

The End of One Story

The Song, Part 9

Psalm 73:25-28

Asaph began his song of testimony – labeled Psalm 73 in your inspired hymnal, by telling us how close he came to slipping . . . how close he came to abandoning his walk with God.

Here he was, one of the three primary worship leaders of Israel – one of the composers of sacred song.

This is like Isaac Watts and John Newton throwing in the towel.

In more recent days, this would be like a Keith Getty, writing hymns about the power of the cross and then announcing that he no longer wanted to follow Christ . . .

And why?

Because, as Asaph transparently admitted, bad people seem to have it better than God's people.

Now admittedly, every wicked person doesn't prosper and every godly person doesn't suffer, to the same degree as Job did, for instance.

But the problem to Asaph is that *any* wicked person should prosper at all and any godly person should *suffer* at all?

In other words, why shouldn't the wicked *always* fail and why shouldn't the godly *always* succeed?ⁱ

And so Asaph starts looking around . . . and he comes to the conclusion that evil people seem to have less problems than redeemed people.

Look at them . . . they glide all the way through life; they seem to enjoy better health (v. 4) and less stress (v. 5).

God's letting them off the hook!

But then, you might remember the turning point for Asaph in verse 17, was that moment when he took his anguish into the presence of God and put it all on the table – or in the courtyard, so to speak.

And there – in the sanctuaries of God – in the Tabernacle courtyard of God, he was reminded that the answer wasn't in what he could reason, but in what God had revealed.

This is what God says . . . Asaph . . . this is what God has revealed.

And what was that?

Asaph effectively writes in *verse 17, I discerned their end* – in other words, by means of communion

with God, I remembered the end of the story for the ungodly.

Asaph was reminded that this life is just the beginning. In fact, he recalled the coming judgment of God where all the good things the ungodly enjoy is but a moment in time.

As we disclosed in our last session the rather blunt truth that good times on earth are the only heaven the unbeliever will ever enjoy; and painful times on earth are the only hell a believer will ever suffer.

You see, Asaph is taken to the last chapter of the novel. And the way a novel ends changes the way you view every preceding chapter.

It was well known in 1899 that the death of two famous men ended drastically different from one another. The public knew it; the church at large knew it; everybody knew it.

Robert Ingersoll was the famous atheist of his generation. He was popular, winsome, educated, eloquent . . . he openly and publicly denounced the existence of an eternal God. He lampooned the possibility of an eternal future.

His lectures at Harvard University on the subject of immortality effectively became a best seller and the talk of popular culture.

He was famous for saying, among other things, "This is my creed: the only place to be happy is here (in this life); and the only time to be happy is now."

People just ate it up . . .

His father had been a Presbyterian pastor for years and at one point served as an associate of Charles Finney the evangelist.

But Ingersoll rejected the gospel and would grow up to openly defy the existence of God. A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance called Robert Ingersoll that daring blasphemer.

At the height of his fame, people would pay \$1 a ticket just to hear him speak, which was a rather large sum of money to go and hear a man speak.

He would often pull out his stopwatch and say, "If there is a God, let Him strike me dead in 10 seconds!" And then he would begin to count down.

10 – 9 – 8 – people would faint at such a challenge to God. 3 – 2 – 1!

There he would stand holding his watch as people held their breath and then when it was obvious he wasn't struck dead, he would announce – “You see, God does not exist.”

Now, if I were God, all there would be on that stage at the end of 10 seconds would be his pocket watch. Poof.

God, evidently, is more patient than I am . . . and much more gracious; however, He is even now, the Apostle Paul writes, *storing up His wrath until that day of judgment. (Romans 2:5).*

But that was Asaph's problem . . . he thought God should have done something; he writes in *verse 9, “Lord, their tongues strut through the earth defying your existence.”* In other words, silence them!

But then he remembered, God will . . . one day.

When all the unbelieving of all of human history are judged at the Great White Throne, they will so clearly be shown their guilt and unbelief, Paul writes, *“every mouth will be silenced.” (Romans 3:19)*

With the gravity of that revelation, everything changes for Asaph's perspective.

What we discover next is an entirely different grammatical structure to this poem.

In fact, throughout this Psalm there has been this interesting shift in pronouns. I know that doesn't sound all that exciting, but let me show you . . . it weighs in on our application.

In the first part of this Psalm, Asaph constantly used the pronouns – *they and their*; v. 4, *they have no pangs until death . . . v. 5, they are not in trouble as others are*; v. 8, *they scoff*.

But then he changes and begins to complain about his own life in particular . . . and the pronouns shift to *I and me*. *All in vain, verse 13 have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. All the day long I have been stricken . . .*

Listen, whenever your eyes are on other people in envy, it won't be long before you're focusing on yourself . . . and it becomes all about I, me and mine.

But then this transition takes place – this turning point in verse 17 takes place and then in verse 18 the pronouns shift to You, in reference to God.

You set them in slippery places (v. 18) you make them fall to ruin; You rouse Yourself (v. 19). He then only references himself in terms of admission and repentance.

But then – in this final section, the pronouns change again . . . and wonderfully, to you and I . . . Asaph begins to sing about God and himself.

Now it's God and Asaph together!

Listen, this is one of the life-changing, mind transforming truths of the Christian life. It isn't about all of them; it isn't all about you, it's all about God and you – together.

Notice *verse 25 – Whom have I in heaven but You . . . there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You*

Asaph's eyes shift from the prosperity of others; his eyes shift from the problems in his own life . . . his eyes shift upward to God.

God gets into the right place and so does Asaph.

Now let me point out three results in Asaph's life – you could call this, three results from the reunion of Asaph and God.

1. First, notice his resurrected vision

Look at verse 25 again; Whom have I in heaven but you? (He's talking to the Lord); And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

In other words, Asaph's perspective is no longer earth bound.

Think about it, isn't it true, if we lived perfectly and uninterruptedly in light of our eternal future, how different our present attitude would be?

Imagine if you could have a week in heaven and then come back;

- What would you crave?
- What would you live for?
- How would you view your trials?
- How would you value other people?
- How would you love the redeemed church?
- How would you pray . . . and how often?
- How would you pray for the lost?
- What would you read?
- What would you cry about?
- How would you sacrifice to give away what you have?

Listen, everything would change, wouldn't it?

Asaph's feet had almost slipped into disobedience and despair until God revealed the unbeliever's coming judgment and the thought of heaven.

And now, God is all he wants. His perspective was transformed.

Well, here's the really convicting thought in all of this – we have so much more revelation from God

than Asaph had . . . we know what he couldn't have imagined.

We have the completed canon of scripture; we live in the light of the New Testament; we have the Apostles testimony and the Book of Revelation and the descriptions of the future by Paul and the Apostle John who were both given tours of heaven:

- they saw the glory of the Lord and His throne;
- they saw the Father's glorious house of gold
- with its twelve stories reaching into and through the atmosphere;
- they saw constantly bearing fruit trees lining the river of life cascading down from God's throne
- they saw the brilliance of His being which makes nighttime impossible.
- They tasted the sweetness of fellowship which makes sorrow unthinkable.

It's in light of that – Asaph sings here – what on earth could ever steal away my desire for You, Oh God.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Spiritual sight leads to spiritual insight.”

Insight into what really matters in life.

Keep in mind, nothing about Asaph's circumstances changed . . . nothing around him changed . . . but everything about his perspective changed, when he regained his focus on God.

Asaph experienced a resurrected vision.

2. Secondly, Asaph experienced a reconstructed realism

He regains a realistic view of himself. Notice *verse 26. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

This is balanced realism.

Asaph isn't doing better because he's stronger now – he isn't changing his tune because he's got it all together; he's doing better because he's back to relying on the strength of God.

In fact, notice that Asaph doesn't refer to the strength of *his* heart now that he's back . . . he refers to *God* who is the strength of his heart.

There's a vast difference.

Asaph speaks with spiritual realism and man, is it refreshing.

My flesh and my heart may fail – you can translate this phrase – *my flesh and my heart have been spent . . . consumed.*ⁱⁱ

Flat out – worn out!

By the way, don't miss the wonderful revelation of God's faithfulness here; He did not abandon Asaph and He does not abandon you while in the darkness of your doubts and the misery of self-focused frustrations.ⁱⁱⁱ

My flesh and my heart fail . . . but God! . . . but God . . . is ever-faithful to remain the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Asaph not only regains realism concerning himself; but he **regains realism concerning the lost.**

Notice *verse 27. For behold, those who are far from you, shall perish, you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you* – literally, one who plays the role of a prostitute.

That's a realistic metaphor to define sin.

That's what sin is – it is giving your focus and your passion and your energy and your plans and your imagination and your attention and your money and your time to something other than that which pleases God.

And that's the terrible thing about sin – we're actually giving away something that belongs to Him.

Above all, worship and love.

Asaph experiences a resurrected vision; a reconstructed realism;

3. Finally, Asaph experiences a reinvigorated mission

Look at the closing stanza of praise – *verse 28, 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.*

Growing up as a kid, the church we attended near downtown Norfolk, Virginia had wooden letters attached to the wall behind the pulpit.

The letters spelled out, “To Know Him and to Make Him Known”

To know Him, and to make Him known

That's Asaph's final appeal.

To know Him . . . look, Asaph writes, in *verse 28*, you could render it, “*It is a good thing for me to be near God.*”

Isn't that the truth!

I have made the Lord God my refuge.

Spurgeon comments here on this text, “It is always good, and always will be good for me to approach the greatest good – the source of all good – God Himself. His presence is a great privilege and a cure for a multitude of problems.”^{iv}

And now that I am walking with Him and strengthened by Him and hidden in Him, now I can tell others about Him.

To know Him, and to make Him known.

Joni Eareckson Tada, the quadriplegic who has impacted the lives of so many people with her testimony, wrote in a magazine article I read a few years ago, recorded an incident where she was speaking at a Christian women's conference. One woman said, "Joni, you always look so together, so happy in your wheelchair. I wish that I had your joy!"

Joni responded, "I don't do it. In fact, let me tell you how I woke up this morning. This is my average day. After my husband, Ken, leaves for work at 6:00 am, I am alone until I hear the front door open at 7:00 am. That's when a friend arrives to get me up. While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, "Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, get me dressed, sit me up in my chair, brush my hair and teeth, and send me out the door. I don't have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don't have a smile to take into this day. But you do. May I have yours? Joni then turned to his woman and said, "[Just so you know] whatever joy you see today was hard won this morning."^v

Only then was she ready to speak, travel, record her radio broadcasts, write, etc.

She depended on Him . . . stayed close to Him . . . exchanged her weakness for His strength, so that she could not only know Him, but make Him known.

Asaph promises the Lord in his closing measure, I will tell of all your works.

This Psalm began by Asaph knowing everything about everybody else . . . then focusing on

everything about himself; but finally saying, "Lord, I want to know everything about you and I want more than anything to tell everybody I know about everything I know, about You.

Oh, and one day . . . my life here ends . . . and I am home forever, with You. That's the end of this story . . . but the beginning of another one . . .

I mentioned at the outset of our study that there were two men in particular who died in 1899. The public knew about it, the church knew about their deaths as well as their lives.

When Robert Ingersoll died, his wife and family were so distraught and tormented that they refused to have his body removed from their family home . . . until it became a threat to their health. He had lectured, this life was all there was; and now that it was over, they couldn't bear the thought that there was nothing more beyond; and so died hopeless and empty, this brilliant, eloquent atheist.

But in 1899, an uneducated evangelist who was known to slaughter the King's English died as well. His name was Dwight Lyman Moody. And his final words couldn't have been more eloquent. He was moments from death and his family was crowded around him when he roused up a bit and suddenly said, "I see earth receding . . . heaven opening . . . God is calling." Moody's son, Will, was there and said, "Father, you are dreaming." To which Moody responded, "This is no dream, Will, this is bliss . . . this is glory."^{vi}

The end of one story and the beginning of another, glorious, eternal story that never ends.

He holds me by my right hand; Asaph sang . . . and afterward, receives me into glory.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/9/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms: Volume II* (Pickering & Inglis, 1949), p. 140

ii Adapted from Donald Williams, *Mastering the Old Testament: Psalms 73-150* (Word, 1987), p. 27

iii Adapted from Scroggie, p. 141

iv Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Volume 2* (Zondervan, 9th printing: 1977), p. 253

v Adapted from Joni Eareckson Tada, "Joy Hard Won," *Decision* (March 2000), p. 12

vi Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (P & R Publishing, 2006), p. 467