

Sunday evening August 19th 2018 at CBC

Sermon outline - Psalm 73

What do you do when you feel like giving up your faith?'

This Psalm, unlike the others we have been studying, was not written by King David, but by his musical director (or possibly a descendant thereof) Asaph. He lived through the reign of David and also Solomon and was present when the temple was dedicated in Solomon's reign.

If you have ever thought of giving up your faith in God, you now know, having heard Psalm 73 read, that you are not the first to have felt like that; you are not alone in your experience.

Outline:

[1] Statement/testimony

 [2-14] The reason for doubt

 [15-16] Inner anguish expressed

 [17-20] Solution

 [21-22] Inner anguish exposed

 [23-26] The recovery of faith

[27-28] Statement/testimony

That may just be too neat, but I found it helpful!

[1] THE ARCHITECTURE OF DOUBT

When you doubt, you move away from a position you have previously occupied.

[a] Statement/testimony 1

We can see verse 1 as the orthodox, the correct, the usual, the obvious position of faith for an Israelite, and certainly for the director of music.

[b] the reason for doubt 2-14

It began to dawn on Asaph that he was seeing something that appeared to contradict his core belief. He assumed that those who were arrogant towards the Lord could never prosper. (See Deuteronomy 27 and 28)

But as he looked around the picture he saw was very different. Asaph saw some terrible things, pride, violence, callous thinking, malicious words, a spiritual arrogance (laying claim to heaven?) and an influence amongst those who feed on their words. They seem to be openly defiant – *‘How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?’* And as Asaph looked on, he saw that these people appeared to be utterly untroubled by anything. They enjoyed good health, they literally ‘lived long and prospered’.

Asaph began to wonder why on earth he should continue to pursue a godly lifestyle. It can be a very compelling argument. It was then, it is now. Why bother with faith in God? What does heaven give you in return for your investment?

[c] inner anguish expressed 15-16

There is no doubt that this wrestling with doubt caused Asaph great anguish. He tried to grapple with the problem but *“it troubled me deeply”* [NIV], *“it seemed to me a wearisome task”* [ESV].

[2] THE TURNING POINT

The good news is that Asaph found his answer. And the reason for this psalm being in the Bible is surely that all who read and who can identify with the same problem can find the same answer.

[a] where he went 17

He tells us that he went into the “sanctuary of God”. Where is our ‘sanctuary’? Today, we do not have sacred buildings. It might help us to discover where our ‘sanctuary’ is if we consider what Asaph found.

[b] what he found 18-20

It was in the sanctuary that “*I understood their final destiny*”. [NIV] The ESV is more literal if perhaps less clear – “I discerned their end.” He realised where the ungodly were going.

Does this suggest where our ‘sanctuary’ can be found? Surely it is when we think about why we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ that we find our sanctuary.

[3] THE RESOLUTION OF DOUBT

We have seen where Asaph found his answer. This resolution of doubt is explored in the remainder of the psalm.

[a] Inner anguish exposed 21-22

Having discovered the right perspective for looking at the apparent prosperity of the wicked, Asaph can now reflect on the anguish he went through. He realises that when he was thinking negatively, before he saw things in the light of eternity,

his grief and embitterment actually meant that he was not thinking properly at all. He was thinking like an animal, which acts on instinct but not in response to reason.

[b] The recovery of faith 23-26

In the light of eternity Asaph sees things differently. He realises that he is always in the Lord's presence, that he may always call upon the Lord's wisdom, his greatest desires are found in God himself, and that while his physical strength may fail, his spiritual life is permanently secured.

[c] Statement/testimony 27-28

The psalm concludes with an assured statement of faith, but it now reflects the eternal realities of which Asaph needed to be reminded. He has made the Sovereign Lord his refuge and whereas at one time he did not want to speak out about his *doubts* for fear of causing others to stumble [15] now he is happy to speak out about his *faith* so that others may find the Lord to be their refuge, too.

CONCLUSION

Jesus was once faced with a man who struggled to have faith. The man was honest enough to articulate his faith and his doubts like this: *"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"* [Mark 9.24]

*"Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace."*