

# Psalm 73

by Robert F. Adcock

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*The psalm of Asaph teaches us that envy and idolizing worldly prosperity can lead to spiritual struggles and that seeking God's guidance and confessing sin are essential for spiritual growth and maturity.*

**Duration:** 39:59

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:1, Psalm 73:1-3, Psalm 73:25-26, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:19

**Topics:** "Materialism", "Spiritual Contentment"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher highlights the grip of materialism on people's hearts in today's affluent society. He observes that despite having more than ever before, many people still complain and seek after more worldly possessions, which ultimately do not satisfy. The preacher emphasizes the importance of drawing near to God and trusting in Him, as He knows what is best for us and will provide what is beneficial for our Christian experience. The sermon encourages listeners to regularly seek refreshment from the Lord and be content with the necessities of life, recognizing that God provides for all our needs.

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## Transcript

I'd like for us tonight to look in Psalm 73. Psalm 73, and we'll read the entire psalm. Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.

But as for me, my step was almost gone, my steps had almost slipped. Why, I was envious of the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death, but their strength is firm.

They're not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued with other men. Therefore pride compasses them about like a chain. Violence covers them like 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 here and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

And they say, how does 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 innocence. 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 generation of thy children. 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 did set them in slippery places. Thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in the 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 soul was grieved and I was pricked in my heart. So foolish was I and ignorant, I was like a beast before thee.

Nevertheless, I am continually with thee. Thou hast helped 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 fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For lo, they that are far from thee shall perish.

Thou hast destroyed all those that play the harlot departing 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.

When you read this psalm, and along with Psalm 37, which gives us almost a verbatim warning, it says, fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither like the green earth. Very often when you look at a passage like this, I feel like that we think perhaps it has stronger application to one group than perhaps another.

And in reading this for a number of years, I said this has real special meaning to young people. They are the ones that are threatened by the thing that is exposed here. Until one day, a dear old man that professed to be a Christian, I believe he was, he called me and said there was something he wanted to talk about, so I went by to see him one day.

And you know, he confessed to me that this was his problem. He was 84 years old, 84 years old. We read this psalm together, and he said, that's it, that's it, that's my problem.

He said, I've been doing that for years, and it brought a lot of misery into his life because he entertained thoughts. It let his heart go a-wandering after things that brought no joy and brought no satisfaction to him. Now, there is indeed a remedy for all this, but I'd like for us to think about this man.

It's a psalm of Asaph, possibly a man that he had a role in the ministry that went on in the Temple, perhaps concerned itself with music. He may have been a musician or director of choral music or something like that. But he was at a point, as far as service was concerned, that he could make an observation of what was going on.

No doubt he had made many judgments concerning what he had seen. And out of all of this, he takes pen in hand, and of course, under the guidance and the direction of the Spirit of God, he writes down what was on his heart. It took a pretty courageous man to do that.

I don't know if I would confess to all that he has and expose to you what I've had on my heart that indeed is so unwholesome, and not only write it down but sign my name into it. That's it. That's what I've been doing.

Not long ago, I assume this was in jest, but I entered a room where there were some brethren, and they said, Oh, come on in. We're having a good time confessing our sins. And one brother said, Well, wait, I want to go get my tape recorder.

I want to put this on tape. Well, there must have been some ulterior motive. They were going to use it for some purpose other than what would be right.

But we are told in the word of God that when we have confidence in each other and there's a right kind of spirit between us, that indeed the confessing of our sins, one to another. Many of the great revival movements that have taken place in the past, this was one of the things that preceded some of these movements. Men were just shook by the Spirit of God.

God's people were brought down on their knees, and there was a confession of sin. Indeed, you do have to have confidence in that person that sometimes you unburden your heart to. Confidentiality, I think, you're willing to tell it to him because you know the only one he's going to tell it to is the Lord.

And you can do that safely. But you be very careful who you tell all of the things that are in your heart. You'll find that sometimes there's not confidentiality, and there may be those that wouldn't know how to handle something that was intended for the purpose of restoration, for just prayer fellowship.

But in this case, this man makes an admission that when I read about it, I have to say, I thank God for Asaph, and I thank God that he wrote these things down, because we're not prone to sometimes expose our weaknesses and especially write it down and then sign our names. The question is, have you ever envied anyone, especially the children of this world, those that are of this world? Do you ever take a look at those people that are in the world that are just prospering and it just seems to have everything in its way? As one brother said, he said one time to the Lord after some observation that he made, he said, Lord, it just doesn't seem fair. It just doesn't seem fair.

Well, you know, we have to commit ourselves completely into his wonderful care. And the Apostle Paul says that we brought nothing into the world, we're not going to take anything out. So shouldn't we be content with just the necessities of life? God provides everything we need, our clothing, our food, our shelter, and so many innumerable benefits are ours just from being members of the family of God.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Do we believe that? Do we accept that? You see, we have to come to grips with these things. We have to be able to appropriate that wonderful divine truth, that promise that's made in the Word of God.

Obviously, this man, in a position where he could observe other people, familiar with the history of the children of Israel, he found himself in a position where he was envious and horror of horrors, he was envious of evil people, people that had no claim upon God, people that were people of the world. They didn't even acknowledge God and give place to God in their lives, yet they prospered. This baffled him, caused him great concern.

But we'll see as we read the psalm and look at it a little further, there was a day of awakening, a day of understanding. The same thing will apply for us. Truly, God is good to Israel.

This man could reflect upon the heritage that was his, perhaps, as an Israelite, as a child of God. He could think of Israel, he could think of the deliverance that was theirs, the day that they were liberated and set free out of their bondage in Egypt. He could remember all of the good things that God did for them.

That's just one occasion in which one could reflect upon and think about how good God had been to them. Indeed, truly, God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. And when I think about the conditional atmosphere that must be set sometimes if we are to appropriate and to truly appreciate divine blessing, it does require that we be in touch with the Lord, because sometimes there can be so many things that could be pointed out to us.

Indeed, God has been good to you, and all the while you've been murmuring, you've been complaining, you haven't lifted your heart heavenward and given thanks unto the Lord. Had you been in the right condition of heart, you would have known that the Lord is good to you. I think we can say, in a sense, there may have been just a little wavering on his part.

He had forgotten just how good God had been to Israel and especially to him. He says, because as I reflected, as I looked upon these things that troubled me so much, things that had been entertained in the heart, I'm so thankful that all of the crazy things that have ever gone through my mind and all the things that have been entertained there, I thank God that most of them stayed there. They never got beyond that point.

I'm thankful for that. You know, some of the harebrained ideas that sometimes people have, and I believe it is God's protective care that sometimes he shields us from making foolish statements and doing foolish things. In this instance, the man is confessing something that he thought about.

His thought life is written down here on the page. And he says, but as for me, my feet were almost gone. He hadn't taken that step in the direction of folly.

He hadn't taken that step, but yes, he had almost slipped. You know, but God had been there. He had looked upon it as God's protective care over him.

Oh indeed, the Lord has been good to me. For I was envious of the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. It's a sin to be envious of someone else.

It's a sin to be jealous. It's a sin to be covetous. Now, God knows what we need.

And if in faith we commit ourselves into his care, we know that he's going to provide everything that we need. But here's temptation. There's a temptation to think that we deserve something better than we're getting.

I am persuaded that we're all getting better than we deserve. And when someone very frequently asks me, well, how are you getting along? Well, I'm getting along just great. At least I'm not going to get what I deserve.

And I make a reference to the fact that if I got what I deserved, he knows well what I would get. But there is a desire to have all in this world that is so appealing to the flesh, the carnal man, admired as such a parade of things today. And that's why I said that I think that this has a special meaning, a special warning to young people.

I really sympathize with young people that live in this world we live in today. I say very often to my wife and to others, I don't know how I would have fared with all of the things that are put before young people today. Looks like Satan is just so busy.

And these things are attractive. They are allurements. And they appeal to the flesh.

And indeed, many young people respond to them. They no longer resist. And they fall victim, they fall prey, to these things that Satan uses, and uses indeed to such a great advantage, to spore human life, and to sometimes wreck human life, and cause so much misery, because people were looking upon something that they didn't need to make them happy, didn't need to bring fulfillment into their lives.

But they thought they did. They were deceived. They were deceived by the master deceiver.

There's no question about it. The master deceiver was very busy, and he had worked on Asaph, and he had caused him to look afield and to see all of the things that God seemingly had bestowed so lavishly upon the ungodly. And they were prospering.

At least they had many things perhaps that he thought he should have. And why don't I have them? I've honored the Lord in my life. I try to give place to God in my life, and yet life for me is a struggle.

Material things don't come to me very easy. All of these things he could have thought about in his life. As we think about this, and we make some observation about the good fortune of those that are estranged from God, I know for a fact that we could spend our time a lot better.

And I've mentioned young people, but they look at some of these people that they idolize. There are people of this world. There are men and women of this world.

And they glamorize sin, and they participate in so many things that a young person looks and says, Surely, while that strong man that's a star athlete, and he does all of those things, and in fact he advertises, he publicizes these things as being good for me. And they want them. And in many cases, they get them.

I think Paul, when he tells us, If you then be risen with Christ, you seek those things which are above. You fasten your affection, your mind, your heart, let it be centered upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one that sits at the right hand of God, your Savior, your Redeemer. And you be reminded that everything that you need in this life, God will surely provide.

The writer of Proverbs has something to say about envy. He says, Envy is like rottenness of the bones. And there's some dread diseases in this world, and one of them, of course, is leukemia.

One of them is that disease that attacks the very source of life itself within the human body, the marrow of the bones. And here he says, Envy can be likened unto rottenness of the bones. It just gets right down to the very depth of man's being, and it's destructive.

It'll consume you. It'll make life miserable for you. It'll cause so much heartache and dissatisfaction in your life.

The writer of Proverbs says, Let not thine heart envy poor sinners. Isn't that a tragic thing? To look out on someone, and he's living just for this life. He says, I want to eat, drink, and be merry.

I want to get everything I can out of this life. I want to live it with all the gusto that I can possibly sum up within my being. I'll take my chances when I die.

I'll meet with God one day, I suppose, at the end of the road, and we'll settle up then. And you know, everything just seems to go so beautiful for him in life. Oh, he has the very best of everything.

And you look at him, and you have to admit, all of that flamboyant spirit that he demonstrates, all of that confidence and everything that he seems to demonstrate about life itself, he has a hold of everything. We find ourselves just a little bit envying that person. And here is an individual that unless God changes the course of his life, he's going down into the lake of fire that burned it forever and ever.

And God forbid that I would ever envy one of those in this life, of the ungodly, and certainly none of God's people, talking this afternoon about those indeed that prosper in this world. We're to rejoice with them. When I see someone that possesses spiritual gift and is able to edify and build up God's people and indeed provides that which is wholesome and good for the people of God, it should cause us to rejoice and thank God's voice and not be envious, not be jealous in one thought that we have about that individual.

Indeed, that's a reflection upon our immaturity as believers in the Lord Jesus. The psalmist also says, a courageous man indeed is one that learns to confess his sin and to forsake it. And I believe that this man Asaph, he demonstrated that sort of courage when he indeed confessed his sin.

This earthly prosperity, and when we think about it in terms of the threat that it represents, it does tend to turn one's face away from God rather than towards the source of all true blessing. But I'm reminded that man without God is not admired by others that sometimes submit to that lure, if you want to think of it in that term, that inducement to admire them, drinking in all that they do, making idols out of those that indeed have had more than perhaps their share. Certainly they've had an abundance of the things of this life.

And to think that there are those that have an admiration for them, there's always a threat. And this, in itself, will bother you. It does me.

When I see someone, and I know that young people, in many instances, they put that person on a pedestal. And I say, in a sense, that person's not worthy of that admiration. He's not worthy of that devotion, loyalty, whatever it is they have for them, because we are reminded that all flesh goes away of the grass.

It's like the vapor that rises in the air and it soon disappears. You see, to have one's eyes fixed upon those things that are temporal in this life and not be able to see beyond and understand that there are those things that have spiritual value, they are eternal. They are the things that bring eternal happiness and joy to the hearts of men.

And yet men are tripped. They are stumbled. They are deceived in this life by those things that appeal to the flesh.

In these verses, as Asaph looks at this list of things, and he sees that confidence, that pride, that arrogance, all that is demonstrated by those that are so corrupt and so wicked, even they set their mouths against heaven, says Asaph. Their tongues walketh through the earth. Well, they're not shy for one moment about speaking out against those things that you count as being holy and dear.

They have no respect for the Lord. They don't give any place in their lives. They don't even give him credit for creating them and maintaining their life day by day.

There is no ignorance concerning the very fact that he carries within his power their very life. He looks at all of this and he says, indeed, it's a mystery to me how that they can prosper, how that they can increase. He says, there's a serious thought that comes to my mind.

Is the position that I've taken and the stance that I've taken in this life, is it the wrong one? Have I made a mistake somewhere along the line? Now, honestly, I wouldn't have wanted to make that statement. I wouldn't want anyone to ever know if I had doubted that I'd taken the wrong step. The day that I entrusted myself into those pierced hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, all that I am, all that I shall ever be, into his holy care, thank God I've never doubted that that indeed is the best decision, the wisest decision, that any man ever made.

And to be aware that we were included in that wonderful, divine, sovereign plan and will of God, it ought to thrill our souls. And to have one thought, one alien thought, to that concept, that that's the best thing that could ever happen to any human being, indeed I would be ashamed to admit it. But Asaph says, you know, I began to wonder.

Living for the Lord, being a witness for God, thinking about what he has done for us, and maintaining a position in this life of holiness and respect and reverence for God. Is it worth it all? Because they seem to be getting the better end of the deal. But then you get to that point in this psalm where he makes an admission and what he's saying is, this has caused me so much concern.

This is a painful experience I've been through. There's been a struggle going on within my soul. And I've got to get it resolved.

Well, he says, I went into the sanctuary of God and then I understood it all. I'll tell you what, you want to get your mind straightened out concerning how you should live in this life and your whole attitude toward life itself, get into the presence of God. Get into the presence of God.

I'll tell you, it'll straighten your thinking out, brethren. Get down over the book and say, Lord, your dear child needs enlightenment. He needs some relief.

He needs to know more perfectly some of these things that mean happiness and joy and satisfaction in this life. And all you've got to do, brothers, is claim them one by one, the promises that he'll reveal to you. At the very close of this psalm, a statement, indeed, that thrills me every time I read it because it is so true.

For it is good for me to draw near to God. It is good for me. A wholesome pursuit in this life is to seek more and more of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ for your life.

You can't get too much of him. He will delight and fill your soul. You'll find satisfaction there that indeed, in the words of the songwriter, turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face.

The things of this earth, they will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and his grace. That's the key, brothers. And Asaph looks at all this and he says, When I went into the sanctuary of God, when I acquainted myself with the holiness of my God, the greatness of my God, he is a holy God, he is a righteous God, he is a just God.

That's something we need to do every day, isn't it? We can't afford to feed upon the manna that's grown stale. We have to gather it. It was there fresh every day.

And they had to go get it. And we have to get it, brothers. You can't feed on that which was a blessing in the past.

You've got to keep the mind, you've got to keep the soul refreshed continually from the only source of refreshment, and that's the Lord himself. And indeed he will refresh the soul. He will bring back into our lives that which will make our lives a refreshment for others.

He's not a stagnant God. He dispenses that which is wholesome and good and indeed makes our lives full and complete. And Asaph, in the presence of God, understood the end.

Why, he said, surely thou set them in slippery places after that visit into the presence of God, into that holy place, alone with God. And God no doubt revealed in a fresh and a new way that indeed these dear souls had walked through this life and they walk in dry places and what little satisfaction they draw from those pleasures, even the sensual pleasures of this life. It's only for a season.

And then an encounter with God, an encounter with God. And if you've ever had a bad dream, a nightmare, and you wake up and you thank God that it was a nightmare, it was a painful experience, it was unpleasant. But those that go down, the ungodly that perish, that nightmare will never end for them.

It's not just a bad dream. Brother, this is life. This is real.

There's reality to this. And Asaph was reacquainted with what's going to happen to those regardless of what they experience in this life. They may have a great best of everything in this life, but listen, if they die without knowing the person of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and that living experience of salvation, they're going down.

They're going down to experience the judgment and the wrath of God upon their souls. They're going to be separated from God eternally. And how dare anyone that has experienced the sovereign grace of God in his soul ever envy anyone in this life regardless of what he has? Let each one of us be sure within our souls that we don't entertain those thoughts.

But if we do entertain those thoughts, let us hasten into his presence, and he will cure us of such unwholesome thinking. Asaph said, the whole experience was a very foolish experience. It was just ignorance on my part to ever entertain thoughts like this.

And there's a warning here again. Those that get away from the Lord just a little, and you know, you only turn your back upon the Lord and get away from the Lord just a little step at a time. And in this case, this man gives us a running account of the fact that his steps had almost left, but praise God, God delivered him.

God enlightened him. And we need to issue warnings. Our Lord Jesus Christ said over and over in the scriptures, Whoa! Whoa! And this is a word of alarm.

It's like a sounding alarm. We live in a world in which materialism has just gripped the hearts of men and women. And it's a very affluent society in which we live.

Honestly, I don't like to hear what they call poor talk today. People that talk about, well, I could have a little more. Listen, most of the people that I know, they got more than they ever had before.

What saddens me is that some of them are still complaining. And they're still seeking after more and more of this world. And it doesn't satisfy them.

You don't have to be very clever to understand or very intelligent. Just the, almost the slightest observation will reveal things do not satisfy the human heart. It seems once they've gotten hold of one of those desires, the heart reaches out for more.

It asks for more. And in this case, Asaph says that's indeed a foolish experience. It's just ignorance on the part of the one that entertains thoughts such as this.

And then his last thoughts concerning those that he'd entertained these thoughts is that they shall perish. And you know, there's going to be a day of reckoning and each one of us shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ. We shall stand before the Lord.

And you know, to go through this life and constantly be in turmoil in one's soul and have envy and jealousy that's unconfessed because you didn't think that you got everything that you deserved in this life. You couldn't say with a psalmist the lions indeed have fallen unto me in pleasant places. You always thought that you deserved a little more.

Let us take a lesson from this. Let us be reminded that the wicked, they're going to perish regardless of what they have in this life. Regardless of what their attitude is toward God.

When they boast, they may defy God. Indeed they have the rebel spirit within their soul. And they have no place for God.

They give no honor to God. They give no respect to God. Yet they shall perish.

But for me, it's so good to draw near to God. Why put my trust in the Lord God that I may declare all thy works and to out of the fullness of our hearts and souls to be able to share and tell others what our great God has done for us. Never a murmur.

Never any note of dissatisfaction with what God has done for me. Listen. God knows what's best for every one of us.

And God will not withhold from any one of us anything that would indeed be beneficial to us in our Christian experience. God knows what's best for us. Are we committed? Are we willing to trust Him with confidence that He knows what's best for us? And can we in that confidence ever say, the guiding hand that supplies all of my needs relieves me of all care and all worry, all of the fretting that I see going on in the world.

I'm delivered. I'm liberated. I don't have to worry about those things.

My Heavenly Father, He takes care of them. And I'll never be guilty I'll never be guilty of entertaining thoughts that were so unwholesome as these that Asaph has penned for us. And if you never entertain those thoughts, there'll never be the danger that you'll take that step that indeed would bring reproach upon your testimony and perhaps destroy your Christian witness because indeed all sin starts with a thought.

Things that are entertained in the mind then it has a way of getting its grip upon you. And then all of the sad consequences and all of the sorrow and all of the tears that have been shed all the sin that come into

the life of a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, let God's people be a people that seek after holiness in the inner man.

People that revere the God that they've entrusted with the care of their soul and believe that He knows what is best and He'll always provide what is best for us in this life. But it is good for me to draw near to God. Shall we pray? Our Father in Heaven, we do bow in Thy presence and thank Thee for a wonderful time that we've experienced today with our dear people.

And the Lord to be assembled even this day around the table and to have the privilege of remembering the Savior who loved us and died for us. Indeed that privilege to us, we prize it. We thank Thee for every precious thought that's been in our hearts today concerning Him.

We thank Thee that You've been able to garrison these hearts and minds and ours about and that many of those foreign thoughts, those alien thoughts, those things that would indeed grieve us that You've even spared us for so much of this. We do pray that Thy people wherever they're found, that the warning that's been issued in the Word, this warning not to lust after the things in this world, but to walk in the Spirit and fulfill not the lust of the flesh and to indeed let that heart have a single purpose and that to enthrone the blessed Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, enthrone Him in our hearts. And indeed He will provide all that we need.

We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. O Lord, look upon Thy people and favor them with a consciousness of Thy presence. And grant, we pray Thee, as they lift their hearts heavenward, as they meditate and think upon Thy word, there will be that ample reward of seeing Your glory and having You fill and provide all that satisfies the longing heart, the heart that longs after Thee.

These things we ask again in the wonderful name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks. Amen.

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