

# Asaph's Realigned Heart

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, before I begin preaching, hang on to the hope and the joy in those songs that we just sang, because the first part of the sermon is going to be dark.

It's going to be sobering. It's going to be oppressive. But there's light at the end.

Well, evil exists in our world today. That's not a profound statement, right? I think most of you, all of you, would agree with that. If I were to ask you to give me examples of evil in our world, we would no doubt fill the rest of our time together this morning with your responses.

Some of your responses might include the decline of our culture that we see, corruption in politics, corporate corruption, human trafficking, mass shootings, 9-11, terrorism, people living under oppression.

I even think that's both internationally under oppressive regimes. But even here in America, people live under oppression. Christian martyrs, folks dying for their faith.

[ 1 : 24 ] And not only does evil exist in our world, but it is prospering. Let's consider a moment the abortion industry, and specifically Planned Parenthood.

The Heritage Foundation summarized three key takeaways and trends from their April 2020 report, which reviewed and analyzed the annual reports of Planned Parenthood from 2006 to 2019.

And this was their three takeaways. Again, this is the summary from the Heritage Foundation report. First takeaway, Planned Parenthood is a billion-dollar abortion business and political machine with an increasing market share of total, I'm sorry, with an increasing market share of total annual abortions in the United States.

Second takeaway, Planned Parenthood's reported financial data reveals that net assets, government funding sources, and private contribution sources continue to rise each year.

Third takeaway, during that same time, between 2006 and 2019, other areas of their business, prenatal services, prenatal services, cancer screening, prevention services, contraception clients, those showed dramatic decline.

[ 2 : 48 ] The Heritage Foundation's review of Planned Parenthood's latest annual report, and that was from June 20 to June 21, from June 2020 to June 2021.

And that annual report covered October 2019 to September 2020. It revealed these startling statistics.

Planned Parenthood's one-year revenue for that time frame, from October 2019 to September 2020, their one-year revenue for that time frame was \$1.7 billion.

And they have overall assets of over \$2.5 billion, with a B, billion dollars. Evil is prospering.

The number of abortions performed in that one-year period hit an all-time high of 383,460 abortions.

[ 3 : 48 ] And the number of abortions continue to rise, in no small part due to Planned Parenthood going all-in, promoting dangerous do-it-yourself chemical abortion pills.

Notably, among other problems, these pills have a complication rate four times that of a first-trimester surgical abortion. Evil is prospering.

Let's consider another area. Human trafficking. Modern slavery. Listen to these accounts. When she was just 16 years old, Bianca was taken from the village where she grew up.

From there, she was trafficked and sold five times before arriving in a nearby country, where she was kept behind bars and made to work as a prostitute.

When she became pregnant, she managed to escape to a shelter where her baby, Anne-Marie, was born. Another account. When he was only 16, Ran took a \$20 loan from a landowner.

[ 5 : 01 ] \$20 American dollars. He took a \$20 loan from a landowner. And to repay his debt, he plowed the landowner's field for years until his government freed him.

For years, the fruit of his labor belonged to someone else. He couldn't leave. He couldn't rest. He couldn't stop. He was in bonded labor. Another account.

After signing a contract with a recruitment agency in her home country, Ida traveled abroad where she was promised a job as a domestic worker. When she got there, her employers confiscated her passport.

She was made to work very long days, had to sleep on the floor, and eat leftovers. For three years, she was kept a prisoner and only managed to escape by jumping out of a window.

After weeks in a hospital, she was finally sent home, limping, penniless, and scarred for life. One last account.

[ 6 : 06 ] Lynn met her boyfriend on a social media platform, and they talked for many months before arranging to meet in person near her hometown. Once they met in person, he asked her to come meet his uncle in another town.

So when they arrived at their destination, her boyfriend and his uncle took her and sold her into marriage to another man. Lynn never saw her boyfriend again.

These accounts that I've shared with you are included in the report, Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, Forced Labor and Forced Marriage. And this report was published just this past September.

The International Labor Organization's website, the ILO, International Labor Organization, their website also documents these following estimates. Forced labor, for example, they are in forced commercial sexual exploitation.

Forced labor across the world generates annual profits of, get this, \$150 billion.

[ 7 : 33 ] Evil is prospering. Annual profits per victim of exploitation range from \$2,300 American dollars for domestic work.

This is profits per victim. These are the profits that those in this evil work, if you call it that, this is what they get for profit.

\$2,300 roughly for domestic work. \$4,800 for construction and manufacturing work. \$22,000 for sexual exploitation.

It's a lucrative business. Evil is prospering in our nation and in our world. Ours is a world where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

Isn't this sobering? Sobering, discouraging, depressing. It can make us grieve, get angry, and perhaps turn despondent.

[ 8 : 43 ] I will tell you, as I was researching this information, I just got sick to my stomach. I shared with you only a snippet of much of what I read. And if we remain focused on this, on the circumstances of the world that we read about and observe, it can make us start to wonder where God is in all of this.

And it can perhaps make us start to question some of the things that we read in Scripture about how God deals with the righteous and with the unrighteous.

Because what we read doesn't seem to line up with what we see and hear in the world. And left unchecked, focusing on the wicked and the evil in the world could cause us to spiral down into questioning our faith as we attempt to reconcile what we observe with what we believe and read in Scripture and what we know about God.

Well, this, my friends, is the account of Asaph in Psalm 73. And that's what we're going to read through this morning.

So open up your Bibles to Psalm 73. And while you're turning there, let me share just a bit of an overview, a bit of a context about Psalm 73 before we dig in.

[ 10 : 08 ] Psalm 73 is a psalm that deals with the problem of suffering and of the prosperity of the wicked. But it doesn't struggle with the presence of suffering or wickedness, but with who suffers and who does not.

It doesn't deal so much with the presence of evil, but it wrestles with who prospers from evil and who suffers from it. In many ways, this psalm parallels a subject found in both Job and Ecclesiastes, and that being the profound shortcomings of the traditional, of the conventional wisdom that says the righteous should prosper and the wicked should suffer, right?

Psalm 73 is both a lament psalm and a wisdom psalm. And it's also autobiographical. It's painfully autobiographical, as we will see.

And it's bitterly honest. It's also a psalm that resonates with the people of God. The psalm demonstrates to us how we should deal with our own emotions, what to do when we feel disoriented, despairing, and hopeless.

Now, we will see that Asaph won't come up with a solution for suffering, but we'll read that his faith is rescued, and that his emotional well-being is restored.

[11:37] But we're going to read, just momentarily, that God salvages Asaph's faith through, of all things, eschatology. Right? That is what's going to happen in the end.

And God renews Asaph's joy through theology. That is what God is like. Psalm 73 is a glorious picture for us about the truth of how God, in knowing who He is, and communing with Him, how God actually can realign our hearts and restore our joy in the midst of suffering and in the midst of an evil world.

This psalm assures us of that. That's why I said, just hold tight. Hold tight. Well, Asaph is the writer, and he's actually responsible for 11 other psalms.

You can turn back, don't, but you can turn back to see in Psalm 50, and then in Psalm 73 through 83, those 11 psalms, he is responsible for those. Asaph was a Levite.

According to 1 Chronicles 6, he was one of a number of Levites chosen by King David to lead the worship music for the people of God. 1 Chronicles 6, verse 31 describes their duties.

[12:53] These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark rested there. 1 Chronicles 16, verse 4 further describes Asaph's service.

And we also learn here that Asaph was appointed as a chief of the Levites. And I quote this from verse 4, Then he, King David, appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel.

Asaph was the chief. And then going down to verse 7 in 1 Chronicles 16, Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the Lord by Asaph and his brothers.

And lastly, 1 Chronicles 15, 16 describes more their duties. And it says, Levites, they were to raise sounds of joy.

And in a roundabout way, we're going to see that Psalm 73 raises the sound of joy. And it does so in the midst of a real world that is impacted by evils and sufferings.

[14:24] And that includes our days, those that I just mentioned. Even in the midst of when we see evil prospering via abortion, human trafficking, and other wicked sin.

So for today, the sermon title that I have chosen, this was probably the hardest part of the preparation, was what do I title this sermon? And so I landed on Asaph's Realigned Heart.

So Psalm 73, Asaph's Realigned Heart. Now Psalm 73 is organized in four sections. So just to let you know what's coming, four sections.

The first section is verse 1. It's Asaph's Declaration. And then in verses 2 through 12, we're going to read about Asaph's Observations. And then we'll finish up in verses 13 through 17 with Asaph's Realignment.

Time is going to prevent us from going on to the 4th in verses 18 through 28, Asaph's Recitation. You might see that again later at some point. All right. Maybe on Jeff's next vacation.

[15:30] We'll come up and finish up Psalm 73. But we will spend our time today looking at those first three sections, verse 1 through verse 17. So let me read.

I'm going to read all of Psalm 73, but we're going to study just the first 17 verses. Are you there yet? Psalm 73? I gave you plenty of time. All right. Let me read this for us. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

But as for me, and this is referring to Asaph. This is a Psalm of Asaph. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For they have no pains until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

[16:34] Therefore, pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their hearts overflow with follies.

They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily, they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens. And their tongue struts around through the earth.

Therefore, His people turn back to them and find no fault in them. And they say, How can God know? Is there no knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease.

They increase in riches. Verse 13. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

For all the day long, I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

[17:40] But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then I discerned their end.

Truly, you set them in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors. Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you.

You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. And afterward, you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire beside you. My flesh and my heart may fail. But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[18:46] For behold, those who are far from you shall perish. You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of your works, of all your works. Let's pray. Let's pray. So Father, we pause, Lord, before we go any further.

We thank you for your word. We thank you for Asaph's testimony. Teach us now. Help us to glean from your truth how we can understand this word and apply this word to our lives.

For your glory. In Christ's name. Amen. All right. We'll turn back to verse 1. The psalm starts out on a very good note.

Right? It's a proclamation from Asaph of something that is true about God. He writes, Truly, God is good. And this is a key to the whole psalm as we study it together this morning.

[19:53] Now, as is the case in some novels and some movies perhaps, this psalm starts with the last scene first. You familiar with that? Have you watched movies or read books where you hit play and you're watching the first few minutes and you're like, what's going on?

And you realize, ah, they're doing the last scene first. And then the picture fades away and then it comes back and there's some flashback and then the movie sort of goes through what happens where the characters arrive at that initial, at that last scene.

I don't particularly like those type of movies because I can't keep up, especially if they do multiple flashbacks. And it does make for an interesting dialogue between my wife and I because I'm falling asleep. I wake up.

I don't know, you know, where we are in the movie, right? Thankfully, in Psalm 73, Asaph doesn't go back and forth. But we do see that Asaph makes a proclamation right at the very beginning. And it's so important as this psalm, in this psalm, because of what Asaph shares in the subsequent verses. Truly, God is good.

[21:02] I like the ESV's rendering of that first word, truly. Some of your, I think, translations say surely. And yeah, and so we use the word surely in a way, well, surely, my Tennessee volunteers will win this weekend, right?

It's surely, we use it in a way that hopefully, but I like the ESV because it starts truly. In the use of some of the other translations, surely means truly.

Truly, God is good. It's a proclamation. It's a theme that reverberates throughout scripture. Psalm 25, 8, good and upright is the Lord.

Psalm 34, 8, taste and see that the Lord is good, right? That was what we read this morning in our call to worship. Psalm 54, 6, I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

Psalm 86, 5, for you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to those who call upon you. Psalm 100, verse 5, for the Lord is good, his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.

[22:13] We've read a lot. If you're in scripture, you read a lot about God being good. But have you ever stopped to think what it actually means? What does it mean that God is good?

Well, in Hebrew, the word for good here is defined as good or well in the widest possible sense. In other words, it's much different than saying, mmm, those french fries are good. Or for those of you who ate breakfast this morning, mmm, you know, that bacon croissant was good. It's not like

that.

When scripture says that God is good, goodness refers to a moral quality about God. It refers to the benevolence of God, the kindness of God, whereby he acts on behalf of others for their good and for their benefit.

Again, it's vitally important that we keep this in mind as we go through this psalm where we see Asaph wrestle with what happens when life looks like God is not good.

[ 23 : 23 ] Is that relevant to anyone here this morning? What happens when to you God doesn't look good? No doubt in each of our lives things have happened inside of us, outside of us, around us, relationships, circumstances, our health, our jobs.

And if all we could judge the Lord on was by our feeble sense based on the circumstance, the words, truly God is good, might not be the first thing that comes to our minds and to our mouths. But Asaph makes that declaration first thing here in Psalm 73. Truly God is good. So the first, the whole verse says, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

So Bible scholars take Israel and pure in heart, those two references, as synonymous due to the way Hebrew parallelism is constructed in their poetry.

Israel is the true Israel, the faithful of God, those who are pure in heart, who are committed to the God of Israel, those who live in covenant fidelity to the God of Israel.

[ 24 : 44 ] And pure in heart indicates those who are on the inside what they say they are on the outside. They're basically not hypocrites.

That is, they're not just ceremonially clean, right? They're not just clean on the outside, but they are also truly clean, truly pure in the inmost parts.

Heart heart is referenced six times in this psalm, and that should be an indication to us that the state of one's heart plays a significant role in this psalm, and it does.

The state of our heart basically determines if we live either in the truth in which God's goodness is experienced, or in the semblance of truth, where, for example, the fact that it goes ill with Asaph, is confused with the illusion that God is not good to him.

Let me put this on the slide to make sure this makes sense to you at this point. If our heart is aligned to Scripture and to the character of God, then we live in the truth that God is truly good, and we experience the goodness of God even when we experience the sufferings of the world.

[ 26 : 13 ] But, if we live in the semblance of truth, we allow our circumstances to define if God is good and good to us.

So where's your heart? What's the state of your heart? Are you living in truth as we read and learn from Scripture? Or are you living in the semblance of truth?

Well, Asaph's declaration in verse 1 is his resolution after he struggles. He starts this psalm by declaring, by shouting, by proclaiming the goodness of God.

And while this declaration should be on each of our hearts, this declaration is perhaps especially pertinent and encouraging for those of you right now who might be battling and struggling with life's trials and who may be or perhaps already have hit rock bottom, who have found out that at the end of the day that God, the God of heaven, the God of Israel, is the God who truly is good and does all things well.

Isn't that the anchor that we hold on in our lives in turbulent times? Well, why is this proclamation so important here at the beginning?

[ 27 : 38 ] Because of verse 2. Verse 2, But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I, Asaph, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

This was Asaph's confession. Brutal, raw honesty. He basically says, I came close to abandoning my faith.

See, something came into his life that shook him to his core in such a way that he almost slipped and fell away from God. Now, this is how he experienced it, right?

How it felt to him. Now, let me do a quick sidebar. here. We read at the end of Psalm in verse 26 that God is the strength of Asaph's heart.

So, even when Asaph felt that his feet were slipping, we know that God had his heart. So, we don't have to worry about Asaph losing his faith in the Lord.

[ 28 : 47 ] But to Asaph, it sure felt like it, right? Verse 2 shows us that. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.

This is how he experienced it. Prone to leave the God I love. Do those words sound familiar? Yeah, we sing this regularly, right?

I think I put the verses up here, right, Josiah? Yeah, come thou fount of every blessing. Look at verse 3. O to grace, how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be.

Let thy grace, Lord, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above. We sing this song, right? We sing this. Is this truth when we sing this? Are we prone to wander?

[ 29 : 48 ] Are we prone to leave the God I love? You know, if Asaph was sitting here right beside Alonzi here on the front row, he would look at that, right? He would say, that was me. This is what I was recording in Psalm 73.

It's an honest confession. Well, why did he experience this? And this is what verse 3 tells us. Verse 3, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Now, some of us may read that verse and think, he's envious of the arrogant? What a dumb reason. Perhaps not a good reason, but let's not take Asaph's struggle too lightly.

I think if we are honest with ourselves, we all feel Asaph's struggle to some degree at times. see, what Asaph is wrestling with is not the problem of suffering, but it's ultimately the problem of justice. And I think that should hit home to many of us. It hits home with me, many of us here this morning. I know you. I know many of you. I've known some of you for many, many years. And many of us have a strong sense of justice.

[ 31 : 04 ] Asaph is struggling ultimately with the problem of justice. He looked out and he saw the arrogant and the proud and the boastful and the wicked, those who resist the authority of God, and he sees them prospering.

And he thinks, this doesn't seem right. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

The word prosperity, if we were to look at the Hebrew word, the word for that is shalom. Well, happy, friendly, prosperous, restful, peaceful.

If there's anything that the Bible tells us, it's that the wicked shouldn't have shalom. Right? They shouldn't have prosperity. Asaph thought, why are really good things happening to really bad, wicked people?

Again, I mentioned earlier, but our conventional wisdom, traditional wisdom tells us that the righteous should prosper and the wicked should suffer. It's the wicked who should get what they deserve.

[ 32 : 25 ] The righteous should get shalom. Right? Not the wicked. Can you sympathize with Asaph here? Even though we live in the United States and don't regularly witness firsthand man's inhumanity against man, we surely see some of it on the news and perhaps read about it online.

And surely some of us ponder, even in the quiet recesses of our mind, God, what are you doing? What are you up to?

It doesn't make sense. Asaph began to doubt God's goodness and justice. And verse 3 tells us that he found himself becoming jealous of the wicked who were receiving all the blessings but didn't do anything good or right.

You see, jealousy, envy, they rot the worshiper's heart. And this is what's happening with Asaph's heart.

It's starting to rot his heart. As we read the full psalm earlier, you may have noticed that this psalm is not so much about God.

[ 33 : 42 ] It's not God who is on trial here, but it's about Asaph, right? It's autobiographical. This is a tale of a heart seduced then healed, a heart isolated then restored to fellowship.

But for Asaph, this is what we might call having a crisis of faith. And brothers and sisters, don't think that we are not exempted from the same or similar crises of faith.

None of us are quite as strong or as faithful as we think we are that we would like to be. Because after all, we're talking about Asaph here, right? He's a worship leader.

He's one of the chief worship leaders. He was appointed by King David. He's got his theology down. He writes songs for the people of God. He's not some Israelite spiritual bum, so to say, right?

He, Asaph, is one of the cream of the crop. Yet, Asaph confesses in verse 3 that he almost fell because his heart became jealous.

[ 34 : 48 ] because as he looked at the world, he saw that things were not the way they were supposed to be. You understand that the way we think, how the righteous aren't supposed to lose their jobs, and the righteous aren't supposed to get cancer, and they're not supposed to lose their homes and be taken advantage of or to have unspeakable crimes committed against them, you understand that that same frame of reference in our minds is very similar to the very thing that Asaph wrestled hard against.

We're not necessarily so very different from Asaph. Well, verses 4 through 12 give us Asaph's observations of the prosperity of the wicked that he noted in verse 3.

Now, one maybe technical note before I move on, perhaps a reminder, is that obviously, just like we do, you know, obviously Asaph doesn't see all that there is that's going on in the world, right? It's from his perspective. But what he did observe and what he has recorded in Psalm 73 was enough to deeply trouble him. So turn to verse 4.

Now, I'm going to run through verses 4 through 12 just for the sake of time, but I do want us to explore a little bit about these various observations that Asaph had.

[ 36 : 16 ] So verse 4. For they have no pains until death, their bodies are fat and sleek. No pains until death. The NASB translation renders this, there are no pains in their death.

Asaph is saying that these people die and they don't experience the terrors of faithless, godless people like he had always heard about. He says that they're peaceful in death.

Isn't peace at death the dominion of God's people, not the wicked? Their bodies are fat and sleek. Now, remember, fatness is actually an ancient picture of healthy prosperity. Right? Not so much in our culture. Right? But fatness equals good.

Right? Excess of fatness equals really prosperous. Right? So Asaph is saying that the wicked have plenty to eat and they're enjoying their abundance.

[ 37 : 18 ] The NIV renders the second half of this verse, their bodies are healthy and strong. For they have no pains in death, their bodies are fat and sleek.

Asaph observes that the wicked have easy deaths and easy lives. Easy, easy, easy. Verse 5, they are not in trouble as others are.

They are not stricken like the rest of mankind. I have a quote from Spurgeon here on the slide, Josiah, if you would advance that to this quote. Charles Spurgeon says of this particular verse, the prosperous wicked escape the killing toils which afflict the mass of mankind.

Their bread comes to them without care, their wine without stint. Asaph observes here that the wicked have no troubles in life. In their jobs, in their families, wherever they go, they do wherever they want to go, they do whatever they want to do.

Again, everything is easy for them. And again, I repeat, easy, easy, easy. No cares in the world. That's how Asaph is viewing the evil and the wicked.

[ 38 : 34 ] Verse 6 continues, therefore, pride is their necklace. And violence covers them as a garment. In the Old Testament times, a necklace was a symbol or a token of one's dignity.

Okay? A necklace, a symbol of one's dignity. And Asaph says here that the wicked's token of dignity is their pride, their arrogance, they show it off, they're boastful, they're cocky, they're proud, they're untouchable.

And further, they're clothed in violence. They're scheming. And in their schemes, they hurt people to get whatever they want.

They live at the expense of others. And perhaps what's even more appalling than that is they don't even try to hide it, right? It's an outer garment. They wear it like a garment. Violence covers them as a garment.

They don't care. They're outwardly violent. Verse 7. Their eyes swell out through fatness.

[ 39 : 39 ] Their hearts overflow with follies. That's the ESV. The picture here is greed. The wicked cannot get enough. They consume more and more and more.

And think figuratively here, although you could perhaps even think literally here as well, that they consume more and more to the point that their eyes are bugging out.

Again, I reference Charles Spurgeon, his commentary on this verse in verse 7. The countenance is changed, loses its human form, and is assimilated to that of a fatted swine.

The face here is the index of the man. The man has more than suffices him. He is glutted with wealth. John D. Rockefeller, the first billionaire of the United States, and once, the richest man on earth, was asked by a reporter, how much money is enough?

To which he calmly replied, just a little bit more. That's greed. There's never enough. Greed is the driver for these people here that Asaph is pointing to.

[ 40 : 58 ] That's his point in verse 7. The second half of verse 7, their hearts overflow with follies. The NIV says, their evil imaginations have no limits.

So, these two halves of this verse are very good as far as, you know, paralleling one another. It's all about greed. Like their greed, which is never ending, so are their evil imaginations.

Never ending, never enough, no limits. And you know what else? Their abundance doesn't seem to result in any type of gratitude or generosity.

I don't see that in these verses. Do you? Well, what does Scripture teach us about when God prospers us? Our response should be, number one, an incredible sense of gratitude to God for what He has done for us.

And number two, a sense of generosity to others. Right? This is being a biblical steward of the blessings of the prosperity that God has given us. It's not really ours to begin with.

[ 42 : 02 ] Right? We are to be biblical stewards by sharing that with others. But the wicked are like, excuse me, but the wicked are like, I get the blessing and I will keep it all to myself and at the end of the day, I want more.

I want more blessing. This is what Asaph sees in verse 7. Verses 8 and 9, let's continue. They scoff and they speak with malice loftily.

They threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens and their tongue struts through the earth. Well, these two verses combined address how the arrogant speak.

They're blasphemous and oppressive and insolent. They mock everything. They threaten. They set their mouths against heaven. Their tongues strut through the earth as if they own and control everything.

Nothing is sacred in their speech. John Calvin comments on verse 8. I have this on the slide for you. What, they will say, is it not in my power to deprive you of all that you possess and even to cut your throat?

[ 43 : 09 ] Well, robbers, it is true, can do the same thing, but then they hide themselves for fear.

These giants, or rather, inhuman monsters, of whom Asaph speaks, on the contrary, not only imagine that they are exempted from subjection to any law, but unmindful of their own weaknesses, they foam furiously as if there were no distinction between good and evil, between right and wrong.

John Calvin comments further in verse 9, comments about verse 9, that they, not the, but they, they have set their mouth against the heavens.

Here it is declared that they utter their contumelious, now, what does contumelious mean? I didn't know. I had to look it up. So, I put in brackets, insolently abusive and humiliating, right?

So, they utter their insolently abusive and humiliating speeches as well against God as against men. For they imagine that nothing is too arduous for them to attempt, and they flatter themselves that heaven and earth are subject to them.

Don't you want to just duck, right? Don't you want to duck when you hear that? This is what Asaph has seen. Verse 10, verse 10, Therefore his people turn back to them and find no fault in them.

[ 44 : 39 ] So, this verse is probably the hardest verse in this particular chapter to translate because the term his is not used with an antecedent, but the idea goes something like this.

The wicked in all of their pomp and pride and prosperity, they would attract a certain kind of people to them who would want to drink from the wicked's abundance.

These are the followers of the rich and famous. They're groupies, so to speak. The Kool-Aid drinkers who think they have found an opportunity with the prosperous wicked.

These are the people who stand back and admire the wicked because they're making money hand over fist, because they're fat, because they're happy, they do what they want to do, they get what they want to get, they use whatever means they want.

And the people love what they see regarding the wicked. Right? The ESV says they find no fault with them. And these people desire to drink the water of the wicked's abundance.

[ 45 : 46 ] If you have the NASB, this verse renders waters of abundance are drunk by them. Verse 11.

And they say, how can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? The wicked flatter themselves in thinking that their oppressions and persecutions are unobserved by heaven.

They reason that since God hasn't stopped them, He must be oblivious. He must not be paying attention. Perhaps God is too occupied with other matters to know what is going on upon this world. The wicked simply live as if God does not see. And then they dare ask the second half of the verse, is there knowledge in the Most High?

Isn't that foolish? Blasphemous. It's insane. Well, such is the acted insanity of the wicked and the evil.

[ 46 : 59 ] Let's move on. Verse 12. Behold, these are the wicked always at ease. They increase in riches.

This is Asaph's summary of the wicked. He says that these are the bad ones. These are the ones who deserve to suffer. But they're always at ease and they increase in riches.

You know, I can imagine Asaph right now thinking, maybe thinking upon the truths that he knows from Scripture.

Maybe looking at Psalm 1. You know, Psalm 1 says, the wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away and the way of the wicked will perish. And I can see Asaph thinking, wait a minute, that's not what I'm seeing.

Psalm 9.16, the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Asaph, that's not what I'm seeing. Proverbs 28.1, not written at the time Asaph was alive, but nonetheless, the truth applies.

[ 48 : 10 ] Proverbs 28.1, the wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as lions. I can hear Asaph saying, these wicked people don't flee.

They're the ones who pursue and rob and steal and oppress. Asaph knew the truths of Scripture, but he said, I don't see it happening that way.

We see this in this Psalm. The wicked are rich and getting richer and how? They're breaking God's laws, they take advantage of others, they oppress, they deceive, they intimidate, they sit in places of power.

And it's stuff like this that can drive you and I to sometimes think, as I've just said already, that's where I live, that's what I see, that's the way things really are.

The wicked appear to be getting what I deserve, and I appear to be getting what the wicked deserve. And that is a crisis of faith, and this is what Asaph is going through.

[ 49 : 15 ] Well, verses 2-12 are Asaph's observations. So we're going to move forward now to verses 13-17, and we're going to see Asaph's foolish conclusion, and yet a wise decision, and most importantly, a realignment of his heart.

Alright? We're about to turn the channel here, right? I told you, this is oppressive, this is heavy, but we're about to make that turn. Hang in there. Verse 13, okay? We're not there yet, though.

Verse 13, Asaph confesses, all in vain have I kept my heart clean. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

Asaph basically says, I have served God for nothing. It's all been in vain. The reference to keeping one's heart clean and washing one's hands in innocence tells us that Asaph has sincerely lived a life of trying to avoid sin.

He's lived a life of righteousness according to God's word. He stood for righteousness. He stood for justice. He's done the right things. Not perfect, but he's done the right things.

[ 50 : 34 ] He's lived honorably according to the revealed word of God. Keeping one's heart clean, washing one's hands in innocence.

These words echo back to Psalm 24 verses 3 through 5. I'll read it, but if you want to turn there, please do so. But Psalm 24 verses 3 through 5 says, Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully, he will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

And I can hear Asaph saying, I've done this. And as I look around and see what's happening in all the circumstances, everything I've done was in vain.

It was for nothing. It did not pay off for me. And again, before we judge Asaph too harshly here as being unspiritual, how many times have we not said to ourselves, I've conducted myself rightly, right?

[ 51 : 44 ] I'm a person of integrity. I've stood up for what is right. I've told the truth, but yet people believe someone else. They believe the liar instead of me. People give credit to someone else instead of me.

I'm looked down at. I'm reviled. I'm mocked. I'm made fun of. I'm seen as a total idiot. Where's God in all this? We see in verse 13 that Asaph's honesty here is real and it's raw and it's bitter. all in vain. I have served God for nothing. Verse 14, for all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.

Asaph basically says, my conclusion is proved by these circumstances. Now, it could have been that Asaph was perhaps victim of some of what he's observed and shared in the earlier verses and we don't know and he doesn't say but in verse 14 he does basically say, I suffer all day long. I'm punished every morning. Every morning I get up. I want to get kicked in the face and knocked down. It seems that God treats his enemies better than he treats his children.

[ 53 : 08 ] That's the essence of verse 14. verse 15. Asaph writes, if I had said I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

That's interesting. Right? We've just read, what, verses 2 through 14? And Asaph's bitter. He has a crisis of faith.

He's trying to reconcile what he knows with what he sees. Asaph is basically saying here that although he had gone through all the agony and turmoil and wrestling with everything that he has observed, and although all of this had led him right up to the precipice of losing his faith and falling into oblivion, if he would have expressed his thoughts out loud, he would have betrayed God's children.

Isn't that interesting? Did you catch that when you read that? Although Asaph wrestled in his heart and in his mind, he would not cross the line of verbalizing his doubts, lest he destroy the faith of others.

Wow. That's worth making note of. Asaph knew that God's children needed to stand firm in faith. They needed to continue in covenant faithfulness and not be undermined.

[ 54 : 29 ] Therefore, he kept his mouth shut. And again, I find it fascinating that these first 14 verses minus the first verse, we read and they're filled with agony and despair of a soul wrestling and wondering if it's even worth following God and concluding that he has done all this.

He's lived rightly in vain, and yet Asaph wouldn't cross the line and actually say it out loud for the sake of God's people. You've got to be wondering.

You've got to be wondering like I was at this point, so why couldn't Asaph verbalize his doubts?

What was it? What was it that kept him back?

Why couldn't he publicize his thoughts and doubts? Why couldn't he jump on Facebook or Twitter or his phone, you know, the social media of the day and just spew what he was feeling and what he was thinking?

What was it that was holding him back? Well, Asaph doesn't say why specifically, but I have to think it was because of his faith. He wouldn't cross the line because there was something at a deeper level, deeper than the level of his own wrestlings, where his faith was still there.

[ 55 : 49 ] And what he really did believe was an impediment. What he really did believe deep down was an impediment. It was a blocker to him actually saying these things out loud.

Now, I happen to think this is true. I think it was because of his faith, because we read later in this same psalm in verses 23 through 26, what we read there.

Now, again, because of time, we're not going to be able to make it to the latter part of the psalm, but let me read, remind you of verses 23 through 26. Now, in this context, why do you think Asaph couldn't cross the line of verbalizing his doubts and frustrations?

So, let's read again what Asaph writes in verses 23 through 26. By the way, 25 and 26, that's our scripture memory this month, right? So, verse 23, nevertheless, I am continually with you.

You hold my right hand. God, I am continually with you. God, you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward, you will receive me in glory.

[ 56 : 56 ] Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail. Right? That's what we read.

My flesh and my heart may fail. But God, you God, you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever. I think it was Asaph's faith.

And I identify with this because I have times that I struggle and I get frustrated and I wonder, God, I trust you, but what's going on? I don't get it.

But underneath, praise the Lord, God has put in me a rock-solid faith and foundation in Him. And I think this is Asaph. Verse 16.

Let's go back to verse 16. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. Well, Asaph continues to share his heart and he says that he gave himself to honest inquiry to understand why good things happen to really bad people and why bad things happen to people who are trying to do their best before God.

[ 58 : 03 ] And what did he say? It wore me out. Wearisome. ESV, it was a wearisome task. The NASB, it was troublesome in my sight. Asaph shares, I couldn't figure it out.

I couldn't make sense of it. Verse 17. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

This is almost like saving the best for last, right? Right? Maybe this is why I stopped on verse 17, right? Asaph basically says, I went to church.

Right? That's what he says. Read it. Read it. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task until I went into the sanctuary of God.

I went to church. Asaph had beaten his head up against the wall trying to figure all this out. He had shed tears. He had cried out to God. He had struggled and struggled and struggled and in the midst of the struggle, he decided to go to church.

[ 59 : 09 ] And he says when he went to church, all of a sudden, God turned on the light for him.

Right? Note. Verse 16. I pondered this and it was wearisome, it was troublesome in my sight until I went into the sanctuary of God.

God used the means of grace, the sanctuary, the place where he dwells, the place where he meets his people. It's as if Asaph is telling us, God got me out of myself.

God got me out of myself to bring me to himself, to the place where he dwells. God got myself out of the way and brought me to him.

While Asaph was on the brink of losing his faith and he was asking all the tough questions, it wasn't until he entered the house of God into the light of God's presence and under the means of grace that God reminded him, get this, God reminded him of something that he already knew.

This faith. Incredible. Now, Asaph doesn't tell us exactly what happened when he went to the sanctuary of God.

[ 60 : 26 ] You know, perhaps, perhaps the priest stood up and read from Holy Scripture. Right? Perhaps the worship leader led them in singing psalms, such and such. Don't know.

But whatever specifically happened when Asaph went to the sanctuary of God, God met Asaph and gave him a realignment and a reorientation of perspective and priority.

Amen? Amen. He realigned him and he reoriented him. That's why I chose the sermon title, Asaph's Realigned Heart. So here's a warning and an application, my brothers and sisters and friends who are here.

When we wrestle with God and start asking questions like, how can God be good in rotten times like this? How can God be just when evil continually prospers?

How can God be loving and allow such and such to happen? How is God being good to me when I'm in the middle of this circumstance? If God loved me, why did he let this happen?

[ 61 : 34 ] What happens to us when we get into that frame of heart and all of a sudden we begin leaning on our own understanding and on our own wisdom and on our own frame of reference and on our own knowledge and on our own experience, there is nothing good.

Nothing good that can come from that. Proverbs 3, 5. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And do not lean on your own understanding.

There is nothing good when we are shut up in the throes of despair wondering where God is and we basically shut ourselves up with ourselves. That is not the person you ought to be with.

You ought not be with yourself when you're in the throes of despair. Right? Asaph says, you know what God did. God used the meeting house.

God used church. God used the people of God. God used the means of grace. God used the Bible. God used the preaching. God used the singing. God used all the stuff that takes place in the tabernacle, in the sanctuary.

[ 62 : 44 ] Why? Because it was there that I entered in. And I started to realize that God is the center, not the circumstance of the world that I'm observing.

And I started to remember that he is the most important person. And that God is exalted. And God realigned my heart as I started to worship.

And as I worshiped, what God did for me is that he started to help me see things as they really are. See, when you and I are huddled away in our bedroom and you're by yourself and covers over your head and you're talking to yourself and then you're listening to yourself and you're listening to yourself more than you're talking to yourself, we joke about that, but this is a dangerous place to be. God says to get up, go to my house, be with my people, hear my word. And guess what? I will realign you in ways that you never could imagine.

You're going to sing words that will blow apart any of your whining and complaining. And when you read those words from scripture and sing those words in song, you are going to say, bless God.

[ 64 : 07 ] God, those words are true. Every single one of them are true in spite of the circumstances of the world. And when you're with God's people, you're going to see other people that are also persevering in faith.

Other people who are trusting God. Other people, some of whose situations are worse than yours. And all of a sudden, you start to see things as they really are.

And when we gather together in this place, do you realize that there is more reality that takes place right here than when we go out into the world?

Out there, they act like God doesn't exist. Out there, they act as if there is no knowledge of God and that God doesn't see anything and that God is irrelevant.

The ultimate truth, the ultimate reality is that God is ultimately relevant. And where do you get that? You get that here in the house of God and in His Word.

[ 65 : 14 ] The songs that we sing declare the way things are. This book declares the way things really are. It's not pain free.

And we've just spent a whole year going, walking through 1 Peter. Right? We know life is not pain free. It's not trouble free. But Scripture tells us about the ultimate reality and the ultimate truth.

And so Asaph said, I went into the sanctuary of God. Last part of verse 17. Then I discerned their end.

Notice that Asaph didn't say, I discerned that God loved me. He didn't say that. Notice what he said? I discerned the end of the wicked.

This is why I said earlier that eschatology, right, the study of the end, that that saved, evidently that saved Asaph's faith. How about that? Looking ahead at what God has promised to the end.

[ 66 : 21 ] Rest assured, beloved, that God is going to take care of the evil and the wicked. Rest assured. Verse 17 is the beauty and the power of God's appointed means.

Asaph didn't say that he read a really good book by Charles Spurgeon or that he heard a stimulating podcast by so-and-so or that he saw a really cool online video of fill in the blank with your favorite pastor, right?

Asaph said that he went to the house of God. And there is a beauty and a power to the Lord's day. Don't take Sundays for granted. It's that appointed day that we enter.

Perhaps having been beaten and battered by the world and perhaps thinking, if we're honest, God, what's going on? We come into this place and there's a realignment of our hearts and minds that takes place here.

Each Sunday morning when we gather to worship and read God's word, when we pray God's word, when we sing God's word, when we are taught God's word, and we celebrate. Amen.