

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

DEC 2023 | PSALM 73:1-28

*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.*

Psalm 73:28 (ESV)

SEEING THE TRUTH ABOUT THE LIES

Every day seems to bring a new level of shock at the audacity of evil aggressively expressing itself in our world. Just a casual glance seems to suggest that life is fairly random and that evil might just be winning. A closer look brings more confusion and even depression. Finding the original source of evil feels illusive, so we don't know how to stop its flow. We must find a perspective that allows us to honestly face reality and find stability as children of God. The testimony of Asaph in Psalms 73 is an example of having the right perspective of evil and how necessary that perspective is.

Asaph was a worship leader in the temple of Israel. He was surrounded by holy things every day. People looked to him as an example of how to appropriately approach God and worship Him. But, he admitted in his song that he almost stumbled into despair. He confessed that he began to notice the obvious: the wicked seemed to be doing better than the righteous, and especially him. We can identify. We are bombarded with cultural metrics to which we can't measure up. The prosperity of the wicked seems to contradict the promises and agenda of God. Doesn't He say that we will be blessed and be the head and

not the tail? (See Deuteronomy 28.) Many have concluded that the best life on earth is that of the wicked, and the best life after death is for the righteous, so we try to get as much of the wicked's bounty now as we can while making sure we don't go too far and lose what is waiting in heaven. Asaph points to a different way of living.

APPARENT REALITY IS ALARMING

Psalm 73:1-16

As we look at those who have concluded that God is not real, or at least not relevant, they don't seem to be as burdened as we are. Many times it appears they have ease with no pain, success without failure, applause without rejection. They have chosen to eliminate God from their worldview. That way there is no ultimate accountability nor any absolute boundaries that can't be crossed. They don't deal with guilt because there is nothing that they have done wrong. (What even is wrong in a relative world?) They are not afraid to use whatever power they can muster to rule over those who are powerless. They fear neither God nor law. In the world as they perceive it, they are free to explore all their desires and ambitions without any concept that some

may lead to death. They offer attractive plans for naive people. They are recognized as leaders because people follow them. What is a small pastor like Asaph to conclude when he has a congregation of 50, and the narcissist has thousands following him? He could easily conclude that he has washed his hands in vain. Respecting boundaries and following God's word don't work as well as whatever plan they are following. We, too, run the danger of concluding the wrong things and being deceived when we entertain the conclusion that the gospel doesn't work in every situation.

Surveys show that thousands of previous church attendees are no longer attending. No doubt many are saying in their hearts "church doesn't work for me." Often we too quickly accept their diagnosis and try to change the church so it will work for them. That never improves anything. Yet many are trapped in Asaph's perception, and because they have been leaders in their faith, they feel that they can't tell anyone (see verse 15). They hurt alone and afraid. What can be done for us when apparent reality has become our reality?

TRUE REALITY IS LIBERTY

Psalm 73:17-28

Just as when we adopt apparent reality, we conclude lies and experience death to joy, love, hope, and meaning, when we accept God's perspective, we conclude truth and experience life. When Asaph went into the sanctuary to meet God, he saw reality. He saw the end of the wicked. Contrary to what he thought previously, he saw that their path was slippery and their end was sure. We aren't sure what all he saw that made him conclude this, but we know what God has revealed to us in His word about the end of the wicked. Though the Bible doesn't tell us the origin of evil, it does tell us the end. The same God who created all things and permitted the serpent to occupy the Garden of Eden is the one who became a man and took on evil in Himself and killed it. Evil did its worst on the cross as Jesus drank the dregs of the cup of wrath. All the principalities, powers, and demons gathered at mount Calvary to witness the death of their only threat (see Psalm 2). But, in His death He took all of them on - satisfied eternal justice, defeated death - so that He could forgive sin. That is the end of evil. It stops where forgiveness begins. Yes, those

who refuse forgiveness will experience the wages of wickedness. In fact, the most wicked act that is possible is to refuse the grace of forgiveness.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.

Hebrews 10:28-31, ESV

We as God's representatives are equipped to forgive those in our gardens simply because we are forgiven. Hostilities end when forgiveness is offered and received. While we wait for the whole cosmos to be restored, we are infecting the whole world with a power greater than evil: forgiveness by grace.

Asaph also saw the permanent presence of God. His eyes were opened to the reality that God never leaves us on our own. He is ever present. Our merits don't draw Him and our demerits don't repel Him. We are never alone. Since He is present, all His resources are available to us. Guilt can't make Him leave. He has forgiven. Shame can't repel Him. He cleansed us with His own blood. Fear can't deter Him. He banishes fear. Nothing can stop His presence from being with us.

Asaph also received courage from seeing that God has Asaph's right hand. He holds him up. Likewise, no one has the power to rip us from His hand. We are protected by God Himself. It is His grip, not ours that matters here. His hand is firm when mine is limp. Asaph was aware that God has taken to the role of guidance. We aren't expected to know all the paths of righteousness. He will lead us. It is ours to follow.

Asaph saw the surety of the future. There is coming a day when all that was purchased on the cross will be made manifest in the earth. Wick- edness will be vanquished. Evil will rule no more. Injustice will

be made right. Sadness will be untrue. We will be unable to remember the hurt and pains of oppression. All things will be renewed and re- stored. Jesus' blood guarantees it. Asaph's conclusion? It is good for me to be near God. No kidding. In His presence, there is nothing in heaven that I don't have and nothing on earth that I lack. I can think of nothing that I don't have in Him. Perspective is essential. God gives us His perspective by faith. We are not living in fantasy when we believe the invisible is real and the visible is only temporary. When our eyes are filled with the effects of evil on society, we can go into the sanctuary and find a new perspective. It is a better view.



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