

## PSALMS BOOK 3

### PSALM 73

Category: Faith ~ Occasion: Envyng the Wicked

Author: Asaph

- 1 Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*
- 2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.*
- 3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*
- 4 For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.*
- 5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.*
- 6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.*
- 7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.*
- 8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.*
- 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.*
- 10 Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.*
- 11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*
- 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.*
- 13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.*
- 14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*
- 15 If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.*
- 16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;*

17 *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.*

18 *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.*

19 *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.*

20 *As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*

21 *Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.*

22 *So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*

23 *Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

24 *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

25 *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

26 *My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

27 *For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.*

28 *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.*

### The Point:

The goodness of God sometimes fades in our minds when we are confronted with the success of evil. But then we look through eyes of faith and see the redemption of God and His judgment on the wicked.

### How do we feel in the recitation of this psalm?

Our hearts are in turmoil as our eyes fixate on the evil power of the wicked. Suppose for a moment that you are swimming in shark-infested waters. As a gigantic, twenty-foot great white bumps your leg, you feel small and vulnerable. But would fear overwhelm you? Or would you be more impressed with the power of God who made such a magnificent animal? Are you

more likely to glorify the big shark, or glorify the big God who made the shark? Very often, our moods and perspectives are fear-based, being controlled by the actions and achievements of the wicked around us. When this happens, we lose our focus on God, Who sometimes does give wicked men temporary success in order that He might perfect His judgment upon them. By the end of the psalm, we refocus our eyes upon God, acknowledge His protection and salvation, and realize His absolute justice.

## What does this psalm teach us?

*Verse 1.* The psalm begins with a gracious recognition of God's goodness to Israel, the body of the church, and the assembly of the saints. As we take in the big picture of God's work with the church in history, throughout the world, and in our own local church, we get a clear picture of the rich blessings God has poured out on us, and we begin to see the sharp difference between the church and the world around us. In the church there is more holiness, sanctification, joy, and blessing than what we find in the wide world surrounding the church.

Those who make up the church should be the "pure in heart." Purity of heart is a singleness of vision. When a foreign substance like dirt is mixed into clear water, it becomes impure. Another example of impurity is the impure eye of an unfaithful man who is quickly taken with other women besides his own wife. Similarly, the impure heart is a double-minded heart (James 1:8). It is unstable and lacking in faith because it fails to keep God in its sights. And this is precisely where the psalmist is failing—this will become clear in the succeeding verses.

*Verses 2–16.* It was the point at which Asaph's attention was drawn to the prosperity and power of the wicked that he almost slipped. How often do we see the wicked prosper? At times in human history, as human empires grow over hundreds of years, we see a steady growth in the power of the wicked. We watch them as they abandon God's law, endorse abortion and infanticide, and continually teach less and less fear of God in

their schools. In the face of the massive expansion of evil, it is easy to be overwhelmed with discouragement. Sometimes the wicked do enjoy more resources, more power, and better health than those who faithfully serve God. This only further fortifies the wicked in their prideful state. As the years go by, they are less and less concerned with the possibility of God's existence or His displeasure with them. As Asaph considers these things, he bitterly confesses, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence."

For a moment, Asaph gives way to depression. His spirit falters when he walks over the slippery ice field of disbelief because his eyes are removed from the goodness and justice of the living God. This is what happens to the double-minded man of whom James speaks. When the eyes of the saint begin to wander from God and then focus upon the works of men, his faith in God will languish. The problem with Asaph is that he is distracted. Without the backdrop of the law of God, any believer may be distracted by the delights, activities, and temptations of this world. Or, without the backdrop of the sovereign will of God, he may be distracted by the oppressive acts of the wicked as they sin with apparent impunity. This distraction can press our souls to the ground, causing us to think of nothing but the machinations of the wicked. These distractions distort our perspective.

*Verses 17–20.* The resolution to these tormenting thoughts comes promptly in verse 17. All Asaph has to do is to step into the congregation of God's saints, and instantly his vision is restored and he sees the end of the wicked as clear as day. For Asaph, this clearer vision led him to interpret reality in these two possible ways. He understands that God would not vindicate those who love Him by punishing His enemies—and He doesn't care a thing about justice. Or He is saving the wicked for a dreadful day of judgment in which He will wipe them away in terrifying and sudden destruction—and justice is highly important to Him. It can only be one or the other, and a man of true faith will conclude that the latter case is the true one. Two hundred years can seem like a very long time when

there is nothing but vile oppression and evil power working against the people of God. But if you can see it from God's perspective, you will see that the legacy of the wicked will be nothing but a dream soon forgotten. The evil of the wicked is but for a moment, while their destruction is forever.

*Verses 21–24.* Now as Asaph sits in public worship, he is better able to see himself from the vantage point of God's reality. Now he can see that he was ignorant and blind to the truth. His heart was grieved and embittered until he saw the hand of God holding him up. As the fog cleared ever so slightly, the focus upon God sharpened even more. Hope returned, and now he knows for certain that one day God will receive him into glory. With this perspective in view, he can hardly be bothered any more by the wicked and their evil progress. God is sovereign; God will judge the wicked, and Asaph is going to heaven and eternal glory. Why should he be bothered with what the wicked are doing?

*Verses 25–28.* The psalm ends with words that nourish the heart of every man, woman, and child of faith. Truly, there is nothing in heaven and earth that could satisfy the believer besides God Himself. All of our hopes, desires, and purposes hang upon God alone. For the Christian, it is an all or nothing proposition. Either men will find in God the fulfillment of their every hope and desire, their very purpose for living, their salvation from the corruption of sin and temptation, and final justice for every cruel injustice wrought on earth, or they will not. True believers will seek for these things in God and God alone.

When we focus upon the tyranny of evil governments, the deceitful scams, the tragedy of families broken up by sin, and the domination of men who do not fear God in media, entertainment, and education, we are quickly overwhelmed. When we face our own flesh and see how easily we are led into temptation, we are weakened at the very prospect of taking up the battle against it. "My flesh and my heart fail." But in our weakness we have just enough strength to say, "God is

my strength and my portion forever!” We have just enough strength to acknowledge God as Savior because we know that strength comes from God Himself.

## How do we apply this psalm?

1. Distraction is a joyless business for the Christian. When we are constantly surrounding ourselves with news reports or fictional stories about wicked men who continually break God’s commandments without receiving consequences but do not have the vision of God’s righteousness, justice, and redemption, we will be disheartened in our faith. Therefore, we should be careful how much we immerse ourselves in godless education, media, and entertainment. Whatever we do, we need to engage in regular prayer and the reading of the Word such that we are able to see the backdrop of God and His truth around us and behind everything we experience.

2. Let us be careful not to allow feelings of defeat or bitterness to consume us as we view the success of wicked men in the workplace or in the political realm. Some Christians and their ministries over-emphasize the conspiracies of godless men against God’s law and His liberty. They lose the proper perspective because they themselves are not living in the fear of God and do not have an understanding of His sovereignty, power, and love for His people.

## How does this psalm teach us to worship God?

1. There is something about public worship and the assembly of the church that clarifies our vision, enabling us to see the world around us from the right perspective. Those who are absent from the public assemblies of worship will constantly slip and slide in the ice fields of wrong perspectives and discouragement.

2. It is appropriate to mention the wicked and their activities during our public worship of God, but it must only be a brief mention. Godly worship is always to be focused upon God in His redemption, His final and perfect judgment, and His

goodness to His church. That is the vision that we must capture every time we worship God in our families and churches.

### Questions:

1. Give several examples of Faith Psalms.
2. What is it to be pure in heart?
3. According to James, what sort of man is unstable in all his ways?
4. Why did Asaph's foot almost slip?
5. How did Asaph regain a vision for God?

### Family Discussion Questions:

1. What happens to you when you focus a little too much on what the enemy is doing?
2. Are you a different person after Sunday worship? When you stop the work and entertainment that you do on every other day and focus upon God in the assembly of the saints on Sundays, do you find this changes your attitude and perspective?

## PSALM 74

Category: Deliverance ~ Occasion: A Decimated Church

Author: Asaph

*1 O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?*

*2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.*

*3 Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary.*

*4 Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs.*

*5 A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees.*

6 But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers.

7 They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground.

8 They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.

9 We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.

10 O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?

11 Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom.

12 For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

13 Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.

14 Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

15 Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers.

16 The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun.

17 Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.

18 Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name.

19 O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever.

20 Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.

21 O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.

22 Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily.

23 Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.

## The Point:

As the people of God face great desolation and ruin at the hands of the wicked, they are still impressed with the sovereignty of God, and cry out for his deliverance.

How do we feel in the recitation of this psalm? The desolation of war is devastating. If we were to walk through war-torn streets strewn with dead bodies and lined by blown-apart buildings, our minds would grow numb, and we would barely be able to comprehend what had happened. This is how the psalmist feels as he views the “sanctuary” of the people of God. We understand “sanctuary” to mean the church or assembly of God, and it applies just as much to the church in the New Testament as it did to the church in the Old Testament. With the church in shambles around us, we turn to God Who is the omnipotent Sovereign of heaven and earth. For a brief moment, we wonder if He cares about His beloved people. By the end of this contemplation we are certain that He most certainly will do something about the tragic state of the church.

## What does this psalm teach us?

*Verses 1–11.* How could God do this to us? This question pierces to the very soul of the believer who sees the devastation of the church before him. Of course, the psalmist attributes the destruction to the enemy in verses 3–8, but it would not have happened had it not been for God’s sovereign purpose. God is in control, and if the church has been utterly decimated by the enemy, it could not have happened had not God purposed it. Therefore, Asaph is convinced that God is displeased with his people, and, as a son who appeals to his father on the basis of his relationship, he cries out, “Why have you rejected us forever, O God?” He cries out on the basis of the investment God has put into His people. After all, God redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt—not to mention redeeming them by means of the death of His own Son. Why should He neglect the investment that cost Him the death of His eternally begotten Son?

But the church sits in ruin, and those who cannot see the corruption and the weakness of the church will never feel the true import of this psalm. This psalm speaks powerfully to the church in every age. Consider the ruin of the church in the Middle East and North Africa as the Muslims overwhelmed the initial breadbasket of the faith in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Or think about the almost complete ruin of the Christian church in Germany, France, England, and Scotland today. What about the many challenges the church faces in this country? We see modernism's rejection of supernaturalism and evangelicalism's compromise with man-centered ways of thought and life. There is chaos in the local church, with discontentment among the members, frequent church splits, and pastors who have to resign from office after they are discovered to have been living in adultery or homosexuality for twenty to thirty years. Practically every sincere believer alive today can repeat the words of this psalm as one who has firsthand experience with these circumstances. He prays these words through the tears that pour out of his aching heart, knowing that the old Christian church is dying in the Western world. Almost every mainline denomination has capitulated to the ordination of homosexuals. Among the faithful few left, there is constant schism, mistrust, academic pride, and confusion. The layers of decay, corruption, and weakness are too many to count.

So the Psalmist cries out to God, "Take a look at it! Dear God, pick through the ruins of the razed sanctuary and look at what your enemies have done!" The intent of the following verses is to incite God to love His people and to take vengeance upon the enemy who has destroyed the church. The psalmist interprets what he sees in the body of the church by way of metaphor, and his descriptions are poignant and painful: malicious vandals are viciously attacking the church, smashing the furniture, the walls, and the décor. They are burning the whole structure to the ground. In the same way, evil forces have broken the church of Jesus Christ to pieces. In such a weakened state, the church is utterly incapable of proclaiming the truth of God's Word against the antithesis of the world; it

is a church that is split a thousand ways by internal dissension and filled with leaders without character who are taken by homosexuality and other vile sins. The ideas and institutions of men destroy the church by corrupting it and compromising it from the inside. What destroys the church is the orthodox and orthopraxic compromise that begins in the personal lives of those who come from within the church.

In verses 10 and 11, the psalmist appeals to God on the basis of His love for His people and His antipathy towards His enemies. “How long are you going to let the enemy mock you?” Asaph asks. He could hardly be more insistent. He verges on audaciousness in his appeal.

*Verses 12–17.* This second part of the psalm turns to a contemplation of God’s greatness in creation, providence, judgment, and redemption. These are comforting words indeed, as we recall that God is both our King and Savior. The Old Testament saints have a vivid mental image of God parting the Red Sea and destroying the enemy. But salvation is far more than the destruction of Pharaoh and the great and powerful Egyptian empire. Verse 14 says that God destroys the leviathan, the dreadful serpent in the waters. We see that this prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus crushed the head of all evil principalities and powers at the cross.

Verses 15–17 speak of God’s providential control over the weather patterns, the rivers and oceans, the sun and moon, and the seasons. Such language is comforting to those of us who find ourselves sitting in the ruins of His precious church. If God were not all-powerful over this world in all of history, then there would be no hope for us in these ruins.

*Verses 18–23.* Now Asaph appeals to God again on the basis of His justice and mercy. Would not a just God wish to deal with those who are destroying His church? Would not a merciful God care for His tender dove as she is being ripped to shreds by a wild beast? Asaph’s words show that he is assuming that God can be provoked to action and that the fervent prayers of a

righteous man do avail much. These prayers may be emotional pleadings, but they are based in truth and come as a result of our confidence in God's covenant relation with us, for we know His commitment to mercy and justice. If a father happened to see a horrible ruffian on the street attacking his precious child, don't you think he would be anxious to save her from the man's hands? "Do not hand over your tender dove to the wild beasts," says Asaph to our Father in heaven.

In verse 20, Asaph adds yet another appeal, calling God to act on the basis of His long-standing covenant with His people. A covenant is an agreement and a promise, and it is sealed in blood. If God has promised to Himself and to us that He will have a people for Himself and that He will be a God to us and we will be His people, then we can hold Him to that promise. Of course, the promise itself is a gracious promise. But it is still a promise.

The final verses of the psalm encourage us to boldly draw near to God as poor and needy because God resists the proud but draws near to the humble. Therefore, as we acknowledge our weakness and our need, and as we call God to help us in our disgrace and oppression at the hands of the enemy, we can count on His deliverance.

## How does this psalm teach us to obey God?

1. Now we are in the early years of the 21st century, and Muslims are purchasing church properties in Europe to build their mosques. Yet it is not the Muslims who have destroyed the church in Europe. Christian churches were destroyed long before the Muslims came—when the church leaders stopped loving God and His holy law and turned to serve other gods, the chief of which were the gods of self and materials. This is the enemy we ask God to destroy! It is anything and everything that tempts us away from God whether it be our own flesh, false teachers within the church, or forces outside of the church such as ungodly education, media, or government.

2. This psalm also assumes a love for the church of Christ. We cannot read this precious psalm with passion and fervor unless our hearts are first broken by how pitiful and weak the church is in our own times.

## How does this psalm teach us to worship God?

Fervent prayers are essential in worship, and this psalm is an excellent example of that. These prayers begin with a deep sense of our need and our helplessness without God's intervention. Fervent praying is also persuasive praying. We persuade God in worship when we form arguments based on our knowledge of the nature of God and His covenant with us.

### Questions:

1. Give several examples of Deliverance Psalms.
2. What is the psalmist concerned about in this psalm?
3. What does he want God to do?
4. How does he attempt to persuade God to action?
5. How does he describe God's sovereignty and power in verses 12–17?
6. Who or what is the leviathan?

### Family Discussion Questions:

1. Do we love the church of Jesus Christ? Are we deeply concerned with the decline of the church in our country? How might we pray to God concerning this?
2. How fervent are we in our prayers? Do we just say things we have memorized without thinking about what we are saying? Do we really desire the things that we pray for, and are we sensitive to our own great need before we begin to pray?