

## **Sermon Sunday 24 August St Andrew's Psalm 73**

### **Introduction**

The title of this psalm is 'A Psalm of Asaph'. So the question is 'Who was Asaph? Asaph was a singer and musician at the time of David and Solomon and this psalm was written by him. Asaph was an organiser and leader for the temple choirs in the days of David, and presumably for Solomon after him. In addition to being a gifted musician he is also a prophet in his musical compositions under the guidance of David. This is referred to in Chronicles 29 v30.

This is a psalm of two halves. In the first part Asaph is concerned about the contradiction he sees around him between the goodness of God and the prosperity of the wicked and ungodly people he comes across. In the second part of the psalm Asaph enters the house of God and meets with God. We shall see how God changes his attitude and deepens his understanding.

## Sermon

As I said earlier, this psalm is written by Asaph who was a musician at the time of David. Asaph begins this psalm with a simple declaration of the goodness of God to His people. By this he showed that he understood not only that God was good, but that God actively showed that goodness to Israel and to the pure in heart.

But there was another truth that disturbed him greatly. It made him almost loose his foothold; it made his feet nearly slip. V3 says 'For I envied the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked': This seemed to contradict what Asaph knew of God as declared in the first verse. It also seemed that God was good to the arrogant and to the wicked. It all seemed so unfair to Asaph, and this made him almost stumble and slip.

In the next few verses Asaph develops this contradiction further. Not only are the wicked rewarded equally to the righteous, but they seem to be *more blessed* than the pure in heart. Their lives seem to have *less trouble* and are not as plagued by ills as the average man or woman. Therefore in verse 9 we read pride is their necklace: In Asaph's analysis, because God did not punish the wicked as Asaph thought He should, they simply became *more* wicked, and even wore their pride as a prominent necklace. They therefore became more violent, greedy, and more likely to scoff and blaspheme. Together with Asaph, we picture these rich, famous, proud, showy, violent, greedy, people strutting about enjoying their wickedness. Nothing seems to change: we are as troubled today by people behaving like that just as Asaph was.

In verse 10 Asaph develops his argument even further. 'Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance'. The wicked man has associates who are just like him, and they take even more just as he does. In verse 11 'They say, "How does God know?' In the previous verses Asaph told us that the wicked man sets his mouth against heaven. Here, he tells us what the wicked man and his associates say against heaven. They claim that God is blind or ignorant; therefore, they can do as they please and Asaph seems to believe that God is unable to do anything against them.

In verse 13 Asaph laments: 'Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure'. The frustration kept building for Asaph. He felt that it was vain for him to be pure in heart, in vain for him to have clean hands before God and in vain for him to be innocent.

Asaph continues in verse 14: 'All day long I have been plagued, I have been punished every morning': Asaph felt that his life was much more difficult than the life of the ungodly man. While the wicked man enjoyed all his wealth and ease and pride, Asaph had to endure being plagued and punished all day and every morning.

As we may expect in a poetic outpouring, Asaph was exaggerating. The life of the wicked was not as good as he observed, nor was Asaph's life as bad as he felt it to be. We can probably sympathise with the *feeling* that prompted Asaph in this psalm.

In verse 15 we read 'If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed your children'. Asaph caught himself from sliding further into despair over the perceived prosperity of the wicked. He did not want to promote this sense of injustice and despair that he felt.

In verse 16 'When I tried to understand this, it was too oppressive to me': Asaph was caught in a trap. He could not deny the evidence he saw that the wicked and ungodly often have good lives. He could not deny that his own life was often hard, leaving him feeling plagued and chastened by God. He felt all this to be true, but he also felt he could not talk about it because it would be untrue to others.

In verse 17 however Asaph went into the house of the Lord, the sanctuary of God. The crisis had seemed to build and build for Asaph, until he went into the house of the Lord. In the house of the Lord Asaph gained a perspective and understanding of his problem that he did not have before. In the house of the Lord he was able to see things from an *eternal* viewpoint, and he then understood the final destiny of those he had thought of as wicked and ungodly.

In V18-we read: 'Surely You place them on slippery ground': This is part of the understanding Asaph has gained in the house of the Lord. He understood that the ease and security of the wicked was really only an illusion, and they were actually set on slippery ground, ready to fall at any time. Earlier in the psalm, Asaph worried that his own feet had almost slipped. Now, with a perspective gained from the house of the Lord, he sees that the wicked are the ones on slippery ground.

Verse 19 'How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors': Asaph could only understand this with the *eternal* perspective brought to him at the house of the Lord. In daily life he could only see what worked well for

the wicked; with an eternal perspective he saw their destruction, their desolation and their terrors. Earlier in the psalm, we had the feeling that Asaph would have gladly traded places with the wicked person who seemed to be blessed. After gaining this eternal perspective, we see that Asaph would *never* trade places with them. With an eternal perspective from the house of God, Asaph understood that the good life of the ungodly is really as fragile as a dream, and they will soon wake to the reality of the destruction, desolation, and terrors that are their portion.

In verse 20 we read: 'So, when You arise, O Lord': Asaph admitted that it *seemed* as if God were asleep because he could not always see His active hand of judgment against the wicked. Using this idea, Asaph knew that God would awake and judge them; He would 'despise them as fantasies'.

In verse 23 Asaph writes 'Yet I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand': Asaph here declared both that *he* was **with** God, and that *God* was with him. It wasn't enough for Asaph to know and to say that God was with him; he also had to confess that he was with God.

V 24 'You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory': With the new perspective gained at the house of the Lord, Asaph now understood that God would guide him in this life and ultimately him into glory. It is important that Asaph expected God to guide him with His counsel. He expected to hear God's wisdom and receive guidance through it. He didn't expect to be guided primarily through feelings, circumstances, or experiences, but to be guided through counsel.

V25. 'Whom have I in heaven but You?' This is the beautiful expression of a longing heart for God and for eternity. Asaph probably understood that there would be much for him in heaven. But most important of all is the presence of God.

V 26 'My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever': Asaph recognised both his weakness and the strength of God, and the enduring character of God's strength.

This verse speaks deeply to the human experience, it recognises our inherent frailty, both physically and emotionally. We may often find ourselves in situations where we feel weak and helpless. Our bodies can become weary and our hearts heavy. Praise God for we are not left to face these challenges alone. God is our source of strength. He is the one who uplifts us and provides peace

when we feel overwhelmed. The word “portion” in this context signifies that God is not just a passing support but the lasting source of our fulfilment and sustenance. Everything we need and seek can be found in Him.

In moments of struggle, it is easy to be tempted and then rely on our own abilities or external sources that can lead us astray. However although we may falter, God remains our stronghold. In our weakest moments, His strength shines the brightest. It is a reminder to return to Him, to lean into His support, and to acknowledge that true security lies in our relationship with Him.

At the end of this psalm Asaph no longer had doubts about the destiny of the ungodly. With the eternal perspective gained at the house of the Lord, he understood that they would indeed perish. In verse 28 ‘But as for me It is good for me to be near God; I have made the sovereign Lord my refuge. I will tell of all your deeds’: Asaph’s visit to the house of the Lord has changed him. It gave him far greater understanding and an eternal perspective and the Lord is the strength of his heart and his portion forever.

### **Prayer**

Lord you have my heart  
And I will search for yours  
Jesus take my life and lead me on.

Lord you have my heart  
And I will search for yours  
Let me be to you a sacrifice.

And I will praise you Lord  
I will praise you Lord  
And I will sing of love come down  
I will sing of love come down  
And as you show your face  
We'll see your glory here                      Amen