

## What to Make of the Prosperity of the Wicked?

We read Ps. 109 as our call to worship this morning. When I preached on this psalm last June, I pleaded from Scripture that we regard that psalm not as a call for us to nurse our own vengeful thoughts, but as prophecy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, through the pen of the prophetic David, with specific application to Judas Iscariot, but also, importantly, as a type of all that the believer is saved from, and setting before the wicked the ruin that lies before them if they do not repent. Our brother Walter [Flynn] spoke to me afterwards with some comments along the lines of the ruin of the sinner not always being as obvious as it was in the case of Judas, and I think he pointed to Ps. 73 at that time. Quite true – in fact, it often seems as if righteousness is rewarded with ruin and the wicked do well. So, to follow my sermon on Ps. 109 (eight months later), this morning I put before us the 73<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. As we come to this, let us remember what the prophet Isaiah was told to cry out: that we are but grass, grass that withers and fades, but that the word of our God stands forever (Is. 40:6-8). Hear the word of God, “A Psalm of Asaph”:

- <sup>1</sup>Surely God is good to Israel,  
To those who are pure in heart!
- <sup>2</sup>But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,  
My steps had almost slipped.
- <sup>3</sup>For I was envious of the arrogant  
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- <sup>4</sup>For there are no pains in their death,  
And their body is fat.
- <sup>5</sup>They are not in trouble as other men,  
Nor are they plagued like mankind.
- <sup>6</sup>Therefore pride is their necklace;  
The garment of violence covers them.
- <sup>7</sup>Their eye bulges from fatness;  
The imaginations of their heart run riot.
- <sup>8</sup>They mock and wickedly speak of oppression;  
They speak from on high.
- <sup>9</sup>They have set their mouth against the heavens,  
And their tongue parades through the earth.
- <sup>10</sup>Therefore his people return to this place,  
And waters of abundance are drunk by them.
- <sup>11</sup>They say, “How does God know?  
And is there knowledge with the Most High?”
- <sup>12</sup>Behold, these are the wicked;  
And always at ease, they have increased in wealth.
- <sup>13</sup>Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure  
And washed my hands in innocence;
- <sup>14</sup>For I have been stricken all day long  
And chastened every morning.

<sup>15</sup>If I had said, "I will speak thus,"  
Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.  
<sup>16</sup>When I pondered to understand this,  
It was troublesome in my sight  
<sup>17</sup>Until I came into the sanctuary of God;  
Then I perceived their end.  
<sup>18</sup>Surely You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.  
<sup>19</sup>How they are destroyed in a moment!  
They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!  
<sup>20</sup>Like a dream when one awakes,  
O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.

<sup>21</sup>When my heart was embittered  
And I was pierced within,  
<sup>22</sup>Then I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was like a beast before You.  
<sup>23</sup>Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
You have taken hold of my right hand.  
<sup>24</sup>With Your counsel You will guide me,  
And afterward receive me to glory.

<sup>25</sup>Whom have I in heaven but You?  
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.  
<sup>26</sup>My flesh and my heart may fail,  
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
<sup>27</sup>For, behold, those who are far from You will perish;  
You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.  
<sup>28</sup>But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;  
I have made the Lord God my refuge,  
That I may tell of all Your works.

(Ps. 73)

What we have heard is the very word of God. May God deal bountifully with His servants this morning, that we may live and keep His word, and that our eyes might be opened, so that we might behold wonderful things from His law (Ps. 119:17,18). [Prayer.]

### **Introduction: the Circumstance.**

Asaph was a musician in the court of David, and his sons had a role in that work as well. This Asaph (and his descendants) are the ones to whom we would naturally attribute the psalms that bear his name, Ps. 50 and the set Pss. 73-83, of which this is the first. I would not be dogmatic about this psalm necessarily being written by Asaph himself, rather than his descendants, since many of the psalms that follow seem to come from the time of the captivity (or, else, are prophetic though that isn't their tone). But for simplicity's sake I will simply call the psalmist Asaph,

according to the clear designation of the psalm. Even though the exact time of the writing of this psalm is unknown, the circumstances in which it was written could not be clearer, and are very recognizable to us – sadly to say. Verses 3 through 12 make it clear, and announce the circumstance with the phrase: “As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” Here is the circumstance that the psalmist found bothersome, wearisome, to ponder: *the wicked are prospering*. They are doing well, and he draws an outline sketch of how they are prospering, beginning at the end: there are no pains, no pangs, in their death – here is a life so full of ease that even in its ending, they are spared pains. So here is an obvious contrast with Judas, who hung himself, fell headlong, burst open and whose innards came out. It is hard to consider Judas’ death a death without pangs – but these, oh these, even in their death are free of pains. How must their lives be, then? They are not troubled as other men are, they are free from what plagues the rest of mankind! Physically, they are well off: ‘their body is fat’ is not an insult as we might read it today: no, it indicates that they are well-fed rather than emaciated, or as the ESV says: ‘fat and sleek’ (two terms we would not put together, but only because we are reading something into ‘fat’ that is not there). Other versions: ‘their strength is firm.’ (These folks have had time to work out at the gym.) Can we understand the psalmist’s envy when he summarizes their estate with these words:

<sup>12</sup>Behold, these are the wicked;  
And always at ease, they have increased in wealth.

But what sort of man does this prosperity make of them? For the psalmist portrays their character as well: they are proud; they are violent. Much is made of their speech: they at least speak of violence and oppression if not practice those things; they mock, they scoff, they set their tongue against heaven itself, and their speech cuts furrows through the earth itself. Their speech is characterized by the one quote recorded from them:

<sup>11</sup>They say, “How does God know?  
And is there knowledge with the Most High?”

Translations of verse 7 vary, but I take the bulging eyes and riotous imaginations to speak of “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16). How does this arrogance affect those around them? The meaning of verse 10 is difficult to discern, and there are many interpretations, but they generally fall into two categories. It may speak of the popularity of the wicked, for ‘those who love the rich are many’ (Prov. 14: 20b) – they have people flock to them, to be refreshed by their drink. So the old NIV interprets it. It may, on the other hand, speak of the oppression of the righteous by these: God’s people, *His* people, return to the same place as the psalmist is in, to drink the dregs forced upon them by the wicked. That too, in our experience, is the case as well, and the psalmist does confess to his being stricken and chastened daily. The wicked experience popularity and the righteous experience their violence.

And where does that leave the psalmist? What is his frame of mind? What does he confess is his reaction to the circumstance he sees? He was envious of them; he wishes that he were in their position, that he had their riches, their ease, their health of body, their popularity – envies, it would seem, even their necklace of pride, their garments of violence. To be able to speak so proudly and meet, not the thunderbolt of judgment, but success upon success - he is wowed by it all. Seeing all that, he considered his efforts to be keep his heart pure and his hands clean to have

been “in vain” – that is, worthless, of no measurable good, to no effect. Efforts to keep one’s affections godly, and the actions that spring from those affections, free of sin – all absolutely worthless in his estimation. Vain. But such a conclusion was not reached leaving his mind untroubled – no: the perplexity of mind with which this left him is revealed:

<sup>16</sup>When I pondered to understand this,  
It was troublesome in my sight

This is not a soul at peace with his envy – no, he is bothered, wearied, grieved, pricked by this circumstance, the seeming injustice of it, and the problem that it poses for him. He is double-minded; his soul is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. Have you been there? Have we been there? Does your heart cry out: what to make of the prosperity of the wicked?

### **I. Recognize the Problem Within (verses 1-3, 15, 21-22).**

The first thing that we can learn from Asaph is that our problem is *not* the external circumstance. We have to *recognize the problem within*. The internal problem that Asaph faces is a larger one than his external circumstance. We see this in verses 1-3, verse 15, and verses 21-22. Right at the beginning the psalmist draws a contrast between himself and the pure in heart:

<sup>1</sup>Surely God is good to Israel,  
To those who are pure in heart!  
<sup>2</sup>But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,  
My steps had almost slipped.

Our Lord Jesus tells us that the pure in heart are blessed, that they shall see God (Matt. 5:8), and in teaching us that he was restating and making yet clearer what David had taught in Ps. 24:

<sup>3</sup>Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?  
And who may stand in His holy place?  
<sup>4</sup>He who has clean hands and a pure heart . . .

(Ps. 24:3-4a)

And with such a people Asaph contrasts himself – and we should as well, when we are tempted to consider the pursuit of *clean hands and a pure heart* to be a *vain pursuit*. Asaph’s evaluation of himself is that he stood in contrast to the pure in heart; far from blessed, he had almost lost his footing, almost slipped. Not for him to ascend into the hill of the Lord, or stand in His holy place. The root of that problem he finds not in his circumstances, but within himself. His frame of mind was not that of the true Israel, the circumcised in heart; he was not pure in heart. His self-evaluation later in the psalm should be ours when we are likewise perplexed and envious of the wicked:

<sup>21</sup>When my heart was embittered  
And I was pierced within,  
<sup>22</sup>Then I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was like a beast before You.

He was embittered, vexed, pricked, ignorant, foolish, brutish – like a beast, a mere animal. No excuse is allowed for in the circumstance. His view of himself is a right, true one, but hardly a

positive one, hardly one designed to build self-esteem. And so he confesses that he came near to treason:

<sup>15</sup>If I had said, “I will speak thus,”  
Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.

He had almost turned Judas to the generation of God’s children, as can each one of us. When we return to that same place where Asaph was, we see that there is a measure of truth in his evaluation of our attempts to keep a pure heart and a clean hands – vain, if the mere circumstances of the prospering wicked tempt us to envy such. Our hearts are obviously not yet pure enough.

Saints, you are not alone – and Asaph is not your sole companion in that place. Nor is it only the three of us. Job had been there; see Job 24:

<sup>1</sup> “Why are times not stored up by the Almighty,  
And why do those who know Him not see His days?  
<sup>2</sup> “Some remove the landmarks;  
They seize and devour flocks.  
<sup>3</sup> “They drive away the donkeys of the orphans;  
They take the widow’s ox for a pledge.”

(Job 24:1-3)

David dealt with this problem at great length in Ps. 37 – even in his time, during his reign, that golden age, it was necessary to exhort God’s people, repeatedly, not to envy the wicked. The sons of Korah, too, in Ps. 49. Such an attitude of heart can become the frame of mind of a whole people – so it was at the time of Malachi:

You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied Him?”  
In that you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?”

(Mal. 2:17)

<sup>13</sup>“Your words have been arrogant against Me,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’ <sup>14</sup>You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord of hosts?  
<sup>15</sup>So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.”

(Mal. 3:13-15)

Both of these passages make it clear, as does Asaph’s confession of approaching treason, that this is sin that we are talking about here. Malachi makes it clear that it reveals a heart of arrogance that is uncomfortably similar to the wicked that are envied.

We must be honest here: when the wicked prosper, the first problem that we face is not that the wicked are prospering, but that our hearts are not pure, that we are not right with God if we find ourselves troubled in that circumstance. *The problem is within, and demands repentance.* If Asaph can see that, living before Christ, how much more we ourselves, when Christ so clearly tells us that it is out of the abundance of one’s heart that all wickedness comes? The problem is a problem within, within our heart, and only the Spirit of Christ can change that heart.

## II. Regain an Eternal Perspective (v. 17-20, 27, 1)

The second thing to note is how, by God's grace and His Spirit, Asaph's problem within was corrected:

<sup>16</sup>When I pondered to understand this,  
It was troublesome in my sight  
<sup>17</sup>Until I came into the sanctuary of God;  
Then I perceived their end.

Asaph came to a place where he is reminded of the things of God, into the sanctuary of God provided for the people of that time as a copy of the things that are in heaven. And what does one gain in a place like that, by the grace of God? He *regains an eternal perspective* there. God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind; to Asaph in His sanctuary, God revealed to Asaph's perception to what end the wicked are moving:

<sup>18</sup>Surely You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.  
<sup>19</sup>How they are destroyed in a moment!  
They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!  
<sup>20</sup>Like a dream when one awakes,  
O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.

He is able to perceive there what his eyes, seeing only the prosperity of the wicked, could not see. And this end of the wicked is in stark contrast to what he has confessed about the wicked, at nearly every point. Are there no pains, no pangs in their death? No: destroyed in a moment, utterly swept away by sudden terrors. Are they not troubled as other men, or plagued like mankind, always at ease? No: they have been set in slippery places, they are cast down to destruction. Do they really speak against the heavens, do they really speak loftily of oppression, do they really doubt God's knowledge, His holiness – all that, without consequence? No – it may seem to us as if the Lord, who neither sleeps nor slumbers, awakens, but that is merely an expression of His perfect, Providential timing, this time in which He is 'aroused' and that form, fat and sleek, firm in its strength, which so impressed us – the Lord God despises it.

So, what is happening here? Is this a mere convincing of oneself of what all evidence testifies against? Is this an existential leap of faith? "I know it's false, but I will believe it anyway"? Is it a shamanistic speaking of something to make it so? Is this a crutch that weak, stupid souls must cling to, to keep their pie-in-the-sky illusions intact? If you really think that's what this is, then you have no idea of what Asaph, or Job before Him, went through to get to this point. No, this is something that is hard-won by God's Spirit: it is a regained conviction that what the all-powerful, all-knowing, sovereign God has said that He will bring to pass, in all holy faithfulness He will most certainly accomplish. He lacks no resolve to do it, He lacks no strength to do it, He lacks no knowledge for a righteous judgment, He suffers no changeableness in His spirit - everything that we know from the Scriptures about our Holy God makes the ruin of the impenitent sinner more certain than the ground under our slipping feet. It is so certain, in fact, that what is clearly in the future for the psalmist can be put into the *past tense*:

<sup>27</sup>For, behold, those who are far from You will perish;  
You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.

And the complimentary truth of what goodness God shows to His people opened this psalm:

<sup>1</sup>Surely God is good to Israel,  
To those who are pure in heart!

*Surely. Surely* God is good to Israel. *Surely* He is good to those who are pure in heart; *surely* they are blessed, *surely* they will see God.

Do you see what faith is required of us, that when the wicked prosper, we yet confess their coming ruin (lest they repent)? That when we see the suffering, persecuted church, we yet confess their blessedness? We have heard Ps. 109 this morning. We have sung Ps. 1. We know these things are taught in a thousand places in the Scriptures – for example, in proverb after proverb. Do not dismiss this as Sunday School pollyanna. I’ve heard that sort of talk, as I am sure we all have, too often. “Well, we taught our children to be nice and kind, took them to Sunday School – but then they’ll go into the real world and find that things just don’t work that way. The nice just don’t get ahead.” To talk like that is to help blind our children to things eternal; it is to betray the generation of God’s children. Here, in this psalm, the real world is revealed: and it is one of eternal consequences, for better or for worse, that make any temporary success (whether it last an hour, a year, a generation, or, as for the Babylonians or the Romans, century upon century) – it makes any temporary success a very small thing, and not worthy of consideration. And, by the way, we are taught to be more than merely ‘nice’; what is commended to us are clean hands and a pure heart. This requires of us faith because in so many cases, these judgments are hidden from us, unlike Judas’ ruin, which was on full display in the field of blood. This psalm testifies to this need for faith: to our view, no pains in their death – according to God’s word, a casting down to destruction, a consumption in terrors. We must *regain an eternal perspective*.

And, brothers in Christ, we are helped greatly in this by the clearer revelation that we have in the words of Christ Jesus, of which we are reminded by the Spirit. He encouraged His disciples on that last night: <sup>18</sup> “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup>If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. <sup>20</sup>Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” (John 15:18-20) And then: <sup>1</sup>“These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. <sup>2</sup>They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup>These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.” (John 16:1-3). The wicked will certainly appear to prosper. And yet, our Lord says that the ruler of this world has been judged (John 16:11), and he says before His prayer: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; *I have overcome the world*.” (John 16:33, emphasis mine). When the Lord comes, will He find faith? Lord, grant us this eternal perspective!

### III. Be Satisfied in God [v. 23-26,28].

But there is yet another, even greater, more comprehensive truth that this Psalm testifies to, and that is a satisfaction found, not in the eternal destiny of the wicked – no, but a satisfaction found in God Himself. Saints, *be satisfied in God*. Hear what the Psalmist says after he has confessed how embittered his soul was, how pierced within, how senseless, ignorant, and brutish he was – all these things the psalmist rightly confesses he was, but then he writes:

<sup>23</sup>Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
You have taken hold of my right hand.  
<sup>24</sup>With Your counsel You will guide me,  
And afterward receive me to glory.

The nearness of God to Asaph is here confessed, and it is not by Asaph's strong hold that this has been the case, but rather that God has taken hold of him. Here is why I said that it was by God's grace that Asaph went to the sanctuary of God and beheld such things as recovered his slipping steps. It was God's presence with him, indeed His very taking hold of Asaph's right hand, that made that come to pass. And God's grace having taken him by the hand, who then guides him, but God Himself? Having been recovered by God, and guided by God, whose wisdom does Asaph then impart in this psalm? "With Your counsel You will guide me" – will guide him, has guided him, and through the words that Asaph here pens, guides us as well when we are stricken and perplexed by the prosperity of the wicked. More: this guiding has an appointed, glorious end – as horrible as the end of the wicked is, so glorious is the end for Asaph "afterward [You will] receive me to glory." He, being of Abraham's children, believes too that his reward is very great.

But what is that reward? God Himself is that reward. Asaph continues:

<sup>25</sup>Whom have I in heaven but You?  
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.  
<sup>26</sup>My flesh and my heart may fail,  
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

And how does he end the psalm?

<sup>28</sup>But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;  
I have made the Lord God my refuge,  
That I may tell of all Your works.

Think of all that Asaph here confesses with regard to God. He has God's continual presence, the continued nearness of God that is, in itself, his good – good enough, indeed, that we could call it his sole good. All other goodness and provision consists in God's abiding presence and is merely an expression of that. His guidance, so important to the recovery of Asaph's senses in this time of temptation, comes in the context of this hand-taking nearness of God. The receiving of Asaph to glory is not a receiving of him to worldly renown, fame, or any other thing we might term glory, but the only true glory itself, the glory of God, the blessed vision, the blessing conferred upon the pure in heart: that they shall see God. In the face of this, the question is asked, "Whom have I in heaven but You?" A rhetorical question with the obvious and unstated answer: no one, confirmed by the words that follow, "beside You, I desire nothing on earth." Here is the psalmist's sole



desire: God Himself. Not any benefit that He may give (as He surely will, and as He surely already has), but . . . God Himself. Thus, His nearness is Asaph's good, and the Lord God is His refuge. God is also confessed as the psalmist's portion – an altogether satisfying portion. The inheritance is a good one; the lines have fallen to Asaph in pleasant places.

It is in the light of this singular truth, yet multifaceted as any fine diamond, that all that made him envious of the wicked can vanish away like smoke. Think of each good that the wicked were enjoying temporarily. There are no pains in their death – yes, but afterwards, *You* will receive *me* to glory, to the glory of God Himself, to be in that place that needs no created light but which is lit God Himself, and by the Lamb. To have destruction and utter consumption by terrors on the other side of a painless death, is that a good? Oh, but to be received to glory on the other side of a stoning like Stephen's, is that not a great good? Or to be free of troubles, not plagued like other men in this life – but again, only to have an eternity of utter consumption by terrors? Where is perfect peace but in Christ alone, that peace that He gives, not as the world gives? Or the riches that were theirs and ever-increasing? Even the book of proverbs often confesses how useful riches are, but also confesses that

<sup>4</sup>Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,  
But righteousness delivers from death.

(Prov. 11:4)

As the sons of Korah tell us, the redemption of a man's soul is costly, and no human wealth will suffice – and we should envy the wicked their riches? Of what profit is it? Or how about those perfected forms of theirs? Those well-fed bodies, fat and sleek, firm in their strength? Their form He will despise, but the psalmist confesses that:

<sup>26</sup>My flesh and my heart may fail,  
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Our health in the present, not unimportant, is not our highest good. Heart and flesh may fail, indeed will fail unless Christ returns beforehand, and yet God is the strength of my heart *forever*. There is life everlasting that we see, more clearly than Asaph did, in the promise of the resurrection of the body that we have in the resurrection of Christ. Or popularity, is that appealing to you in the light of the supremacy of God? What approval of man compares to “Well done, good and faithful servant?” Entering into the joy of the Master makes all else fade away to the nothing, to the vanity that it is.

If all of this means nothing to you, then you do not have the God of the Scriptures in your view. You may be looking for benefits of His, but caring nothing for Him Himself, you will even miss those benefits. This consumption of the inflamed heart with God, as sole desire, more than sufficient portion, good alone, only refuge – this rightly ordered affection of heart can protect us even from how the tempter would tempt us in our recognition of the end of wicked. I have heard Christians, most unattractively, smirk at how the wicked have their just rewards coming to them. Now, there is a right pleasure that a saint should take in the justice of God, indeed in all the decrees of God, but there is a wrong pleasure that we can be tempted to all too easily. You might, in the fullness of time, find yourself frustrated in this, just like Jonah was frustrated in Nineveh. He might show them mercy as He showed you mercy in Jesus Christ. You might just meet this one

at whom you've laughed maliciously on that far shore, and have to welcome him as a brother. And if their sad end was the portion you had hoped for, you would be disappointed and go hungry. But if God alone in Your portion, and you see that this is His good pleasure, this will be one more joy added, for the simple reason that the Lord has done it. (Not that you would be there if God is not the portion you are seeking.)

Here is the thing that will truly satisfy:

<sup>4</sup>One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
To behold the beauty of the Lord  
And to meditate in His temple.

(Ps. 27:4)

When He says to us, "Seek My face," let our response be, "Your face, Lord, we will seek." (cf. Ps. 27:8). As Christ prayed, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3) May we be satisfied in God.

#### **IV. Warn the Prospering Wicked [v. 18-20] and Conclusion.**

This psalm cannot be rightly preached without giving attention to the warning implied to prospering wicked. Prosperity in the here and now does equal God's approval. Prospering in a wicked way is not a sign of God's approval, but rather a sign of judgment upon you. This psalm makes that clear as well. Once the end is clearly in view (set in slippery places, cast down to destruction, utterly consumed by terrors), then the precursors to that final judgment are clear as well: growing in arrogance, in blasphemy, in sins against other men, in making one's belly god. <sup>5</sup>But because of [their] stubbornness and unrepentant heart [they] are storing up wrath for [themselves] in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>who will render to each person according to his deeds." (Rom. 2:5-6, paraphrased). Each "success" in the progress of their wickedness is only adding to their condemnation. The righteous may suffer at their hands in the here and now, but what wrath is being stored up for the wicked. Romans chapter 1 makes the same point. Not honoring God, nor giving Him thanks, but becoming futile in their thinking, and idolaters in practice, this is what God's judgment looks like:

<sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup>For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; . . .

<sup>28</sup>And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, <sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil . . .

(Rom. 1:24-29, excerpts and emphases mine)

God gave them over to impurity, God gave them over to degrading passions, God gave them over to a depraved mind. Each 'giving over' of God will appear, to the eyes of this world, like success.

It works. We practice impurity, and no light bolts come. We give ourselves to degrading passions, pass laws that in practice mean that everyone in the country should rejoice in and encourage those degrading passions, and it looks like success. Give ourselves over to a depraved mind so that we do not even know who ought to use which public restroom, and it looks like great success. But each of those things, even more than being something for which God will bring judgment upon us, is rather God *already judging us*. He is giving us over.

Hence the warning that this psalm gives the prospering wicked: when you succeed in sin, far from feeling secure, be very afraid. God is giving you over. He does not allow Asaph to be given over to the envy of the wicked; He takes hold of his hand, and guides him. But no such benefit is given to the prospering wicked. They are given over, and continue storing up wrath. In bringing attention to this, I feel like I am like James at the beginning of chapter 5: I am speaking, in some measure, to the wicked not present for the encouragement of the saints. But I am also speaking to us here, so that we may be well-alarmed when, in small ways, we cheat, and find success in it – fear, repent, see the problem that is within you, see things from an eternal perspective, and find God to be your sole satisfaction.

May the God of grace apply these words to our lives, and the words of David in Psalm 37:

- <sup>1</sup>Do not fret because of evildoers,  
Be not envious toward wrongdoers.
- <sup>2</sup>For they will wither quickly like the grass  
And fade like the green herb.
- <sup>3</sup>Trust in the Lord and do good;  
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.
- <sup>4</sup>Delight yourself in the Lord;  
And He will give you the desires of your heart.
- <sup>5</sup>Commit your way to the Lord,  
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.
- <sup>6</sup>He will bring forth your righteousness as the light  
And your judgment as the noonday.

To be preached, Lord willing, February 22, 2015

All Scriptures NASB