

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 73.

This third book of the Psalms, which runs through Psalm 89, is mostly written by a fellow named Asaph. There are a couple songs towards the end that David had written, Korah and other, but mostly dedicated to this fellow. His name means to collect or to gather. And this morning we're going to take this Psalm as a unit together, because it addresses a pretty common struggle for Christians.

When things come into your life that you don't understand, that you can't explain, that you can't defend God somehow, because you can't put your finger on what He might be doing, then we have something given to us to survive those days. It's called basic foundational truths. That things that you do know. When you don't know something, you don't understand something, you have to fall back on what you do know. And we've entitled this Psalm this morning "What We Know for Sure," because when unexplained circumstances present themselves, they become light in the dark, these foundational truths; things that you can stand on when the ground shifts below your feet. Things like knowing that God is love, or that God is good, or that God is for you and not against you, that's God thoughts towards you are good and not evil, that He has a plan and a hope for your life, that He does all things well, that everything works together for good, that He will finish the work that He's begun, that one day He'll present you faultless before His throne. You can probably make a list. Things that you should absolutely just know well, things that don't change. Everything around you changes; those things do not. So when a situation or a circumstance presents itself, those are sometimes the very truths and the truth that we have to hang on to, especially if our circumstances seem to be saying the opposite. In fact, the conclusion is just the opposite; God doesn't love me, God isn't for me, God isn't blessing me. And it seeks to try to contradict the things that you should know and that you should believe.

Sometimes our challenges to our faith -- and always from the devil -- they are challenges that are found in short-term

perspective based on present experience. So I make my conclusions about God because of what I'm going through now. Prolonged illness, loss of a job, unfair treatment by someone else, abandonment, betrayal, and the enemy is quick to yell in your ears, where's your good God now? And he whispers and questions the goodness and the nearness of God. Where is God when you need Him? And so there's an attack upon the standing of your faith.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Chapter 6, he said that we didn't war against flesh and blood, but that our fight was against principalities, and powers, and the rulers of darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness. And then he went on and he said, "So take on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand, and withstand, and having done all, to stand." And then he gives us a list of things that we can stand by. And he starts with, "Having your waist girded about with truth."

Sometimes when you don't have an explanation, you're left to fall back on what you know, and rather than struggling to try to explain what God is up to, I just fall back upon what I understand about God, the absolutes that you don't change. If you don't have those basics, I think that you're always going to be wobbling in your spiritual life. There'll be plenty of opportunities for you to go, "What is God up to? And what is God doing?"

The danger for us as Christians is to make conclusions about God based solely upon what we presently see. We don't see God's entire plan revealed. We make determinations in the process or along the way, and because we do that, we come up with the wrong conclusions almost every time.

So here's the way Asaph writes this Psalm. He writes in verse 1 the absolute foundational truth that he's learned. He then says in verse 2 and 3, before I knew this or hung on to this or believed this; however, I had great difficulty standing in my faith. In verses 4 through verse 12 he explains his arguments. In verse 13 through verse 16 he tells you his conclusion. Until verse 17, he realizes that if he looks at things from God's perspective, things change entirely.

Verse 1 says this: "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are of a pure heart." God is good. He isn't just good to Israel, he's good to anyone who walks with Him with a sincere heart. "But as for me," verse 2, "my feet had almost stumbled, my steps almost slipped. And I became envious of the boastful, when I

saw the prosperity of the wicked." In contrast to verse 1 truth that I now have in my heart, I want to look back and show you how I almost tripped. When I began to envy the boastful, I began to envy the prosperous, somehow I believed that even in their wickedness they had better really life experience than I would ever have. And notice that Asaph admits that this was a battle that was hard for him to fight. He would make lots of different conclusions that would be erroneous, if you will. But what had caused the near disaster was forgetting the basics. For Asaph in verse 3 it was the age-old problem, the prosperity of the wicked. Man, Christians have struggled for that since day one.

By the way, Job's counselor, if you read the book of Job, they believed that that was impossible; that God would not bless the wicked, and so Job must have done something wrong to be suffering so much. Absolutely backwards. How can they be so blessed was Asaph's cry, so wicked, while we who are faithful to the Lord struggle constantly every day in this life? What's up with that, God? If they treated me like they treat You, I'd make them live impoverished lives, but no, You bless them. You make life easy for them. And they're ungrateful, they're self-centered. I guess that's okay with You, because they're getting away with it. I watch them on the T.V. shooting off their mouth. They have some money, so they figure they also have an opinion that everyone would want to hear.

We should know God's not like that. He seeks to make us more like Him. God's good, God's patient, God's kind, God's longsuffering towards His enemies. But that produces a conflict in us, because why should God allow the righteous to struggle while the world, who oftentimes denies His existence, just kind of skates through life? And he uses the word "I'm envious." I want to have that kind of life. I want to have the prosperity that I see, not in the lives of the righteous, but in the lives of the wicked. It overwhelmed him. Lord, I've devoted my entire life to You. Look what happened to me. Look where I'm getting. Look what that's gotten me.

Be careful when you allow Satan to build a case against God in your thinking. But it often starts with this twisting of the truth, and then it ends up greatly distorted by the time it kind of comes out the other end. False conclusions.

So Asaph was under the pressure of observation with short-term analysis and decided that God's not fair. I don't think he'd say it out loud, but he thought it. It would sound horrible to

say. It's a little easier just to think. Why should I walk with God when those who don't seem to be doing just fine? But in all of the struggle, his spiritual life was in jeopardy, his witness was gone, his joy escaped him. Everything was clouded over. He says in verse 1, I've learned this: God's good. But until I learn that, man, looking at the world, I was on shaky ground.

Well, like I said, beginning in verse 4 he then documents his suspicions. He doesn't want to just say something to you, He wants to prove it to you; that those, at least at the time, conclusions were correct. He supports his suspicions. He gives us a litany of observations that he discovered that seemed to prove that his frustrations were grounded in experience. To be fair, the things that he says are exaggerated. They are generalized. They led to wrong conclusion. You can see the enemy at work. Be careful as you read them. You know, look at them for what they are. Here's a guy that's made up his mind God's not right towards him. Now he's trying to find reasons to believe that.

Verse 4 he says this: "There are no pangs in their death, their strength is firm." In other words, his first point, the dead or the wicked die in their sleep without suffering. Well, that's baloney. There's plenty of people that die horrible deaths that don't believe in the Lord. They can't all die healthy. But that's a tactic of the enemy; right? He isolates your view, he exaggerates your conclusion, he has you generalize your observations, and then hopes to move you away from trusting in the Lord. Be careful when you start to use words like "always" or "never" as you hunt down examples to keep you on the path of questioning God, doubting His ways. They die healthy.

Verse 5, "They're not in trouble like other men, nor are they plagued like other men." The normal difficulties of life that I face, they don't. That's not true. It might be the Hollywood version of their truth. But again, if you're on the road to doubt and frustration, it's not hard to make these half-baked kind of skewed observations, from your own heart. Because Satan wants to have you be clouded about the goodness of God, and so, cloudy observations become cloudy presumptions become even cloudier conclusions. They die in their sleep healthy. They are able to live above the day-to-day life. Oh, I have to worry about paying my bills. They got more money than they know what to do with. They'll never have to worry. Yeah, life is not easy.

He says of them in verse 6, "Therefore pride serves as their necklace; and violence can cover them like a garment." Because of their position and ease of life, they have become cocky. Their calling cards are pride and they bully their way through life with impunity. They don't worry about the consequences of their behavior because there aren't any. I'm in charge. They're emboldened and entitled. They feel no constraint. You know, being the poetic books of the Bible, really great wording. Arrogance become their jewelry and violence covers their lives. Exaggerated, but if you're frustrated, your observation gets to be skewed.

He says of them in verse 7, "Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than their heart could wish." They are fat and loaded. They don't need anything. They live beyond their wildest imagination. They have it all, and a bag to put it in. It's temporary, man. Yeah, but these are people that don't love the Lord.

He says of them in verse 8, "They scoff, they speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, while their tongue walks through the earth." Great poetry. I love the picture. They are oppressive in what they say. They scoff at any thought of retribution. They speak loftily against heaven. In their pride they don't regard God or believe in Him. They don't regard You. They boast. Their tongue walks through the earth. It is words and words and more words. And Asaph, the believer, is confused, and the benefits of him walking with God seem to be minimalized.

He says in verse 10, "Therefore his people return here, and water of a full cup are drained from them. They say, 'How does God know? Is there any knowledge in the Most High?'" He goes so far as to say, the attitude and ways of the wicked are one of the primary causes where God's people are constantly running to the sanctuary for shelter, with a cup of sorrows overflowing their tears. They are the cause of our suffering as believers. They've left us, the godly, on our knees in distress while they mock us and say, hey, where's your God now, buddy? If He knows anything, is He going to do anything about anything? I don't think so. They feel above judgment, they mock God and challenge Him to do something about it. They blaspheme and persecute God's people. They question does God see, does God exist, does He care, can He do anything about it? And they say to you, "Oh, I don't think He can. You Christians."

He is making a case in his mind. He says in verse 12, "Behold."

It's a great word. It's almost the same word in Greek and Hebrew. It means take a look at this oddity, Lord. Look at them, Lord. "Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; while they increase in their riches." This is the enigma that I'm having to deal with. This is the argument that's going on in my mind. Despite everything I observed, they're doing better and better. Their ease becomes greater and greater. I call upon your name every day. I'm struggling to get by. Lord, how can this be? Are these the mysterious ways of God? I hate these. It's not right.

Verse 1, this is what I've learned; verse 2 and 3, this is what I went through before I learned it; verse 4 through 12, this is my reasoning, this is my thought process, this is why I came to the conclusions I did; and then verses 13 through 16, here's what I'm going to do about it. And he makes the wrong decisions based upon the wrong information.

He says this in verse 13, "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, in emptiness, and washed my hands in innocence." He eventually comes to, I guess, what would be the foregone conclusion by now: It doesn't pay to be godly. The wicked have it made and then some, and they hardly care about holiness. Dirty hands are as good as clean ones, so why bother struggling every day against my flesh and against the enemy to be a child of God when the wicked do more than they want and they simply fulfill every whim and desire, and life goes fine for them. He questions in his own mind the wages of godliness when they are being paid with the coins of affliction. I'm serving God and it doesn't do me any good. There's no advantage to a serious commitment to the Lord. No benefit to being a godly man. Look at their filthy hearts, exalted. They're fed the fat of the land.

He says in verse 14, "All day long I've been plagued, I've been chastened every morning." Look, I'm taking the godly approach. This isn't fair. I seem to live in constant sorrow. I have lots of grief to face. Every morning I get out of bed, it's just the next trial. No relief in sight. I struggle to be committed. I struggle to be a godly man. I don't see any benefit over the long run. Let's get real here. Let's look at the facts.

He says in verse 15, "If I had said, 'I will speak like this,' behold, I would have been untrue to the children of your generation. And when I thought to understand this, it was too painful for me." He even goes so far as to say, I'd like to

tell others how I'm feeling, but I don't want to make their lives any more difficult. If they had faith and somehow they get through it, why should I undermine it? But let's face it, it's not working, so I'm going to say nothing. I'm going to try to keep it to myself and anguish myself, and it's too painful to keep in, but I can't really spill it. And, you know, he's trying to make sense out of the senseless. It left him depressed and discouraged. He feels guilty, but he didn't know what to do. He's living out of false observations and conclusions. He's overwhelmed. His feet, according to verse 2, were slipping out from under his spiritual life, and he didn't know what to do. And I don't know how long this went on. Days, week, months; I don't know. A long time. Enough time to develop verses 4 through 12.

I must tell you I'm really glad that the Psalm doesn't end in verse 16. This would be a bummer of a Psalm. This wouldn't be a song at all. But it doesn't. Because verse 17 begins with the word "until." I was feeling this way until. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; and I understood their end." Asaph has to do what we have to do when we find ourselves overwhelmed with illogical conclusions and forgetting the basic fundamental truths of God, and that is you have to take your reasoning and your understanding and your conclusions and set them next to those basics of God so that your perspective can be right again.

Standing in the world, watching the world too long will give you an entirely distorted view of life, and it'll cause you to err in the way that you would walk with God. If you take your cues from the world, power and success and gain are all that matter. But life in the world is lived without a conscious awareness of where that life is leading you.

Asaph went to church in the Old Testament sense. He went into the sanctuary and then got it right, and here's how he got it right. I consider their life and now I looked where they were headed. I considered their end. If you will live your life looking at life through God's word, you'll develop a Christian world view. That's what you need. You need to be able to take in everything around you and not be moved by the world and its ideas, but be moved by the Lord you serve and His word. It doesn't change. And into the framework of God's word, everything ties itself to eternity. Without His word, I am limited by what I feel and by what I see. And what I reason upon myself is the best way to live. I've got no external absolute truth to guide me at all. So I feel I --you say to people, Are you going to heaven? How do you know that? Well,

that's just the way I feel. I don't feel good when I ate three or four burritos at 12:00 in the morning, but I know it will go away. You can't go by what you feel. You need God's word, or else you're limited in your information and your view is shortsighted at best.

Asaph eventually did -- and I don't know how long to get to verse 17, but he eventually did the right thing. He took his confusion to the Lord and lays his confusions and questions next to the truths that he learned there. I know God's good and I know there's an end to life that needs to be answered to by the Lord.

Ideally, the result of you and I coming together in the sanctuary here as a church during the week and on Sundays is so that we might walk away from here having an eternal perspective so that our worldly outlooks are biblically led and spirit filled, because God's always interested in eternity. It's what matters to Him more than anything else. You don't want to go -- Jesus says if your right hand offend you, cut it off, and it's so -- it's such a shocking statement. You go, wait a minute. That's crazy. Well, it's exactly meant to be crazy, but in the perspective of the analogy, it's this: Would you rather, end up in hell completely whole or would you lose a little bit on the way, but get to the right place?

Paul said to the Corinthians in Chapter 4, "We don't live like those who look at what things that you can see because the things that we see are temporal, but the things that we can't see, those are eternal." If you can see it, you ain't taking it with you. He said to the Romans in Chapter 8, "I consider that the sufferings which I'm going through are nothing when compared to the glory that's coming later." He writes to the Hebrews in chapter 12, "Looking around and seeing we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets and ensnares us, and let's run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, despised the Cross, but He endured the shame, and then He set down at the right hand of the Father." Eternal perspective. It'll straighten out most complaints, because it's eternal.

Notice what he says here in verse 18, "Surely you have set them in slippery places; and you have cast them down to a destruction. And they are brought to desolation, in a moment! And utterly consumed with terror." The same lives and lifestyles that he said in verse 3 I was envious of, he now says



of them, they're the ones on slippery ground. I'm not. And the fate and the experience of the wicked can change in an instant, in a moment. It may not change until the moment they die, and they might even die without illness, but they'll wake up to the judgment of God for their mockery and abuse. He doesn't seem to be envying them anymore. He sees their lives as slippery ground. It's a great way to define, by the way, an ungodly life: Slippery ground. He was envious of their positions. He was envious of their carefree life. He was envious of the ease with which life came to them and the benefits they had of it, but now he looks and he goes, yeah, I don't want that. They're headed for disaster and they don't know God. The end of the wicked is far from pleasant and there's nothing to covet there.

He says of them in verse 20, "As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You will despise their image." Literally, they're living in a dream world and they're in for a rude awakening. They'll find out God despised their lifestyle, but by then it'll be too late and the dream will be over and reality will set in. It might sometimes seem as you look around the world that God's asleep. Nothing could be further from the truth. You read in Ecclesiastes Chapter 8, verse 11, "Because a sudden sentence against evil is not executed speedily, it is therefore that the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil." In other words, the Lord waits long enough to where you will be guilty for your decisions and won't be able to say, well, you didn't give me a chance. Oh, He'll give you plenty.

Verse 21, "Therefore, my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before you." Asaph realizes now that his false conclusions in light of the truth of God were immature responses. He felt terrible for coming to that determination about God. He gave himself failing marks, if you will. How could I have been so stupid? Good question. I was like an animal without sense or reason. But Lord, when I began to consider life from your perspective, I realized that what was frustrating me was the short-term present tense narrow view of life that I had adopted. The greatest and most permanent benefit of you walking with God is going to be eternal. Oh, He'll bless your life and get you a new job, make some more money and get you healthy and heal you from your sickness, but then you're going to die, and then the real benefit kicks in.

So he ends by saying this: "Nevertheless I'm continuously with you; uphold me with your right hand. Guide with me with Your

counsel, and afterwards you can receive me to glory. Who have I in heaven but You? There's none upon the earth I desire beside You. My flesh, my heart will fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You will perish; they'll be -- You'll destroy all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; to put my trust in the Lord God, and to declare all of Your works." Thanks, Lord, for sticking with me. You've gotten me through another crisis and Your word's been my guide and counsel. You've gotten me through the maze of life. I should have realized it sooner, but I got it now. Well, for a few weeks anyway.

It's why you go to church, I think. You know, you run everything you believe and see through the filter of what God has to say. And then the enemy's kind of put out of business, because you believe in the right things and you know His Word is a light to your path.

If you're close to walking away this morning because you've determined that God's not good, you should think again. That's not going to be worth it in the long run. And you don't want what the world has waiting for it at the end of line. If you're an unbeliever this morning, I would worry tremendously about where you're going. I know things look good and promising for now, but everyone dies. Check the record books.

There's a woman in India who died yesterday for -- she was 131. She looked 131. It's true. But she died. You'll get there eventually, even if you squeeze out 131. I would be very concerned with where you're going. I would go to Jesus now and make sure your future is secure, because He's the only one that can do that.

Paul was able to say when he wrote his last letter to Timothy, "I'm ready now to be poured out like a drink offering. The time of my departure is at hand. I fought the good fight. I've finished the race. I've kept the faith. Therefore, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness in the Lord, the Righteous Judge; and not just for me, but for everyone who will love His appearing in that day."

My feet almost slipped, I forgot that God was good. Don't forget. Basic fundamental truths. You got to have them. They'll keep you strong.