**Asaph’s Very Bad, Horrible Day**

Prepared by Nathan L Morrison for Sunday July 19, 2020

Text: Psalm 73

### Intro

1. January 17, 2004…
   1. A 66-ton whale died and was beached on the southwestern coast of Taiwan, near the city of Tainan.
   2. Two weeks later, on January 29, authorities decided to truck the dead whale to a laboratory where they could do an autopsy.
   3. It took 50 laborers and three lifting cranes 13 hours to hoist the 56-foot behemoth onto a flatbed trailer truck. Pedestrians and shop owners poured into the streets to watch the spectacle of a whale carcass driven through the streets of downtown Tainan.
   4. And then it happened!
   5. As the truck crawled through that downtown region, with crowds looking on, the whale exploded. That's right, it blew up.
   6. The inner conditions of the dead mammal, combined with the bumps in the road caused an eruption that the townspeople will not soon forget.
   7. Cars, people, and local shops were splattered with whale entrails. Traffic was brought to a halt for hours. The smell was almost unbearable!
   8. *(Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois; source: "Thar She Blows!" AOL News (1-29-04); see also BBC News* [*http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3437455.stm*](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3437455.stm)*)*
2. Probably no one got up that morning thinking they would have whale guts on them by noon!
3. Isn't that just like life sometimes? You're going about your business, and a whale explodes!
   1. You didn't see that coming.
   2. You didn't plan for it.
   3. You certainly don't welcome it.
   4. Life has a way of suddenly altering its course down hard paths, leaving us hurt, confused, and weak, with lots of unanswered questions
   5. What do you do when you have a bad day?
4. What do you do when your theology clashes with reality? When you have a crisis of faith?
   1. How do you hold to the conviction that God is good when life is unfair?
5. In those moments we can turn to the Psalms, where the raw emotions of real people struggling with temptations, sin, unfairness, and an unjust, corrupt world around them can give insight and perspective.
   1. In the midst of walking by sight where all we may see is the darkness, and just when we think God is nowhere to be found, GOD IS CLOSER THAN WE THINK when we walk by faith! *(II Cor. 5:7)*
6. We will examine Psalm 73, a psalm of Asaph when he felt the pressures of a bad day and let his faith waver!

#### Asaph & Psalm 73

* 1. Psalm 73 starts out letting us know the author was Asaph. Who was Asaph?
     1. While most of the psalms were penned by David, many are written by others and some are written anonymously!
  2. Asaph:
     1. Asaph was one of the members of the tribe of Levi whom David put in charge of the worship at the tabernacle (I Chronicles 6:39), and he was a singer and a cymbal player before the Ark of the Covenant when it was brought to Jerusalem (I Chronicles 15:16-19).
     2. He and his relatives were tasked with ministering before the Ark (I Chronicles 16:7, 37).
     3. His sons (descendants) were there after the exile as singers and cymbal players at the laying of the temple foundation in Jerusalem (Ezra 2:41; 3:10).
     4. His sons were singers and ministers at the Temple and were there with Nehemiah at the dedication of the newly built wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:44; 11:22; 12:35, 46).
     5. Asaph, appointed by David, left a family legacy of singing and playing cymbals in the service of God.
  3. Psalms is usually arranged into 5 Books, and Psalm 73 by Asaph begins the 3rd Book!
     1. Book 1: Psalms 1-41. All in this section are ascribed to David except 1, 2, 10 & 33.
     2. Book 2: Psalms 42-72. Psalm 72 tells us it is written by Solomon but ends saying, “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” Perhaps this indicates Solomon wrote it as a tribute to David shortly after his death, because many more psalms ascribed to David appear in the rest of the Psalms.
     3. Book 3: Psalms 73-89. None of the psalms in this section are ascribed to David except 86.
     4. Book 4: Psalms 90-106. Most of the psalms in this section are anonymous except for 90, ascribed to Moses, and 101 & 103, which are ascribed to David.
     5. Book 5: Psalms 107-150. Some of these are ascribed to David while most in this section are anonymous.
  4. Psalm 73:1: Asaph praises God and confesses Him as good to Israel and to all those pure in heart!
  5. Asaph begins the 3rd Book of Psalms by praising God and then admits to a crisis of faith!

#### Asaph’s Very Bad, Horrible Day

* 1. Asaph writes this psalm about the struggle of being righteous in an unjust world.
  2. Psalms 73:2-15:
     1. How demoralized, distracted, and gloomy we can feel when we give in to “envy”! – It can consume us and become akin to idolatry (Colossians 3:5)
  3. Four key words in Psalm 73:3 (not in any order):
     1. **Arrogant:** Arrogant refers to people who make sure people notice them and what they have. They make sure the cameras are clicking and the interviewers are there to fawn over them. They are often overly confident and thrive off being center stage (center of attention).
     2. **Wicked:** Wicked emphasizes the actions of those who are actively choosing that which is offensive to God. Perhaps Asaph allowed himself to be envious of the celebrities of his day, those who lived without a care for God or His word!
     3. **Prosperity:** It was the prosperity these God-rejecters enjoyed that caught Asaph’s eye.
        1. The Hebrew word for prosperity is *shalom (H7965).* Recognize it?
        2. It literally means “peace with God” such that your life is fulfilled, tranquil, safe and complete.
        3. It is the word Jerusalem is derived from, meaning “city of peace.”
        4. How could the wicked have the peace of God?
        5. It is easy to look at the lifestyles, the cars, the clothing, the houses the wicked live in, the company they keep, and think, “They're getting everything God promised to His people! I don't go to the clubs, I maintain all this discipline and for what? They are the blessed, not me. I thought you reap what you sow! God, I'm getting a raw deal!”
     4. **Envy (Covetousness):** Envy is the tendency to compare yourself with someone else in a way that leaves you feeling deprived. Envy means “I want what you have.”
        1. Asaph had fallen into the trap of loving the world and the things that are in the world (I John 2:15-17).
        2. He ceased being concerned about the sin of the successful and started focusing instead on the success of the sinful.
        3. Asaph had let envy in the door, and now it colored everything he saw!
  4. We perhaps have all been there at one time or another – seen the success or prosperity of the wicked and wondered if being faithful was worth it! (Psalm 37:1)
  5. Imagine being a righteous employee for an unjust/wicked boss!
     1. You are not only a law-abiding citizen but also the rule-follower at work.
     2. You recognize you don’t work for man but work for Christ (Colossians 3:23-24) so your work ethic demonstrates your faith on the job!
     3. Your boss says no overtime and no leave for an undetermined amount of time!
     4. But you have 60 days to use by the end of the year or you will lose it. You rightfully earned that time off.
     5. No appeals work and the end of the year rolls around and you lost your 60 days paid leave. You’re angry and hurt but you are not alone for others also endured such unjust treatment.
     6. However, you found out your boss unlawfully used deceit to gain over $40,000 in overtime that year, and took many vacations, and not only that, you found out after she left the job to go on to bigger and better things that she was going to conferences in Hawaii and using company money to take helicopter rides to sight see and island hop!
     7. Your wicked boss lives in a mansion, and you found out how she unscrupulously must have afforded that over the years!
     8. You are left angry and feeling like your faith and playing by the rules isn’t worth it!
  6. Asaph felt that way too! Like his faith had been in vain!
  7. But he also gained a much-needed perspective when he viewed the ungodly through the lenses of God!

#### How God Views The Wicked

* 1. Psalms 73:15-20
  2. Deep within himself, Asaph knows that he is wrong for how he is feeling.
     1. Verse 15 reflects this because Asaph was unwilling to speak these aloud to God’s children, the people of Israel.
     2. He has kept this turmoil to himself, not wanting to cause anyone to stumble.
     3. But trying to understand his own circumstances in contrast to the prosperity of the wicked still is causing him difficulty.
  3. All of his envious thinking changes when Asaph enters the sanctuary of God.
     1. Going into the sanctuary caused Asaph to see life from God’s perspective.
     2. One of the purposes of worship is to put God at the center of our vision *(II Cor. 5:7 reminds us to walk by faith and NOT by sight!)*
     3. Asaph would see the fire burning from the altar, reminding him of his position before the Almighty God, reminding him of his sin, and reminding him of God’s mercy!
  4. We are greatly tempted to say “why bother serving God” when severe trials are upon us.
     1. We must immediately adjust to a godly perspective.
     2. This seems to be what Asaph is able to do by going to the sanctuary of God.
     3. In the sanctuary God was his focus, not his problems, and not his envies!
  5. The prosperity of the wicked is only temporary (Psalms 73:17-19).
     1. They enjoy their sin for a time, perhaps from a human perspective for a lifetime.
     2. But from the perspective of eternity, from the point of view in worship, there is a quick ride to the bottom (Jesus’ parable in Luke 15 of the Prodigal Son).
  6. Their end will be terrible! (Psalm 37:1-2).
     1. Asaph realized that “the world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (I John 2:17).
     2. God completely controls their destiny, not them.
  7. The story of Esther speaks of the seeming success of the wicked till their end is revealed!
     1. The Jews were in danger of genocide at the hands of the King’s 2nd in command: Haman the Amalekite (Agagite; Esther 3:1).
     2. He was an arrogant and hateful man who because of his wounded pride over one Jew, Mordecai, he deceived the king into signing a law that would eradicate all the Jews!
     3. When Queen Esther (Mordecai’s niece) was told she put a plan in place that revealed Haman and his plot to the king which ended with him being hung from the gallows he erected for Mordecai!
     4. Not only that but the comeuppance for the wicked was just starting: the sons of Haman were killed as well as all those who attacked the Jews throughout the Persian Empire.
     5. It was such a route that a perpetual celebration was instituted by Queen Esther, Purim, that is still celebrated by Jews today! (Esther 9:20-32)
  8. When we view the wicked in contrast to the righteous through the lenses of God, envy melts away!

#### Renew Your Relationship To God

* 1. Psalms 73:21-28
  2. Armed with a new perspective about God and this world, Asaph also sees himself clearly.
     1. Envy had poisoned him and had powerful effects on him.
  3. Psalm 73:21-22: “When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.”
     1. “God, I was like an animal.” What does he mean by this?
     2. Example: Dogs are only concerned with the immediate. Our dog, Stormy, is not thinking about tomorrow. His big concern is immediate gratification.
     3. Asaph confessed his self-pitying, self-centered bent. And then, in worship, he renews his relationship in praise.
  4. Psalms 73:23-28: “Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works.”
     1. Asaph takes his bad day to the right place and finds out that he didn't have it bad after all (Psalm 37:16)
  5. With an eternal perspective, everything looks different.
     1. The psalmist’s speech has now changed dramatically from self-pity (73:13-14) to praise of God’s handiwork (73:28).
     2. Now he speaks no longer as an ignorant beast; instead, through God’s guiding counsel he has now become a spiritually “enlightened witness.”
  6. God wants to do that for you!

## Conclusion

1. Asaph concludes with hope in Psalms 73:27-28.
2. The final two verses of this psalm are the conclusion of the matter for Asaph.
   1. Those who are far away from the Lord will perish. Do not be envious of their situation.
   2. It is good to be near God. It is better to be near God than to be far away from God. Problems will come to all; do you want God with you or against you when problems come?
   3. Make the Lord your refuge. When trouble strikes, set your focus upon God. Put God in the center of your vision. See life from God’s perspective.
   4. Tell the world about the goodness of God. God’s deliverance is a powerful evangelistic tool to share with others. Tell them about how God helped you through your turbulent times!
3. Psalm 73 begins with praise, covers envy and doubt, then moves from radical doubt to a reaffirmation of faith!
4. Psalm 65:4: A psalm of David, it also affirms that the one who seeks God in His courts will be blessed!
   1. “How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You To dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple.”
5. Life will be filled with unfairness and the successes of the unjust, and if we walk by sight we will be filled with doubt and experience wavering faith.
6. In those moments, let us not envy the wicked for their end is destruction, but like Asaph concluded, draw near to God and tell others of His mighty works!
7. If not obeyed Christ yet, repent, be baptized, and hold fast to His word!
8. If a Christian, let your life show it – live *for* Him now so you may ever live *with* Him!
9. Whatever your requests, let them be made known ***NOW*** while we stand & sing!