

Nothing on Earth *Finding Contentment in a World of Comparison*

Sermon 3 of 3: “My Portion Forever: How I View God”

Psalm 73

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Sermon audio and video available [here](#).

Sermon Transcript:

He wanted to meet with me for lunch. He is a man in our community who doesn't belong to our church but I minister to him from time to time. I knew he had been out of work for a long time and I figured he wanted to meet and talk about that. But when I sat down at the diner table across from him, I wasn't prepared for what he was about to say.

He said, "She wants a divorce."

“She said to me, ‘I married you for financial security. You're not providing that anymore. You're a failure.’”

Now, I know what that's a really sad way to begin a sermon. But I want you to see this man as I saw him that day in the diner. I want you to see him as I saw him because in that moment I saw this man so sad, so heartbroken, so crushed. In fact, in his own words he said, "I feel rejected and unloved." I want you to see him because in that moment I realized that this is how God feels when I treat him this way, when I basically believe that I'm in this relationship with God, and his end of the bargain is to provide material provision for me.

And as long as he does that, then my end of the bargain is to remain close to him.

We break the heart of God when we treat him that way. This is what Asaph discovers in the sanctuary.

We come now to our third and final installment of Psalm 73 and I want to thank you as a congregation for letting me indulge in this psalm all month and preach on it three different times. It's like a diamond that we turn and see a new facet, a new color. Today we turn the diamond to see it's most beautiful face. We will see the culmination of Asaph's prayer. In the first two sermons of the series we saw that Asaph, in the sanctuary, got a new perspective--a new perspective of how he views other people and of how he views himself.

He found himself in a place we often find ourselves. He found himself in the compare and despair trap. He had a very low view of others and a very high view of himself. And it all began with some wrongly guided theology in verse one of Psalm 73. There, he lays out his theological worldview. He says, "Truly God is good to those who are pure in heart." If I have a pure heart, with his assumption, God will be good to me. And this got him into all kinds of trouble because the human tendency is to count our own righteousness and count the unrighteousness of others around us. We tend to do that as human beings. We have more interest in the speck in our neighbor's eye and we can't see the log in our own. Jesus said that and he also said something that's very relevant for where this psalm leads. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there also is your heart." Where your treasure is, there also is your heart.

We we tend to put our treasure in things in this world while at the same time counting our own righteousness and the unrighteousness of others. And we start to look to God and we say, "Where's my blessing?"

I deserve it. They don't.

This was Asaph's worldview in verses 12 and 13 before he went into the sanctuary of God and got a whole new perspective on these things. We see how he viewed others and how he viewed himself pre-sanctuary. Verse 12:

"Behold these are the wicked. Always at ease, they increase in riches."

Then he turns to his view of his own self in verse 13.

"All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence."

You see what he's doing there? He's counting the unrighteousness of others and he's counting the righteousness in his own life, and he's wondering, Why isn't God blessing me like he's blessing them? I used the illustration in the first sermon of my daughter who was then around 4 years old who had every blessing a human could ever need on a on a cold winter day: she was warm near a fire, she had a cup of hot chocolate, but she thought an injustice was being done to her because her brother had more marshmallows in his cup. I heard from a lot of you saying, "If I'm honest, I can relate to that."

I used another illustration in the second sermon when we turned to viewing our own selves. I confessed before you that I think I do more dishes in the house than my wife does. Boy, did I hear from a lot of you about that one. A lot of the men reached out to me and said, "Bro, you do dishes? You're making me look bad." So I apologize if that got anybody in trouble in your marriage.

We often do this. We get ourselves in the miserable trap of compare and despair. We're perfectly capable of counting our own deeds and missing the deeds of others. So we we're confused; we say, "God where's my portion? Where's my blessing? Aren't you good to those who are pure at heart like me."

Then, everything changes for Asaph in the sanctuary when he gets a new view of others and a new view of himself in the presence of God.

Over the years of his life, Asaph should have known better.

He was a lot like us in many ways. We can follow Asaph's journey through First and Second Chronicles in the Old Testament. When we first encounter Asaph, he's a bit player in a larger story. He's literally a guy next to a guy. He's standing at the right hand of Heman the Singer. I can't wait to get to heaven and meet Heman the Singer. Heman is standing there and they are collecting musicians and instrumentalists for the tabernacle band and Asaph is spotted at the right hand of Heman and he gets invited into the band. A few chapters later, in First Chronicles, we see Asaph again, but it seems that he's been promoted from his humble position. He's in charge of a few more things. Then in Second Chronicles, when Solomon's Temple has been constructed, they have a grand opening of Solomon's Temple a huge worship service. Can you picture it?

By that time Asaph is the chief musician in all of Jerusalem. He's experienced promotion after promotion after promotion, and probably some fame around Jerusalem, and yet even he who leads God's people into worship in the sanctuary--even he started counting his own deeds and discounting

the deeds of others and wondering why God wasn't blessing him. He should have known better, but he forgot. He was led astray like any of us could be. Until finally he has some kind of unique and special worship experience in the sanctuary and his whole perspective changes.

In verse 18 Asaph looks back at the same people he was despising before, and now he has mercy on them. He realizes that God will deal with them and he looks at his own self. He looks at his own heart that he thought was so pure and his pre-sanctuary worldview. And now he thinks, My heart isn't pure at all: it's stained with bitterness. And in the sanctuary, Asaph meets "the God of the nevertheless." The God who says, "Nevertheless:" even though you are counted among those who are sinners, nevertheless, I still love you. I still accept you. This is what Asaph experienced is in the sanctuary when he had a personal encounter with the Holy God.

We pastors can always tell when we've had a special Sunday here at Stanwich because after the service when you all are coming out of the doors, there's a different look on your faces. This is true. We talk about this sometimes. We come into the sanctuary every Sunday and we're carrying all of the things of the world. Maybe it's worry, maybe it's anxiety, maybe it's laughter, or we're just talking with one another. We have a certain look on our face from being out there in the world, but when the service is over, if we've truly met God, if we've had one of those behold moments, we walk out of here and our faces have changed.

You see, God changes us in the sanctuary. God changed Asaph. He had a low view of others and a high view of himself, and we sometimes walk into this place with a similar mindset. We walk out having a whole new perspective. We have mercy on the people around us, and we have an honest view of ourselves through confession and through realizing what Jesus has done for us on this cross. He changes us.

Now, so far in this sermon series, we've been talking mostly about the compare and despair trap which is really a psychological problem that can get solved in the sanctuary. But there's actually something more significant happening here. There's something deeper than simply the psychology of how we relate with others going on here.

It's theological. Compare and despair actually affects our relationship with God because comparing distances us from God. That's what Asaph experienced in his pre-sanctuary worldview--distance from God.

Read about it with me in verses 10 and 11 look at Asaph's view of God when he's in his compare and despair trap:

"[God's] people turn back to [those who are wicked] and find no fault in them. And they say, 'How can God know? Is there knowledge in the most high.

Now, if you're a believer in God, this should scandalize you. Asaph makes an audacious statement here.

You see, what Asaph is doing in this part of the prayer is the exact same thing that that woman did to the man I met with in the diner.

She said, "I reject you.

This is what Asaph is saying.

Remember his theological presupposition at the beginning of the prayer was that God is good to

those who are pure in heart. He spends the next several verses saying, "I'm pure in heart. Where's my blessing? Why aren't you being good to me? You're being good to those who are wicked. You know what? Maybe God, maybe you don't know anything."

That's really what he's saying here in verses 10 and 11. He's saying that God is a failure. If agreement is that you're good to me if I'm pure in heart, then you're failing. "Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

I think Asaph knows how dangerous this prayer is because he actually puts it on the lips of others. "God's people" say. But Asaph wrote the prayer, so he's the one saying it. And this is how we act sometimes with God. That's why I wanted you to see that man in the diner who felt rejected and unloved when his wife said, "You're not providing for me anymore. You're a failure." This is a pretty low view of God isn't it? You want to know how to break God's heart? Only count on him for material blessings.

I met with the man in diner again a few days ago. I wanted to ask his permission to use his story in the sermon. I told him how I wanted to use it. And he said he thinks it will really help people gave me permission to use it.

And then I said, "Well, how are you doing brother?" And suddenly, he sat up straight in his chair, his shoulders went back, and he had a smile that lit up the room.

He said, "My daughter called from college. She knew that I'm going to be in town in the next couple of days and she said, 'Daddy can we have dinner tomorrow night? I just want to be with you, I miss you.'" This very same man who was so heartbroken and crushed by the rejection of his wife was now lit up with joy. Why? Because his daughter just wanted to be with him.

This is the truth that Asaph discovers in the sanctuary. He was relying on God for material provision. He was missing God himself. This is Asaph's new view of God in the sanctuary.

Let's read about it as we move on. His post-sanctuary view is revealed in verses 23 and following.

Asaph, now in the sanctuary, beholding God, says:

"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."

Daddy, I just want to have dinner with you, I just want to be with you. This makes God's heart sing! Asaph realizes in the sanctuary that he has all that he needs if he has God.

Both now and into glory.

"What is your only comfort in life and in death?"

Do you know that question from the Heidelberg Catechism? I teach it to my Confirmation kids year after year. "What is my only comfort in life and in death?"

I have the kids imagine some things that bring them comfort in life: their families, good food, their comfortable bed. Then I ask, "Can any of those bring you comfort in death?"

What is my only comfort in life and in death?

"My only comfort in life and in death is that I am not my own but belong, body and soul, to my faithful savior Jesus Christ."

What brings us comfort in life and death is being near, is being with, is belonging to, our faithful savior. This is what Asaph discovered in the sanctuary.

He continues in verse 25 in this wonderful gaze. I just picture a self gazing into the face of God, and he says this in verse 25:

"Whom have I in heaven what you? There is nothing on earth I desire besides you."

Asaph, in the sanctuary, has a new vantage point. He's now seeing the world as God sees it.

He's seeing the whole world. It wouldn't be until 1972 that we'd get a picture of the whole world. NASA released that image. You know it. It's called the Blue Marble, where one of our space ships took a photograph of planet Earth and suddenly we could behold the whole world from space. Here in the sanctuary, thousands of years before that photograph, Asaph is able to behold the whole world, seeing everything the world can offer: job promotions, security, fame, material provision. Asaph, beholding the face of God, seeing his true treasure, looks back at the whole world he says, "There's nothing there. There is nothing on earth I desire besides you, oh God.

Asaph knew it. Jesus taught it in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also is your heart.

Where is your heart? Is it in something the world can offer? If so, you might find yourself in the compare and despair trap.

Is it in heaven? You will never be disappointed.

Where your treasure is, there also is your heart.

Asaph knew it. Jesus taught. The Apostle Paul reaffirmed it in Colossians.

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

Where is your heart? Where is your mind? Is it with your truest treasure in heaven? If so, you will never be disappointed.

What do you think about?

I despise Black Friday. In Thanksgiving, we have a whole day set apart just to be thankful, just to be grateful. Thank you God for who you are or what you've done.

Now let's go buy some more. Let's go elbow out the competition to get a little bit more.

What are we doing?

Set your mind on things above. I was driving to school a few weeks ago with the children. I bring them to school every morning and we drive down Stanwich Road and Riley, my 9 year old, sits in

the front seat. Eva, my 7 year old, sits in the back seat. We came around a bend down in the road and all of a sudden the morning sun was just blasting through the front windshield. I quickly put down the visor and put on my sunglasses, annoyed. Eva was squealing in the back seat because it was so bright.

I looked over at my son who was sitting there, holding his backpack and gently swaying with his eyes closed while the sun blasted on his face.

Finally he spoke. He said, "Probably in heaven the sunbeams are more real.

I'm sitting there, driving and thinking, Wow, man. It's 7:40 A.M.

I'm about to drop him off to go learn addition and subtraction. At drop-off, I wanted to say to the teachers, "Good luck with this one.

"Probably in heaven, sunbeams are more real. This is a boy who has his mind, who has his heart, on things above. I was complaining about the sun blasting in my face. He was thinking about heaven.

Set your mind on things above. Where your treasure is, there also is your heart.

Asaph is not done with his prayer. In verse 26 he continues.

"My flesh and my heart may fail."

This is interesting because this is a Asaph's fourth time talking about his heart. He began the prayer by saying that God is good to those who are pure in heart, and in his pre-sanctuary worldview he said, "All in vain if I kept my heart clean." But then he meets God in the sanctuary and looks back at his own heart he realizes, My heart wasn't clean at all, it was pricked with bitterness. Now in verse 26, he returns to his heart, and he realizes, My heart failed me. "My heart may fail." I was relying on my heart. I was relying on my righteousness. It's really a substitute for righteousness, this word "heart" in this psalm. I was relying on my righteousness. It failed me. But look now. God is the strength of my heart.

"My flesh may fail." I might even die! What's my only comfort in life and in death? It's that I belong to my Savior. My heart--my righteousness; my bod--my strength, may fail.

I rely on God now. "God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

His pre-sanctuary worldview was "God, where's my portion? Where's my blessing? Why are you blessing others and not me?" Now, he realizes that if he has God, if he has his Savior, he has a portion that will never be taken away. God is my portion forever.

No matter what you desire, if it's on earth, it will pass. If it's in heaven, it's a portion forever.

He concludes the prayer in verse 28 with a new theological orientation. He's got a new theology now with everything he's learned in the sanctuary. Listen to the way he describes his orientation now. Verse 28:

"For me, it is good to be near God."

He had used that word "good" in the first sentence: "God is good to those who are pure in heart," but now he has a new understanding of goodness. You want to know what's good? To be near God.

That's that's all I need.

"I've made the Lord God my refuge." Asaph realizes he was seeking refuge, he was seeking security, in his own righteousness. That failed him. Now he has a new place of refuge. I've made the Lord God my refuge.

What am I going to do with all of this that I've learned?

"That I may tell of all your works.

You see, in Asaph's pre-sanctuary mindset, he was looking at his own good works. He washes more dishes than his wife. He was talking about his own good works and the bad works of others. Now, he's experienced God in the sanctuary, and he says, "I want to tell the world a new story about your good works.

We have a story to tell about the good works God has done for us on the cross.

It's not our righteousness that will save us. It's his.

If that's where our treasure is we will never be disappointed.

Where your treasure is, there also is your heart. Amen.