

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Facing Our Stuff

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Message Title: Facing Disappointment Pt. 2

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Verse 1:

Surely God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart! (*NASB, Psalm 73:1)

Verse 2:

But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling;
My steps had almost slipped.
I was envious of the arrogant,
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (Vs. 2-3)

Verse 4:

For there are no pains in their death;
And their body is fat.
They are not in trouble as other men;
Nor are they plagued like mankind.
Therefore pride is their necklace;
The garment of violence covers them.
Their eye bulges from fatness;
The imaginations of their heart run riot.
They mock, and wickedly speak of oppression;
They speak from on high.
They have set their mouth against the heavens,
And their tongue parades through the earth.
Therefore (in light of this) His people (the Hebrew people) return to this place;
And waters of abundance are drunk by them.
They say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge with the Most High?"
Behold, these are the wicked;
And always at ease, they have increased in wealth. (Vs. 4-12)

Verse 13:

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure,
And washed my hands in innocence;
For I have been stricken all day long,
And chastened every morning. (vs. 13-14)

Those words drip with disappointment. He is saying, "I think maybe I have made a huge mistake. The world says, 'Eat, drink and be merry...' and it sure seems to me that it's working for them. Their kids don't get sick; everything seems to work out; they have more than enough and every day for me is a struggle!" He says, "I've tried really hard to do the right things; I've tried to walk in righteousness; I've tried to walk uprightly, to do that which is pleasing to God, and every day is a struggle!" In the words of a friend of mine, "If that's the way God's going to play the game, count me out!" He's more than a little disappointed there.

Verse 15:

If I had said, "I will speak thus," (In other words, if He had followed through on that)

Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.

When I pondered to understand this,

It was troublesome in my sight. (vs. 15-16)

Asaph, looking back, recognizes the sober responsibility he has as a spiritual leader. And what he's saying is, if he would have followed through and thrown in the towel, it would have devastated an entire generation. That's the sobering reality of those in spiritual leadership. Whether you're talking about a spiritual leader in a home, whether you're talking about a spiritual leader in a life group, a spiritual leader at work, or a spiritual leader at church, there are devastating consequences, when we choose the wrong path. Asaph understood that there were many in that generation feeling as he was feeling. They're seeing the same thing; they're coming to the same conclusion. But they love and trust Asaph, and they're saying, "You know, I don't get this but I do love and trust that guy and he seems to believe it, so I'm going to hang in there." But, if he chooses to throw in the towel, the domino effect would be devastating.

Verse 17:

Until...(We've been waiting for this "until")...I came into the sanctuary of God...

Until he regained his perspective, and how did he do that? It was when he gathered together with the people of God in worship. Asaph, as a worship leader, is certainly referring to when the nation gathered to worship and, in that context, he remembered again what's true, and that put everything back into right perspective. I think we would all acknowledge it's really hard to be a Christ follower in this culture. Every day we are bombarded with a value system that's contrary to the eternal value system of God. Frankly, it often seems like it's working for them. It's when we gather together as the people of God, that our faith makes sense, and we remember we're not alone in this journey.

Oftentimes, when we're struggling with depression, we tend to isolate ourselves, which just makes the problem worse. What we need is the exact opposite. We need to come back together in community. Asaph is saying the exact same thing. The way to keep from losing our way, is to come together as the people of God, and remind ourselves who we are, and why we live the way we live. We might say it this way: on those days when you want to come the least, it is on those days when you need to be here the most. That's part of why it's so important to cultivate a habitual pattern of worship. So on those worst days, the odds at least are in your favor that you're going to be where you need to be, to regain some perspective.

Until I came into the sanctuary of God;

Then I perceived their end. (vs. 17)

Asaph was reminded that what he's seeing is a moment in time; what he's seeing is a snapshot. The world says, "Eat, drink and be merry!" At the moment it maybe seems pretty good; it seems like it's working for them. But we need to back out of the moment and see the rest of the story; it's not so pretty.

I was watching a documentary on The History Channel of Adolf Hitler. At the height of his power it was very impressive. It looked like maybe it was possible he would take Europe and possibly the world. But the story ends with Adolf Hitler in a devastated Germany, in a bunker with a self-inflicted bullet in his head. The whole thing looks different when you see the end of the story. When we as Christians look at the way of the world, there is appeal there; it does seem to be working for some people. But, before you decide that's the path you want to travel, you maybe need to see the end of the story; you maybe need to see where that path goes, maybe rethink that a little bit.

Verse 18:

Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.
How they are destroyed in a moment!
They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!
Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form. (vs. 18-20)

He says the people in this world are living in a dream world. They are chasing pleasure for a moment, maybe for a season, but for all those who have rejected Jesus' offer of salvation, the end is devastating; the end is eternal destruction. There are a lot of people in our culture today that think the things of Jesus are funny. But one day they're going to stand face to face, eyeball to eyeball, with that Jesus and I'm going to tell you something, it won't be funny then. "Every knee will bow; every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord!" Nobody's going to be laughing at the end of this story. Asaph says, "I need to remember that".

When my heart was embittered,
And I was pierced within,
Then I was senseless and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You. (vs. 21-22)

It sounds very "Job-like" here. He's saying, "God, when I lost my perspective, I acted like a beast." Oftentimes, the scripture uses a beast, to refer to that which is flowing from our instinct. An animal doesn't have perspective; an animal lives for the moment. An animal doesn't see the end of the story; it's just living in the moment; that's all they know. And that's what Asaph is saying, "God, I was living in the moment, and in the moment, it did seem like their way is better. It did seem like their way is working out, seems like maybe that's the better path to take." But then he regained his perspective.

I love verses 23 and 24:

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.

What he's saying is, "When I was acting like a beast, when I was throwing a fit, when I was telling You, God, You had it all mixed up, the world's upside down and I think maybe I'm out of here," what was God doing? Was God saying, "Okay, if that's what you want, I'm going to throw you under the bus"? No. Asaph says, "You know, God, You are always there." In the words of Jesus in the New Testament, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Even in our worst moments, he says, God had me by the hand and was walking me through the stuff, committed to never let go until He finally gets me to the other side. And, when we get to the other side, everything's going to be made right: a place where there will never again be another disappointment. Everything that you've ever longed for, everything you've ever desired, everything you've ever lived for, everything that's ever disappointed you, will come to reality and fulfillment, beyond what you can ever imagine today. And Asaph is saying, God's commitment, even in the worst moments, is to hold our hand and to walk us through the stuff. And He promises He's going to get us to the other side, where there will be disappointments no more!

So his response:

Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. (vs. 25)

Contrast that verse with Verse 3; that's the turnaround. In Verse 3, he was envious of the wicked; in Verse 3, he was saying, "I think maybe their way is working. I think maybe I'm going to try that for a while". But he regains his perspective and, at the end of the day, that way he can't deliver the goods. There may be a moment, there may even be a season, but the end is total devastation. In light of that, whom do I have but God? What does this Earth have to offer me, that can promise me what God promises me? Do you really want a momentary pleasure in exchange for an eternal Paradise? Asaph says, "This world offers me nothing."

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. (vs. 26-28)

Asaph regained his perspective---that the world may offer snapshots, moments of pleasure, but the end of the story is devastation and destruction. There's no question, there are going to be times in this life where things just don't make sense and, from where we stand, sometimes the world seems upside down, and God seems unwilling to do anything about it. But you have to think of it this way: for those who have rejected Jesus as Savior, this life is as close to Paradise as they get, as they're destined for eternal torment. Contrasted with those who have trusted Jesus as Savior, this life is as close to torment as we get, as we're destined for eternal paradise with Jesus. God promises, that no matter what happens, He's going to take you by the hand and He's going to get you to the other side. Will there be disappointments in this life? Absolutely!

Sometimes those disappointments will stretch you to the end of your faith, but there is a promise, that even in our worst moments, like a loving heavenly daddy, God's going to take us by the hand, and even when we're throwing our worst fit, he's going to walk us through it. And He promises, "I'll get you to the other side, and there you will spend forever in a place where there will be disappointment no more"!

Father, we're thankful for Your promise. Lord, sometimes like Asaph, it's just hard to understand what's going on. It seems like the Christians suffer and get beat up; our children get sick and we lose our jobs and everything seems to fall apart. And in the godless world, the cheaters, the wicked, the pleasure seekers, it seems to all work out for them. Lord, help us to gain and regain Asaph's perspective. Lord, help us to remember that You will take us by the hand, walk us through whatever stuff this world throws at us, until one day we are in that place where there will be pain and suffering and disappointment no more. Lord, find us faithful. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Cara: I'll add my "Amen" to that as well. I want to be faithful, Bryan. Especially now, because a disappointed Christian doesn't help the cause.

Bryan: No, it doesn't help the cause. It's not good for anyone. I know this sounds like a broken record, but it's very helpful to keep coming back to the question. Do I believe God tells the truth? Yes or no?

Cara: You reminded us that for anyone who has rejected Jesus as Savior, this life is as close to Paradise as they get. That's why having the best, being the best, and climbing the ladder of success, is really so important for people.

Bryan: I don't know that they necessarily see it that way, but I think it's driven by their choice to be their own God, which makes them in charge of their own significance, their own value, trying to find meaning in life. So the only option on the table are the things of this world, and as you said, that's why they live for those things. The strange thing is, I think a lot of those people think they're going to Heaven. They just don't understand the Gospel.

Arnie: But the flip side of that coin is that for Christ followers, the world is as bad as it will ever get, and we really have no room to complain, do we?

Bryan: We really don't. We just really need to keep perspective. Again, we're back to First Peter. The hope is in the return of Christ, and what lies ahead is glorious. And nobody can diminish that. Nobody can take that away from me. And at the end of the story, that's a glorious truth.

Arnie: Complaining all the time is really very counterproductive, isn't it?

Bryan: Yeah, it doesn't really help much. You know, in most circumstances, they're relative. We're so used to comfort in America and we forget how the rest of the world lives, and we forget how Christians through the ages were treated. So we don't have really that much to complain about.

Cara: Bryan, Asaph also wrote in Psalm 73, where he talks about the end of the wicked. They're having a good time now, but it's not going to last.

Bryan: It's not going to last. And that's what completely turns his perspective. But that shouldn't make us happy. It just gives us some perspective and it's important. We don't lose sight of how the story ends.

Arnie: I know when I look back on my life, it's been hard being a Christ follower, but it's the best thing that God's ever done for me. So there is so much joy, and we talk about the negative side of the spiritual battle, because we are in a battlefield. We're not on a cruise ship, as you like to say, but in the end, it is a "peace and a joy that passes all understanding", wouldn't you say?

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely. It's interesting how much the Bible talks about grumbling in very serious terms. So I think again, it's a discipline to notice the blessings, and there's wisdom in "count your blessings." So in the month of November, one of the things I've practiced for years is, in all my prayers, I limit them to just things I'm thankful for, [Really?] and want to rehearse that as much as I can. It's a long list.

Arnie: Wow.