

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 73 — A New Life Lesson

1.0 Introducing Psalm 73

- Psalm 73 opens Book 3 (Psalms 73–89).
- Asaph authored twelve psalms: Psalms 50, 73–83.
 - ✓ Asaph was Heman's brother and Berechiah's son (1 Chronicles 6:39).
 - ✓ Asaph, Heman, and Ethan were all appointed as singers for worship in the Tabernacle and the Temple (1 Chronicles 15:16-19; 2 Chronicles 5:12).
- Psalm 73 is one of the wisdom psalms.
 - ✓ Psalms 1; 32; 34; 37; and 49.
- Recommended reading: D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial: Studies in Psalm 73* (reprint; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1982).

2.0 Reading Psalm 73 (NAU)

73:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

Surely God is good to Israel,

To those who are pure in heart!

73:2 But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,
My steps had almost slipped.

73:3 For I was envious of the arrogant
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

73:4 For there are no pains in their death,
And their body is fat.

73:5 They are not in trouble *as other* men,
Nor are they plagued like mankind.

- 73:6** Therefore pride is their necklace;
The garment of violence covers them.
- 73:7** Their eye bulges from fatness;
The imaginations of *their* heart run riot.
- 73:8** They mock and wickedly speak of oppression;
They speak from on high.
- 73:9** They have set their mouth against the heavens,
And their tongue parades through the earth.
- 73:10** Therefore his people return to this place,
And waters of abundance are drunk by them.
- 73:11** They say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge with the Most High?"
- 73:12** Behold, these are the wicked;
And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth.
- 73:13** **Surely** in vain I have kept my heart pure
And washed my hands in innocence;
- 73:14** For I have been stricken all day long
And chastened every morning.
- 73:15** If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.
- 73:16** When I pondered to understand this,
It was troublesome in my sight
- 73:17** Until I came into the sanctuary of God;
Then I perceived their end.
- 73:18** **Surely** You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.
- 73:19** How they are destroyed in a moment!
They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!
- 73:20** Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused,
You will despise their form.
- 73:21** When my heart was embittered
And I was pierced within,
- 73:22** **Then I** was senseless and ignorant;
I was *like* a beast before You.
- 73:23** **Nevertheless I** am continually with You;
You have taken hold of my right hand.
- 73:24** With Your counsel You will guide me,
And afterward receive me to glory.
- 73:25** Whom have I in heaven *but You*?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
- 73:26** My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
- 73:27** For, behold, those who are far from You will perish;
You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.



73:28 But as for me. the nearness of God is my good;
I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
That I may tell of all Your works.



3.0 Understanding Psalm 73

3.1 Outline

- I. Confusion Caused by Envy for the Evil Person's Easy Life (vv. 1-12)
- II. Conception Changed by the Practice of Worship (vv. 13-17)
- III. Confession Clarified by the Presence of God (vv. 18-28)

3.2 Notes

- **vv. 1, 28** “good”
 - The goodness of God is the theme of this psalm.
 - “Good” forms an inclusion bracketing the whole psalm.
- **v. 1** “those who are pure in heart”
 - “Heart” occurs six times in this psalm as a key word (vv. 1, 7, 13, 21, 26 [2x]).
 - See Psalm 24:3-5.
 - Compare Matthew 5:8.
 - 1 Timothy 1:5 and 2 Timothy 2:22.
 - *How healthy is your heart of hearts today?*
- **v. 2** “But as for me”
 - This phraseology is found four times in this psalm (vv. 2, 22, 23, 28).
 - Each time the phrase highlights a contrast related directly to the psalmist, Asaph.
- **v. 7** “Their eye bulges from fatness”
 - The wicked prosper—their fatness represents their plenty and their strength as compared to the emaciated poor.
- **vv. 8-11** The Speech of the Wicked
 - “They mock” (v. 8a) the righteous.
 - They “wickedly speak” (v. 8a), plotting to oppress the righteous.
 - “They speak from on high” (v. 8b)—with arrogance.
 - They “set their mouth against the heavens” (v. 9a) as enemies of God.
 - “Their tongue parades through the earth” (v. 9b)—no one is safe.
 - They question God's omniscience (v. 11).
- **v. 10** What does it mean?
 - Allies of the wicked dominate the land and prosper.
 - God's people turn aside to the paths of wickedness, because they drink up the words of the wicked.

- **v. 11** “How does God know?”
 - Asaph quotes the words of the wicked to illustrate their attitude.
 - Such a technique is found characteristically in Asaph’s psalms: 74:8; 79:10; 83:4, 12.
 - Rhetorical questions indicate a negative answer: God does not know; the Most High has no knowledge.
 - Compare 1 Samuel 2:3.

- **v. 13** “Surely in vain”
 - “Vain” is literally “empty” or “futile.”
 - This is the exact opposite of the first “Surely” (v. 1).
 - Here is the second reference to a pure heart (cf. v. 1).

- **v. 14** “chastened every morning”
 - Compare Lamentations 3:23.

- **v. 17** “Until I came into the sanctuary of God”
 - This is Asaph’s turning point. In the course of his normal worship he finds the answer to his doubts.
 - ✓ At the Temple Asaph found prophets or wise men who helped him resolve his doubts and strengthen his faith (Amos Hakham).
 - ✓ Perhaps the psalms (the Word of God) sung in the worship provided the answers Asaph needed (Barrick).
 - Worship is a great solution—we are able to see things as they really are only when we are focused on God.
 - See Hebrews 10:22-25.
 - ***What are the benefits of corporate worship in the church?***

- **vv. 21-22** Asaph’s Spiritual Renewal
 - Asaph admits that his doubts had created bitterness and pain within him (v. 21).
 - His lack of knowledge caused him to be a fool, as dense as a brute beast (v. 22).

- **v. 23** “You have taken hold of my right hand”
 - Asaph learned that God had never forsaken him—He was always there supporting him, even while confused by affliction and doubts.
 - See Psalms 16:8 and 63:8.

- **v. 24** “And afterward receive me to glory”
 - “Afterward” reminds us of Job 19:25-26.
 - “Receive” (= “take”) is the same word used of Enoch in Genesis 5:24. Compare Psalm 49:15.
 - “Glory” could refer to the presence of God (cf. 149:5).
 - Compare Romans 8:35-39 and Hebrews 11:13-16.

- **vv. 25-26** Verses to Treasure



- Whom have I in heaven *but You*?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
- “The strength of my heart” (v. 26) is literally, “the rock of my heart.”
- **vv. 27-28** Asaph’s Conclusion
 - Asaph contrasts the condition and future of the wicked with that of the righteous.
 - Compare Psalm 1:6.

4.0 Singing Psalm 73

O God, How Good Thou Art (Tune: “My Faith Looks Up to Thee”)



O God, how good Thou art
To all the pure of heart,
Though life seems vain.
Burdened with anxious care,
I groped in dark despair,
Till in Thy house of prayer,
All was made plain.

In earth or Heaven above
Who is there that I love
Compared with Thee?
My heart may faint with fears,
But God my strength appears,
And will to endless years
My portion be.

Ever, O Lord, with Thee,
All shall be well with me,
Held by Thy hand.
And Thou wilt guide my feet
By Thine own counsel sweet,
Till I, for glory meet,
In glory stand.

O it is good that I
May still to God draw nigh,
As oft before.
The Lord Jehovah blessed,
My refuge and my rest,
Shall be in praise confessed
Forevermore.

— Unknown

5.0 Praying Psalm 73

- No matter what happens, Lord, You are good. [v. 1]
- Deliver me from envy and its damaging effects. [v. 3]
- Father, help me to remain faithful in spite of doubts. [v. 13]
- O God, remove my ignorance. [v. 22]
- Lord, You are all I desire. [v. 25]

6.0 Applying Psalm 73

- God’s goodness is not denied by the sufferings of the righteous.
- We can see things as they really are only when we are focused on God.
- God converts our confusion into comforting certainties about Him.