

Psalm 73

This Psalm deals with the same theme as **Psalms 37, 49 and 94**. The problem is that of an apparent inversion of morality and success.

In this life in this world, evil people prosper while godly people are often in serious distress and need.

The emphasis here in this Psalm is not on the temporary nature of the prosperity of the wicked. It may, and often does, persist through life, [verse 4].

Job 21:7-13 [New King James] *“Why do the wicked live and become old, yes, become mighty in power? Their descendants are established with them in their sight, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull breeds without failure; their cow calves without miscarriage. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They sing to the tambourine and harp, and rejoice to the sound of the flute. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.”*

Job had the same problem as the Psalmist: both agreed that ultimately there must be condemnation.

The essential truth for the righteous person was that it is well with them really, because the true test of our wellbeing consists not in the power and riches of this world but in our personal relationship with the Creator God.

Psalms 73:1 [New King James] *“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.”*

This positive statement indicates the absence of doubt in the Psalmist’s mind in general.

Psalms 73:2-3 [New King James] *“But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”*

Nevertheless there had been a time when the Psalmist had almost turned aside from the path of Godward trust, he had almost staggered through the sudden pull of unbelief, even gone as far as to feel envious at the success of those who spoke boastfully and who were obviously enjoying more worldly success than he, notwithstanding their wicked character and life.

Psalms 73:4 [New King James] *“For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm.”*

This indicates a life-long prosperity ending in a personal and painless death.

Psalms 73:5-9 [New King James] *“They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.”*

They behave insolently and unscrupulously in the way they show off their expensive clothing, [verse 6]. Their gaze is intent on self-gain and their thoughts and imaginations are utterly vain, [verse 7].

It is only to be expected that such behaviour should indicate an exaggerated self-opinion and their speech is a true indication of what is in their minds and hearts, [verses 8 and 9].

Nothing in either the heavens or the earth is above or beyond their criticism.

Psalms 73:10-12 [New King James] *“Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, ‘How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’ Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches.”*

There is a sense of mystery as to why God is tolerating such people who are causing His people to be led astray and to return to the world from which God had called them out of and return to their former evil practices.

Psalms 73:13-16 [New King James] *“Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I had said, ‘I will speak thus, ‘Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me,’”*

A graphic description of the strict integrity of heart and mind, and adherence to the high moral code of the law that seems in vain so far a tangible advantage is concerned in his life.

In fact his endeavour to live a godly life brought the Psalmist no evidence of divine approval, only a daily chastening.

Yet, if he had voiced his doubts in public, he knew he would have been a traitor to God’s children, encouraging them to doubt, [verse 15].

Note how the godly man controls his tongue, thinks before he airs his problems, thus giving pride of place to the spiritual wellbeing of others.

The more the Psalmist ponders on the meaning of this inversion of values, the more worrisome it became, [verse 16].

Psalms 73:17 [New King James] *“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.”*

At last he brought the problem to the Creator God, face-to-face in prayer, meditating on the ultimate state of the wicked.

In this action the Psalmist discovered a new outlook, he realised that life had baffled him because he had not looked at it in the light of the final issue.

Psalms 73:18-20 [New King James] *“Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.”*

The Psalmist sees clearly now that the wicked can never escape the judgement of the Creator God, [2 Corinthians 5:10-12].

The question remains, when will this happen? Not often, if ever, in this present physical life, as verse 4 indicates. But the Psalmist looks forward to their awaking in a resurrection when their salvation will be quite different.

Revelation 20:11-13 [New King James] *“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”*

All who have never had their eyes opened to the real reason for human life, as shown in God’s Word, the Christian Bible, will be in this resurrection, where all their previous so-called achievements will be seen in a very new light.

Psalms 73:21-22 [New King James] *“Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.”*

Very different is the Psalmist’s awareness of his own life now, having taken his problem directly to the Creator God in heartfelt prayer, [verse 17].

He now understands that his period of envy and bitterness had made him utterly devoid of insight into the plan of God for humanity as a whole.

He acted like a beast, [verse 22], that is a being who did **not** have in it the human spirit that gives them intellect.

Job 32:8 [New King James] *“But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.”*

It is this human spirit that separates us as human beings from other animals.

1 Corinthians 2:11 [New King James] *“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.”*

In the same way, we can only understand the thoughts and attitudes of the Creator God through an active indwelling of the Holy Spirit, [Galatians 5:22-25].

Proverbs 20:27 [New King James] *“The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart.”*

It is through this “human spirit” that God relates to us.

Daniel 4:24-34 [New King James] *“This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: they shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules. Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.’ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, ‘Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?’ While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.’ That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.”*

When the “human spirit” in Nebuchadnezzar was taken away from him he acted as an animal.

Psalms 73:23-26 [New King James] *“Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”*

The Psalmist is now aware of his spiritual wealth, his peace with his Creator God and his security, and eventually receive the gift of eternal life, [Romans 6:23].

Psalms 73:27-28 [New King James] *“For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 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 Your works.”*

The Psalmist has come from doubt to a burning desire to tell other people about the Creator God and His wonderful plan for all humanity.