being frustrated, that he has a different plan for every life. And I shouldn't compare myself to other people. He taught me things about life and about people in other ways than seminary and Bible school.

Someone just told me the other day where I was, where was I yesterday in Grand Rapids, Michigan? And a guy told me this. He said, you know what the problem is with a lot of preachers who go come out of seminaries and Bible schools is the teachers in the Bible schools and seminaries never were successful pastors themselves. They never saw the blessing of God.

That's why they're teaching in the Bible school. If they were successful as pastors, they'd be pastoring. So they're teaching Bible schools, telling people about things they never saw God do themselves.

So God had to show me, Jim, in your helplessness and in your weakness, I'll help you. You can trust in your education, but if you don't have any education, who can you trust but God? I mean, think about it. The first preacher on the day of Pentecost was Peter.

Fifty days earlier, he had cursed three times and denied he knew the Lord. Right? And he had been the biggest, like, full of himself guy of the 12 disciples. Right? And on the day of Pentecost, who does the Lord pick to do the preaching? A fisherman never been trained and a mess up as a disciple.

And God says, you're the preacher. Because God's ways are not our way. But you don't know that.

You don't see that until you get in his presence. You chafe, you fight, you get frustrated. And even the blows you take in life, you don't understand.

I need help with that. The blows in life, the rejections in life, the pain of life, whatever. You don't understand what God is doing until you get in his presence.

A friend of mine wrote a song and it was like, it's a picture that sermons have been built around that. The most beautiful tapestries that the greatest artists and workers with fabric like that, they are, they're the most beautiful thing. You stand in front of and you go, how could anybody make this huge tapestry? But if you go on the backside of it, it's all loose strings, red, blue, things cut, things just crazy.

Looks like a mess. That's the way our lives look sometimes. It's like, what was that about? And God says, no, no, just get in my presence.

You got to get on the other side and see what I'm doing. You can't tell from the back. That's the way it's been in our lives.

How many have been through some things? You didn't know what it was about, but you see now that God was working. And anybody have something like rejections in life? You know, like that late girl, young lady, and it happened with someone of our pastors. You find out who your real father is and then you go to your real father and he tells you, get lost.

I don't want to see you. Don't tell me that doesn't hurt. Of course that hurts.

But God works all things together for good. Close your eyes with me. I feel that God wants to bring some of us into his sanctuary, into his presence and quiet us so that he can start to show us what he's doing in our lives and things that are troubling us.

He's going to speak words of encouragement to us like he did that day when I was so frustrated with my, my lack of training, my inability, my lack of so many things. Oh, we praise you, God. We thank you that we can come in your presence and in your light, we see light.

When we think in our brains, we see darkness. We try to figure it out. It doesn't make any sense, but we thank you that a spirit of revelation can come and you can show us.

And even though if you don't explain everything to us, you give us that peace that you are working on our behalf and that we can rest. We don't want to be like the Psalmist almost lost it and slipped and fell because he just saw things in the natural. And then he got frustrated and I can't take this anymore.

And why are they like that? And then he went into your sanctuary. You say, pastor, I want to stand with you or kneel in the front or sit on the steps because I'm going through some stuff. I need God to show me what's going on.

Because what I see with my natural senses, it frustrates me. It's getting the best of me. I'm getting angry.

I'm getting discouraged. The pain in my heart is starting to affect me. Please, God, show me what's going on in your presence.

Reveal something that will encourage me and hold me steady. You can get out of your seat and just come here and stand with me. Sit with me.

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