

I want you to imagine a typical kiwi kitchen, in the days before dishwashers. There's Dad in the sink washing the dishes, and they are going into the rack for drying by two siblings. After about three or four minutes the first notes of discord are heard. The familiar refrain starts to play....

"I've dried more than him, its not.....Fair."

Has that scene played out in your kitchen?

One of the traits that defines the kiwi psyche is fairness. Boy we love it. We want everything on an even keel, we want everything to be equitable. We love fairness. If you're not from New Zealand have you noticed that about us?

The Psalm we're opening today is a hard one for us, because in many ways it just doesn't seem fair. The Psalmist sees the godless prosper, and the godly suffer. He feels like life's just not fair.

As we walk through this Psalm this morning we'll examine it in three parts **{slide 2}: Asaph's crisis of faith** vv.1-3, his reflection that **The godless seem to prosper** vv.4-14 and the realisation that **The godly truly prosper** vv.15-28

We know where we are going, so let's pray and ask God to Guide us.

A crisis of Faith vv.1-3

{slide 3} The Psalmist, Asaph, really puts himself out there with this Psalm. He exposes his innermost thoughts, in a way that I think a lot of us would be very nervous to, especially around questions of faith.

His key question, which is the heartbeat of this Psalm is one I'm sure we've echoed "If God is on the throne in heaven, how on earth do the ungodly get away with so much? It doesn't seem fair!"

That question sits in contrast to the proclamation of v.1 'Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.'

It's a true declaration. God *has* been good to Israel, but life is hard for them at this time. Psalm 73 opens the third book of Psalms. Preceding it have been wonderful Psalms full of praise and celebration. Israel has been strong and prospering under the reign's of King David and King Solomon. Now her enemies are rising in strength, and threaten to overthrow her.

If Israel, who he describes as 'pure in heart' are faithful to God why aren't they rising in strength? Why are the very ones who scoff at God and mock his ways, living lives of ease and enjoyment, while he and his people struggle and strain?

It's a question that threw this Psalmist into a tailspin. He's not just having a bad day, he describes a crisis of faith.

v.2 his feet almost slipped, he nearly lost his foothold on God. When he should've been walking alongside God, he's almost off the path, and he tells us why. He envied the wicked, he saw their prosperity and it rocked him.

Jealousy is a cruel master. It only ever breed discontent. Proverbs 14:30 'A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.' It eats us up. It causes us to question God's goodness, it robs us of peace, and joy, and contentedness.

We might serve a jealous God, a God who covets his relationship with us, who wants the worship that the pagans give to the baals and the ashteroths, the worship that is his due as creator of all.

But we aren't to be a jealous people.

Asaph's jealousy has cost him dearly, his foot has slipped, he is contemplating walking away from the path of righteousness, because all he can see is the prosperity of those who are wicked, who deny God **{slide 4}**. The godless seem to prosper vv.4-14

The Godless prosper - vv.4-14

These enemies, the godless ones, seem to be living the good life.

They don't have any struggles. They don't face the same grind as the rest of us. They are healthy and strong. Their lives look like they are charmed. They don't have the common burdens we do.

It sounds a bit like the insta-famous influencers, or the pampered celebrities of today doesn't it?

The lifestyles of the rich and famous can rattle us. They enjoy Caviar, and champagne, and Bali beach houses, while we have to live life in the real world. We don't all have it all.

We come up against people who despise God. That work mate who belittles us. The family member who makes a snide remark. And they get ahead. Those who scoff and mock make progress, and we're left behind.

Worse than that, there are godless, successful people who are violent and arrogant, and proud. Not much has changed since Asaph wrote 'Pride is their necklace, violence is their clothing v.5 '

There is no limit to their evil imaginations, and they behave as if they are gods, v.9 Their mouths 'lay claim to heaven and their tongues take possession of the earth.'

They are untouchable. Unrestrained. They harm and hurt and amass wealth. The Psalmist is talking about neighbouring nations, but there are followers of God who could echo his words today.

Christians in Nigeria are hunted by Fulani Militia. Jesus' people in Myanmar are imprisoned without trial. Believers in Indonesia are beaten, their churches torched.

Men claim to be gods. They mock the wisdom of the Creator, and redefine right and wrong, good and bad, and we see them, and it hurts, it's unjust. It's not fair.

Just like the Psalmist, our hearts, our jealous hearts lead us on to slippery ground. We see the ungodly prosper, and we question God's goodness. We echo his thoughts in v. 13 - walking in faith has been in vain. I've done what I can Lord, to be pure in heart, to serve, to live your way, and where has it got me?

The ungodly get ahead.

We look at their lives, which seem so carefree. They enjoy promotion, friends, fun. Better phone, Better car, better house, better family, better sex life, better health,, better retirement.

Where has trusting in God got me?

You've live God's way and turned down a dodgy deal and you've made a loss instead of a huge profit.

You've live God's way and said no to sex outside marriage, or same sex attraction; times where you feel deeply lonely

You've shared the Good News and now you're on the outer; a misfit at work.

You've forgiven, like Jesus commands and reconciled a relationship, and been hurt again.

You've served faithfully, year in year out and now you're ill.

It's not fair! My expectations haven't been met, I've done it all right, and the ones who are ungodly prosper.

I had a workmate who couldn't stand followers of Jesus. We worked in a pretty large workplace and we'd never met before. But, someone had told him, that I'd spoken in Synod, in favour of the Anglican Church upholding the Bible's teaching that marriage is exclusively between men and women. When he heard this he made a complaint about me to my employer.

In that process I was told I would have to hand over any sermon I had preached during the time I was employed, and that if I had said anything deemed to be negative about same-sex relationships I would be instantly dismissed. It was a horrific experience.

Here was someone who despised God, who ridiculed His people, who rallied against His teaching, who had never met me, who had gone out of his way to make my life difficult, who had campaigned to have me fired, because I have upheld the Bible's plain teaching.

There are times we ask 'Where has holding fast to Jesus got me?' Aren't there? It got me a lot of sleepless nights. It changed how I related to other people at work. It made me anxious, and nervous, and I hid away. I was distracted and fearful. My health suffered.

About a year later that same person campaigned against me again, and it cost me a huge opportunity. A golden opportunity. Six months after that, he was awarded a distinguished accolade where his integrity was praised. He had judged me, he had said untrue things about me, and he came out the winner.

During our lives we are going to see the ungodly prosper, and if we only fix our eyes on that we are going to respond as brute beasts, by instinct, feeling disheartened, our feet slipping. But as the people of God we are freed to see another perspective.

The Psalmist, without the benefit we have, of the revelation of the Lord Jesus, hit a turning point at v.16 & 17 'When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.' The ungodly will be destroyed. They will face a reckoning for their rejection of God's way at Jesus' return. **{slide 5}** It is the godly who truly prosper vv.15-28

The godly truly prosper vv.15-28

Searching for answers, trying to understand the injustice the Psalmist is driven to the place of God's dwelling, The Sanctuary.

There he is able to reassess the prosperity of the ungodly, and he sees his folly.

By lifting his eyes above what he sees around him, he recognises that his viewpoint is off kilter. God is still good. God will see justice done.

He came close to slipping off the path, but reminding himself of God's goodness, has changed him. His jealous heart has been revealed to him, and so has the future trajectory of the ungodly. v.18 they are on slippery ground, they are like a dream, their influence and power will vanish into thin air v.20. He holds on to the promises of God.

Where do we enter in to the sanctuary? Where do we find the knowledge that makes sense of the world around us, its inequality, the oppression, the success of the mockers and scoffers, the ungodly who act as princes, as gods of our age?

We don't go to a temple, we go to the one who rebuilt the temple in three days in his own body.

We don't make a sacrifice, we go to the one who made the one perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world.

We go to the Lord Jesus, revealed to us perfectly in the Bible, brought alive in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who brought him alive from the dead.

In Jesus the true desires of our Hearts are revealed to us. The jealousies we feel when we see the ungodly prosper can be used by the Spirit of God to remind us where we need to press closer to our Lord.

Asaph has admitted his great need for God, and wonderfully, there is no shame in it. He recognises that he was ignorant, and senseless, that he was like a brute beast (v.22). We have a loving and kind Lord, full of mercy and grace. Who hears our cry of sorrow, and is strong where we are weak.

It is only in him that we find true satisfaction. If we look at the world around us, and glance longingly at the things the ungodly have, we will only sink. Our flesh, and our hearts will may within us, like Asaph's did v.26. In the 'crisis of faith' moments, our feet may almost slip, we might feel like we've lost our way as we take the deep injustices of our world to heart; but God places the ungodly on slippery ground. Their influence, in God's economy, is a vanishing dream, a breath, a nothingness, and so are the things they enjoy.

There is no lasting satisfaction in the things of this world.

Our hearts still desire those things don't they? And in the strength of the Holy Spirit we can wrestle with those desires. That's our faith at work, that's us denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following the Lord Jesus in the confidence that what he gives, is far more.

We see it when a crowd of listeners came and asked him for proof of his divinity, they didn't believe it. "give us a sign", they cried in John 6. Our ancestors got bread from heaven, if you're really someone, show us with a sign.

v. 35 Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Where are the hungers and thirsts of our hearts fulfilled? Where are they satisfied? Only in the Lord Jesus. He guides us with his counsel, and will take us to glory. Who else do we have in heaven beside God? Where else can we put our trust?

By trusting Him... by saving faith in his promises... by believing that the future he promises is greater than life here... by believing that being close to God is worth more than all the things of this world, than all the things the ungodly enjoy during this lifetime, we will find true, and lasting satisfaction.

John Piper warns us "If we are indifferent to God as our supreme satisfaction, we will not be able to glorify him from the heart as we should."

Without an, overarching, Jesus shaped view of God's justice we will lose our way. if we focus on the injustices of this life and what the ungodly have and we don't, our lives will be bitter and joyless.

Surely, God is good. In Jesus, all his promises are yes.¹ Let his promise drive our eyes back to God, even in the moment when we are slipping, when our feet are taking us off the steady path, when our hearts fail and our flesh is weak, draw near to God. Push into the Lord Jesus. Cry out to the Holy Spirit. He is our strength, he is saving us, he is redeeming us, he has a wonderful future in glory for us - where we will know the incomparable joy of life with our God as his people, restored, redeemed and satisfied.

It's this truth that revives Asaph, its this truth which can revive us. It dispel the sense of futility. God is active. No wonder Asaph could tell of the wonders of all God's deeds!
Can't we? **{slide 6}**

God has not abandoned us, he hasn't forgotten us, he isn't powerless, he is refining us. He is our refuge, our satisfaction, our sustainer. The ungodly may scoff or mock, they may get ahead and prosper for a time, but God is the Sovereign Lord, who is saving any who put their trust in Him. In Him the godly truly prosper.

Pray

¹ 2 Cor 1:20