

Sermon: Triumph over Bitterness; Delivered by: Dr. D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament emeritus, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School;
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Bible text explored: Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph

- ¹Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
- ²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.
- ³For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- ⁴They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.
- ⁵They are free from common human burdens;
they are not plagued by human ills.
- ⁶Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence.
- ⁷From their callous hearts comes iniquity;
their evil imaginations have no limits.
- ⁸They scoff, and speak with malice;
with arrogance they threaten oppression.
- ⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.
- ¹⁰Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.
- ¹¹They say, “How would God know?
Does the Most High know anything?”
- ¹²This is what the wicked are like—
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.
- ¹³Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.
- ¹⁴All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.
- ¹⁵If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.
- ¹⁶When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply
- ¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.
- ¹⁸Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.
- ¹⁹How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!
- ²⁰They are like a dream when one awakes;
when you arise, Lord,
you will despise them as fantasies.
- ²¹When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,

²²I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.

²³Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.

²⁴You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

²⁷Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

²⁸But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds. [NIV]

Review and application:

1. The psalm's opening sentence (v. 1) ties God's goodness to those whose hearts are "pure." Dr. Carson suggested this purity is about single-minded confidence as much as about avoiding evil. (See also *Ps. 24:4*). How does this set the stage for Asaph's tentative conclusion in v. 13?
2. Have you also been tempted to feel (vv. 2-3) that it is unfair of God to allow morally depraved people to prosper?
3. In *verses 4-12*, are you inclined to identify with Asaph's envy of conceited people living a life of ease?
But is this an exaggerated assessment of how the godless "have it made"?
What is inadequate about the time-frame being considered?
4. How does Asaph's initial conclusion (vv. 13-14) smack of self-pity and self-righteousness, and what Dr. Carson called "functional atheism"?
What factors (vv. 15-17) helped him abandon his doubts about the value of living a godly life?
5. What are some negative results (vv. 21-22) of resenting the lifestyle of the ungodly?
6. What is the accurate perspective (vv. 23-26) that Asaph was now able to affirm?
To what extent does our failure to resonate with God being our "portion forever" indicate a truncated view of what awaits us in heaven?
7. What (v. 27) is the final destiny of those who abandon God?
8. What (v. 28) are the benefits of staying close to God?
9. Reflect on the ending of the song that concluded our worship service:
*And mine are keys to Zion city where beside the King I'll walk.
For there my heart has found its treasure; Christ is mine forevermore.*

