

# How God Delivers the Righteous

*Book of Psalms*

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 73:1-17

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All right, let's take our Bibles and look together at Psalm 73. And this particular psalm has to do with how God delivers the righteous. Notice a change here. It says:

“A Psalm of Asaph.”<sup>1</sup>

So for the next 11 psalms we are going to be looking at these psalms that would have been written by this man named Asaph.

Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 73:1.

Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.<sup>2</sup>

Let's have a word of prayer.

*Most gracious heavenly Father, as we meet here once again today and take your Word and open it, I pray that you would quiet our hearts and minds, remove all distraction from within us. Enable us, dear Father, by your Spirit to be taught of your Son the Lord Jesus Christ and to see just how great a deliverance you have wrought for sinners such as we are, undeserved and certainly in ourselves inherently no better than any that are condemned, but to see that because of your Son, because of your mercy and grace in him you have delivered through his death. You do yet deliver and you shall deliver. What a great salvation. And I pray, dear Father, that our hearts would be stirred once again to know Christ, to love and by your grace to look to him alone in every aspect of our lives knowing that you ordain every step. And we are mindful to give you all the praise and the glory in our dear Savior's name. Amen.*

Now when I announce the title of this message, “God Delivers the Righteous,” it thereby presupposes that even though we are the Lord’s and even though Christ has paid our sin debt, that we stand justified before God in his person and in his work alone. That does not mean that in this life, then, we are not going to know trouble. I think that that is a huge error in people’s thinking today, particularly in Christendom as it is so-called where preachers are promising health, wealth and prosperity to people if they will just make their little decision for Jesus and walk an aisle or say a prayer and then all will be well. It is treated much like a rabbit’s foot. If you get the right one and carry it around and rub it at the right time, then things work out for you. Maybe that might be so in a fictitious magical movie world, but certainly as God has ordained this world in this life, it remains under the curse until Christ comes again and removes all sin and judges this world as we know it.

But having said that, I believe any of us that are the Lord’s, having been taught of the Spirit, we can get into our own mindset, sometimes, that this is the way it ought to be. We keep looking for that little Utopia of life and even, perhaps, praying for it, that at least today, Lord, give me some peaceful times. Take away the trials or whatever our flesh would cause us to cry unto him. But my prayer is that after having looked together at this particular psalm—and it is a key psalm, I believe, for any of the Lord’s children, that we

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 73:1-28.

come to see that it is through trials, it is through temptations that the Lord delivers his own. And that his chastening and his use of temptations and trials is for that purpose.

Remember, the writer to the Hebrews quoted the writer in Proverbs in saying:

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”<sup>3</sup>

And so even here the psalmist in crying out in verse 14 says:

“For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”<sup>4</sup>

If such is our case, I would say to you then that is a mercy, because whom the Lord loves he chastens and will not allow any of his own to get their roots too deep in this world, because as that old spiritual says:

This world is not my home.  
I am just a passing through.  
If heaven is not my home, oh Lord,  
What would I do?

And certainly I believe the Lord uses trials and affliction. But one thing about the Scriptures, I am sure you have found and one that I have come to appreciate and honor is the fact that they hide nothing. Sometimes when you read books that men write you get the impression that they are really not telling the whole story and there is something they are holding back on. Whereas, in Scripture such is not the case. The fact that Asaph here would be caused to write everything that he has written here, directed by the Spirit is a blessing for us, because, again, it is a reminder that there is no temptation that has taken us, but such as is common to man. And I love the clarity. I love the transparency which is what you would expect from one that is directed by the Spirit to write these things. There is no pretense. There is no playing happy before God. He very plainly declares here in verse three his problem and that is really, if I were to break this chapter down into three parts, it would be this.

First of all, the temptation exposed. In other words, verses two down to verse 14 here of the nature of this temptation, the nature of what it is to be tested. And then in verses 13 though 20 we see the remedy, how it is that God was pleased to deliver Asaph, but he is but an example of how it is that God delivers any of his own. And then the last part, verses 21 to the end of the chapter, the benefit of being tempted. The blessing. There is nobody that when they are going through the trial find that trial joyous. They are not hee hawing and laughing and giddy and saying, “Boy, this is great. Here comes another trial.” A trial, when someone says it is difficult, well, it wouldn’t be a trial otherwise. This is why it is called a trial. And yet the peaceable fruits of righteousness, in other words, if you were not one of the righteous that God has declared so in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, then there would be no peaceable fruit. But the peaceable fruit of that

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:12.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 73:14.

righteousness which Christ worked out and God imputed, that peaceable fruit is a blessing. It is a mercy, because it draws us again and again to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But notice how this entire chapter is framed in verse one when we consider how it is that God delivers the righteous. I believe it begins with his Spirit teaching us that he is good at all times, not just when things are going our way. And I find it a blessing here in verse one even before Asaph is directed to address his complaint as to the nature of his trial, notice how it starts.

“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.”<sup>5</sup>

Now we know that there is none clean in themselves, but the word there is a purified heart, one that has been taught of the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is of a pure heart. It is what Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount.

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”<sup>6</sup>

It is not in ourselves, but it is the Spirit in us which causes us in all situations to say:

“Truly God is good to Israel.”<sup>7</sup>

Now, that is the truth. And you notice it begins with the word truly. In truth God is good to Israel even to such as are of a clean heart. And we have to constantly be brought back to the truth. How? In this Word. Everything that we know of God is based on objective truth. It is what is revealed right here in this Word. And so when our minds begin to get muddled and our hearts unsettled, don't try to sort it out yourself. It is like taking a piece of yarn and trying to untangle it. The more you work at it, the worse it is going to get. As the Lord has directed me—and he brings you to this—I will be the first to say I am of that nature to try to work it out. But as he hedges in your way and brings you to that place where there is no wiggle room and actually directs you to his Word and causes you to reflect upon what this Word says of him as God, that our hearts are settled once again and even though we might not see the good in a situation from the fleshly standpoint, we can be brought by this Word to declare that which the Scriptures declare. And I recommend that. Just in prayer when prayer becomes difficult, read back to the Lord what he has written, what he has declared of himself, rather than going to some mantra that the world gives you. Well, just hang on to this or repeat this. Men love to do that. They like to quote this preacher and that. I will tell you. There is no greater author than the Word, than the Spirit of Christ who has written this book.

And it is in those times that even though it might be difficult as well as with Abraham facing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, not even knowing whether Lot was one of those that the Lord would be pleased to condemn, but he was brought to say what? Shall not the judge of the earth do right? That is, in essence, a way of declaring truly God

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 73:1.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:8.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 73:1.

is good to Israel. Regardless of what he does to Sodom and Gomorrah and were he to destroy every creature, he would be just in doing so. Yet, I can rest in this. He will be good to his Israel. And Israel, in the language of Scripture is a title of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When it says:

“Truly God is good to Israel...”<sup>8</sup>

He is good to every one that he has put in his Son and declared righteous based upon the person and work of his Son. He is good to Israel and even to such as are of a clean heart, because of his work accomplished on their behalf.

I am sure that others, other than Abraham would have been able declare the same thing when you think about Job, how tried Job was. If you look at Job chapter 24 look at the testimony of others in Scripture. This, what we are reading, is the testimony of Asaph. And were there no other it would certainly stand alone. But look in Job 24. This was Job’s trouble. If you go back up in the chapter previous he talks about his trouble, but notice in verse 10, if we begin there:

“But he knoweth the way that I take.”<sup>9</sup>

Now how does God know the way that we take? Well, he has ordained it.

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD.”<sup>10</sup>

And, again, a good man is not anything inherent in us, but it is one that God has declared to be good based upon his son and his righteousness.

“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”<sup>11</sup>

This one verse here in Job 24 sums up our chapter in its progression. There is the way in which the Lord was leading Asaph, one of temptation. There is the remedy. And then there is the blessing.

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Job 23:10.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 37:23.

<sup>11</sup> Job 23:10.

So this is a matter of being brought to see even as Asaph, truly God is good to Israel. There is no changing of his mind. Verse 14.

“For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me.”<sup>13</sup>

These are not random acts that we encounter in this life. But everything that takes place has been appointed, notice, for me, custom made. That is why there are times when my mouth is shut because when the Lord’s hand is heavy on another person, that is a particular path for that person that I dare not even try to compare myself with. And isn’t that typically what we do when someone starts sharing their woes or troubles? You pop up or somebody pops off and says, “Well, wait till you hear mine.” Well, whatever that path is, it is the Lord that has ordained it and therein our mouth is shut.

“...and many such things are with him.”<sup>14</sup>

That is interesting there, too, because we can’t cookie cut God. We can’t say, “Well, this is how he led me in this case. So next time I will just be able to open up a manual and read it and follow step, one, two, three, four and five. That is not how it works. Many such things. The word many there is in the sense of variableness. There are many variables. But the matter that quiets our heart is that these many variables are with him. In other words, in his hand, to direct as he will. This is not a fatalism like some would describe it of a steamroller that has started and is rolling and is going to crush everything in its way. It is out of control. No. The wisdom of God is a directed wisdom. It is founded upon who he is the person of God, his deity. And you have heard that expression. He is too wise to make any mistakes and too loving to hurt any of his own. We read that recently in the gospels. If you ask of bread, will he give you a scorpion or a stone for an egg?

No, in all things he answers according to his will and many such things are with him. But notice the reaction of Job to this. And this is what I say. When the Lord brings these troubles there is not a giddiness. Oh, I feel good. Oh, that feels good. He says:

“Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.”<sup>15</sup>

It’s the Lord’s way of keeping us from presumption. I remember in Africa it was one of the things that we had to instruct some of the Africans in and that was on how to show express love for their children. And even hold them, hug them and take them on your knee. It wasn’t in their nature to do it because their thinking was: If I do that with my kids, then they are going to become too familiar with me. And so what you found often was they were often shooing the kids away. They were waiting until things built up and

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<sup>12</sup> Job 23:10-13.

<sup>13</sup> Job 23:14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Job 23:15.

finally just exploded and then you would see a parent just taking a piece of bamboo and licking the daylights out of the kid. And that is how they reacted.

Well, no wonder kids feared their parents. There was no expression of love to call them.

Here, however, when Job said:

“Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.”<sup>16</sup>

This is a reverential fear, one that seeing the hand of God it removes all presumption. We come before him in his presence knowing that we are worthy of more than even the chastening he gives. And yet knowing all the while that he is good. He is good to Israel. And verse 16 explains it more.

“For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me.”<sup>17</sup>

That right there is the case that were God not to chasten us, were he not to bring us through trouble, our hearts would be as ever hardened as could be. It is but for his grace and mercy. And he says:

“Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.”<sup>18</sup>

In other words, this chastening was not to his destruction. But verse one of chapter 24:

Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days? Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, Job is saying, “Why is it so with me, but not with others?” Well, there again is a distinctive mercy. And that is the same testimony, going back here to Psalm 73 with regard to Asaph. For a while he says in verse three:

“I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”<sup>20</sup>

Is there anybody here that can raise a hand and claim guilty to that? You know, you are struggling to pay the bills and just when you think it is done, here comes a storm and blows some shingles off the roof and here we go one more time and then you look down the road and you see somebody building this brand spanking new house. It is just a picture of wealth. And your mind might go that way thinking, how is it that they can enjoy such riches and seeming prosperity when I am in trouble? And this is the thought of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Job 23:16.

<sup>18</sup> Job 23:17.

<sup>19</sup> Job 24:1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 73:3.

Asaph. It is the thought of every one of our hearts. I would have to say you are a liar if you never have been jealous of your neighbor and coveted what they have or wished even for a second to be in their situation versus the situation you are in. That is just our flesh speaking. And yet even as with Job when he wondered at how it is that they could continue to live how they are and not have the fear of God, here Asaph says that in verse 17.

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.”<sup>21</sup>

Well, the sanctuary of God was the place where sacrifices were offered. Here, again, I believe it is a mercy when the Lord can remove our minds and hearts and thoughts from off the world and the things of the world and turn them to the one place where God has put his glory and that is in his Son, because that is what the sanctuary represents, the priesthood, the sacrifices. In fact, back in 2 Chronicles if you look in 2 Chronicles 29:30 with regard to Asaph, he would have been one of these that would have been occupied with praising God in the worship of the sanctuary and singing the psalms along with the other priests. In 2 Chronicles 29 and verse 30:

“Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer.”<sup>22</sup>

Asaph would have been alive back in the David’s day. Hezekiah, much later, but you can see how these very psalms that we are studying right now in Psalm 73 would have been used in the worship of the Lord.

“And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.”<sup>23</sup>

That was the purpose of these psalms. And I believe that to study these psalms and not see how they are anchored entirely in the person of Christ and the work of Christ is to miss completely the reason these were given. This was for worship. So when Asaph says:

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God...”<sup>24</sup>

Until my mind was brought, once again, to what is vital in life, and you ask yourself what is vital in this life. When all else is taken away, I believe the cry of every one of the Lord’s following the Spirit is, “Give me Christ or I die. Help me, by your grace, to have that affection set on things above and not on things on the earth where we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies.”

And in view of that light, how great, then, is the darkness of these that for a moment, for a time our hearts might covet. And Asaph says in verse 18.

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<sup>21</sup> Psalm 73:17.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Chronicles 29:30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 73:17.



“Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.”<sup>25</sup>

When you stop and consider, even if God does cause any one of our neighbors or acquaintances to prosper and to live somewhat of a peaceable life, as far as never having to worry about a bill or even from the standpoint of health. It might be somebody that goes through most of their life just as healthy as a horse, as they say. And yet if they are not Christ's do you realize that is the only mercy they are ever going to know for eternity?

Now when you stop and consider that, I heard this explained even in a smaller way on a CD I was listening to. You hear about these people they get a million or two million or three million dollar settlement because of an incident and yet they are paralyzed for life as a result of it. You might look at that settlement and think, man, that would be great to have that money. But ask the person that is immobilized whether they would rather have the million dollars or whether they would rather have their health back. They would tell you in a heart beat. “I would rather have my health.” And I have found myself... what would I rather have, the riches of this world or would I rather have Christ? Now I know the slogan is, “Well, I would rather have Christ.” Well, so when the Lord tests us and takes everything away, takes away the prosperity, takes away the health and shuts us up to Christ, may this be a reminder then that, yes, by God's grace, I thank him even for this deep trial that would keep me from going the way I would go in this flesh so long as I have Christ.

And certainly that is what Asaph is stating here. When you compare our position in Christ which is unchanging, when you think that God from eternity purposed to save sinners such as we are and then sent his Son to pay the ultimate price, I think that is all wrapped up here in verse 17.

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God.”<sup>26</sup>

And considered the price that paid this sinner's debt and that righteousness put to my account. And then I consider the state of men outside of Christ, those for whom the ransom was not paid. How slippery then is that state? Unsettled? Whereas the gospel writer said it is sinking sand. Any that build on that supposed foundation of works or pleasure, whatever it might be, sinking sand. Thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into destruction as in a moment?

Life, physical life had 100 percent mortality rate. There is nobody getting out of here alive. And even the time of every person being taken out in a moment.

I stop and think about some that are suffering from a disease that they have already been told by the doctor they have got six months to live or 12 months. And how many times have you heard that on the news or someone shared it with you in a phone call, et cetera,

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<sup>25</sup> Psalm 73:18.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 73:17.

and then that very day or the next day you learn of somebody that was taken out and wasn't even expecting it, just that quickly. It is a reminder that God is daily executing his judgments for the wicked. In other words, those that are not in Christ—for we are all wicked by nature—but declared righteous through the blood and righteousness of Christ, but those outside of Christ, when that death sentence is executed, that is God's justice. He is ushering them into an eternity where there will be no mercy, where there will be no light, where there will be no truth. And if he in an instant is pleased to take out one of his own that Christ has redeemed, that is not justice. That is a grace. Scripture says:

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”<sup>27</sup>

You know, we talk about longing for glory. And yet given the choice to enter into glory today, our flesh would be hesitant. We would be tied to our relationships and what we do. That is just how fleshly we are. We would be like Lot and are like Lot when even when the angel of mercy came and took him by the hand to take him out. He was hesitant. He had to literally be drug out. We would never leave this world. As much as we talk about heaven and glory, we would never leave this world were it left up to us. But the Lord doesn't leave it up to us. Even that moment in time is determined of him.

I think from the pure sense, from Christ's standpoint, where he said upon completion of his death, “Behold, I and the children whom thou hast given me,” there is a yearning and a desire on Christ's part to have with him for eternity every one that he has redeemed. And you know how that is from the standpoint of being a parent. You love it when all the children are home, home safe.

Well, I think about that when it says:

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”<sup>28</sup>

When he gathers unto himself everyone that he has redeemed. And he will have every one. There is not going to be one missing child. Every prodigal son brought home. And if the Lord does it through trouble and chastening, blessed be his name.

I think about the Philippian jailer. The earthquake was not his conversion, but it got his attention. Even as with the prodigal son, being down in the smell and the mire and stench of that pig sty, that wasn't his conversion. It was the Spirit of the Lord drawing his heart back to his Father. And time brought him. And therein we bow. We don't know how the Lord is going to be pleased to work, but we just know that even if he acts in justice, he is still good. He is good. And he is just in what he does. But if he acts in mercy, oh how merciful.

All right. We will stop there and, Lord willing, pick up with the rest of this next time.

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<sup>27</sup> Psalm 116:15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.