

“NOTHING BUT THE BEST”

Text: Psalm 73

Theme: Temptation will be strong but we must look to the One who overcame all temptation—He truly is the best!

Read Psalm 73.1–25

Pray —

O Lord, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, and strength to follow on the path you set before us; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Introduction – Bunyan’s classic, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

- traces journey of man on his way to the Celestial City from City of Destruction
- when first sets out, burdened down by great weight on back
- represents burden of sin, guilt, and conviction
- has couple of misadventures & meets a few unsavory characters
- finally comes to house of Interpreter, perhaps a pastor who teaches him
- shows several rooms in house, which are all necessary to see
- show cost of following Jesus, danger in doing so, and even greater danger in not
- one room has two little children in it: Passion & Patience
- allow me to read just a portion of this great work

Read pages 28 & 29 of *Pilgrim’s Progress*

Asaph is author of psalm before us today

- tribe of Levi, so served in Temple
- he and brothers helped in worship of God, song leader
- **I Chronicles 6:31 These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark rested there.**
- **I Chronicles 6:39 and his brother Asaph, who stood on his right hand, namely, Asaph the son of Berechiah...**
- served Lord all his days, up to this point

Like character from cartoon, though, two figures, one on each shoulder

- on one shoulder was Patience
- he led Asaph through many years of faithful service in Temple worship
- however, on other shoulder, Passion
- hadn’t heard from him until v. 2
- now, Passion’s voice charming Asaph, sounding so alluring
- Patience’s voice nearly drowned out

You and I are no different than Asaph, even today

- do you not love the absolute relevance of God’s Word?
- speaks to us all, as clearly as did 2,500 years ago
- what we need to hear today is the powerful struggle with Asaph’s temptation

- but even more, we need to see the One who overcame temptation & delivers us

First, we need to feel...

I. THE WEIGHT & FORCE OF THE TEMPTATION, vv.1–12

- has a good life, working in temple, leading worship, serving faithfully
- others about him, living life he knows little about
- but he still watches them,
- Asaph starts out so well, hear his words in v. 1
- and then comes the bomb: v. 2 – **“But as for me...”**
- you know this can’t end well
- do you hear the tone? “God is good... to everyone... but me.”

1. Does it pay to be godly?

- Truly—emphatic; Asaph declares this
- God is good to Israel
- God’s goodness sandwiches this Psalm, verse. 28
- but in between, we hear the writer’s struggles
- he wonders, as he looks around him, “Is purity of heart worth it for God’s people?”

2. Hear the near despairing cry of one who looks away & around in 3–16

- cue the sad violin music as Asaph recounts his musings
- he knows these people he’s looking at do not love God
- they’re evil, wicked, shameful in the ways of God
- and yet they’re prosperous, successful; influencers of his day
- v. 4: no pangs ‘til death: healthy, don’t struggle to live
- they don’t seem to toil hard for all that wealth & prosperity
- and consider all the toys they buy with all their money
- that’s what Asaph would say today
- figure of Passion looms heavy on his shoulder

3. Not only do they appear to have the best life offers, they mock God

- normally, this would cause Asaph to condemn such attitudes
- but remember, his feet are on a slippery slope right now
- he’s sliding toward a place that is very, very dangerous
- it’s a bit like driving your car
- you can glance around while driving down road
- but if you stare long & hard at something off road...
- eventually you’ll end up driving where you’re looking – off the road
- Asaph looks “off road” to these wicked people & kinda likes it
- he’s also troubled: all his life he’s been taught: do well, live holy & pure life before God
- yet he sees these wealthy, successful people who taunt God
- they seem to dictate to God what they want and get it

4. Final insult, v. 11 ff

- listen to their words, Asaph, listen to their words
- they mock God, now; revile Him, boast of their arrogance

- “Does God really know? Can He do anything to me?”
- Asaph sees success, life of ease & apparent happiness
- but also can’t figure out how they have all this with their hearts
- they stand and shake fist at heaven; thumb noses at God

5. Torn up by this

- v. 12 – behold, these are the wicked
- at least he calls them what they are
- doesn’t justify them, even though he’s thinking it might be nice to get his own piece of the pie
- do you feel the struggle here?
- have you felt it before, even today?
- inundated with Passion’s playthings all day long
- TV ads, radio ads, billboards everywhere, pop-up ads on internet, spam in email
- even get it in texts and fake phone calls
- all crying out: you cannot live without all this stuff!

6. Another felt this great weight

- Jesus had been fasting and praying for forty days in wilderness
- at end, devil comes, whispering in His ear with voice of Passion
- “You don’t have to do God’s will His way; there is a short-cut”
- took Lord to high place, showed Him world & all things in it
- “Could all be Yours, right now; You don’t have to wait, suffer”
- again, while in Garden of Gethsemane, He came under this great burden
- no doubt voice was heard, “Here’s Your chance: RUN!”
- “Why endure all this horrible suffering? Leave; no one would blame You”
- how could He bear up under it?
- you and I could not, would not

Now, let’s consider...

II. THE FIGHT WITH THIS TEMPTATION, vv. 13–17

- v. 13 – as for my life, thinks Asaph, where has it gotten me
- not in ESV, unfortunate; begins with “Truly”
- saw this in v. 1, didn’t we; here again, he makes a declaration of certainty...or is it?

1. Lived life of holiness; serve & work hard for God, all for God

- yet I get rebuked & corrected & told what my sins are
- I’ve been taught that if I lived & talked like these people do I’d be punished & judged
- but look at their lives; then, look at mine...why is it like this?
- v. 15 – knows the community of God’s people are at stake, too
- not just his own little world; others watch, listen, even emulate him

2. Finally, reaches a conclusion, v. 16–17

- mind seems about ready to explode with all this
- too much for him to comprehend... until he paused
- and went to the place that matters... to God

- when he comes to the place of rest & sanctuary
- when Asaph enters the realm of the King of all things, then he knows
- sees the ultimate end of these wicked, but prosperous people
- grasps that a purely holy God will rise up against those who mock

3. The One who grappled with temptations: His & ours

- we're coming to it, but let's peek ahead just a bit
- **Hebrews 4:15-16** **15 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. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**
- find yourself tempted to succumb to worldly pleasures?
- feel weight of wanting to be successful? Make a difference? Have influence?
- anxious about retirement: will I have enough to live?
- Jesus fought with this—every temptation similar to what you & I battle
- so, where do we go, turn?
- where Asaph did, where Jesus did: look to God's place of comfort & safety

In doing this, we will...

III. **OVERCOME THIS TEMPTATION, vv. 18–28**

- look at transformation here
- from foot almost slipping into destruction to standing on heights of God's delight
- from wanting to hold all that life on this earth could offer, to realizing this earth has no hold upon his life
- knows that his life could just waste away, but God is always and eternal
- understands, in God's presence, his eternal joy is God Himself
- one last note: all those things & people I longed after? Undone in the end
- as for me: God is all I want, near Him, my refuge, my Lord

1. Realization of what is best

- Asaph found the best portion
- not just heaven, but even for this life on earth
- this isn't just pie-in-the-sky thinking
- Asaph's struggle was real; your battle in this is real, serious
- temptation rears its ugly head again & again & again
- "If I just had more...stuff!"

2. What does Asaph want, in the end?

- **Psalm 73:25-26**

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And 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.

- there is no other reward from God except God

3. How often we want something from God other than Himself

- things of this world? Maybe, if they are pure and can be used well
- but what about heaven
- what comes to mind when you think of heaven?
- clouds, angels, harps of ivory, streets of gold?
- meeting saints of Scripture & history, talking with John & Paul?
- lots of other wonderful thoughts?
- what is in heaven that holds your heart?
- keeps you going from day to day?
- steers you clear of shoals of destruction of this world's wealth?
- is it God & God alone?
- is it your Maker & Redeemer? Your Sustainer & Friend?
- is your heart truly enraptured by God & His glory?

4. Deliverance from this temptation

- as we read just moments ago: Jesus was tempted
- in this as much as you & I will ever know
- but He overcame it...how?
- constantly looking to God, which we must do
- **Hebrews 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**
- He overcame, He defeated power of sin, devil, and death
- and it is there for you
- if you are His, then know joy unspeakable of v. 28
- **But for me it is good to be near God**
- because Jesus overcame, He would die as the propitiation for our sins
- this opened the way for us to be near to God, as Asaph discovered
- Asaph knew of the Promised Messiah who would deliver
- praise God, He looked to Him now rather than to world's passions & pleasures

Conclusion – Asaph came around to his senses

- even as did the pilgrim in John Bunyan's book
- **read from Pilgrim's Progress, page 29, second blue marker**

Asaph saw the glory to be had in his Savior

- he recognized that the very best is God Himself
- both here, on earth, and there, in heaven
- is He yours through Christ alone?
- in Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us