

## A MAN WITH A PROBLEM!

PSALM 73 is one of a group of Psalms often called the "Wisdom" Psalms, where the writers tell us something of their own spiritual journey so that we can learn from their experience - in this case the writer's journey from a place of simple faith and trust in God (V 1) - through a deep valley of doubt and disillusionment (Vs 2-17) - and back to a deeper trust in God's and a closer walk with Him (Vs 17-28).

Today we are looking at just the first half of this Psalm (Vs 1-16), which sets out the problem that almost de-railed the writer's faith (V2), and has troubled God's people all through the ages. The writer had a ...

### CONVICTION...

that God is 'good' to those who trust Him and seek to please Him (V 1). His expectation was that God would make the path of life easy for them, giving them good health and material prosperity. But his own experience and observation of life seemed to indicate the opposite

### CONTRADICTION

the ungodly, even the openly wicked seemed to prosper, and he seemed to face every kind of difficulty and trial (Vs 4-14). His faith had almost failed V.2. He even came to envy the this-worldly well-being of those who ignored God's claim on their lives (V.3). He was perplexed and...

### CONFUSED.

Three things we need to remember when we are feeling perplexed...

1. Being perplexed is not surprising. God is GOD - infinite in knowledge and eternal, standing outside of time. We have to accept the limitations of our humanity...our knowledge is limited and we are locked into the framework of time. If you sit in a wide-screen theatre but can see only a small part of the screen, it is not surprising that you have difficulty following the plot. See Isaiah 55:8,9.

2. Being perplexed is not sin. Paul tells us honestly that he was often perplexed by his circumstances given that he was devoting his life to proclaiming the Gospel. But he did not abandon his faith or give up on his task - "*perplexed but not driven to despair*" II Corinthians 4:18. But...

3. Being perplexed is Satan's opportunity. Satan is a liar, John 8:44. He seizes every opportunity to misrepresent God's good character - insert grumbling and bitterness into our minds - and to turn us away from the Lord.

What saved this man was a

### CERTAINTY..

Though not directly related to his problem, this man had a fixed principle that stopped the free-fall of his faith, V15 "*If I had said 'I will speak thus', I would have betrayed this generation of your children*" i.e. it is always wrong to speak (or act) in a way that would undermine the faith of others, Romans 14:13. (Conversely, it is always good to encourage others, V19).

CONCLUSION. We all need some well-thought-out principles as a firm foundation to guide us through the troubled times of life...

\* I will never do or say anything that would discourage a fellow-christian.

\* I will always spend time with God each day in prayer however little I may feel like it. \* I will always put reading God's Word before other reading. \* I will always join with God's people in worship and fellowship unless illness makes it impossible. More on this theme next week! (V17)

## UNDERSTANDING PSALMS

Today and on Sundays May 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, I plan, (God-willing) to focus our attention on Psalm 73. Sermon notes will be available on each of these Sundays.

The Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, occupying about 100 pages in most editions. It is also the Old Testament book most often quoted in the New Testament

Each Psalm is written in the form of a poem, and various other literary devices are used by the writers to make their message easy to remember. Even our English translations (of the original Hebrew) preserve enough of these characteristics to make the Psalms have special appeal. The Psalms have been an important source of comfort and strength to God's people over a period of up to 3000 years. Their unique appeal lies in the fact that the great truths about God's character that we need to recall in the changing circumstances of our lives reach us more through the heart than through the head. There are times in life when we are so emotionally battered and so mentally wearied that we find it hard to grapple with the more 'doctrinal' parts of Scripture. In the Psalms the writers express their feelings of the moment (joy, praise, gratitude, sorrow, perplexity, despair) and tell us how they related these feelings to appropriate aspects of God's character so that they were drawn closer to Him by their experiences, even the negative ones. Many of the Psalms are in the form of testimony.

The Psalms then, not only help us identify our feelings in the various circumstances that make up life, but also give us the words we need to draw near to God and find his comfort and help.

The Psalms help us to live a God-centred life!

## PASTOR'S NOTES Psalm 73:1-22

### A man with a new perspective

Over these three Sundays, (last Sunday, next Sunday and June 19th) we are working our way through an man's (Asaph's) account of his spiritual journey, drawing lessons for ourselves from his experience. Last Sunday ("A man with a Problem", Vs 1-16), we saw how the apparent comfort and prosperity of those who ignore God and His Law (Vs 3-12), and the troubles of his own life as one who tries to please God (Vs 13,14), led him to a place where he was almost ready to give up believing (V2). All that stopped the landslide of his faith was the strong conviction that he should not do or say anything that would harm the faith of others (v15). That was a principle he held to firmly despite his own disillusionment.

In today's section of his story, Vs 17-22, we discover another principle he held that lead to a change of perspective....about the 'prosperity' of the wicked (vs18-20).and.... about his own 'purity of heart' (V13, Vs 21,22)

PRINCIPLE, V17 "I entered into the sanctuary of God".

He firmly held to the conviction that however spiritually "down" he felt he ought to continue to meet with God's people in the Temple for worship and fellowship. See Luke 4:16; Hebrews 10:25. At the Temple he gained a new

PERSPECTIVE on things. \*No doubt he saw other people at worship who had greater troubles than his own, and was prompted to re-think his own attitude. \*At the Temple he would have heard God's Word read and explained, e.g. that the Lord's covenant with His people ("I will be your God and you will be my people") does not mean that we will be spared the trials and troubles of life in a fallen world, but rather that He will give His people His presence and strength to bear them. See Isaiah 41:8-14; 43:1-5; John 16:33. \*He also gained a new perspective on the ungodly (vs18-20), that they live in a false paradise. When God "awakens" (V20) from his seeming inactivity against evil, all that they have trusted in will be seen as "fantasy", and "destruction" and "terror" will be their lot, (v19).

He also gained a new perspective on \*the state of his own heart (Vs 21,22). It was not sin to be perplexed by the seeming contradictions of life (V16), but he had allowed doubting God, envying others and bitterness of spirit...ugly qualities, to fester within. He saw now that the roots of sin went deep into his heart, (Jeremiah 17:9). So, his confession before the Lord (Vs 21,22) was humble, honest and specific - as our's must be if we are really to find forgiveness and renewal.

General confession is appropriate when we meet together for worship, but in our own quiet times of prayer we cannot be satisfied with "Lord, You know what a sinner I am". HE does!, but the question is "Do WE?"... not until we name our specific sins, humbly acknowledging their ugliness in God's sight, and honestly seeking a renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the depths of our heart!

PSALM 73:23-28      NEW INSIGHTS...NEW RESOLUTION.

Today we conclude our series on Psalm 73, the account of a man's spiritual journey from a place where his faith had almost gone (v.2), to a closer walk with God than he had known before, (Vs.25,26,28) - finding guidance for ourselves from lessons he learnt along the way.

\* We have seen him as "a man with a problem", about the apparently trouble-free lives of the ungodly and his own trouble-beset life as one who sought to keep his life "pure" in God's sight (v.13).

\* We have seen him as "a man with a new perspective" on the supposed "prosperity" of the wicked (v.18-20), and also on his own supposed "purity" of heart (v.21,22). At this point (where we start today) he seems to be at his lowest ebb emotionally... "*I have been wrong about the ungodly, envying them not pitying them, I have been bitter towards God, stupid and foolish in His sight.*" (Vs.21,22.)

But in truth he has arrived at the place where the Lord can begin to lift him up. Our extremity is often God's opportunity. Only when we see ourselves as hopeless, helpless sinners can we begin to appreciate God's mercy toward us in Christ (Luke 18:10-14). Only when as Christians we humble ourselves can the Lord lift us up. Pride and self-sufficiency are the greatest barrier to His ongoing work in our lives. The Psalm-writer came into a new appreciation of

1. GOD'S FORGIVING GRACE... "*I am always with you*", v.23. Scripture assures us that when we return to the Lord He is always there for us - in fact He has never let us go!

2. GOD'S RESTRAINING GRACE... "*You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel*" v.23,24. Looking back he could see that all through his episode of doubt, envy and bitterness, the Lord had kept him from falling right away (v.2 "*almost*"), and brought to his mind the principles that had checked his fall.(v.15) and led to his return to faith (v.17). We should thank God for His restraining grace in our lives- through a verse of Scripture He brings to mind, or the words of a hymn, or the encouragement of a friend.

3. GOD'S PERSEVERING GRACE... "*afterward You will take me into glory*" v.24. God has promised to complete what he has commenced, (Philippians 1:6). John Newton's hymn says it all... "*Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home*".

The closing verses of the Psalm set out the writer's NEW RESOLUTION and PRIORITY (v25-28). He has come full circle - from seeing "the good life" as one of "this-worldly prosperity"(v.3), to realising that the ultimate "good" is a life lived in closeness to God whatever the outward circumstances of life may be - a closeness that even the ravages of old age cannot dim (v26). It was foolish of him to ever have thought otherwise! Closeness to the Lord, is life's greatest "good", and must be our highest priority. The Psalm concludes with a summary of the writer's new perspective and resolution! (Vs. 27,28)