

Worshipping Our Way Out of Envy

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[0:00] And so you can be praying for this ministry. It is a very difficult and challenging ministry. I mean, addiction comes with a lot of darkness.

! And so, please, the thing I always ask is, if you think of us, please pray. I even had a challenging call late last night. And so, the other thing is, we don't take any government funding.

So, one of the things I always have to do is tell people, hey, if the Lord has blessed you, and this is a ministry that you can see the biblical approach and you would love to support, we really do need financial support.

We're closing in on a \$150,000 goal to have another house because we need a second phase kind of sober living. And we have just under \$40,000 left.

So, the Lord has been so kind to bring in a huge chunk. That's a lot of money. And so, all that to say, thank you for even just considering and praying for that ministry.

[0:56] So, that's a little bit about Redemption House. Now, what I really enjoy doing is opening up God's Word with you. So, if you have your Bible, let's look at Psalm 73.

You can open it up there. The title of this sermon is Worshipping Your Way Out of Envy, a case study on disordered worship. And all I want to do is just show you another example.

So, I did it kind of this weekend with addiction, anxiety. We looked at a couple examples. Here's another example in God's Word of disordered worship that is transformed by the presence of God and reordered worship, right?

So, he worships his way out of a particular struggle. So, we're going to consider Psalm 73 and look at one of the struggles, envy, that God's people, one of God's people, Asaph, faces, and look at how he finds freedom, or we might say worships his way out.

So, let me read it for you now. This is the Word of the Lord, Psalm 73. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

[2:07] But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For they have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

Therefore, pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their hearts overflow with follies.

They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily, they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

Therefore, his people turn back to them and find no fault in them. And they say, How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease.

[3:06] They increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long, I've been stricken and rebuked every morning.

If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

Truly, you set them in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors. Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast towards you. Nevertheless, I'm continually with you. You hold my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel. And afterward, you will receive me to glory. Whom am I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire beside you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but

God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[4:15] For behold, those who are far from you shall perish. You put an end to everyone who is faithful to you. But for me, it is good to be near to God. I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of your works.

This is the Lord. This is the word of the Lord. Let us pray to him to bless his word. Well, Father, come and do what we desperately need you to do in your word is show us Christ.

Reveal truth to our hearts. Reveal yourself to us so that we can be like Asaph and worship our way out of whatever we come in here wrestling with, struggling with, so that we might find true peace and joy and satisfaction in the presence of Christ.

Help us do that by the power of your spirit, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. I want us to view Psalm 73 this morning like a case study.

Okay, so I'm not going to do a traditional outline, though if you were to break down this text, you could look at verses 1 through 15 as kind of his disordered worship. He's disoriented in the world.

[5:21] Verses 16 to 17 is him coming humbly into the presence of God, and the worship begins to reorder, and then the rest of the psalm is the worshiping his way out. His worship has been reordered.

But I'm going to just walk through this like a case study. That's the biblical counselor in me. When you go to school or get training for biblical counseling, one of the ways that they test your ability to counsel is through the use of case studies.

And so case studies are brief summaries of real or imaginary counselees that have a presenting problem, you're only given a brief amount of information, and you have to come up with a counseling approach and a plan describing what questions would you ask, what goals would you have in which you would be inclined, and then a counseling plan.

How would you want to counsel this particular person? It's an important part of counseling because abstract theology that cannot connect to real life won't bring people transformation.

The Bible is about real life, and we need to be able to connect it to real life. This morning, we have been provided in God's Word a divinely inspired case study.

[6:35] We have a psalm written by a worshiper of God who experienced a temptation towards a particular sin, but who also experiences the grace of God meeting him and transforming him.

And he records how this transformation happened. So it's a little different than a counseling case study. When you're only given a little bit of piece of information, you've got to come up with a counseling plan.

We just get to watch his process of transformation as he comes into the house of God. Now let me introduce us to this case study with a quote from the late J.I. Packer from the opening pages of his book, *Knowing God*.

Packer writes this, The world becomes a strange, mad, and painful place, and life in it is a disappointing and unpleasant business for those who do not know about God.

Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life, blindfolded as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you.

[7:45] That's what happens to Asaph in this psalm. The world becomes a strange, mad, and painful place when he loses sight of God.

He cannot understand what is happening around him, and he loses his sense of direction, and he nearly stumbles. And that is going to be the case until God reenters the picture in his mind, and his God-centered worldview returns to him, and he refocuses his worship on God.

So I've kind of summarized the whole concept of the psalm. And I trust you will find yourself as we walk through this very similar to Asaph. When our worship shifts and we lose sight of God, this world becomes disoriented.

Disorienting. It becomes a strange, mad, and painful place, but when we repent and shift our worship back to God, we can understand and navigate this world with joy, peace, and contentment. So with that introduction out of the way, let's meet the person in our case study. We don't know much about him other than he was a musician appointed by David in 1 Chronicles 15 to sing before the Ark of the Covenant.

[9:09] He's the author of several psalms, including this one. Now we don't know much about his background, but we do know much about him through this particular text, through his psalms, and particularly the way in which he struggles.

So let's begin by looking at the opening verses, verses 1 through 3, and notice he begins by recounting two things, the goodness of God to his people and his own wandering heart. Psalm 73, verse 1 through 3, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

The opening line tells us that Asaph emphatically knows the goodness of God is among the covenant people of God. Now remember, we're looking at a case study here completely after the fact.

So he begins this psalm with where he's going to end, the conclusion that he comes to. He knows God is good, and he saw God's goodness afresh through this particular trial that he is about to describe.

[10:27] God is good, but he temporarily lost sight of that. At the same time, he describes what we describe in biblical counseling as the presenting problem, the diagnosis.

So when we want to help people change, we want to diagnose their problem. Diagnosing correctly is really important. If you misdiagnose, you get the wrong cure, the wrong solution.

I just basically walked through our approach is to diagnose addiction, not as a reductionistic, biological approach, a medical disease, but as a worship problem, and you can see why the cure matters.

So Asaph is telling us that his feet had nearly slipped, that he was on shaky ground, and then he tells us why. He says, for I had become envious of the arrogant as he looks out and sees the prosperity of the wicked.

Now let me pause and say something important here. I think it's very important for a cultural moment. You cannot control what happens to you in life, but you can control how you respond to it.

[11:37] That's the truth in Asaph's case. He cannot control whether God sends rain or sunshine on the wicked, but he can control how he responds to that.

And Asaph is acknowledging that while observing what he can't control, God is seemingly prospering the wicked in his day. Something began to happen in his own heart.

He realizes that he is becoming envious of wicked people as they seem to prosper. So he's losing sight of God, trying to understand the world in which he lives.

He's trying to understand this world without God shaping his worldview. And so the world becomes, as Packer said, a strange and maddening place.

Now what he does next in the psalm is one of the common features of the psalms. Many psalms contain this. It's called lamenting.

[12:36] He begins to lament to God about the world in which he lives. Now let me say something briefly about lamenting. Lamenting should be a regular part of the Christian life.

But when I say lamenting, I do not mean this victim mindset that sinfully complains about everything or shakes the fist at God thinking that we deserve to be treated better by him.

But biblical lamenting is just pouring out your heart to God about what is difficult and hard and challenging in this life. And Asaph is going to lament about living in a world where at times the righteous seem to suffer and the wicked seem to prosper.

And lamenting is a good thing. And many times when we start pouring out our heart, God begins to show us the own disordered worship in our heart which he is going to continue to do to Asaph.

Jesus was the perfect lamenter. He laments to his father about the hardship he was about to face on the cross. He does this in the garden when he asks the father if there's any way to let the cup pass.

[13:41] And he does this on the cross when he cries out in Psalm 22 verse 1, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning?

This is not a sinful complaint by Jesus, nor is it a statement that there was some separation within the ontological nature of the Godhead. It is Christ fulfilling the Psalms to show that they were about him and showing us how to lament.

So lamenting is an incredible gift that God gives his people. You don't have to clean up your lives to come to him when it feels disordered. You just come to him in the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the disorder, and start talking to him.

And you'll find that he talks back to his people. So look at verses 4 through 12. Asaph begins to lament what it's like to live in a world where the wicked are prospering.

He begins in verse 4. They have no pangs or bonds or shackles until their death. In other words, their life here seems to be without struggle unlike the rest of mankind.

[14 : 55] But not only do they lack struggle, it seems like they are abundantly provided for. He uses poetic language, right? Their bodies are fat and sleek.

They have abundance. They are well fed and increasing in riches. While many ask the question, why do bad things happen to good people, Asaph is asking the question on the other side of the coin.

He's vexed over the question, why do good things happen to bad people? Why do the wicked seem to prosper? In verse 6, he continues and he gives us a vivid picture of their wickedness.

They are adorned in pride and violence like fine jewelry and clothing. Their hearts are not pure like those in verse 1 whom God is good to.

Just the opposite. He says they are corrupt and they overflow with folly. It says, verse 7 is saying, their eyes look and see everything their wicked hearts desire and they get filled up to the point of swelling out fatness.

[16 : 04] Not only that, in verse 8, Asaph tells us that they scoff and speak with malice. They do not care about the poor. They arrogantly oppress the poor. They blaspheme God in verse 9 and they do so with pride.

They are opportunists. And in verse 10, we see they take advantage of others whose abundance of waters are drained by the wicked, which is how the CSB puts that verse. In verse 11, they boast about their ignorance of God, asking two questions.

How can God know? Does the Most High know everything? And the implied answer is no. He does not know. Asaph summarizes his lament in verse 12.

The wicked are always at ease, increasing in riches. Again, think of Packer. He's trying to understand the world without God.

And that is a maddening thing to do. It will disorient you. And now look at verses 13 through 15. He continues his lament, but he does the comparison game.

[17 : 09] So he looks at his own life in relation to theirs. Look at verses 13 through 15. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

For all the day long, I've been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. The word heart is used six times in this psalm, and Asaph's heart is, in contrast to the wicked, clean.

It's clean because he trusts and worships God. But he goes on to say that he's been stricken all the day long. He is actively being afflicted, and life is hard, which is shocking because he looks at the wicked and sees their life of apparent ease and comfort.

To use New Testament language, he's on the narrow road. It's not a road easily traveled. It seems to be filled with bumps and detours. And he looks over at this wide road.

It's paved and traveled. The road seems easy. There's plenty of room. Many people are there. The people there, he can absolutely see their wickedness and their arrogance and their pride.

[18 : 21] He watches them and notices their path seems to be filled with blessing, and the journey seems easier. He considers, in an envious way, that path.

And at that point, Asaph's worship is, in the words of David Powlison, contested ground. See, worship is warfare. There's competing voices, and he's trying to make sense of his situation, and this is why he feels like his feet almost slipped, because he finds himself on shaky theological ground, just like Job's friends, who assume the favor of God is demonstrated in worldly ways. And in verse 15, he comes close to speaking out everything he is thinking. But here begins the means of grace. He's wiser than he knows right now, because he is, in James' words, slow to speak.

He has a skepticism towards his understanding, and he knows that if he speaks out, this would offend and betray others. The reason why he would offend and betray others is because he's really questioning, in his struggle, right, the character of God.

The underlying struggle is really with the goodness of God, the justice of God, and the omniscience of God. I really want you to think about that. When we as God's people struggle with the prosperity of the wicked, we're really questioning the character of God, right?

[19 : 51] The goodness of God is questioned when believers suffer and the wicked prosper. We ask ourselves, how can God be good and allow this? Why is this happening to me and not to them?

The justice of God is questioned when we wonder, why isn't God doing anything?

If he's just, isn't he supposed to punish the wicked and reward the righteous? And the omniscience of God is questioned. Does God really know what's happening down here?

Every struggle in the human heart is a struggle with God himself. It's a worship battle where we fight to believe, trust, and obey God. And so Asaph knows that he won't speak yet because he knows his thinking isn't right.

And Charles Spurgeon comments on this exact point in his commentary on the Psalms. He says, where we have any suspicion of being wrong, it is better to be silent.

It can do no harm to be quiet and it may do serious damage to spread abroad our hastily formed opinions. And now we reach the turning point of the text.

[20:57] We consider the counsel and the ensuing transformation that takes place. Look at verses 16 to 17. I think this is the most important part of the text.

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task until I went into the sanctuary of God and I discerned their end.

Think again of that quote by J.I. Packer. He was trying to understand his situation apart from bringing God to bear and now he realizes this is exhausting.

I need to go to the house of God and so he humbly approaches God in worship. He goes to the house of God. He stops trying to understand the happenings of life in his own understanding and he goes in humility to look away from self and to God.

And that's where transformation happens in Christianity. That's like the difference between our approach of change and the world's approach. The world has this belief that if you look in you are capable of overcoming your problems and Christianity says we look away from ourself and that's how we're changed.

[22:13] This is the only place to go and receive help and our main task in discipling one another and counseling one another whether it's addiction or envy is to help bring those who struggle into the presence of God.

Don't overlook this fact that Asaph knows God can be approached in worship when he's struggling and we can expect God to help us.

And we church ought to have much more confidence than Asaph because we have a greater sanctuary. We don't have to bring an animal sacrifice and have a long drawn out process before we can go into his presence.

Christ the perfect once for all sacrifice has atoned for our sins and granted us access direct access to the Father. We can go to him right where we are.

When we find ourselves disoriented in the world when our desires are disordered or when we doubt God's goodness in the midst of our suffering we can go right to him in prayer in worship through the blood of Jesus Christ.

[23:28] The gospel is incredibly good news to bring us in to the presence of God. Here is Hebrews 4:14 through 16. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens Jesus the Son of God let us hold fast to our confession for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

What's the application of knowing that? Let us then with confidence come near to the sanctuary of God drawn near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in times of need.

And oh does Asaph find help and grace in his time of need when he goes into the sanctuary of God. He meets God and two things happen. Look at verses 18 through 20 the first thing that happens and this is what happens when we worship God when we come to him God reveals truth.

So notice circumstances are not going to change God's just going to reveal truth to Asaph. Truly you set them in slippery places you make them fall to ruin how they are destroyed in a moment swept away by utter terrors like a dream when one awakes so Lord when you rouse yourself you despise them as phantoms.

Remember how this psalm started with Asaph declaring his feet had nearly slipped but now we see the truth in the house of God that the real ones who are standing in slippery places in this life are the wicked and though they enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin they are about to fall in to utter ruin they are the ones truly in danger like a dream where everything seems so real and you suddenly

wake up to realize it was a dream so is their life but they wake up from a pleasant dream into an utter terror reality is an everlasting nightmare as they face the God they have been rebelling against redemption house is very close to lake minnetonka in minnesota one of our ten thousand lakes it's a very nice area some of the most expensive homes in minnesota on lake minnetonka it is beautiful area i love just going out hiking by the lake enjoying god's creation and many things that people love to do in a land of ten thousand lakes is fish and when you love to do something you figure out how to do it often and they even do it in the winter and they go ice fishing and they set up ice houses on the lake that are just beautiful and you drive by the lake and see tons of them out there and the first time i drove on the ice i was terrified i'm like people do this regularly this is terrifying i want you to use that as an illustration of our text the wicked are walking across the lake on thin ice and they might be well fed very comfortable they might be blessed they might even be walking to a luxury ice house right but they are wicked they are wicked and the illustration is that someday coming very soon there will be a crack in that ice and they will fall through immediately with no one to rescue them that is the reality of the wicked apart the wicked who do not have relationship with god through jesus christ asaph asaph now sees this perspective he sees that god actually does see what's happening here on earth god does see the wicked he sees their apparent prospering in this life but god is faithful to punish men according to their deeds and this leads to some serious reflection upon his own heart he finds the grace of conviction and mercy of god that leads him to confession and repentance he confesses and takes ownership of his own sin in verse 22 what does he say i was brutish and ignorant i was like a beast towards you perhaps as he's in the house of god in the sanctuary he sees the animal sacrifices that were being sacrificed in worship and he begins to see himself rightly it's like how we get convicted of our sin when we see the son of god slaughtered for sinners we begin to realize i was like a beast i should be slaughtered and he stood in my place and was slaughtered for my sin asaph sees his own beastliness that he was brutish and ignorant and as he confesses god mercifully shows asaph another truth so here's the second thing that he shows him the second truth the destiny of the righteous it's right there in verses 23 to 24 god you are holding me you are continually with me and you will receive me into glory asaph is aware of god's presence now and for all eternity remember i talked about the to use new testament language the wide and narrow path he now sees that the end of the narrow path is the celestial city and the end of the wide path is the river of death to use pilgrim's progress language but with [28:55] no one to rescue them from death this is true of all believers you will suffer in this life we're not spared from sickness sorrow suffering and death but the good news is that though we struggle to stay above water in this life and eventually will go under and face death god has defeated death in christ jesus and when we take our last breath and the waters of death overtake us we will find ourselves washed up on the shores of glory where we will be with god forever he holds our right hand through all of our struggles and we will wake up to enjoy him for all eternity now i mention this it's really important god reveals truth as we approach him in worship so he doesn't promise to change our circumstances and that truth is beginning to respond how beginning to shape the way asap is going to respond to his circumstances and that leads us to the second thing that happens to asap in the sanctuary in worship asap meets god himself and finds contentment and satisfaction in god look at verses 25 through 26 one of my favorite passages in the old testament whom have i in heaven but you there is nothing on earth that i desire besides you my flesh and my heart may fail but god is the strength of my heart and my portion forever asap's real treasure in the midst of suffering is not a place but a person he rediscovered afresh that he has god and that god is enough the believers ultimate happiness and contentment is not found in what we have but in whom we have he makes what i think is one of the most incredible statements by a sinner in in all of scripture whom have i in heaven but you and there's nothing on earth that i desire besides you why can he say this because his heart is reordered through worship and he comes to see that though he might not have the prosperity of some other people who are wicked he has everything he could ever want in god himself he has god and so now he is beginning to no longer see the world as a strange mad and painful place because he is beginning to see the world rightly now so asap is transformed by being satisfied in god to the point where his envy dies and he realizes i've got everything i have nothing i desire anymore i was desiring what they have and now i have found that i have all that i need which is why we say what's the solution for envy it's contentment and satisfaction that's found in christ alone now we don't counsel problem oriented like that notice it's person oriented you come to know christ and you find contentment and satisfaction and it's found in god himself john piper in his book god is the gospel says this the gospel of christ is

the good news that at the cost of his son's life god has done everything necessary to enthrall us with what will make us eternally and ever increasingly happy content namely god himself that's what asaph discovers afresh in worship he discovers god himself himself and once asaph's heart is redirected towards god he realizes the hope he has he's going to live beyond this world of wickedness and he remembers what he has forgotten god is the rock in which he stands even though he may fail

it is god who is the strength of his heart and his portion forever asaph comes to realize i really do have the better life you got god you have the better life do not envy the wicked and the psalm ends with a fitting conclusion look at verses 27 to 28 for behold those who are far from you shall perish you shall put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you but for me it is good to be near to god i have made the lord god my refuge that i may tell of all your works the psalm ends with another declaration that god is his refuge and he is near to god and a direction a declaration that he will declare of all good god's good works which is how he began by declaring that god is good his worship has been reordered and he's worshipping his way out because what is he focused on now god and other people i know he's good and i just want to declare it and he's no longer focusing on himself what he doesn't have in relationship to the wicked he's no longer focusing on them he is refocused redirected on god and the evidence of that is that he loves god and he loves his neighbor as himself a world that did not make sense he now understands a heart that was envious is now content because he went with humility into the house of god and he discovered afresh the truth of who god is and he worshipped his way out and we church whatever you come in here this morning struggling with you can come into the house of god the presence of god because of the finished work of jesus christ and you can find truth revealed that's going to reorder you when the world seems disoriented it's going to combat lies but most importantly you're just going to get a glimpse of god himself who will begin to change your affections and your desires and reorder your worship and you can worship your way out of whatever you are struggling with let me pray well father thank you so much for the good news of your word and the gospel thank you that we can humbly come into the presence into your presence because of the finished work of jesus christ on the cross thank you for the gospel thank you that you promised to give us help and grace in our time of need and thank you that you are constantly reordering our disordered worship so that we can follow you more faithfully have more joy and contentment in you for the glory of your great name in christ's name we pray amen