

A Study in Psalms, Week 3 Handout

Psalm 73: How can a good God allow the righteous to suffer?

“...look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

2 Cor 4:18

Introduction

1. Howard Stern, radio “shock jock”: 5-year, \$500 million contract
2. Magic Johnson: Contracted AIDS during countless adulterous acts
3. Faithful Christians: lost jobs, alienation, persecution, tragic illnesses (self/spouse/children)
4. Can’t God take better care of his faithful saints? (Or at least punish the wicked!)
5. This is an age-old and extremely important issue—many have lost their faith over this!
6. Psalm 73 deals with this cynic-pleasing, saint-puzzling topic

Background

1. Theme for this study of Psalms: praise and worship
2. This is a psalm of worship, but more, a psalm *about* worship
3. One of 12 psalms written by Asaph (see the superscription)
4. Like many others, this is a two-part psalm
5. This is a very candid psalm—Asaph openly admits his struggles and shortcomings
6. This psalm challenges our assumptions about evil
7. Many misconceptions about faith and suffering

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

Heb 11:6

The Struggle

1. <Read Psalm 73:1-14>
2. Asaph begins with the truth on which his faith is founded (and the truth which vexes him!)
3. Asaph believes God exists and is good, but he’s confused by what he sees
4. Notice Asaph’s honesty—he tells it as he sees it
5. Very important confession in v.3—it qualifies what he writes next
6. Asaph made some incorrect conclusions
7. Asaph was also troubled by the prosperity of the wicked (their “*shalom*”, vv. 3b-5)
8. Asaph describes these wicked ones (vv. 6-12):
9. Asaph also proclaims the folly of remaining pure and faithful (v. 13-14)

The Restraint

1. <Read Psalm 73:15>
2. Kudos—Asaph kept silent while he pondered the situation

The Triumph

1. <Read Psalm 73:16-28>
2. But human reasoning didn’t solve the problem—only in worship did he find the answer
3. The worship experience caused a dramatic change in Asaph
4. Worship had two specific effects on Asaph
 - a. First, it gave Asaph a new perspective on eternity
 - b. Second, it gave Asaph a new perspective on himself
5. Though struggles may continue, he praises God as his “*strength and portion forever*” (v. 26)
6. Asaph also found that God had never left his side (v. 28)

Summary and Conclusion

1. God's children are not promised a life free of suffering
2. Worship gives us focus, strength, and encouragement to "keep running the race"
3. Worship teaches us that ultimate good is knowing God
4. Prosperity in this life isn't guaranteed, but it is in the next one!
5. The fate of the wicked is a sobering reality

Next week, Psalm 90...