

ENVY'S CURE IS THE SANCTUARY!

Proverbs 23: 17, 18, Galatians 5: 25, 26, and Psalm 73: 1-28

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Back in January of 2004, a little over ten years ago, on January 17, 2004, a 66-ton whale died and was beached on the southwestern coast of Taiwan, near the city of Tainan. Two weeks later, on January 29, the local authorities decided to load the dead whale and truck it to a laboratory where they could do an autopsy. It took 50 laborers and three lifting cranes 13 hours to hoist the 56-foot long behemoth onto a flatbed trailer truck. Pedestrians and shop owners poured into the streets to watch the spectacle of a whale carcass driven through the streets of downtown Tainan. On Friday afternoon, I viewed the video. As the truck crawled through that downtown region of Tainan, with huge crowds looking on, the whale exploded. That's right, it blew up. The inner condition of that dead mammal, combined with the bumps in the road caused an eruption that those townspeople in Tainan are still talking about. Cars, people, and local shops were splattered with whale entrails that flew over 800 feet in diameter from the truck. Traffic was brought to a halt for hours. The smell was nearly unbearable.

Just another normal day in our lives can start out so great. We are clearly going about our own business. We didn't see it coming, nor did we plan for it, but life can explode all around us. Suddenly all traffic is called to a halt and we are left behind with the stench of the explosion all over us; we are frightened, weakened, and filled with tons of unanswered questions. What happens is that our deep faith in the Lord runs smack dab into one of the worst days of our month, our year or our lives. Our strong faith and our biblical theology has crashed into the reality of what is happening around us. So what do we do when the Lord whom we believe and love allows our lives to be invaded with what feels like tons of whale entrails bombed down all over us? Perhaps you can identify with Israel's worship leader, Asaph who was one of King David's three chief musicians and worship leaders. Take a look at v. 1: "God is indeed good to Israel, to the pure in heart."

Was Asaph leading all Israel in worship when the bombshell of envy blew up on him? We don't know for sure when the whale of envy exploded, but it almost made Asaph slip and fall down in his solid faith. Asaph's faith was intact before the explosion. Asaph was shaken and trembling for a while, but in the end, Asaph remained intact even after the bombshell of envy exploded before his eyes, all over him. After the bombshell of envy exploded, Asaph would have still agreed with Hebrews 11: 1 which declares "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Asaph believed God existed, and that He is good to Israel, His people, v. 1 and that He is sovereign over all. Yet, I thank God for Asaph. Why? I thank God for Asaph because he became transparent and raw before us all. He let down his guard in Psalm 73 and we see this worship leader

shaken, trembling, and tipsy, spiritually, not secure, as he struggled with something he saw way too clearly, something that made not an ounce of sense to him. We read in vs. 2 and 3, in spite of how good Asaph knew God to be, yet he declared, “As for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, (the proud), when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” Have we tried to hold God to being a God that makes life fair for us all? Does life have to be fair for us to trust the Lord? Well, Asaph made a slide on the black ice of envy. He went from being a gifted, called, and anointed worship leader to one of David’s chief musicians ready to throw in the towel, ready to walk away from serving the Lord. The issue was not that Asaph was depressed or in despair. No, Asaph was up on a high horse. Have you ever gotten up on a high horse with God?

This psalm divides itself up into sections that are dominated by different pronouns. When Asaph is troubled by the lot he sees of the wicked in Psalm 73:1-12, the dominate pronoun is **they**. When he describes his own frustrated thinking to God leading him to pour out his envious heart to the Lord about this inequity in Psalm 73:13-16, the dominate pronoun is **I**. When Asaph begins to find the cure, the antidote and some resolution to his comparing problem in Psalm 73:17-22, the dominate pronoun is **You**, referring to God. Finally, when Asaph proclaims the assurance of his emboldened faith as he has been talking to God, in Psalm 73:23-28, the dominate pronouns are two, a mixture of You and I or you and me. These pronoun shifts are a key to the psalm for me. So, now as we look at this psalm, let’s search the text to find a four step cure for Asaph and for us when we get on our high horse with God, when we become envious of folks who don’t even trust the Lord, folk who seem to be getting along better than us or any of God’s own children. What are these 4 steps?

POUR OUT YOUR HEART TO GOD ABOUT THE INEQUITIES YOU ENVOUSLY SEE IN THE WICKED ON THE OTHER SIDE. (I.) Notice

verses 3-12. “For I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For **they** have no pangs 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. 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 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 knowledge in the Most High?” Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, **they** increase in riches.” Notice the focus of Asaph—on the wicked—8 times I find, “they,” 6 times I find, “their,” and 3 times “them.” That’s they, their, and them used 17 times in 9 verses. Asaph is looking at the other side, the other team, and it is bringing out the worst in him.

Now notice with me in Asaph's struggle with envy, there are some key words and key factors that make his envy even worse. Notice in verse 3—for here are all four key words. Who are these wicked people Asaph was looking at? (1) First, he was envious of the **arrogant**. The Hebrew word for arrogant is **hallal**. **Hallal** means to clearly make a show of oneself, to boast, to clamor foolishly for attention. The only time a believer is to boast is in our Lord. These arrogant people that for a time captured Asaph's focus made sure he noticed them and what they had and owned and their great abilities. These are the folk that are always found where the cameras are clicking and where they can be interviewed and fawned over. These folk know the way to find and get and keep attention. The second word, (2) relates to Asaph being envious of the **wicked**. This Hebrew word is **rasha** which means to be morally wrong, ungodly, condemned and guilty, restless in tossing and turning on the bed, living a life of confusion and perpetual agitation, those who bring false reports, those hostile to God and His people. It is not that Asaph wanted to be arrogant or hostile to God, but track this with me as Asaph began to focus his eyes, not on the Lord but on the celebrities and the big shots of his day, those who openly and defiantly were hostile and hateful towards God.

Now look at the third word in verse 3; it is **prosperity**. This is what brought on Asaph's envy. It is exactly what got his goat. It became for a time all that Asaph could see. Look at the prosperity these God-haters were enjoying. The Hebrew word for prosperity is –shake your head with me. It is **shalom**. **Shalom** means peace and safety and health and happiness and tranquility, fulfillment, and completeness in hopes and dreams and favor from God. Beloved, be honest, have you ever started to obsess and get on your high horse because the wicked all seem to be well and strong and happy and healthy? Where are we beloved? Do we envy the lifestyles of the rich and famous, their houses, their cars, their clothing, and their corporations and their bank accounts? Notice verse 10 which states that these celebrities are popular heroes: they build up a huge following and many folks look up to them and acclaim them with praise. Many folk approve of these arrogant boasters who hate God. Many people flatter them and follow them. I prefer the translation of the NASB which speaks of how the righteous act when these wicked folk parade throughout the earth. “Therefore, his people return to this place, meaning it is hard to get past this fact—what fact, we read, “And waters of abundance are drunk by them.” This is Asaph's way of picturing to his readers a scene familiar at a desert oasis, where a thirsty camel gulps down water in seemingly endless amounts. To get the picture, it appears, these arrogant folk get what they want. God doesn't seem to interfere with their successful careers. This leads these arrogant folk to say, v. 11, “How can God know? He is not even aware of what happens down here on earth. Surely there is no such knowledge in the Most High.” Yes, the picture that gets Asaph's goat, that incenses him is that they are always at ease, shalom, v. 12, increased in riches. The fourth word about these folk is envious. Why? It is because, v. 4-9, they are sleek, fat, not sick, or troubled

folk, wearing pride like a necklace and violence like a garment, whose eyes swell with fatness and whose hearts are full of folly, who scoff at God and speak with malice toward Him and His people, who threaten oppression on God's people, and set their mouths against God in heaven as they do the strut with their tongues. So get step one as we seek to overcome and find the cure, the antidote to envy. Step one is that we must tell it to Jesus and pour out our hearts as we observe the inequity of the apparent "good times" folk have who live on the other side, the back side, the wrong side, and the unbelieving side of God. Step # 2 is:

PONDER YOUR ENVIOUS FEELINGS CAREFULLY BEFORE GOD BEFORE SPEAKING BEFORE GOD'S PEOPLE. (II.)

Notice with me these meditations and ruminations of Asaph in Psalm 73: 13-16. "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. But when **I** thought how to understand this, it seemed to *me* a wearisome task." Notice now that the dominate pronoun is not **they**, but **I**. I find the pronoun **I** six time and "me" or "my" three times. When we meditate, we ought to notice if we are focusing on our hurt feelings like Asaph was. It can be very dangerous. The longer we meditate on our envious broodings before God, thinking of our raw deals and how bad we have it, truly the more weary we often will become of the road we are on and the route we have chosen to walk down. Also, if we begin to listen to the Lord, the more we will experience a check in our spirit from the Lord, as the poison envy of me and my and I reveals our folly. Would we dare to pray to God to ask His anointing and help for us to spew out our poison and thus betray the trust of God's children in the Lord? Would we let the poison of envy in our hearts surface before the people of God? It is truly a frightful trap when we compare ourselves among ourselves, which II Corinthians 10: 12 tells us, "we are not wise." It is even worse when we dare to compare our sad lot with the temporary and ephemeral happiness of the wicked. David in his memorable Psalm 37: 1, 2 tells us, "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb." So you ask me, "Pastor, what is so poison and awful about envying the wicked? First of all, it takes us into the lust and love of the world, and the things that are in the world. John, the beloved in I John 2: 15 warns us all, "Do not love the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Would you and I envy the wicked for their temporarily God-blessed lives for allowing His rain to also fall on them, the unjust? Envy is the tendency to compare ourselves with someone else in a way that leaves us feeling deprived. The Hebrew word for envy here in verse three is **qana**. Qana means to have a strong competitive sense against another, to be zealous in a bad sense, to be jealous enough to be provoked to anger. So envy means "I want what you have. For a period of time, Asaph was eaten up with envy. Have you ever been eaten alive with envy? It has doubtless happened one time or

another to all of us. Life introduces inevitable comparisons and inevitable dissatisfactions. Envy makes us temporarily misrepresent life so that we conclude, “Those people I envy live on easy street without hardships. They never get sick, live longer, have more fun playing, and they get everything they want and get away with everything they do wrong. They get the biggest slice of the pie, and God gives it to those who hate Him. Inevitably, envy often leaves us angry and plain mad at God. Asaph had let envy in the door. Now it colored everything he saw.

So notice the weighing and pondering and ruminating Asaph did. He asks, “Did I purify my heart and wash my hands in innocence for nothing?” Like a child, envy makes us all feel like blurting out, “Am I being a good Christian for nothing? Don’t I get any gold stars for being good? Does it even pay to serve Jesus? Why is everything around me upside down? Why is God blessing the godless instead of judging them? Asaph didn’t pretend everything was okay, but in his haste to conclude God was in the wrong, the pondering of all his I, me, my offenses against the Lord left Asaph weary and worried that he was on the verge of betraying God. I’m glad Asaph already seems to have had a strong check against the direction envy was taking him. Step two opened the door for a hunger for step # 3.

PROCEED PAST ALL YOUR ENVY INTO THE SANCTUARY OF GOD AND THERE, YOU WILL DISCERN THE END OF THE WICKED. (III.)

Look what made the difference for Asaph. Things were bleak and blaming and burdensome and bothersome and bordering on becoming black as night, until, until, until, until. This is one of the great “untils” in God’s Word. Listen to verse 17—which is the pivot of Psalm 73. There are two **I’s** in verse 17, but the I’s are pointing in the right direction. We read, “Until **I** went into the sanctuary of God; then **I** discerned their end. Now notice the change in verses 18-22. Notice now the dominate pronoun is You, meaning the Lord, the One we worship and adore and do business with in the sanctuary of God. “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**.” The sanctuary of God is the place for perspective and discernment. It’s a great place to unload all your pent up, stored up anger, pain, and resentment. As we give it to God in the sanctuary, did you know what can happen to headaches, bitterness, grudges, ulcers, private moment by moment rehearsals of injustice you’ve experienced? The acid of envy can be unloaded anywhere, but how often it is when we come to worship that we find the handle on our dump truck and we unload it all on the Lord and leave relieved, and freely talking again with God. Having pondered our options and feeling disillusioned, upset over our anger and cynicism, we have hoped to avoid becoming a tool of Satan to ruin God’s people. What is it about the sanctuary? The sanctuary is where we finally get the big picture. It is

where we sort life out, winnow out our negative attitudes and the ripple effects they are having on us and could bring to others—in your family, in the church, and among your friends.

All our trying to understand our envy and the way things seem so oppressive, all of it falls into place as we worship. It makes me think this worship leader got it straight while leading God’s people in worship. Reasoning out our problem with envy is as foolish as me trying to work a Rubik’s Cube. In the end, I just feel frustrated. Have you and I insisted on thinking our way out of envy? It is in worship in the sanctuary that the scales fall off our eyes, when we worship the Lord. Everything changes. Now we see that the end of the wicked is terrible. We finally see where God has truly placed them—in slippery places, on the cliff of ruin, ready to be swept away in a flood of terrors, like despised phantoms of an evil opera. It is at this moment of true discernment, that God pierces our hearts and we are pricked in heart to the point of being ashamed. We see our foolishness, acting like a brute beast before God. It’s in the sanctuary that we often see it’s time to get right with God and spit out the poison, and be washed in the blood. Step # 4 is:

PRESENT YOURSELF ANEW AND AFRESH TO BE NEAR TO GOD, TO ACCEPT HIS COUNSEL, TO HOLD HIS HAND, AND TO DESIRE NOTHING ON EARTH BESIDE HIM. (IV.) Notice Psalm 73: 23-28. This final

section has both **You** and **I, me,** and **my** prominent. In other words, there is a renewed personal relationship between Asaph and the Lord, which declares, “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 besides **You.** **My** flesh and **my** heart may fail, but God is the strength of **my** heart and **my** portion forever. 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 all **Your** works.” When we finally see the Lord clearly in the sanctuary, we find out afresh who we are. We now can confess, forsake, and repent of our self-pitying, self-centered envying. And as we worship and praise the Lord, it’s hand in hand again, God guiding our steps and our spirits by His promptings and counsel. Now we are all about giving God first place—“Who have I in heaven but You?” Being near God, is our refuge and our sanctuary. We don’t have it bad. In the sanctuary of God, with each other and with Him, we now have an eternal perspective. Praise God for His sanctuary!