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Psalm 73

"When Life Seems Unfair"

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Have you ever felt that life seems to be unfair or that bad things happen to good people or that followers of the Lord don't seem to have it any better in life than those who don't know the Lord? You aren't alone if you've ever wondered about such things. A man in the Bible by the name of Asaph - an accomplished musician and priest in the Temple of God - thought about these things too, and we have a psalm he wrote that reveals his innermost struggles about how he wrestled with the justice of God and the apparent unfairness of life. A pivotal event happened in his life that helped him reconcile these things, and the lessons he learned are shared in this psalm. Pastor Gary's message will bring encouragement to everyone who has considered these questions.

Historical Background

1. Asaph was a priest.
 - a. **1 Chronicles 15:17** - *"So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel; from his brothers, Asaph son of Berekiah..."*
 - b. He also served under David's son, King Solomon.
2. Asaph was the chief musician appointed by King David to serve in the Temple.
 - a. **1 Chronicles 16:4-5** - *"[David] appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel: Asaph was the chief, Zechariah second, then Jeiel..."*
3. Asaph was a seer (prophet).
 - a. **1 Chronicles 25:2** - *"... Asaph, who prophesied under the kings' supervision."*

- b. [2 Chronicles 29:30a](#) - "... *Asaph the seer.*"
4. Asaph wrote 12 psalms: [Psalm 50](#) and [Psalms 73-83](#).
 5. There are more writings in the Bible from Asaph than Jonah, Amos, Micah, Joel, Malachi, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Nehum, Haggai, Obadiah, Peter, James, and Jude!
 6. We need to understand that Asaph wasn't just some spiritually shallow guy who asked these questions; he was a pastor who led worship in the house of God!
 7. This psalm is Asaph's testimony about his struggle with the "Why?" questions, and his perspective on things once he had come out on the other side, so to speak.
 8. Asaph was troubled so deeply about the "Why?" questions that he almost lost his faith in God.
 - a. [Psalm 73:2](#) - "*But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.*"

Asaph's Initial Observations About The Wicked

9. The wicked are financially prosperous.
 - a. [Psalm 73:3](#) - "*For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*"
10. The wicked are physically healthy.
 - a. [Psalm 73:4-5](#) - "*They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.*"
11. The wicked are morally corrupt.
 - a. [Psalm 73:6-8](#) - "*Therefore **pride** is their necklace; they clothe themselves with **violence**. From their **callous hearts** comes **iniquity**; the **evil conceits** of their minds know no limits. They **scoff**, and speak with **malice**; in their **arrogance** they **threaten oppression**.*" (Emphasis added)
12. The wicked are verbally blasphemous.
 - a. [Psalm 73:9-11](#) - "*Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and*

drink up waters in abundance. They say, 'How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?' ”

Asaph's Initial Conclusions

13. **Psalm 73:12** - *“This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth.”*
 - a. “Why are the wicked blessed by God; aren't the wicked supposed to be punished at some point?”

14. **Psalm 73:13** - *“Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.*
 - a. “I guess I've been a good person for nothing!”
 - b. Pastor Gary said: “There's a lot of Christians who are tormented with [this] thought. [Christians] look around and they see people who are seemingly fine in their lives without God, and that causes [them] to question [their] faith and to wonder: 'Maybe this whole Christianity thing and living for God is not all that it's cracked up to be. Maybe I should be out having fun with all of my friends who don't love God and don't know God?' ”

15. **Psalm 73:14** - *“All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.”*
 - a. Pastor Gary said: “[Asaph's saying], 'I've got the problems. They don't even seem to have the problems. I have the problems! Stuff isn't always working right in my life. Why is this? What's up with that, God? How come the wicked seem to have a carefree life and my life is plagued by problems?' ”

16. **Psalm 73:15** - *“If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' I would have betrayed your children.”*
 - a. Pastor Gary said: “In other words, Asaph [was saying], 'If I had complained about this [and] if I had opened up my mouth about this and said, “This is not fair, this is not right, and I don't get it; God, why are you doing this? Why do allow this and not that?” 'If I had said this stuff out loud I would have caused your children [to] stumble. So I kept my mouth shut. But boy, I wanted to say something, because I don't like this.' ”
 - b. Pastor Gary said: “Take note, [because] this is a wonderful point for us. When you think that God is not really doing what you want God to do, don't complain about it... Pray it; don't say it! Because you will eventually come through it like Asaph... But in the meantime, if you complain about [things] you're going to be a bad witness to other people who need to know that God is faithful... So, learn to guard your mouth and be careful

when things are troubling in your life. You [should] pray it; don't say it. [Make] sure you don't set a bad example and dishonor the name of the Lord."

i. **Psalm 141:3** - *"Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."*

17. **Psalm 73:16** - *"When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me..."*
- NKJV - *"it was too painful for me..."*
 - ESV - *"it was a wearisome task..."*
 - The Hebrew word for oppressive is *amal*, which means, miserable, grievous, and burdensome.
 - Pastor Gary said: "If you try to always figure stuff out in this world, if you try to always make sense of the senseless stuff, you will torment yourself. [This will be] burdensome [to you]... There are some 'Whys?' in this life that will not be understood this side of heaven... Shame on any of us who try to do [this] on behalf of someone else. There are some things that just need to be left alone... [What we need to do] is look somebody in the eye and say, 'You know what, I don't know why this happened, but I'm so sorry, and I'll pray for you.' We need to stop giving answers for stuff that has no answers this side of heaven. Some stuff just does not make sense to us and we need to recognize that, and we need to stop trying to make sense of everything... It is even more tormenting to try to explain the unexplainable."

Asaph Concludes: God Is Good

18. **Psalm 73:1** - *"Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."*
- This verse was written in the present tense, while verse two forward was written in the past tense, until Asaph transitions to the future tense, after he gained a proper perspective about these things.
19. Asaph came to realize and understand that God is good.
20. Pastor Gary said: "Every crisis of faith, in terms of blaming God for something or becoming angry with God for something or believing that God is unfair about something... every crisis of faith is rooted in the [lie] that God is not good... This is a lie that is as old as the Garden of Eden. This was the lie that Satan perpetrated against Adam and Eve."
21. Satan twisted what God said, which is always one of his major tactics, and he basically insinuated that God's not good, because God wanted to keep something from them that would help them attain their full potential!

- a. **Genesis 2:16-17**- *“And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’ ”*
 - b. **Genesis 3:1** - *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”*
22. Pastor Gary said: “Here’s something that [should] be a real caution... We can look at life [and our circumstances], and [then we] look at other people – here’s the danger – and we can think that other people have it better than we [do]. Translation: God’s not good to me... Stop comparing yourself to other people!”
23. **2 Corinthians 10:12** - *“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.”*
24. Pastor Gary said: “An inaccurate view of God will lead to an exaggerated view of people. When you don’t think God is good, you [will] end up exaggerating other people [and their circumstances]... [Asaph] came to understand that no matter what life [threw his] way, God is good all [of] the time. And, he realized that [his] changing circumstances [aren’t] a reflection upon God’s unchanging nature. Life has unpredictable twists and turns. [There are] a lot of things we didn’t plan. [There are] some things we never imagined would happen [to us]. Those unpredictable, changing things are no reflection upon the unchanging nature of a good God. Don’t believe the lie of Satan.”
25. **Isaiah 41:10** - *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*
26. **Psalms 34:8** - *“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”*

Asaph Concludes: The Story Ends Differently For The Ungodly

27. **Psalms 73:16-17** - *“When I tried to understand all this, It was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.”* (Emphasis added)
28. When Asaph worshipped the Lord and engaged with the Word of God in the house of God he was able to see things from an eternal perspective.

29. Pastor Gary said: “[Asaph came to understand that] life is more than just here and now. [He came] to realize that it doesn’t matter what other people have or don’t have; God [would] take care of him. [Asaph came to] realize that all of the injustice and iniquity in the world [would] be punished in God’s time. [Asaph came to realize] that all of the things that [seemed to be] unfair; that scale [would be] balanced in God’s time. [Asaph came to] realize that heaven [would] be a wonderful reunion with family and friends. [Asaph came to] realize that [he] could make it through another day, because God really does love me and care about me.”
30. Pastor Gary said: “Church is where we come together on our good days and our bad days... We are reminded about the love of God and the cross of Christ... We can be encouraged to face another day... Some of you have gone through some terrible, difficult things... It’s one day at a time, isn’t it? ... There’s something about coming into the house of God and letting our hearts be bathed in the worship [of] the Lord and hearing God’s Word that just stirs us again to remember: ‘Okay, God is good, despite my circumstances. There’s a good God on the throne, and when I come to church and I gather with God’s people [that will help me] to get an eternal perspective about life.”

Important Things To Remember When Life Seems Unfair

31. We have limited understanding this side of heaven.
a. [Psalm 73:22](#) - *“I was senseless and ignorant’ I was a brute beast before you.”*
32. God will never abandon us.
a. [Psalm 73:23](#) - *“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.”*
33. God will take us to heaven at the end of our days.
a. [Psalm 73:24-25a](#) - *“You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you?”*
34. This world offers nothing to be desired compared to God.
a. [Psalm 73:25b](#) - *“And earth has nothing I desire besides you.”*
35. God is forever our strength and everything we need.
a. [Psalm 73:26](#) - *“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Psalm 73](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they've struggled with the "unfairness" of life.
4. What was your reaction to Pastor Gary's remarks about Asaph (who was a priest, prophet, and "worship pastor"), and his struggles with the "Why?" questions?
5. Share your thoughts about times when you've looked at the lives of ungodly people and wondered why they seem to have it made or have it "all together"? (See #9 and #10 above)
6. Why does God withhold punishment for the ungodly who are morally corrupt and verbally blasphemous? (See #11 and #12 above)
7. Read and discuss Asaph's initial conclusions about the wicked. (See #13 through #15 above)
8. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about refraining from saying something to another person that would be a bad witness and as well as bring dishonor to God. (See #16 above)
9. Read and discuss [Psalm 73:16](#). (See #17 above)
10. Spend time talking about each of the points Pastor Gary made concerning Asaph's conclusion that God is good. (See #18 through #26 above)
11. What are some of the ways worshipping the Lord and listening to the Word of God being taught in a service at church helped you gain an eternal perspective?
12. Read and discuss the five points Pastor Gary made concerning things to remember when life seems to be unfair. (See #31 through #35 above)
13. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).