

“*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*” — *John 12:21*

Until notified otherwise, all gatherings have been cancelled due to “safer at home” regulations ordered by the state of California. We will stay in touch; please watch your inbox for messages from the elders.

Sermon

“...until I went into the sanctuary of God...”

Psalm 73

Introduction

Regardless of the reason, being unable to attend an assembly with each other is disheartening. Unlike in some parts of the country, where snowfall or other severe weather causes temporary lockdowns, we are used to assembling two times a week, 52 weeks a year. But, now, due to the Caronavirus, we are confined to our homes. What should we do?

Our Godly worldview is shaped by the information and impressions we get throughout the week, and our reaction to that information. We come into the church building twice a week always to worship God but also to get an attitude adjustment; to bring our worldview back to square 1, where Christ is.

In **Psalm 73**, the psalmist’s worldview is being threatened by what he observes. He starts off well, with a platitude perhaps commonly quoted by the Israelites in those days: “Truly, God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart” [v. 1]. He probably said, “Amen, brother!”

Yet...something happened. He “almost stumbled” and his “steps nearly slipped” [v. 2]. Why? Because he took his eye off the Lord; he began to look at the worldly people around him who seemed to be doing well — they were enjoying more health and prosperity than he was and he became envious of them [3]

What will become of Asaph, the author of the Psalm? **Will he be swept away with his desire to be “fat and sleek” [4] like those around him?**

- Look at the advantages! [4-12]. “They don’t suffer like we do,” and they are proud of it. They commit violence and get by with it. They have their own “people” — yes men who tell them what they want to hear. They even scoff at the idea of God. Asaph concludes, “These are... always at ease, they increase in riches” [12].
- Asaph’s observations turn to frustration and doubt [13]. He seriously wonders if there is any advantage to being godly. Is it just a waste of time? His life has been anything but cushy; but these people — these *ungodly* people — look at them!

Have you ever felt that way? You try to do what’s right, serve God and others, and what do you get for it? Asaph admits that he was embittered, irritated, brutish and ignorant, like a brute beast [21-22].

The psalmist almost quits on God.

If we’re honest, there are times when each of us stands on a precipice, on the verge of stumbling, slipping. There are times when we doubt that the effort it takes to be a disciple of Christ is worth it. We see people around us who seem to be doing just fine even though they care nothing about God and ignore the teachings of Christ. They don’t wrestle with temptation or ever feel guilt for sin. Is it possible that *that* is true freedom?

Asaph is slipping but he hasn't fallen. He comes to his senses and says, "if I speak what I'm thinking, I'll betray a whole generation — my children and grandchildren" [15].

- The psalmist realizes that his words and his attitude carries some weight with the young people of his time. So he knew he needed to bite his tongue.
- It's not that he had all the answers; he didn't. In fact, he got dog-tired trying to figure it all out [16].

He didn't understand it... until... he went into the sanctuary of God.

The psalmist went to church! And when he went to church, things began to clear up for him. He learned something important. "**...then, I discerned their end**" [17].

When we gather, we hope to learn something new or at least be reminded of some important principles.

When people listen to a sermon with that in mind, they are likely to gain from being there.

- One thing we are constantly reminded of is that a godly worldview makes you an enemy of many in our society today. We are different; our worldview is a weird view and we are getting weirder by the day.
- But you also learn that life will come to an end, no matter who you are. It's like a mist that vanishes (James 4:14). As I write this line, at 6:17 PM Saturday, there are 125,00 deaths **TODAY** worldwide and that is going up at the rate of 3-4 per second. As of 6:26 PM, there have been 108,000 seasonal flu (not Covid-19) deaths this year, worldwide. Death is a real thing.

Asaph goes to church and learns something about those godless people who seem to be having such a great life "...then I discerned their end" [17]

- *They* are the ones who are walking on a slippery slope; *they* are the one who will fall to ruin in a moment, swept away utterly — just like that [18-19].
- He learned — was reminded — that it is far better to be a godly person and suffer for it, than to be wicked and enjoy the fruits of wickedness for a little while [18-20].

Conclusion

We come to church for the camaraderie, to worship, to commune together and sometimes to discover something new. If we're wise, we also come to church to be reminded of things we know already. Peter said, "I stir up your pure mind by way of reminder" (II Peter 3:1). Wise Christians are "stirred up," even by hearing things they already know.

Of necessity, we spend much, if not most, of our time in the world where idols, shiny and full of false hope, beg for our attention. We are tempted by them but we know that they are an illusion.

- Coming to the sanctuary gives you **an opportunity to see things as they really are**. A teacher's function is to present truth (reality) and dispel disillusionment by the light of the gospel.

The psalmist said, "I almost slipped... **until I went into the sanctuary of God.**" There, he found truth and restored his relationship with God.

"...for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works. — *Psalm 73:28*

This week — and perhaps for a few weeks — we will not be able to come "into the sanctuary" together. But each house, in each family, where God is honored, that can be a sanctuary of God.

Fathers, remind your family to keep their eye on God and be careful of being envious of the arrogant. Help them to discern both the end of the wicked and the end of the righteous.

dp

“Culture”: the attitudes and behavior characteristic of a particular social group

Are We In a Culture War?

There is language in the Bible that suggests that our mission, as Christians, is to fight against the culture in which we live. “Put on the full armor of God,” says Paul in Ephesians 6. He also speaks of “waging war” in II Corinthians 10:4-6 and he tells Timothy to “fight the good fight” (I Timothy 6:12) and, toward the end of his life, Paul says, “I have fought the good fight...” (II Timothy 4:7).

When we read this kind of language, we may feel, as one preacher said, “this world is not a playground, it’s a *battleground!*” In a sense, that’s true. But when that analogy is taken too far, lots of bad things happen (think “Crusades” or Westboro Baptist Church, for just a couple of examples).

We should analyze Paul’s “battle language” in light of the way he presented the gospel. Paul never waged any kind of *physical* battle (after he was converted) and he never waged the spiritual war by carrying signs or yelling at people as they exited the *agora* (today’s shopping malls) or synagogues. So Paul’s “fight” must have been something else.

Acts 19:8-9 is instructive.

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

How did Paul handle these “stubborn” Jews, who should have known better? He simply “withdrew” from them and sought a new audience. He didn’t picket them or shout at them; he just moved on.

When Paul ventured into Athens, he was “provoked” (*paroxyno*, “stirred up,” “irritated”) when he saw a veritable forest of idols. But Paul’s approach there, though firm, was also tactful. He focused on Jesus — “a man” who God raised from the dead (Acts 17:16ff.). He didn’t get militaristic in his tone or actions — and some of those Athenians believed.

There *is* a battle but Paul says, in II Corinthians 10:4, that it is not “according to the flesh.” That mirrors what Jesus said when Peter went to battle against the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus. “Put your sword into its sheath,” he said (John 18:11). Later, he said his kingdom is not of this world; if it was, his disciples would be fighting (John 18:36). If any part of Jesus’ teaching can be called “militaristic,” it is when he is talking to the religious elitists in Jerusalem. His tone to unbelievers was different.

We’ve seen and deplored the actions of the Westboro Baptist church, carrying their signs and

spewing hate. I’ve met brethren who seem to see things the same way as Westboro Baptist, but don’t take the same approach. But that’s inconsistent. If we are in a real culture war, then let’s go to war! But I don’t see that attitude taught or practiced anywhere in the New Testament. Instead, disciples sought to change the world by pointing people to Jesus, who taught them to be salt and light, a city on a hill (Matthew 5:13-16). And thousands of our brothers and sisters died without a fight, for the cause of Christ. They were like Jesus — remember, he really *didn’t* call down those 12 legions of angels!

Paul taught the Philippians to have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5) and to do all things without grumbling or disputing that they might shine as a beacon in the midst of crooked and twisted generation (Philippians 2:14-15). He famously told them to put others above themselves (2:3-4) and I doubt that action was only to be applied to other believers.

We are not going to win the world by being bombastic or by shouting down those with whom we disagree. I think “we’ve” tried that (look at some old debate tactics) and it failed miserably, and rightly so. Worse, we might have scared off many of our young people with that “mission.” Even worse, that approach in our speech can drown out the words of Jesus yet *Jesus* is the one with all authority (Matthew 28:18). If people won’t change for the sake Jesus, why would you even want them to change for *you*?

One more thing. Our mission is not to become social engineers, attempting to change the world through politics or any other means. Again, nobody in the New Testament did that, least of all Jesus. Vote, by all means, but don’t entertain the false hope that getting the right person in a political office is going to change much of anything. Only Jesus changes things and he changes everything! Unless the majority of people in the United States become disciples of Jesus, the old adage stands: “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” Don’t fall for the ruse that we are here to make the world a better place. That’s too big a pill to swallow. You might make your family better; or your neighbor or your co-worker, or a friend but thinking you can turn the world around by any means besides obedience to Jesus is a pipe dream.

Go be light, be salt. Be the Good Samaritan. Love your family, love your neighbor. Show the love of Christ in your life. Maybe someone will see you glow and want to know why. — *dp*