

The Turning Point

The Song, Part 8

Psalm 73:16-24

In his book, *What Money Can't Buy*, Michael Sandel wrote, "Today, almost everything is up for sale, and if you have enough money – or connections – you can just about get whatever you want.

For instance, he wrote, you can now buy the right to jump to the head of the line at Universal Studios for \$149.00. You can buy a special Front Line Pass that allows you to cut to the front of the line on every ride, every show and every attraction.

You can now purchase seasonal access to the carpool lane in certain cities, even when you're driving alone.

If you have the right doctor, you can purchase access to his personal cell phone 24/7 for around \$1,500 per year. Further, a growing number of doctors are offering same-day appointments for patients willing and able to pay annual fees ranging up to \$25,000 dollars.

You can even purchase a temporary prison-cell upgrade for \$90 dollars a night where in some cities, a nonviolent offender can pay for a clean, private jail cell, without any non-paying prisoners to disturb them.¹

Look, if you've got the right doctor, live in the right city, have enough money and the right connections, life can really be so much better.

Personally, I think that Amusement Park Front Line pass is a great idea . . . it's just a lot of money . . . but you can cut in line legally . . . how great is that?

I came to a Wednesday night dinner some time ago here at church . . . the line was all the way around and through the lobby . . . I was greeting people and shaking hands . . . you know, toward the front of the line . . . they needed me up there . . . but

then the doors opened they wouldn't let me cut in . . . can you believe that? I won't name, names . . . it's not that important . . . besides, they're not members anymore.

Asaph the Psalmist has been, in real life, really upset.

In Psalm 73 this Choral conductor and leader has just admitted that he almost abandoned his walk with God.

Why?

He openly admits it in his testimony – *verse 2 – my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. 3. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

In our last study, we catalogued at least 12 questions that came out of his envy and jealousy and greed and frustration.

And his first question was simply, why do unbelievers have a better life than me?

In other words,

- Why do unbelievers have all the connections?
- Why do they prosper?
- Why do they get better medical reports?
- Why do they get to move to the front of the line and travel through life in the Express Lane.
- Why do the ungodly seem to have it made and the godly seem to have nothing made?

Asaph asked, why do unbelievers seem to have less struggles in life? Notice again in *verse 4 – They have no pangs until death.*

Now with that question, he's getting warmer . . . he's closer to the truth – but it won't register until later, as we'll see.

But he says here, they just seem to glide into the grave.

He complains that God allows unbelievers to blaspheme without any accountability – *verse 9 – their tongue struts through the earth.* By the way, Asaph is dangerously close to accusing God in these statements.

Isn't that what complaining is? Isn't complaining really an accusation against God for not giving us what you want, or not coming through, or not making life easier?

I mean, aren't we really accusing God? We have *all* sung from the lyrics of Psalm 73.

And Asaph now arrives at exactly the place you should expect anybody to arrive with his perspective.

He comes to the dangerous conclusion that his pursuit and his priorities of worship and purity were all for nothing – *v. 13, I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.*

In other words, my relationship with God didn't pay off and I would have been better off if I lived like an unbeliever.

And, of course, Asaph is tormented in his thoughts, because of this conclusion.

Notice *verse 16. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.*

He's effectively saying, "God, I don't understand – I can't figure out why the ungodly prosper and the godly suffer . . . I can't get my mind around the obvious facts that bad things happen to good people and good people seem to have it so bad – it isn't fair.

Literally, he writes, my internal struggle wore me out.

But now we come to the turning point in Asaph's life.

It seemed to me a wearisome task – notice v. 17, until I went into the sanctuary of God.

The word is actually plural – *until I went into the sanctuaries of God.*

Asaph is referring to the three subdivisions of the tabernacle and the first temple – the court, the holy place and the holy of holies – these constituted the three sanctuaries.ⁱⁱ

Asaph happens to have a master key – he leads the choirs, he's on the payroll.

It's as if he slips into the outer court and there, perhaps in the evening, in the calmness of the sacred

court he just laid everything out in the open before God and began to think it through in like of God's presence.

This is his turning point in testimony and in his song.

Notice, I went into the sanctuaries of God and then I discerned their end.

Listen, the answer wasn't a matter of reason; it was a matter of revelation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Instead of focusing on the success of the wicked, Asaph recalls the revelation of God concerning their end.

The issue isn't so much about the unbelievers care free disposition; it's really all about their final destination . . . their coming devastation.

Asaph regains a biblical perspective on the lost

a. First, he rediscovers that the unbeliever slips into ruin.

Verse 18, Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

They might seem like they are the established people on earth – connected and cash happy – they seem secure in their finances and in their portfolios.

James Montgomery Boice comments on this text, "They are actually on slippery ground, and it only takes a gentle puff by God to blow them off their proud golden pedestals."^{iv}

Oh, but they aren't on solid ground after all. Riches make themselves wings and often fly away. They not only slip into ruin, secondly;

b. They are swept into death

Notice *verse 19, How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors.*

Death is personified as the king of terrors.^v

Spurgeon puts it, "without warning without escape, without hope; despite their golden chains, their expensive clothing, death does not have good manners and it hurries them away!"^{vi}

Queen Elizabeth the First of England made popular the extravagant gowns of her era – they dripped with jewels and gems; as she lay dying, her last words were, "All my possessions for a moment of time."^{vii}

Asaph said, "Oh, death is coming and for the unbeliever it is the king of terrors."

They slip into ruin;

They are swept away in death,
Thirdly,

c. They are surprised by judgment

Verse 20, Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

In other words, the Lord will one day awaken the wheels of judgment and the unbeliever will realize that his care-free existence was no more lasting than a dream.

All his connections and all his pomp and pride were nothing more permanent than some fantasy . . . some phantom . . . some dream.

Have you ever taken a nap – how many of you got a nap this afternoon – well, in one of your naps, have you ever had a dream and then awakened to realize that even though it seemed to have lasted hours – it only lasted 3 minutes?

It went by so quickly.

That’s what dreams do . . . they come and go.

Asaph says, “I get it . . . it seems like their dream life has lasted for years, but in light of eternity, it didn’t last but 3 minutes!”

This is Asaph’s regained biblical perspective on the lost.

Now notice Asaph’s biblical perspective on himself.

Notice *Verse 21. When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.*

In other words, “Lord, when you pricked my heart – when you convicted my heart over with my wicked envy; when you reminded me of your revealed truth about the unbeliever’s terrible destiny and short life-span, I realized how embittered and brutish and even beastly I was in my thinking.

Now that sounds like true confession, doesn’t it?

In other words, “How could I have been so blind?”^{viii}

I was really *bitter . . . brutish (rude) . . . even like an unreasoning beast.*

He literally writes here in the last part of *verse 21, I was like a dinosaur* – the Hebrew word is, a behemoth – I was like a giant dinosaur toward God!

Look, I’ve got to do a little rabbit trail here and chase this dinosaur.

What does Asaph know about dinosaurs?

The Hebrew word used here by Asaph is behemoth – used also by the prophet Joel and found in the earliest book of the Bible – the Book of Job.

Fortunately, Job described the Behemoth for us and he specifically describes what some authors have suggested is a hippopotamus or an elephant.

The trouble is, the description doesn’t fit an elephant or a hippopotamus. Let me just read the description for you as Job describes it: ***Behold Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox; behold, his strength in his loins and his power in the muscles of his belly. He bends his tail like a cedar. (Hippos and Elephants have tails that do not resemble a cedar tree). (40:16-17).***

I would agree with Old Testament scholars that this animal was a member of the dinosaur species.

Enough of them have been excavated to discover they had tails the size of trees . . . and the largest among them ate grass like oxen.

And the really startling thing is that Job says, “Look – Look now at Behemoth” . . . in other words, you can see for yourself.

Obviously a reference to this land species, now extinct.

The problem for the Bible student is that we’ve been inundated with now 100 years of evolutionary conditioning, we’ve all been taught to believe that dinosaurs existed at least 10 million years before mankind.

So what do you do with a 6 day creation – what do you do with

Job suggesting that people need to just look at the dinosaurs – and Asaph comparing himself to one of these lumbering giants?

Well, let me add that according to Genesis chapter 1, the world and the universe were created with all the appearances of age and maturity. It had to be, in fact, in order for human and animal life to be sustained.

Trees were bearing fruit immediately upon creation according to Genesis 1; light from the sun, moon and stars immediately cascaded to earth.

And by the way, a man and a woman were immediately walking and talking . . . and eventually started an argument – they were real people.

The egg didn’t come first, the chicken did.

Dating methods have been proven unreliable and subject to interpretation.

In fact, before I shoot this rabbit, let me read from one account that will not be in your

neighborhood library any time soon. It clearly indicates that dinosaur bones are not as old as we're being told by the evolutionists. Around 30 years ago, scientists from the University of Montana found T-Rex bones that were not entirely fossilized. The sections of the bones were considered fresh bone. If these bones were really millions of years old, then the blood cells would have already totally disintegrated. A report by one of these scientists recorded, "The lab was filled with murmurs of excitement for I had focused on something inside the vessels that none of us had ever noticed before: tiny round objects, translucent red with a dark center . . . red blood cells. Blood cells are mostly water and couldn't possibly have stayed preserved in the 65-million-old- tyrannosaur. They were indeed hemoglobin fragments."^{ix}

That discovery never made it into the evolutionary discussion.

According to God's word, dinosaurs and humans were alive at the same time.

Job literally tells his readers to look at him – meaning, they're alive and observable.

It's always been interesting to me that stone carvings and drawings by people several thousand years ago that show them hunting mammoths and antelope – even drawings by Native American Indians – those drawings of the mammoth and antelope ended up in textbooks, but not their drawings of huge animals that looked exactly like dinosaurs.

Those were left out.

The Prophet *Joel, in chapter 1* also speaks of the Behemoth along with herds of cattle and flocks of sheep groaning for pasture land to satisfy their hunger.

Now we're not sure which dinosaur Asaph is referring to here in Psalm 73 – it could have been the Brachiosaurus which weighed 90,000 pounds, was 75 feet long and over 40 feet tall – he would not have fit in this auditorium.

Fortunately, God created him to eat leaves and grass, and not people.

But Asaph effectively chooses the largest land animal species which crushes all sorts of things as it lumbers along; large in size, but small in intellect and without reason – and he admits – that was me.

That was me!

But now I understand . . . not by my own limited reason, but by God's revelation.

The unbeliever that I envied . . . this is their tragic end!

So with this new perspective, his envy turns into pity!

Spurgeon wrote, "No envy gnaws now at his heart, but a holy horror both of their impending doom and their present guilt, fills his soul."^x

We don't envy the lost, we pity them . . . we seek to win them . . . we take the gospel to them – knowing that if they reject that gospel they will suffer forever.

Death is coming for them too!

Remember the Psalm began – *I was envious of the wicked!*

Asaph isn't envious anymore.

But now, he writes, I have a new perspective: In fact, he has three new perspectives on his own life and the life hereafter.

a. First, God is continually guarding me

Notice verse *v. 23a* – *Nevertheless, I am continually with you.*

You might want to underline the word *continually*. You could write into the margin of your Bible the exact translation of that Hebrew word continually . . . it's the word, continually.

Continually . . . isn't that a great word?! God never stops guarding His beloved.

b. Second, God is not only continually guarding me, He is wisely guiding me.

Notice *verse 23* again, the latter part, *you hold my right hand and You guide me with your counsel.*

The right hand was a metaphor in ancient days for the hand of purpose, of authority, of decision. Even to this day, we shake each other's right hand because it represents your personal offer of fellowship or agreement.

God has you by the right hand . . . guiding you with His revealed wisdom and purpose and authority; personally fellowshiping with you as you walk with Him.

c. Thirdly, Asaph writes, God is not only continually guarding me; and wisely guiding me, but God will ultimately glorify me.

Verse 24b, And afterward you will receive me to glory.

Afterward. What a wonderful word that is!
For you who believe, there is this glorious **afterward**.

Money can't buy it! The currency of Christ's blood already has.

Paying a doctor for access 24/7 won't help you win this – the Great Physician already paid for it.

This isn't a Front Line Pass at an amusement park – this is an Eternal Life Pass – and it takes you way beyond the front of the line – all the way into the Father's House of glory.

You see, Asaph rediscovered the perspective of eternity – here it is; Spurgeon summarized it the best: we can happily put up with the present, when we truly foresee our future.^{xi}

Paul said it this way; when this brief life is over . . . we will then consider our suffering to have been light, when compared to the eternal weight of glory which is beyond comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17).

There is an **afterward** . . . and for the believer, it is **glorious**.

Listen, Asaph effectively sings; for the unbeliever, life on earth is the only heaven they will enjoy, but only for a moment; but for the believer, life on earth is the only hell they will suffer, but only for a moment.

And for us, even death then is not the king of terrors; it is the doorway into the glorious presence of God.

Several years ago, I was given The One Year Christian History devotional by one of our elders – it recounts historical accounts and biographical events throughout church history. I still read from it . . . the entry from a few days ago was on the life of 21 year old, Eric Liddell, the man who won the four-hundred-meter dash at the Paris Olympics, in 1924. The movie, Chariots of Fire, was based on Eric Liddell's life up to that point.

The following year, Eric went to China to teach at the Anglo-Chinese College at Tientsin. He continued his missionary service, married Florence and when she was expecting their third child, he sensed that the political climate was turning hostile and he sent them back to her parent's home in Canada. On March 12, 1943, Eric and hundreds of other "enemy nationals" were taken to a prisoner of war camp. Soon after he arrived, three hundred

students from one of the academies operated by the China Inland Mission also arrived separated from their parents.

These children became Eric's focus and he organized a school, even started some sports teams and also served as the chief translator.

By 1945, he went to the camp doctors with symptoms that had grown to include partial paralysis of his right leg; trouble speaking, and migraine headaches. The doctors seemed unconcerned and treated him as if he'd had a minor stroke.

Their diagnosis was incorrect, and with a month, he suffered spasms of choking and coughing. After one of the nurses – a believer as well and a close friend of the family named Annie – observed his condition, she went to the next room where doctors were discussing Eric and said, "Do you realize Eric is dying?" They replied, "Nonsense." Annie returned to Eric's side and sat next to him, holding his hand. In just a few minutes more, he whispered, "Annie, it is complete surrender." And he died.

A few days later they were cleaning out his things and found a slip of paper he had dated – it was the afternoon that he had died – and on the slip of paper was the first line of his favorite hymn. It would be the hymn they would sing in honor of Eric Liddell.

The hymn matches the perspective of Asaph – and every believer not only in this auditorium – but throughout the history of the church.

His favorite hymn – that Asaph would have been proud to sing:

*Be still, my soul! The Lord is on thy side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul! Thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

*Be still my soul! The hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul! When change and tears are past,
Safe and blessed we all shall meet at last.^{xii}*

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- i Adapted from Michael J. Sandel, “*What Isn’t for Sale*,” *The Atlantic* (April 2012)
- ii H.D.M. Spence & Joseph S. Exell, editors; *The Pulpit Commentary: Psalms: Volume II* (Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 71
- iii Donald Williams, *Mastering the Old Testament: Psalms 73-150* (Word Publishing, 1987), p. 25
- iv James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: Volume 2* (Baker Books, 1996), p. 614
- v *Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 3*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Zondervan, 1992), p.481
- vi Spurgeon, p. 251
- vii Ray Robinson, compiler; *Famous Last Words* (Workman Publishing, 2003), p. 101
- viii John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms: Volume One* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 609
- ix Ken Ham, *The Great Dinosaur Mystery Solved* (Master Books, 2000), p. 18
- x Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Volume 2* (Zondervan, 9th printing: 1977), p. 251
- xi Spurgeon, p. 252
- xii E. Michael and Sharon Rusten, *The One Year Christian History* (Tyndale, 2003), p. 104