

Psalm 73 • The Lord is my portion forever

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Open your Bibles if you would. We're going to do something different tonight. Go to Psalm 73 please. Psalm 73. We're going to read through this Psalm and then we're going to take a look at it.

I want to do something a little bit different as we dig into these and start to unpack these verses. And I need to just tell you, when I started really getting serious about walking with the Lord back in the early eighties, I didn't I didn't have a Bible.

I was going to church. I found a church. Sue and I were living up in Montana at the time. And, I didn't have a really a good Bible to bring to church. And so I went to the lost and found and I found a Bible there. It was a paperback one. It was basically like a pew Bible, those ones that cost like \$2.99. And I picked it up and it was the 1984 revision of the NIV. And so that was the Bible that I cut my teeth on initially as a new believer. And I loved that Bible. And I used it until it was practically falling apart. Well it was falling apart. And even for the first several years as a pastor, I taught from that Bible.

When they came out with the 2011 revision, I wasn't super happy with the way some of the verses that I loved were rendered. And so I switched at that time. That was back in about, I think 2012, I switched to teaching through the ESV. But I've never lost my love for the NIV and that original 1984 revision. It was just so wonderful.

And I got to tell you, it was reading the NIV for the very first time, and reading this chapter in the Psalms, that I was impacted so much by the words of the psalmist in this particular chapter.

And so what I'm going to do here tonight, and this is the little different part, we're going to read through this chapter again, but I'm going to do it through the NIV. Now, I know several, you probably didn't come here with the 1984 revision of the NIV. I'm quite sure of that. So I've made the verses available on the screen, so as we read it, as I read it, you're going to be able to read along on

the screen. I really just love the particular way that the NIV rendered this chapter. So we're going to do these on the screen.

So here we go. Psalm 73 in the older NIV. It says,

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.

⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.

⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.

⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity ; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.

⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.

⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.

¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.

¹¹ They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"

¹² This is what the wicked are like-always carefree, they increase in wealth.

¹³ Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

¹⁴ All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children.

¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me

¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.

¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!

²⁰ As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,

²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.

²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

²⁸ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds. ”

I love this chapter. This is very long, for many years has been one of the most comforting chapters frankly in the Bible for me. And the first, you'll notice the first 2 verses of this do a really good job of setting the stage by giving us the context of what the psalmist is dealing with here.

And he tells us in verse 2 that he had nearly lost his foothold when he began to stumble over what, as he viewed as the success and prosperity of unbelievers. It's like they're getting away with murder, God. Why is that? And he's questioning the Lord. He's questioning why it seems to be such an easy life for people that don't care a snit about God.

And he's burdened by this and he says, this really became a problem for my walk with Jesus. This became a faith crisis for me when I was looking at the people of the world because I saw their success, I saw their prosperity. And it seems like the more wicked they are, the better their life. And you can see that he's really bothered by these things.

And so what he really have here is, what we have is the heart and the voice of a believer who loves the Lord with all of his heart, but who has been fixing his eyes on life under the sun. And I'm borrowing that term from Ecclesiastes. Those of you who know and have studied through that book of the Bible, you know, that was the favorite term of Solomon when he wrote Ecclesiastes to speak of life on earth. And not just life on earth, but life apart from a biblical, eternal worldview.

Solomon would speak of life under the sun as, well, the closest thing I can come to is a worldview that's based on the nightly news, which sounds pretty oppressive to me. But if that's your worldview, what you are seeing and hearing on the news, then you're going to probably feel just like the psalmist. And you're going to be oppressed, and you're going to be depressed, and discouraged. And you might even be like him, at a place where you feel like my faith is about to stumble.

The psalmist admits there in those first couple of verses that, as a result of fixing his eyes on unbelievers, looking at their lives, and comparing them to his own, he has developed a sense of envy. And envy, rots the soul.

And so he's observing how prosperous and happy these people appeared to be. And they, yeah they walk on the red carpet. We see this is what you and I see regularly, and they wave to the adoring crowds as they cheer their name, and call their name. They emerge out of their expensive cars and flaunt their wealth and beautiful clothes. Living in their multimillion dollar mansions. And here you are a believer in Jesus and you're struggling to make ends meet. And you don't have that expensive car or expensive home, and it just doesn't seem right.

I want you to notice here, beginning in verse 4, we're going to put this up on the screen. Verses 3 and 4 actually. I want you to see what he says, and we're going to look at these again outta the NIV. He says:

Psalm 73: 3-4 (NIV84)

They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.

They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.

Now, you got to understand this. There's a little bit of exaggeration going on here, but this is what happens when you get your eyes off the Lord. And when

you start fixating or focusing on the things of the world, and particularly people of the world, you start seeing them in a rather unrealistic light.

Now, there's an element of truth here, but you can hear the exaggeration in his voice. It's like, these guys never have any problems. They never seem to struggle with anything or anyone. They just simply sit around and make money. Lots of it. And then they flaunt it in front of us and that's what he's saying here.

But this is, again, this is what happens when your heart becomes touched by envy. We really stop seeing things as they really are and we begin to elaborate or exaggerate and things become a little bit worse than in fact they really are. But it's something that can happen to any believer and it can happen to us today when we take our eyes off the Lord and we begin to focus on the things that are going on in the world around us. What happens is we literally can begin to drift away from truth.

The Bible is all about truth. God is all about truth. Jesus said, I am the truth, and yet here we are, children of God, and we have the potential of actually drifting away from truth. We can do that if our eyes are not where they should be. If our focus is not where it should be. And that's probably one of the best descriptions of life under the sun. It becomes reality from our perspective. Reality from my perspective.

Now as we look at the next few verses, we're going to see that in addition to exaggerating a little bit about the lives of unbelievers, he's going to go on and he's going to talk about some things concerning the attitudes and actions of unbelievers. And some of this is pretty accurate.

Look on the screen. Here's verses 8 through 12.

Psalm 73: 8-12 (NIV84)

They scoff and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth.

He says: "*They scoff,...*" yeah and that's true, they do. And by the way, scoffing means mocking and ridiculing. Have you ever heard unbelievers mocking your faith? On television maybe, or at an award ceremony, or something like that?

He says: “*They scoff and speak with malice; ...*” Malice means hatred and bitterness. “*...in their arrogance they threaten oppression.*” In other words, they threaten violence against those who disagree with their particular beliefs. We don't see any of that today of course.

He says: “*Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.*” And that's rather poetic language, which we would expect in the Psalms. I mean, this is the poetry literature of the Bible after all. But this is poetic language describing how unbelievers speak pridefully and boastfully in a sense of actually claiming to be their own God. And that's what he's saying. And honestly, this is fairly accurate, what he's saying here.

And so he says, “*Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.*” Again, poetic language, describing their popularity. They gather people around them, and those people become their followers. And they love them, and they adore them, and so on.

And then the Psalmist notices how they speak about God. Look at this. He says: “*They say, “How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?”* (and he says) *This is what the wicked are like— (they're) always carefree, (and) they (just sit around making money, they) increase in wealth.*”

So what they're saying here and what he's saying about them is that their attitude toward God is, I can kind of do what I want. I mean, does God see everything? What they're saying is, I don't expect God to bother me anytime soon. This is my life and I'm enjoying it. And I'm not really, I'm not concerned about ever being accountable to God in any way. And that's the way they speak. They speak with that kind of boastful arrogance. You can tell this is really getting under this guy, this psalmist.

And so here's the deal. When anybody goes through this sort of a, kind of an analysis where they're so fixed on the things of this life, this world, and the people of this world that don't know and love the Lord, eventually they're going to compare what they see to themselves, okay? That, by the way, that's human nature. It's a very normal and common sort of a thing that we do. I will say it's normal. On the other hand, I will say it's not very productive, but we do this a lot. We compare ourselves to what we see in the world.

And that's what the psalmist goes on to do as he's thinking about his life of devotion to the Lord. And he's saying, for years I've been walking with Jesus. Look what he says. We will put this again on the screen. This is verse 13. He says:

Psalm 73:13 (NIV84)

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

Let me translate that for you. Essentially, the psalmist is saying, well, walking with God sure has been a waste of time. That's where envy gets you. That's where a fixation on the things of the world, the people of the world, the situations, and so forth, that's where that will get you. You begin to bring that comparison into your life, to the point that you begin to see yourself as a victim. And honestly, this is a little bit funny to me because I can relate to this attitude.

When I was an early, in my early years of walking with the Lord, before I got into the ministry at all, I was going through a time in my life where I think if you'd have asked me, I would've given God a failing grade as it relates to how He was treating me. Or at least how I perceived He was treating me.

And I actually sat down with my pastor and I said to him, I can't believe I said this, but I looked him in the eye and I said, if this is how God treats His children, I'd hate to see how He treats his enemies. I was deep in my own pity party at that point and was just fixated on myself as a victim at the hands of God. And it was, I'm surprised my pastor didn't just burst out laughing when I said that. But bless his heart, he didn't, and he prayed for me, and so forth.

But check out verse 14 on the screen again here. The Psalmist says:

Psalm 73:14 (NIV84)

All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

So you see how, you see what he has begun to now, how he views his life. I'm a child of God and I'm plagued, and God is punishing me. Do you know this is common? This is really common.

I hear from Christians a lot and it is a very common theme for people to say, well, first of all, to tell me what's going on in their lives. And then say, pastor Paul, am I being punished by God? And they're asking the question because life is painful right now. And it's a very common sort of a thing to become

introspective when I'm going through difficult times. And a little bit of introspection is not terrible because it'll begin to get us to take inventory of our lives.

But what that introspection should do is should cause you to draw closer to the Lord. What it often does do, however, is it causes people to stumble and to withdraw from the Lord because they feel like God's mad at them. And who wants to be around somebody that you think is mad at you, right? I certainly don't. I don't want to be around people who I perceive are mad at me and don't like me.

And so when people begin to believe the lie, and of course the enemy wants to jump on that one big time and exploit it and say, well, yeah, I think God is pretty mad at you. I mean, you're a failure. I mean, just, right, right? And so you're getting what you got coming. And that's the attitude that begins to take over in our hearts, and it's just like the psalmist, I'm being punished. This is God pun... He blesses those people and He punishes his children. Isn't this a fun Christian walk?

Well, you can well imagine, that's a pretty miserable place to live if that's your address. You think God is punishing you. He doesn't like you. He never hears your prayers, He never answers them, and He's got it out for you. And that sword is hanging over your head and you never really know for sure if you go a little bit too far, it might just swing down and chop your head off. And it's a terrible, terrible way to live.

So what in the world is going to turn this sorry state of affairs that we see this psalmist caught up in, around? What's going to make a difference? What is going to begin to make a difference?

Well, I want you up on the screen to take special note of verse 16. He says,

Psalm 73:16 (NIV84)

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me...

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me...

Or as the New King James puts it, “*when I thought how to understand it, it was too painful.*”

So here's the deal. This is what's going on in the heart of the psalmist and I'm willing to bet you've been in similar situations. You're looking at life on earth. You're looking at your life. You're comparing what you see in the lives of others. You're comparing it with your life. It doesn't measure up. You are beginning to walk in envy and you're trying to figure it out.

And maybe you're even crying out to God. Lord, explain this to me. I don't get this. Why is it that these people seem to have no problems and I have been doing my level best to walk with You all these years, and this is my life. And if you have ever been there, this kind of oppression. It's just like the psalmist said, when I tried to figure it out with my little pea brain, I couldn't. And God wasn't seeming to give me any insight, and so this whole matter became this weight of oppression that just came over me and became horrible, a horrible existence.

So he says, I'm I feel oppressed. Is it possible for a born again Christian to feel oppressed? You better believe it is. Yes, it is. It is possible. What's the source of that oppression? It comes from fixating your attention on this fallen, broken world.

Years ago, before the pandemic I used to call, I used to consider myself a news hound. And what I mean by that is I spent a lot of time reading, watching the news. And it's really something, when the pandemic hit the world, did you guys feel the change in our culture and in the world? I mean, it was like the gates of hell were opened up and there was just this flood that just became very difficult to deal with. and I think it just rolled over a lot of Christians and they felt very taken by the whole thing and didn't know what to think of it.

And we had some loved ones who were passing away and we didn't, and we didn't know what to think about the whole thing. There were so many questions, there was so much fear, and there was so much going on in the government that we felt was unfair and oppressive, and yet, and it was just, it was terrible. It was a terrible time.

And I found that beginning around 2020 and I had to really back off on the time I was spent watching the news. And that was hard to do because we were looking for answers, we were hoping for answers, I should say. When they first started talking about the possibility of a vaccine and we were—I think everybody was semi hopeful and we were like, wow this could be the answer. Maybe they can, we can stop the tide of what's happening.

And so I wanted to hang on the news, but at the same time, it was so dark, and oppressive, and difficult, that I began to realize that my faith was eroding. It

was eroding my faith. And the Holy Spirit started speaking to me about, hey, Paul, listen, if you're not spending as much time in the Word as you are in the news, this is going to have a negative impact on your life and on your walk with Me. So you need to change your priorities and so forth. And it was hard. It was hard.

So, are you ready for the solution? Hopefully I haven't gotten you into stupor here. Emotional stupor with all this difficulty because there is a solution. God's always got solutions. Look on the screen at verses 16 and 17. I love this. The psalmist says:

Psalm 73: 16-17 (NIV84)

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood...

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood...

And I got it. All I needed to do was come into His presence. All I needed to do was stop fixating on the world and the darkness of this broken, fallen, corrupted world, and start focusing my attention on the Lord my God, and then I understood. He says, then I got it. And the key words are “*till I entered the sanctuary of God; ...*” And the psalmist isn't talking about walking into a synagogue or for you walking into a church. Nothing wrong with that, but that's not what he's saying.

He's talking about coming in to the very throne room of God. He's talking about one of the greatest privileges that you and I have as children of God, as born again believers, and that is to come in to the very presence of God Himself whenever we wish. What a blessing that is.

And do you know why you can go into the presence of God whenever you wish? Because Jesus has made a way for you to do that. He's cleansed you with His blood. He's washed you through His sacrifice on the cross and now you have total opportunity, total freedom to come into His presence at any time. You guys are going through the Old Testament with Tom here on Wednesday night and you're learning a lot about the Mosaic law and all the rules and regulations that went along with that. But when you read the Old Testament, and I've taught through the Old Testament multiple times, when you know the theme of the Old Testament Mosaic law, it comes down to stay away. Stay away. That's the deal. Only a certain, very select number of people could go into the presence of the Lord.

And the high priest could only go into the Tabernacle as you well know, once a year. He would go in two times, once a year on the Day of Atonement. First he would go in to sacrifice for himself and his own sins, and then he would sacrifice, offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel. And for the rest of the people, you know what the word was? Stay away.

And when they began to move from place to place, and the Levites picked up the arc to take it away, do you know what the word was to the rest of the people? Stay away. Stay back. And when God met them on Mount Sinai and echoed the very 10 Commandments which all of them heard by the way, do you know what the message was? Stay away. Don't even touch the base of the mountain lest you die.

So the overwhelming message of the Old Testament is, stay away, stay clear. What is the message in the New Testament? Well, it's the exact opposite. Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace, right? That's the message that we have as born again believers. And what a blessing that is, that we can come any time we want. The message is not stay away. The message is, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Aren't you glad that you're under this covenant? I am. I love the new covenant.

And so it the message that we're seeing here is all bound up in this whole idea of coming into the presence of God. And look at—let me show you on the screen. One of the proverbs. This is Proverbs 2, verse 6. I love this, and this is out of the ESV. It says:

Proverbs 2:6 (ESV)

For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

You see, that's why the psalmist was able to say, this was absolutely an oppressive situation to me until I came into the very presence of God. And guess what I found in the presence of God? Knowledge and understanding. Because that's what you find in the presence of God, knowledge and understanding. He says, then I knew, then I understood. Now I get it. Right?

So look on the screen now, as we look at verses 17 through 20, and verse 27. He says:

Psalm 73: 17-20, 27 (NIV84)

...then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

“...then I understood their final destiny.” In other words, I came to understand how these people end up. Look what he says. He says, oh. Now I see. “*Surely you place them on slippery ground; ...*” Do you know what that means, guys? That means that the people of the world that we were envying before, their whole lives, the foundation of their entire lives are built on sinking sand. You have the foundation of the rock of Jesus Christ. Their foundations are on sinking sand, and that's what the psalmist is saying, that he understood after coming into the presence of God. He says, I get it now.

He says, “*you cast them down to ruin. (oh, he says) How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.*”

A lot of poetic language and wording in there, but suffice it to say the psalmist is made to understand that his comparisons were completely outta focus. Can you relate? Can you relate to those times when you maybe envied someone and you began to compare your life to them? And then you find out later that comparison wasn't fair.

I've had people say to me, I just want to be happy like so and so. And I pastored for about 40 years and I knew the lives of the people, most of them, that attended the fellowship that I pastored. And I knew that nobody had a perfect life. Nobody. Nobody had a perfect existence. And yet, what we see sometimes in church, we don't see the whole story. So we end up looking at their life and we compare our lives to theirs and we go, I want to be like that person. No, you don't.

Our comparisons become out of focus, and that's what the psalmist is admitting now. But he admits it after he came into the presence of the Lord. Now I see that I wasn't seeing properly. What I see is their lives. Oh and it practically gave him the shakes, but he also saw his own life in the proper light.

Now look at verses 25, or excuse me, 23 through 25 on the screen. He said—here's his proper understanding now of himself. He says:

Psalm 73: 23-25 (NIV84)

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, ...” Do you guys understand? Do you guys realize what a blessing it is that you can pick up your Bible at any time and be counseled by the counselor?

We live in a culture today that has elevated counseling and there's nothing wrong with counseling. But as believers, we should never underestimate the fact that the counselor capital C lives in our hearts. And if we're turning to men or women counselors, and we're not turning to the counselor capital C, we're shortchanging ourselves. And this is what the psalmist is saying.

He says, You guide me with Your counsel. I have an issue, I have a question, I have a problem, I go to the Lord. I seek His will, I seek His way, and He counsels me as I read the Scriptures, as I pray, as I long for the direction of the Lord and so forth. That's what he's saying here is, I got the Counselor. Those people in the world that I was envying, they don't. They don't have the Counselor. They could have the Counselor if they wanted Him, but because they've rejected Him, they don't. And so they have to be living their lives based on their own counsel or the council of other humans.

He says, look at this, *“...and afterward (in other words, after this life is done) you will take me into glory.”* Wow! And I'm not trying to say that this life is easy. This life is not easy. This life is hard. Jesus told us so. He said, in this life, you will have trouble, tribulation, difficulty, whatever your particular translation says. But He also said, be of good cheer, I've overcome the world. (John 16:33) And the psalmist tells us what that cheer should be based on. Hey, listen, when this is all over, I'm going to be with the Lord.

Years ago when I first started pastoring the last church I was at, Calvary Chapel Ontario, I had a gal in the fellowship in the first few years, sweetheart, that developed leukemia and they weren't able to cure her. And so she didn't have much time. It was a pretty aggressive leukemia that she had and I went over to visit her at her home. And, I remember dreading going there, even as a pastor. As a pastor, you're thinking, okay, I got to have some comforting words to say and some comforting Scriptures.

I walked out of her house, she comforted me. And you know how she did it? She looked me in the eye, she had this big grin on her face and she said, pastor Paul, I'm going to see Jesus. And I sat there for a minute and I was like, yeah, you're right. It's not long now, you're going to be in his presence. His never removed presence. You're going to see Him as He is.

I walked out of that house that day. My heart was light. She ministered to me by just simply saying, “...*afterward you will take me into glory.*” Wow! And so he says, “*Whom have I in heaven but you?*” And that's all I need. That's all I need. The earth, this earth, this life, this fallen, broken world he says, there's nothing here that I desire besides You. You're it. You're all I want.

He says, “*My flesh and my heart may fail,...*” And that's just a poetic way of saying, my body is going to expire someday unless the Lord comes first, of course. But he says, “*but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*” And don't underestimate those words right there. My portion.

think back, again, from the Old Testament when you begin to learn about the ministry of the Aaronic priesthood; Aaron and his direct sons. And then the Levites as well. They didn't receive any land when they came into the Promised Land. They didn't, and you guys know that. They didn't get an allotment of land that they could call their own. They simply lived on allotments that were owned by other tribes.

But you know what the Lord kept saying to the Levites, I am your portion. They got land, you got Me. And the Levites should have gone woo-hoo. Hooping and hollering. These people got something that's going to pass away. We got Him. And that is what you have. That's what I have. We can say regardless of what we've been given in this life, in this world, and so forth, regardless, we can say, but my portion is the Lord. He is my portion. I love that. I mean, you could, you can meditate on that. That'll lift your spirits.

So not only does the psalmist now see unbelievers in a true and correct light, but he also now sees his own destiny the way he should be seeing his destiny. Remember how he saw himself earlier? I'm being punished. I'm plagued, and now he says, I'm blessed and all because he came into the presence of God.

Look what he says in, up, on the screen, verses 21 and 22. This is interesting. He says:

Psalm 73: 21-22 (NIV84)

When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

Back “*When my heart was grieved* (and I was all bummed and full of envy) *and* (he says) *my spirit was embittered* (that means I was giving into bitterness, look what he says here. He says) *I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute. Beast before you.*”

The New King James actually says, “*I was like a beast.*” You know what that means? It literally means I was like an animal. I was like a dumb animal. I'm sorry for those of you that love your pets. You don't like me to call them dumb animals. I can appreciate that but they are. At least when you compare them with you. You've been made in the image of God. They have not. So animals are governed by their stomach. That's why we can get animals to do things. We promise them food and that is what it means to be a brute beast. It means that my fleshly appetites were all I had to go on.

That's what the psalmist is admitting here. When I was full of envy, when my spirit was embittered, I was reducing myself to an animal and to the animalistic instincts of a brute beast. Isn't that interesting? We have been given the privilege, and I will call it the precious privilege as believers to become so much more than people without the Spirit.

Paul, the apostle refers to unbelievers as those without the Spirit. He calls, he says, the man without the Spirit cannot understand the things of the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:14) They're foolishness to him. He can't get it. He can't understand it because he's thinking from the level of a brute beast. He's thinking more along the lines of an animal than he is really what he was created originally to be, which is to know, love, and serve God. And to think from a heavenly perspective rather than simply a fleshly appetite perspective. Right?

So this is—you'll remember good old King Nebuchadnezzar, remember when he failed to learn the lesson that God gave him through a dream? And that there's a God in heaven who holds accountable all mankind. And it was God who gave Nebuchadnezzar all of the glory and all of the power that he enjoyed. You remember? And then what happened? It wasn't terribly long later, he's out standing on his balcony, overlooking the Babylonian Empire and saying, look what I did.

And you'll remember what happened. He was struck and became like a beast, like an animal. And he literally lost his reason, his intellectual capacity, and he lived like an animal for years until the Lord gave him his ability to think again. And once he did, Nebuchadnezzar began to praise the God of heaven.

So the last thing I want to do, the last thing you should want to do is to lower ourselves to think with our fleshly appetites. The Bible refers to it as like thinking with your stomach. But here he's saying, this is what I was like this. This was me. This was my address.

So what's his conclusion? Look at verse 28 on the screen. It says:

Psalm 73:28 (NIV84)

...as for me, it's good to just be near God. I've made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

...as for me, it's good to just be near God. (because you see) *I've made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;...* "He's my refuge. You know what a refuge is? It's a place of safety. Because we do live in a fallen, broken and corrupted world. And that fallenness and that corruption, it touches our lives from time to time. And sometimes it's very, very painful. And when that happens, we need a refuge.

And the Psalmist realizes now, God is my refuge. And so I'm going to just hide in Him. And then I'm and every opportunity I get, he says at the end of that verse, he says, *"I will tell of all your deeds."* So, yep, just going to stay close to God. Because you see when he says here, it's good for me to be near God.

You see how he got in trouble by not being near God. He got in trouble by wandering thoughts, wandering eyes, wandering attention that he was fixing on the things of the world, right? That's how he got in trouble in the first place. And so now he says, I'm going to stick close to God. And what he's saying there in poetic languages, I'm going to, I'm going to keep my focus on the Lord. Okay.

I'm going to be careful that my thoughts and my attitudes don't wander away from Him and His Word, because I see here that I get in trouble when that happens. And whether it's just watching the news too much in a given day, or whether it's listening to coworkers. You go to work for eight hours a day or whatever, and you just, you're hearing unbelievers chatter in your ear about all the things they talk about and all the unbelief. And all of the stuff that you'd

rather not hear. And you come home and you wonder, yeah, I wonder why I'm so burdened.

And you realize eventually I need to counter that with time with the Lord in His Word. Be in church to hear God's Word, be in Bible study, home group, whatever, so that I'm countering all of this negativity and all this junk that's constantly coming my way.

Let me close out what I'm sharing with you here today with a couple of New Testament excitations that go along with this lesson.

The first one is from Paul's letter to the collages. We'll put this up on the screen from Colossians 3, the first 3 verses of the chapter. Paul says:

Colossians 3:1-3 (ESV)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

If then you have been raised with Christ, (and I assume that means all of you. What are you to do? You're to) seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated (right?) at the right hand of God. (look what he goes on to say) Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (why) For you have died, (when you came to Christ, that's a whole nother message by the way. That's a whole different teaching, but you have died) and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

That's your address, right? That's your address now, with the Lord.

And then I want to share with you the words of our Lord Jesus from John. Recorded in John chapter 15. He says, simply:

John 15:4-5 (ESV)

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you

are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, (but don't ever forget this, He says) for apart from me you can do nothing.

So don't be apart from Him. Don't fixate on this world and on all of the political upheaval and all of the... And I know I'm not telling you to be dumb or to not care. We all care, but just be careful how much influence you're allowing into the garden of your heart and planting there, because that's going to bear fruit. That's going to bear its own fruit and it's not good fruit.

But when you're abiding in the Vine, capital V, speaking of Jesus, that's going to plant in your heart seeds that are going to bear good fruit. Fruit, that's going to be a blessing to your life, amen?

Let's stand together and we'll close in prayer.

Father, thank You so much for the time that You've given us here this evening to dig into the Scriptures, to be encouraged through Your Word, and to be ministered to Lord by your Holy Spirit. You are the teacher, we are the students. Teach us, Lord each and every day, and may we abide closely in the vine that we might bear good fruit.

We commit our hearts to You, the name and authority of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, and soon coming King, amen.