

The Problem of Good and Evil

Psalm 73

Introduction

Good morning, Lighthouse. Are you ready for the Word of God this morning? We're going to seek to answer one of the world's most pondered questions. Many of us have wrestled with the problem of evil or maybe even are currently wrestling with it. But notice in the title I've noted good and evil. The question often poses such as this: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" one could even flip as this way in addition: "Why do good things happen to bad people?" Writers and philosophers have sought to answer this, and in all honesty, most do a poor job in doing so. I'll explain why soon. This issue has even led many to question God's existence because they can't reconcile there being a good God when all that happens in the world. I've known many and have had dear friends walk away from the Lord and their church over this issue too when trials came their way. Philosophy has its place in some things, but I believe the Bible is the best place to seek our answers for things such as this one. Us preachers of Lighthouse are firm that God's Word is sufficient and efficient to give us the answers to these things. God has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.

2 Peter 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

He does so "through the knowledge of Him . . ." How do we seek knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue? Through His Word. So, why all the evil? Why suffering for good people and prosperity for evil? The question itself has foundational issues: No one is truly "good"

Romans 3:10 declares "there is none righteous, no not one."

Ecclesiastes 7:20 "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

We could just conclude it right there: That's why evil happens to good people, because there isn't anyone good, but I think even that is not a sufficient answer. The Bible goes much deeper than that. So, what about those who know the Lord? Trusted in Jesus to save them after understanding what He did for us on the cross. We know in our flesh is no good, but does God not love us, and we are His children? The aim is to not be insensitive to the struggle, but the better way of approaching this is "Why do bad things happen to God's people?"

We know evil exists because of sin beginning with Adam and Eve in the garden:

Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

We live in a world of pain and suffering. There is no one who is not affected by the harsh realities of life. Some of you have gone through things that I cannot even imagine happening to me. All of us feel the effects of sin in one way or another. Sometimes it's our own personal sin; other times, it is because of the sins of others. We live in a fallen world, and we experience the effects of the fall. One of those effects is injustice and seemingly senseless suffering. The problem of evil and good struggle is rooted in this: 1. The Bible teaches us that God is good. 2. The Bible also teaches us that God is all powerful – Omnipotent

I said earlier about writers and philosophers in general do a poor job in answering. Here is why: Some people have attempted to divide the two truths to answer our question. God is all good, but He is unable to stop evil, so He isn't all powerful. It goes further to put man's freewill against God's sovereignty. The logic follows: If we truly have freewill then God cannot be in control and vice versa. You cannot back this up with Scripture though. The second answer is God is all powerful, but He's not all good. This also cannot be backed up with Scripture. Our two truths stand: God is all powerful and He is all good.

So, if God being all good and all powerful, why are bad things happening to good people and good things happening to bad people? The writer of our text today wrestled with the same question. Psalm 73. Many heroes of faith and characters we see in the Bible have faced this struggle. Job and Elijah are good examples and another one we will read about is Asaph. Even though Psalm 73 was written so long ago, it couldn't be any more relevant to today's world.

Background

Author: Asaph – Asaph was one of the Levites that David set as a music director and continued to do so during Solomon's reign. He would organize and lead the people of Israel in worship. 12 of the Psalms are attributed to him.

Scripture

Psalm 73:1-28 (1) A Psalm of Asaph. Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. (2) But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. (3) For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (4) For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. (5) They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. (6) Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. (7) Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. (8) They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. (9) They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. (10) Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. (11) And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? (12) Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. (13) Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. (14) For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. (15) If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. (16) When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; (17) Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. (18) Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. (19) How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. (20) As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. (21) Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. (22) So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.

(23) Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. (24) Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. (25) Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. (26) My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. (27) For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. (28) 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.

Outline

I. The struggle of the Psalmist, v. 1-2.

A. Asaph begins with a declaration of God's goodness, v. 1.

(1) Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart

1. He is truly good to Israel.

a. Israel was God's chosen nation beginning with Abraham.

b. God was actively good and merciful to Israel.

2. And to those of a pure heart.

3. This serves as both the introduction and conclusion of this Psalm.

4. There is such a popular phrase around here God is good: All the time: and all the time: God is good. We often hear a praise or good reports, and we say "God is good." Rightfully so, He is good. But what of when there's bad reports? Not as easy.

B. Asaph's near fall, v. 2.

(2) But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.

1. Asaph says his feet were almost gone and foot nearly slipped.

2. He affirms the truth in verse 1 that God is truly good.

3. There was something else that bothered him and almost causing him to stumble.

4. It's almost as if He recognize God is good to Israel and those of a pure heart in general, but maybe it doesn't apply to him so much.

II. The perceived prosperity of the wicked, vv. 3-11.

A. The perceived well-being of the wicked, vv. 3-5.

(3) For I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (4) For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. (5) They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.

1. Verse 3 explains the cause for Asaph's near stumbling.
2. He says he was "envious at the foolish"
 - a. The word here for foolish means "to make boast or praise" when applied to a person, it's the fool who is arrogant or boastful.
 - b. He was envious of the arrogant fools – This is a description of those who do not know God.
3. Second, he was envious when saw the prosperity (shalom) of the wicked.
 - a. The word prosperity is "shalom" this is what Jews would say to each other as a greeting and goodbye. You are literally saying, "may you be full of well-being" or, "may health and prosperity be upon you."
 - b. Asaph's trouble is because the wicked do not deserve "shalom."
4. There are no bands in their death.
 - a. Bands is referring to pain.
 - b. The wicked appeared to be dying peacefully.
5. Their strength is firm.
 - a. Literally meaning "their body is fat".
 - b. Not only did Asaph see peaceful death, but in life they have more than a person's needs.

6. They are not in trouble or plagued like other men.

a. Asaph further develops his complaint:

b. Not only are the wicked are rewarded, but their lives also seem to have less trouble and are not as plagued as the average man.

B. The pride of the wicked, vv. 6-8.

(6) Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. (7) Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. (8) They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.

1. They wear the pride as a chain or necklace.

a. A chain around the neck signified status and importance.

b. The wicked wore their pride as a symbol. There was no shame to them.

2. Violence covered them as a garment.

3. Their eyes stand out with fatness – They are full of greed.

4. Their speech is corrupt.

5. Not only does their arrogance extend towards men, they extend their arrogance towards God.

a. They set their mouths towards heavens.

b. Heavens here is a replacement for God.

c. They make a mockery of God.

6. Their tongue walks through the earth – meaning, their popularity spreads.

7. “Therefore his people return here” - This wicked man has associates who are just like him, and they take and take just as he does.

C. The slander of the wicked, vv. 9- 11.

(9) They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. (10) Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. (11) And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?

1. They question and mock God

a. They question His omniscience.

b. In the previous verses Asaph told us that the wicked man sets his mouth against heaven. Here, he tells us what the wicked man and his associates say against heaven. They claim that God is blind or ignorant; that therefore they can do as they please and God is unable to do anything against them.

2. These wicked people do not deny God's existence. They assert that God

Most High, the creator of heaven and earth is totally oblivious to what happens on earth. It is one thing to deny God's existence:

Psalm 14:1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.

I can't fathom the arrogance and foolishness to set against Him.

III. The protest of the Psalmist, vv. 12-14.

A. Asaph's struggle with the results of the wicked and their lifestyle, v.12.

(12) Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

1. Asaph saw the ungodly life as the good life. They are always at ease; they always increase in riches.

2. He seemed to think they are rewarded for their wickedness by a God who seems to be as unknowing as the wicked say that He is.

B. Asaph's perspective on what godly living has resulted him, vv. 13-14.

(13) Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. (14) For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

1. Cleansing of the hands was part of an oath of innocence.
2. The frustration kept building for Asaph. He felt that it was vain for him to be pure in heart, vain for him to have clean hands before God, vain for him to be innocent.
3. His thoughts were as if godly living just produced more suffering; what was the benefit of being a believer?

IV. The changed perspective considering eternity, vv. 15-28.

A. Asaph's turning point vv. 15-17.

(15) If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. (16) When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; (17) Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

1. He had awareness of his faith-sabotaging thoughts:
 - a. Asaph caught himself from sliding further into despair over the perceived prosperity of the wicked. He did not want to betray God's people.
 - b. He knew promoting this would be false and harmful to them.
2. When he tried to comprehend everything, it was too painful for him.
 - a. He saw how the wicked was living and the results that came from it.
 - b. He also knew he would be a stumbling block to God's people if he promoted his complaints.
3. It was until he went into the sanctuary of God he came to a right perspective.
4. There, he could gain understanding in several ways.

- a. By prayer and worship in the sanctuary, he understood that God was at the center of all things, and he gained a fresh appreciation of both God and eternity.
- b. By hearing the word of God in the sanctuary, he understood that there was a truth that went beyond what he saw and experienced in everyday life.
- c. By observing sacrifice at the sanctuary, he understood that God takes sin seriously that it must be judged and atoned for.

5. It should be noted that the psalmist's sobering moment begins, not in isolation, but as a member of a larger community to which he is accountable.

B. The fate of the wicked, vv. 18-20.

(18) Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. (19) How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. (20) As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

1. They are set to fall at any moment.
2. Earlier in the psalm Asaph worried that his feet had almost slipped (Psalm 73:2). Now, with a perspective gained from the House of the Lord, he sees that the wicked are the ones in slippery places.
3. Asaph could only understand this with the eternal perspective brought to him at the house of the Lord. In daily life he could only see what worked good for the wicked; with an eternal perspective he saw their destruction, their desolation, their terrors.

4. Asaph understood that the good life of the ungodly is as fragile as a dream, and they will soon wake to the reality of the destruction, desolation, and terrors that is their portion. Their prosperity is an illusion.

a. “When thou awakes” This does not mean God is literally asleep.

b. This was an idiom to show when God brings His judgment on them.

C. Asaph’s rebuke on himself, vv. 21-22.

(21) Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. (22) So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.

1. Asaph confessed before the Lord his sinful lack of understanding before he went into the House of the Lord. He felt foolish that he had forgotten the truths of eternity and God’s justice.

2. He was as a “beast” (animal). (22)

a. Animals do not have the concept of God and eternity.

b. Animals live their life for momentary pleasures, satisfying natural urges. When Asaph had his mind set on earth he was truly like a beast before God.

D. Asaph’s recognition of his need to depend on God, vv. 23-24.

(23) Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. (24) Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

1. He acknowledges his nearness to God and God’s nearness to him.

2. He acknowledges God’s guidance.

3. He knew that God would guide him in this life and receive him to glory.

E. The glory of heavenly hope, vv. 25-28.

(25) Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. (26) My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. (27) For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. (28) 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.

1. “Whom have I in heaven but you?” This is the beautiful expression of a longing heart for God and for eternity.
2. “And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee: For Asaph, God was not only a heavenly hope but an earthly desire as well. God was both his inheritance in heaven and his earthly desire. The wicked can ever their temporary pleasure, the saved have their everlasting joy.
3. “My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever”: Asaph recognized his own weakness and God’s strength.
4. The wicked’s destiny is already decided if they continue in it. In His love, God desires the wicked to be saved.

John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Ezekiel 33:11 “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

1 Timothy 2:4-6: Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

5. It is interesting to see how much good Asaph’s visit to the House of the Lord did for him. It gave him understanding and an eternal perspective. He changes from his attitude of despair to an attitude of praise.

Conclusion/Application

There two key concepts to draw out from Psalm 73:

First, it is a warning to those who have not put their trust in Jesus to save them.

If there's never been a time and place you trusted Jesus to save you. Where you understood what Jesus did for you and why and you've been born again. This is a warning. Some may think they are living a care-free life and you're doing fine without God; there is going to come a time where all that ends. The joy God offers far out measures earthly pleasures. You may be trying to find happiness out in the world, but the one who can truly satisfy your heart is the one who made it. God desires to have a relationship with you and spend eternity with Him. He proved through Jesus dying for you. He could've ended all evil long ago, simply remove all of mankind. God intends to remove evil of this world one day. I urge you to consider what Jesus did for you so that you aren't apart of it.

Second, it is an encouragement to those who know Him.

It can be difficult for us to reconcile why bad things are happening when God is all good and all powerful. God never promised no suffering, but He did promise He will be with you always. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

To answer, why do bad things happen to good people? Or why did God allow this circumstance to happen in my life? "Why didn't God stop this?" Maybe there is a greater purpose in it. He doesn't look at the way we look at things. Having your mind set on earthly things when trouble comes is a recipe for discouragement.

Colossians 3:1-2 (1) If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

You may never know the details to each event but do know this: to trust God. He uses awful circumstance to draw you closer to Him. This may be a shocking response: but God allows

us to go through trials because He loves us. It is through the difficulties that we grow and know Him more.

Romans 8:28: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:18: For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not even worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Not everything happens is good, but God works all things together for good because He is molding us to become more like Jesus. We can be assured that He cares too. God is good, even when things are hard. His goodness is not dependent upon good things happening to us. He does indeed care.

Even the hairs on our heads are numbered (for some it is a lot easier). We are not to worry or envy the ungodly's prosperity, all of that will come to an end; our concern should be where they will spend an eternity.

Many of our sufferings can be a result of our own choices. A bad work ethic is sure to bring trials in your life. I'm more concerned on the ones beyond your control. We can ponder whether we deserved it, but there is one who we know that did not deserve any of it, that's Jesus.

1 Peter 3:17-18 (17) For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

(18) For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

You can shake your fist at heaven and demand why, or you can draw near to God and ask Him to help you honor Him in the midst and have confidence He will see you through. God is good all the time and all the time, God is good.