

Exegetical Outline

- I. The psalmist affirms a theological truth (v. 1).
- II. The psalmist confesses his near apostasy because of his envy of the wicked (vv. 2-12).
- III. The psalmist contrasts his personal experience with that of the wicked (vv. 3-16).
- IV. The psalmist gains new insight in the sanctuary of God (vv. 17-20).
- V. The psalmist confesses his foolishness and acknowledges God's presence in his life (vv. 21-26).
- VI. The psalmist reaffirms his faith in YHWH (vv. 27-28).

Homiletical Outline

We live by faith, not by sight.

- I. We can affirm a theological **reality** without truly understanding it.
- II. Envy for the wicked is a slippery slope to apostasy. **Struggle**
- III. Doubt uncontrolled can destroy both you and the community of faith. **Contradiction**
- IV. We gain understanding of ultimate things when we gather together. **Perspective**
- V. We must confess our doubt and trust that God is always with us. **Brokenness**
- VI. Only after we have experienced the dark road of doubt can we fully appreciate the nearness of God. **Reality Reaffirmed**

Though we may be shaken and dismayed while those who despise God go on their merry way, we can gain confidence in the community of faith as we declare that in Jesus Christ we have eternal hope that outweighs all our earthly pains.

I. **Reality.**

- a. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purposes" Rom 8:28.
 - i. How many of you believe this verse to be true?
 - ii. Have you ever experienced great suffering and been quoted this verse or pondered this verse and wondered if it was really true? Does everything really does work together for the good of those who love God? Maybe you have doubted this truth and have been unable to understand it. Maybe this has been a promise that has caused you to doubt God's goodness.
- b. Well Asaph had a similar experience and in Psalm 73 he tells us of how he came to truly understand the reality of God's goodness.
- c. Read Ps 73:1
 - i. Surely God is good to His people, to those who remain faithful to Him. He begins by stating this spiritual reality. One that He fully believes, but one that had almost made him doubt God.
 - ii. You see Asaph was a leader in the temple. A leader among the people of Israel. He knew his theology. He knew the right answers. This is likely a truth he was taught as a child and believed his entire life. One that was generally accepted by the community. A truth that he "surely" affirmed.

- d. I hope that we too readily affirm the truth that God is good to His people; that he cares for their every need.
- e. But maybe you are struggling with that truth today... Well so did Asaph.

II. **Struggle.**

- a. Read Ps 73:2-12.
- b. Asaph here informs us that this reality, this theological truth, almost made him stumble. The image is that of him being on slippery ground with no firm foundation. He was unable to keep his footing.
- c. "For" introduces us to the reason why he almost fell, and it was envy.
- d. Asaph had begun to envy the wicked. He saw their apparently peaceful lives and he wondered why he didn't have that also. He wanted what they had.
- e. He "saw" their *shalom* and he wanted it.
- f. We see here that Asaph's feet began to slip when he took the time to look at study the life of the wealthy wicked.
- g. As we will see later in the psalm Asaph was going through some struggles and so this sparked his contrasting of himself with the wicked.
- h. He describes them here as "super-human."
 - i. It appears to him that they have no struggles, they are different that common humanity.
 - ii. They use violence to get their ways.
 - iii. Their sin knows no bounds. It is a product of their prosperity.
 - iv. They use their tongues to rule over people (Ps 12).
 - v. They even cause the people of God to turn to them and follow their ways.
 - vi. They see themselves as autonomous individuals. They need no one but themselves.
 - vii. They live atheistic lives, with no regard for God.
- i. Asaph had become infatuated with the wicked. He uses the pronoun "they," "their," and "them" some 18 times in these 11 verses.
- j. His envy for the wicked has distorted reality. He began to see their way of life as a viable option.
- k. No doubt he was being tempted to throw off all restraint and live the way they did.
- l. He had fallen into the lie of pragmatism. Whatever works, that must be the right way.
- m. Maybe you are struggling today and those in your family who have no regard for God seem to be doing just great. They are happy. They have a beautiful family and nice cars and a nice house, but you are struggling just to make it by.
- n. Be careful not to fall into the trap of envy. It is a slippery slope that will lead into all types of sin. It will cause to doubt God's goodness and to desire that which is not yours.
- o. A quick word on the wealthy.

III. **Contradiction**

- a. Read Ps 73:13-16.
- b. Now Asaph acknowledges the contradiction between his experience and the promise that God is good to His people.

- c. “Surely” here contrasts with v. 1.
 - i. Asaph is doubting God’s promise.
- d. It seems to him that remaining faithful to God, keeping his hands pure, was all in vain.
- e. He was active in his godliness, persistent in keeping the commands of God. Not only was his heart pure, but he also was diligent in keeping his hands pure.
- f. Surely he did not think he was perfect, but he was a man who had a track record of obedience.
- g. Yet he is beginning to think that all of his godliness has been in vain. He has obeyed the Lord, but for what benefit.
- h. Notice that he has turned his focus entirely inward. The pronouns “I,” “me,” and “my” 8 times in these 4 verses.
- i. He is struggling. He is experiencing pain. He is likely being oppressed by these wealthy wicked. And he is wondering how God could allow this all to happen to him. How could God abandon him?
- j. Asaph is really beginning to wonder if God is actually good to Israel, or if this was just a spiritual platitude that makes people feel better about life.
- k. But there is one thing that kept Asaph from utterly apostatizing and falling into complete sin.
 - i. He knew that if he did he would have betrayed the people of God.
 - ii. Though he had begun to doubt and everything seemed out of place to him, one thing held him in, his responsibility to the community of faith.
 - iii. He recognized that his actions affected more than just him. That he belonged to a community.
- l. We can learn here from Asaph that when we are struggling with doubt we must be careful how we speak. We must be careful to not make one another stumble.
- m. He knew these things and it troubled him deeply. But he allowed his trouble to drive him to look for answers.

IV. **Perspective.**

- a. It was not until Asaph entered the sanctuary of God, the temple that is, that he gained a new perspective.
- b. Sometimes when we are off on our own we get lost in our thoughts and temptation becomes so overwhelming we almost turn from God.
- c. The last place we want to go in these times is where God’s people are.
- d. We want to stay far away and keep brooding over our doubts. But oh that is the time that we need to be in the sanctuary!
- e. As he came among the people of God, and no doubt heard psalms being sung and the torah read, he realized that he was getting it all wrong.
- f. It was in this place that Asaph was given a new perspective and understood the final destiny of the wicked.
- g. Oh brothers and sisters how we need one another. How we need to be diligent of meeting together here at the church and in each others homes.
- h. We must be diligent in meeting together often and reminding each other that we live not for ourselves, but for the one who has given us all things in Christ Jesus.
- i. Heb 3:12-13

- j. “Surely” here is now contrasted with v. 13 and is a signpost that Asaph’s perspective has been completely changed.
- k. We have now shifted from “them” to “I” to now “you.”
 - i. This new perspective is focused on God.
- l. Asaph has been reoriented, as it were, and he now understands that he may have almost fell, but the wicked will surely fall.
- m. His feet had almost slipped, but the Lord will make the wicked fall into complete ruin.
- n. The wicked will suddenly become nothing, they are not forever carefree as he had thought.
- o. The picture of the Lord awakening from a dream gives the image of them as mere phantoms.
- p. The language of Lord here is not God’s covenant name, but rather the name meaning “Sovereign.” They thought that they ruled with their tongues and that God did not care, but oh are they mistaken, for He is the only Sovereign one.
- q. This is not saying that the Lord is sleeping, but that when he arises to destroy them it as if he just woke up from a dream and they were nothing but visions. They will be gone in a mere moment when the Lord acts.

V. **Brokenness.**

- a. This new perspective that Asaph has gained leads to his **brokenness**.
- b. When he was utterly distraught with doubt, he acknowledges that he was like a stupid animal.
- c. Yet God has continually been with him.
 - i. “With you” in v. 22 connects v. 23.
 - ii. Even though he was like a brute beast with God, YHWH was continually with him, right by his side.
- d. He was leading him along with his counsel. Holding him by his right hand and guiding to a place of glory.
- e. Now this language of taking him to glory has caused of debate among scholars. Is he talking about heaven, God’s presence, or the psalmists own honor?
- f. It must be stated that the psalms are never concerned with the intermediate state, as it were. They are concerned with God’s presence being made manifest here and now. They often look forward to a future day in which that will be made a reality, an eschatological hope if you will, but they are not thinking of escaping from this life. They are praying for God’s deliverance here and now and they want to see God’s kingdom made manifest on the earth.
- g. With that said, I think it is best to take this as a metonymy for God’s glory. It seems to me in the context of these verses the focus is on God’s presence with the psalmist and “glory” is a common metonymy for God.
- h. I think what Asaph is saying here is that the Lord is guiding him in his counsel, leading him to a place where only God’s presence dwells. He will be like Moses, seeing the very glory of God pass before Him and thus he will be blessed. There will be no more doubt because he has seen the glory of God.
- i. He then affirms his faith with a rhetorical question, to which the obvious answer is no one or nothing.

- i. He may have envied the wicked, but now he realizes that God is all he needs.
- ii. He doesn't need prosperity.
- iii. He doesn't need a care free life.
- iv. He doesn't need what the wicked have.
- v. All he needs is God.
- vi. He has come to a point where God has become his only desire in the entire universe.
- j. "My heat and my flesh may fail." Even if he is utterly laid bare, and has nothing at all, God is still with Him.
- k. God is the rock of his heart. He may have been on slippery ground, but God was with Him the entire time. The Lord is a rock for him, a solid place to stand. He is His portion, his only need in all the earth.
- l. Do you believe that today? The Lord is all you need. There is nothing else in the entire universe that can satisfy you. Others may seem to have it all together, but they can have the whole world, but if they do not have Jesus they have nothing. And to the contrary, you who have been united to Christ Jesus have everything you ever needed. You have the Holy Spirit, your seal of redemption.
- m. Don't be tempted to believe that God is not good to His people. Come to a place where you know that God is right by your side.

VI. **Reality Reaffirmed.**

- a. "For behold." "Listen!" Asaph has come to fully realize that the promise of Ps 1 is true. That those who are far from God, who's ways He does not intimately involve himself, they will perish.
- b. He states that God will destroy all those who are unfaithful to Him. Those who commit adultery against him. Which is what Asaph had almost done.
- c. "But as for me" is contrasted with v.2. Asaph has come full circle. He has come to understand that his doubts were unwarranted. That his envy had lead him to entertain lies about God and His dealings with His people.
- d. He has exchanged the idea of God being good to His people from an idea of pragmatism, to an understanding that God is near even if he cannot see it.
- e. And for the first time now in the psalm he uses the covenant name of God, "YHWH."
- f. He recalls the claims of Ps 2 and confesses that he has all he needs because the Sovereign Lord is his refuge. For, surely all those who take refuge in Him are blessed.
- g. V. 28 Asaph has recounted these things for the good of the people.
 - i. He almost declared his doubts and made the community of faith stumble, but the Lord was by his side the entire time, keeping him by His grace.
 - ii. Now he declares something, but it is a testimony of faith and an encouragement to the people of God.
 - iii. And don't you agree?
- h. I challenge you today to deal with your doubts. To meet with Pastor Matt or one of the elders, or someone you know has a strong, vibrant relationship with the Lord.