

(How to Understand the KJV Bible) 27 Psalm 73

by Keith Simons

Keith Simons explores Psalm 73, addressing the struggle of understanding the prosperity of the wicked and the ultimate judgment of God.

Duration: 27:54

Scripture: Psalm 73:1-3, Psalm 73:17-19, Psalm 73:23-28

Topics: "KJV Bible", "Understanding God's Justice", "Trusting in God's Goodness"

Description

Keith Simons explores Psalm 73, where Asaph grapples with the apparent prosperity of the wicked compared to the struggles of the righteous. Asaph confesses his envy towards the seemingly successful wicked, questioning the fairness of God's justice. However, upon entering the sanctuary of God, he gains insight into their ultimate fate and realizes that true prosperity lies in a relationship with God. The sermon emphasizes that while the wicked may appear to thrive, their end is destruction, while the faithful are guided and ultimately rewarded by God. Simons encourages believers to trust in God's goodness and to draw near to Him.

Transcript

Welcome. How is it that sometimes good people seem to be poor in this life, when evil people and wicked people seem to do very well for themselves? Well that question was a question which troubled Asaph, the author of today's Psalm, Psalm 73, and he explains in that Psalm the answer that God showed him to that problem. My name is Keith Symons, I'm a Bible teacher from England and I do these talks on how to understand the King James Bible by looking at a Psalm each time, verse by verse and word by word, and understanding its meaning.

So let's look at Psalm 73. Its heading is a Psalm of Asaph. Asaph was one of the temple musicians.

Most of the Psalms, or the largest number of the Psalms, were written by King David and they declare David's name, very many of them, in the heading of the Psalm. Asaph is probably the second Psalm writer in terms of number of Psalms. He wrote about a dozen Psalms.

They're very different in character, as we'll soon see, from David's Psalms and often they were written for times of great trouble in Israel and perhaps this Psalm shows that. It begins with the great declaration in verse one, truly God is good to Israel even to such as are of a clean heart. God is good, what a wonderful start, but especially he's good to those who are sincere, that's what a clean heart means.

They've got a pure heart, they desire God and they serve God alone. They don't turn aside following their own feelings, their own desires into sinful and evil acts. They're serving God and God is good to them.

But it might not seem that way, it certainly didn't seem that way to Asaph, the author of this Psalm, as he explains in his confession, which begins in verse two, but as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped. He was like someone who was walking on a path and he almost fell. His steps, his footsteps had almost slipped from the solid ground, he'd almost fallen with a terrible fall.

This is a word picture, what it means is that he was tempted, he was tempted by something very terrible, very wicked. What was it that caused him to be tempted? Verse three, for I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Now we often use the word foolish today to mean someone who simply doesn't understand things.

But Asaph didn't mean that, and generally the Bible doesn't when it talks about foolish people. It means the same as wicked people. These are people who are so foolish as to abandon God and follow their own desires, even though those desires are wrong and evil.

And Asaph confesses that he was envious of them, he was jealous of them, he wanted to be like them. Why would he want to be like foolish wicked people? Verse three, he saw the prosperity of the wicked, he saw that wicked people were comfortable and happy and healthy and lived pleasant lives, and he wanted that for himself. Verse four, for there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm.

So he speaks here about the death of the wicked people, and he says it's not like other people. Other people, it's like they've got bands. Bands are the things that tie together a person's hands and feet.

But he's using the word picture here. He's talking about troubles and distress and things that upset them. He's saying that when these wicked people died, they didn't suffer distress and trouble like other people do.

Their strength remained firm right up to the moment of their death. They were comfortable and they were happy and that wealth filled them. Now, it is possible to translate verse four in a different way.

And to do this, you only need to take that word death in the Hebrew language and to split it into two words. I don't normally read from other versions in this talk, but I'm going to read to you what the NIV says here. It says, they have no struggles, their bodies are healthy and strong.

And the reason they've decided to split that word is because it seems strange when you're talking about the prosperity of the wicked to start by talking about their death. Now, this could be a double meaning in the Hebrew. The writers in the Hebrew language did like to use meanings in their words.

And you often see that sort of wordplay in the Hebrew Bible. But I don't like the reasoning there that's employed in that modern translation. I don't like the way that people say, well, when you're talking about the prosperity of the wicked, you wouldn't begin by talking about their death.

Because I think when you get something unusual, something that you're not expecting in the Bible, you should analyze that closely. You should try to understand what it means. And for Asaph to speak about the death of wicked people there isn't out of place, because we're going to discover that the answer to this problem that Asaph had was indeed about the death of the wicked people.

We'll see that when we get to verse 18. But let's look at his description first of the wicked people. Verse 5, they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men.

So these wicked people aren't suffering troubles. No, they're comfortable and they're happy. They're not distressed by the things that are around them.

They're living in lives of ease and pleasure. Verse 6, therefore pride compasses them about as a chain, violence covereth them as a garment. The chain we're talking about now is a necklace.

So like someone puts on a necklace, they put on pride and it surrounds them completely. Their proud and evil attitudes and their use of violence and cruelty. Well that's like a garment that they wrap right around them.

It covers their whole body. Verse 7, their eyes stand out with fatness. They have more than heart could wish.

We're describing here someone who is very, very overweight. Now people weren't overweight at the time of the Bible. They didn't have enough food.

People were generally very thin and a person who'd put on a lot of weight therefore could be the only someone who could afford a lot of food. In other words, a very wealthy person. And so these wicked people, well they're so rich that their face has bulged out with fatness.

They're so overweight. They have more than heart could wish. In other words, they have more than they could imagine with their hearts.

Their wealth is so much. Verse 8, they are corrupt and speak wickedly concerning oppression. They speak loftily.

So they're words now we're drawing attention to. They're wicked words. They're speaking about cruelty against other people, against weaker people.

That's what oppression is. But they also speak loftily. They speak as if they are great people.

Verse 9, they set their mouth against the heavens. That's right. They speak words against God himself.

And their tongue walketh through the earth. The strange word picture there. But they speak as if whole countries are theirs and maybe in their power it's true.

Maybe they speak as if everything is their possession and if it's not their possession they want to get it. Yes, these are people who speak bold and proud words and lots of people listen to them. Lots of people are impressed by them.

Verse 10, therefore his people, the wicked person's people, the people who follow the wicked person, return hither. They come back to listen again and again to this evil man. They turn away from the ways of God.

Hither means here. They're coming back here to listen to this evil man and to listen to his schemes and his plans and to follow them. And they're not disappointed with what they receive and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

We speak of the good person in Psalm 23, his cup overflows. And now of these people who are listening to this wicked person, well the waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. They're not disappointed with what they hear when they listen to the words of this evil person.

They're not disappointed with what they receive. They think they're getting something which is refreshing and good and a blessing to them. They feel that they can do so well in life because of what this wicked person says.

So what does this wicked person say? Verse 11, and they say, how does God know? And is their knowledge in the most high? Can God really know about our wicked schemes? Can God really know if I do something cruel to get myself more money? If God is so high, he rules heaven. If he is the most high God, which he is, but if he is, how can he know if I do some small evil act? How can he in heaven see what I do on earth? These are the evil words, the evil teachings of this wicked man. He's telling people, just ignore God.

God has no special knowledge. God knows nothing about what we do, and so we can do what we like. And the proof of it is that we're becoming wealthy and rich as a result of our evil schemes.

Verse 12, behold, look, says Asaph, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world. They increase in riches. They're becoming wealthier and wealthier.

And verse 3, he says, I was envious at them. I was jealous at them because I've lived my life, Asaph thinks. I've lived my life in purity.

I've tried to do what is right and good. Verse 13, verily, he says, truly, I have cleansed my heart in vain. I've tried to live a pure and a right way.

I've tried to remove from myself all wrong thoughts and attitudes in my heart and in my actions too. I've washed my hands in innocency. I've tried to live in a right and good way, both my attitudes and my actions, my thoughts and my deeds.

Yet have I been rewarded for that? Verse 14, for all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning. I've tried to live in a good and right way, says Asaph, yet it's brought me trouble. And I felt guilty about my wrong deeds.

And I've realized that all sorts of things I thought I was doing right, I was doing wrong. When these people have done so well for themselves in this world by their wicked and evil acts, and that tempted Asaph. It tempted Asaph to speak like the wicked people speak.

He spoke very well. He too could have had a great crowd of people following him and agreeing with him if he'd said what the wicked person said. Verse 15, if I say I will speak thus, I will say these things, thus means in such a way, in the way that the wicked people speak.

If I spoke like that, behold, I should offend against the children of thy, sorry, against the generation of thy children. Thy children, he's speaking to God, means the children of God. The generation of them means all of those who are alive.

He would have offended against them. He means that he would have separated himself from them. He would have turned away from those who are the children of God.

He would have abandoned their company and joined the evil doers. And he would have abandoned the reward that God gives to his children and joined the reward that evil people will receive their evil deeds. And so tempted like that, he tried to sort this out.

He tried to work it out in his own mind. Verse 16, when I thought to know this, it was too painful for me. He tried, he meditated, he thought about this problem.

He thought about how rich people, evil rich people, were becoming richer and richer. And God's people seem to receive no benefits. And he couldn't understand it.

But then God showed him the answer to the problem. Verse 17, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end. So he went into God's house and he went there to pray.

And God showed him the answer. He saw the house of God in the middle of the temple courts. He saw that God wanted to live amongst his people.

And he also saw the sacrifices. He saw how God took away the punishment for his people's evil deeds. He saw how those animals died as sacrifices.

And he understood that God's anger against his people for his sins was transferred as it were to those sacrifices. And although that was only a picture for God's perfect sacrifice, he saw that judgment against the sacrifice. And he also saw how God's people received forgiveness through God's great sacrifice.

And then he understood it. He understood that the answer to the problem was their end. He understood that God was a God who judges sin, that God judges evil deeds, just as he'd seen the animals die as sacrifices in the temple.

So he could see that God's judgment is against evil people. He thought when he saw their sudden deaths, verse four, they died when their strength was still firm. They died when they were still wealthy and comfortable and it looked like they'd suffered no punishment for their sins.

But he'd misunderstood that totally. Verse 18, surely thou God did set them in slippery places, thou castest them down, castest them down into destruction. In other words, he thought he saw a comfortable wealthy person, an evil person, having a sudden death and never suffering his punishment.

And then he saw again, he saw it was like someone walking on a slippery path at the edge of a cliffside who suddenly loses his footing and is suddenly drowned in the sea. That death was not a pleasant thing because it was an act of God's judgment to take that person away from this life and into hell. And suddenly Asaph saw that life goes beyond this world.

Verse 19, how are they brought into desolation as in a moment they are utterly consumed with terrors. Yes, God's judgment truly was against them. Verse 20, as a dream when one awaketh, so O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

He's not saying that God sleeps, he's saying that when God awakes, he means it's like when a person awakes, a person awakes and then they do something. And when God in the word picture awakes, then God acts against that evil person. And how sudden it is, how sudden it is.

It's as sudden as a dream ends when someone wakes up. It's that suddenly God acts against them and God despises, hates their image. He hates even the memory of them.

His judgment is totally against them for their evil deeds, for their cruelty. Thus my heart, verse 21, was grieved and I was pricked in my veins. Reins means kidneys.

It was like a sharp pain in my kidneys deep inside me. Because, verse 22, so foolish was I and ignorant. I was as a beast before thee, like a beast, like an animal.

I was thinking about only my own feelings, my emotions for the moment, my desire for wealth. And this was a foolish way to think. It was a stupid way to think.

Yet I am one of God's children. I serve God. I live for God and I've been tempted by this evil thought.

Verse 23, nevertheless, I am continually with thee. Thou hast holden me by my right hand. God, it's you who preserved me from this evil temptation.

I didn't see it, but you were holding me by my right hand. Verse 24, thou shalt guide me with thy counsel. It's your counsel, your wisdom, your advice that guided me away from this trouble, that guided me away from doing this wrong thing.

And just as you have judgment for the evil person at his death, so you will for me. Because afterward, you will receive me to glory. Afterwards, after my life is over on this earth, you're going to guide me every step of the way.

And then you're going to take me up to heaven to be with you always, to glory, into the beauty and the majesty and the honor that the children of God share with the living God. Verse 25, whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. I was tempted by evil men in this world, but now I no longer desire them or their advice.

Now I look forward to heaven, but I don't look forward to heaven for its own sake or for the pleasure I'll receive there, though that will be great. No, all I care for on earth is you, God. And all I care for in heaven is you, God.

And because I live for you, that is my choice. Verse 26, my flesh and my heart faileth. Yes, this life is going to end in this world, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

But when I die, my spirit, my heart will be strong and I will have a place, an inheritance, that's the meaning of portion, an inheritance with God forever. God has a place for me even beyond this life. Verse 27, his conclusion.

For lo, look, they that are far from thee shall perish. Thou hast destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee. A-whoring means prostitution.

It's like as if they were, instead of serving the living God and following the living God, they were tempted by someone else who was not their husband, not the one they should have been with. They should have been with God, but they were tempted by false gods. Maybe that false god was money.

We often see prostitution as a word picture for false gods in the Bible. And that word picture appears here. And Asaph says, God's judgment is against all those that turn away from God and turn to false gods and turn to money and turn to cruelty.

But it is good for me, last verse, to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works. No longer am I going to follow the temptations of my heart.

I put my trust in God. I'd love you to write to me. My email address is 333kjb at gmail.com. That's 333kjb at gmail.com. Now let me read to you the whole of Psalm 73, a psalm of Asaph.

Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm.

They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain, violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish.

They are corrupt and speak wickedly concerning oppression. They speak loftily, they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither, and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

And they say, how doth God know? And is their knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning.

If I say, I will speak thus, behold, I should offend against the children of thy generation. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end.

Surely, thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castest them down into destruction. How they are brought into desolation, as in a moment they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my veins. So foolish was I, and ignorant. I was as a beast before thee.

Nevertheless, I am continually with thee. Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever. For lo, they that are far from thee shall perish.

Thou hast destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.

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