

Honest Prayers – Psalm 73

Intro:

It is good to be with you this morning. I am excited to open up God's Word together with you ([Turn to Psalm 73](#)). Today we are going to look at an *HONEST PRAYER* together. Scripture models honest prayers!

Honesty in Our Prayers:

- The prayers I find recorded in Scripture challenge me to be honest with God. And when it comes to honest prayers (deep, from the heart), I often feel like I need to add qualifiers and caveats.
- As Canadians, we tend to be specialists at saying hard things in fluffy ways! We err on the side of sugar coating the truth; keep it politically correct, skirt around issues, dive, dodge and duck with fancy words, etc. This isn't just a Canadian thing – it's a PEOPLE thing.
- Now, I'm all for tact! To swing to the opposite extreme (blunt, careless and divisive) is not the answer either! ***But I wonder, how does this effect our prayers? Are they HONEST PRAYERS?***
- The Psalms show me that there is room for honest prayers! Psalm 73 is an example of that.

PP Honest question: Have you ever tried making yourself look better than you actually are in prayer?

- **X-Ray analogy:** You can't lie to an x-ray tech. If he's looking at the broken bone, doesn't matter how much you tell him "I feel fine!" or "its not that bad", its still a broken bone.

PP Big Truth: God already sees your heart (the good, the bad and the ugly). There is no point on "hiding in the shadows" in prayer, because God already knows. Step out into the light!

- But what I find myself fighting against (as I suspect others do too) is trying to talk to God from the shadows – trying to hide or cover the parts of me I don't want others to see.
- Prayer is communion with God, where we 'see' (God) and are seen (by God). That is the transformative nature of prayer! (cue "prayer isn't about getting what we want")
- Therefore, we must find courage to pray honest prayers (not talking about self-centered, disrespectful prayers... but *honest* ones). **PP Gods not interested in transforming who you PRETEND to be. He says you 'come as you are', then the work of transformation can begin!**

That's why we are looking at [Psalm 73](#). I have broken it down into THREE parts: 1-14, 15-20, 21-28

PP Corporate Prayer – Unison

Read Psalm 73:1-14 – Pause on "A Psalm of Asaph."

PP This poem (or song) was written by Asaph. Who was Asaph?

- We know that Asaph was one of the men that lead worship within the tabernacle during the reign of David. He was also listed as a 'seer' or prophet. Both David and Asaph were renowned song writers of their day. 11 Psalms in total are attributed to Asaph (Ps. 50, 73-83).
- **2 Chron. 29:30**, *"And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer."*

PP Continue Reading v1-14

PP Part 1: Honest about Envy...

How's that for honesty? Keep in mind, we have **only read through half** of this Psalm **so far**, but let's pause here and reflect on some of Asaph's words.

- In a nutshell, Asaph is sharing his lament with God for a perceived inconsistency he has observed and taken to heart: How is it fair that the *wicked* can live in peace and prosperity, while the *righteous* suffer hardship? WHAT GIVES?

Who, if they're honest, has not felt that before? I have! "How's that fair?" says the soul.

- **First, it's easy to spot when others have it better than us** (*no struggles, carefree, amassing wealth...*)
 - **It's especially true when we're facing hard times.** (*every morning brings new punishments...*)
 - **Add to it the compounding effect of "the bad guys" prospering and you have a recipe for "WHY God!?! How can that be fair?"** (most gut-wrenching line for me is v13 "*surely in vain have I kept pure...*")
 - **Our culture celebrates sin, greed and pleasure to the point that we monetize envy!**
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- Consider his opening line: **PP "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."**
 - **Understand that Asaph BELIEVES this statement to be true!** Here's a man that has declared the goodness of God alongside others for most of his life. Along with David he's sung of the Lord's goodness and recalled all that He has done for Israel! (*and will do!*)
 - **Interestingly, its the very fact that he believed this opening statement that led him to the transition statement immediately following... PP "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold."**
 - Asaph knows God's good **TO ISRAEL (in theory)**, what about **to him (practically)**?
 - Knowing something up here can be one thing (head), knowing something here can be another thing (heart). Agreed?
 - And notice – his feet had **ALMOST** slipped! (*as in he hasn't quite fallen flat on his face yet, but he's begun to lose his sure footing*)... This is what I love about the Psalms.
 - Asaph is working through some big feelings with the Lord (as we will get to in just a moment). But that's just the point: He is working them through WITH THE LORD. There is an appropriate time and place to work through big feelings.
 - **PP "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong." (Ps. 73:3-4)**
 - The trouble for Asaph is: He's caught between what he knows to be true (that God is good and good to those that seek him), and what he perceives to be true around him.
 - He looks around and sees the 'wicked' prospering even though they have no regard for the Lord and his way. In fact, they are PROUD of their defiance! **HOW CAN THIS BE?**
 - Furthermore, he himself (who is presumably 'good') is suffering affliction! That is important to note: **Suffering is the backdrop of this Psalm (v14)**. While we won't take time to unpack the role of suffering in the life of a Christian, I preached a mini series (Jonah) on that subject 1 year ago.

To help us understand Asaph's wrestle more thoroughly, we need to wrap our heads around **how he understood the righteous and the wicked**, and the outcomes there of. Asaph's mind, being Jewish, would have been saturated in the Torah (first 5 books in the OT).

- **In the book of Exodus, The Lord enters into a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Mosaic Covenant).** Unlike the **unconditional** covenant made with **Adam and Eve** in the garden (that 'a seed' [*singular, male*] would come to crush the head of the snake), as well as the covenant God made with **Abraham** (that God would form a nation [chosen people] out of his offspring containing the promised 'seed', give them the land as a everlasting possession, bless them + make them a blessing), **the covenant God made with Moses and Israel at Sinai was conditional.**
 - o **Simply put, God said:** 'Follow me + walk *in my ways* and it will go well for you. But if you turn from me, it will not go well for you.' This was true **personally AND corporately.**
 - o This can be easily seen in Deuteronomy, which nicely summarizes:
 - **PP Deuteronomy 28:1-2,** "If you **fully obey** the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God..." (goes on to list blessings)
 - **PP Deuteronomy 28:15,** "However, **if you do not obey** the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you..." (goes on to list curses)
 - This was "wickedness" in Asaph's mind! The wicked would not only include those from within the community of Israel that did not keep to the covenant commands, but also those outside of the community (i.e. the surrounding nations) who did not know the Lord. **Plainly put, we are talking about SIN.**
- **PP CONCLUSION: Deuteronomy 29:9,** "Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, **so that you may prosper in everything you do.**"

Moreover, Asaph's understanding aligns with the surrounding tone of the Psalms! (Note: David wrote a very similar Psalm to this; **Psalm 37**. Spurgeon called David *the Sun* and Asaph's *the Moon*)

All throughout the Psalms you find compare/contrast between "the wicked" and "the righteous". We won't spend much time on this, but consider Psalm 1 which is often called **The Preface to The Psalms**, meaning that in general it sums up the overarching tone and tenor of the book of Psalms in a few lines.

- **PP Compare/Contrast:** Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— **whatever they do prospers.** P.1:1-3
- The Lord watches over the **WAY** of the righteous, the **WAY** of the wicked leads to destruction.
- **Elsewhere this theme is confirmed:** *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, **for at the proper time** we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* Gal. 6:7-9
- **Question is, is it true? (YES).**

PP To Summarize: Asaph understands that God is good. He understands that God blesses those that seek him (*the righteous*), and destroys those who turn from him (*the wicked*). Where he gets caught is; “*how come immediate observation tells me otherwise?*”

And again I ask: Who, if they’re being honest, has not wrestle with questions like that?

Perhaps you, or a loved one, are facing health challenges. Perhaps you lost someone you loved? **Why God?** Perhaps you have struggles in your marriage, or a child that has gone astray. **Why God?** Perhaps you lost your job, or can’t make the ends meet. Or you applied for the open position and didn’t get it, but **they** did... you were more qualified and better suited. **Why God?**

- **How come bad things happen to good people?**
- **How come good things happen to bad people?**

We will come back to this in our conclusion, but for now let’s put a pin in these WHY questions and finish reading this honest prayer of Asaph! So far we have only read Part 1.

- Good news is, this Psalm has a **hopeful ending!** Perhaps you snuck a peek at the ending already!
- The question is, what helped Asaph find God in the midst of his wrestle? Because that’s the goal. The goal of the Christian life is not to have it all together or figured out all the time – rather, it is to find Jesus amidst our questions and honest prayers! Let’s read on...

PP Part 2: Perspective (Line and Dot)

PP Read v15-20

- **PP Psalm 73:15-17, *if I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply TILL I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.***
- The question of fairness was at the heart of Asaph’s wrestle. That is a natural human desire, we want things to be fair. **(that is, when ‘fair’ benefits us!)**
- It wasn’t until Asaph ***came into the house of the Lord*** that his eyes were open and he saw the **OUTCOME** of their way of life. **His perspective was changed!**
- Last week Pastor Stefan reminded us of our sin nature, as well as the end result of unrepentant sin. Basic Christian Theology 101 – sin leads to death. (Rom. 3:23). Sin is rebellion against our Creator and his designed order.
 - o Far too many people see Christianity as merely a set of rules: *dos and don’ts*. I call this **Checkbox Christianity. This view reduces God a harsh overseer.**
 - o Check the right boxes and you punch your ticket to heaven. God ‘owes’ you for your right deeds, holy living, etc.
 - o Conversely, God a kill joy out to ruin *your fun*. You better not get caught doing ‘bad things’. Sadly, Christians have played a big part in propagating this misrepresentation.
- While this may have an appearance of truth, it misses the heart! God is a **GOOD** God; our Creator! He designed us for **LIFE!** As creator, he is responsible for determining the purpose for

which his creation is to be used, and is well within his rights to prescribe rules. **God has a good purpose and plan for us, and sadly we turn from that and rebel.**

- Pastor Stefan gave the illustration of a road that led out to a steep and unexpected cliff. Would it be loving to know of such a thing and not warn others about it? Of course not!
 - o God loves us enough to warn us of the outcome of sin. **PP** *“Surely you place them on slippery ground; **you cast them down to ruin.** How suddenly are they **destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!**” Psalm 73:18-19*

We have a phrase at Southland that goes back to Pastor Ray (maybe he got it from somewhere, I don't know). **PP Line and the dot.** The idea is simple; life on this earth is like a dot. It's a nice dot, filled with wonderful opportunities and experiences, yet also with pain and hardship too. While you're in it, the dot seems big. All encompassing even. But its only a dot, and next to it is a line – that's eternity. *BTW - the choices we make now impact the outcome of our eternity.*

- What seems big to us now will not seem big (*or as big*) when we get to the line. And while we are in the dot, we need to get ourselves connected to the line by going to God as Asaph did.
 - o Can I add something as a rabbit trail here? We need a bigger perspective (an eternal perspective) which can only come from God. We need to stop thinking in the dot.
 - o If the message we preach is simply one of “don'ts”... if our only focus is to simply avoid sin and/or “earn heaven”, we are going to fall into envy.
 - o Example: Within my role, I talk with young people and couples about *purity* often, and when I ask them how purity is going, I usually get the same reaction...
 - *It gets a little awkward, maybe their head drops, feeling guarded. Why? Because we instinctively view purity in terms of “have you screwed up?”*
 - o **“Purity is not merely the absence of sin – it is the presence of GOD in your life.”** That's dot to line thinking! To be clear: Purity DEFINITELY INCLUDES turning from sin! But what's next? **Walking in step with the Spirit – and that's our greatest reward.**
- **Compare and Contrast: Olympic Athlete vs Couch Potato**
 - o Try to get into the mindset of an Olympian with me. FYI – I enjoy running, but on the sliding scale I am probably closer to a couch potato than I am to an Olympian... LOL!
 - o Imagine the thought of standing on that podium having claimed the gold medal. The sense of accomplishment would feel amazing! The best of the best. Soak it in!!
 - o **Well, that didn't happen by accident.** Take Olympian Michael Phelps for example: 28 medals within Olympic competition, 23 of which were gold medals. I did a quick search and concluded that Phelps trained on average **5-6 hours a day, 6 days a week.**
 - o **Imagine yourself committing to something like that.** Then there would also be dietary routines to consider, getting enough sleep and rest, etc. **It is a massive commitment.**
- Do you think that Olympians ever struggle with the gruelling routine? Likely. Would they ever perhaps envy the *couch potato*? Perhaps at times. But I'll tell you what, my guess is that they don't motivate themselves by saying – *“today I am not going to eat chips and lay around all day”*... and then repeat that in their head constantly. They aren't focusing on “don'ts” **they are focusing on do's** because they are motivated to WIN.
- **We need a bigger perspective!** When following Jesus feels difficult (Which it will!), **and we find ourselves envying the wicked,** we need to get into Gods presence for a realignment!

- **I am going to say something here:** The description of the wicked in this Psalm should not describe your life in Christ.
- **Perhaps that's part of the problem, isn't it?** *We envy the wicked because we want what they have (or at least what we perceive they have).*
- **What's our ambition – an easy life? Comfort?** Is that why we signed up to follow Christ? No struggles, care-free, amassing wealth? You've got the wrong rabbi then! Our ultimate prize is not on this earth, friends. Its Heavenward in Christ! (**read Philippians 3**)
- Not only does wickedness ultimately *lead to* destruction – we are created for so much more! We are created for oneness with God NOW (in the dot) and beyond (the LINE).
 - **PP** *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."* C.S. Lewis
 - **God, INCREASE OUR DESIRES!!**

PP Part 3: Whom have I but you?

PP Read v21-28

We have seen this Psalm come full circle. Asaph began with declaring God's goodness, then came out of the shadows and prayed honestly. He lost perspective, and found himself envying those that neither know God nor walk in the way of life. He asked himself *"Is God really worth it, or is it all in vain?"* Yet at the end of this beautiful struggle, his eyes are lifted and he sees God once again in all his GOODNESS!

You see, church, Asaph was reminded of something that we all need to remember: who are the 'wicked', those that stray? That was (is?) YOU, and that was (is?) me. **Not only victims, but perpetrators.**

- **PP** *"I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you."* Psalm 73:22
 - Over the last two weeks we have been talking about our sin nature. This is not to tear us down or apply condemnation to a heart that is already broken over sin.
 - But if we don't get the fact that we are all BRUTE BEASTS (have been, continue to be at times), I am afraid the gospel will never make sense to us.
 - The cross of Jesus will never be understood.
 - The cross shines brightly against the backdrop of human depravity and suffering.
- **PP** *"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 but you.**"* Psalm 73:23-25
 - This is the gospel, my friends! We are by nature sinful and deserving of wrath. On all accounts we were cut off from God because of our wickedness and still struggle with sin, even as a follower of Jesus...**YET!** Yet I am, you are, always with HIM.
 - What is there to envy? **We already have EVERYTHING!**
- **And remember:** We are not at war with people. We are at war with wickedness, evil ideologies, and people that do wicked things (even propagate it)! Sin is real, very real, and God will be judge of the wicked. But remember, in the meantime our job is to seek the lost and show them Jesus.

In conclusion: What about our 'WHY God?' questions? What about fair?

How come bad things happen to good people? How come good things happen to bad people?

PP GOSPEL: God himself, the purest of all, totally good, let bad things happen to Himself **SO THAT** we, those who have done wicked and bad things, can experience the goodness of God found in Christ.

PP Trust me, we don't want 'fair'.

***"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."** Isaiah 53:6*

PP Weekly Challenge:

1. Review Psalm 73 this week in your devotions. Ask the Lord to bring anything to the surface of your heart that needs to be dealt with. Perhaps it's a 'why God' question, or envy. Or maybe its just the reminder that he is always with you!
2. Grow continually in *Honest Prayers*. Visit the Psalms often to soak in the rich language of prayer, and ask the Lord to transform you from the inside out as you meet with him in the Secret Place.
Scripture: Read it, write it down, pray it, sing it, memorize it.