

Gaining a New Perspective

Psalm 73

Introduction:

I've always loved marching bands. I was in marching band in high school and college. So I am a certified band geek, and proud of it. How many band geeks out there? And because of this, I am a huge fan of Drum Corp International or DCI. Anyone been to a DCI competition. It's absolutely amazing, and I hope to make some new fans today!

Anyway, I was looking at some videos online this week to share with you and came across a performance by the Crossmen from 2012, that is taken from a camera on one of the members of the corp. Let's take a look...notice members just walking here and there...it looks a little chaotic...you can't see any logic to why members are moving in different direction...

Marching band shows are not designed to be seen from the field level. They're designed to be seen from a higher elevation – in the stands. Take a look now at the next video which is from the same section of the same show, but now from the stands...you can see the formations, the movement and the music go together...This gives us a whole NEW PERSPECTIVE!

AWESOME stuff. DCI season is over now. But next summer we should get a group to go to a competition. It really is a fun night.

As we go through life, we often view the events and people in our lives through the perspective of being on the field. From that perspective, we see evil in our world, and even evil people getting ahead, and wonder, "is my Christian faith worth living out?" On the field, we can't see the intent of the designer. We can't see the big picture!

This is the situation in Psalm 73 as well. Asaph, the psalmist here, begins in v. 1 affirming that God *is* good, but confesses that he has nearly slipped in his confidence in the Lord. See how it says in verse 2, "*But as for me...*"

He was dealing with tough questions and wondering why he shouldn't just give up. And I'm sure all of us have been presented with similar situations. I mean, have you ever seen how things play out in the world around you, and then be disgusted by it. Or have certain events or ideas caused you to question whether God exists, or if he does, if he is really good?

Human Condition: And although the psalm doesn't specifically say this, I imagine that Asaph is currently going through a tough time in his life. Maybe a death in the family, a financial crisis, or something. All of us have experienced trials at some point in our lives. Maybe you're going through one right now. And when we go through trying times, we can easily start to focus on others and how they're doing fine, and we're struggling, and wonder, "Why isn't God being good to me?" If

things are going well for us, God is good – but if things are difficult, God may not be so good.

Transition: In this Psalm, Asaph is struggling in his thought life. He knows deep down that God is indeed good, but his present experience is NOT lining up with that belief. Through the psalm we see a progression. 1st – we see what got Asaph into this struggle. 2nd – he tells us how he gained a new perspective on the struggle. And 3rd – he explains what he learned through this experience and how he was better because of it. First, let's look at how this problem began. In verses 1-14 we learn...

I. We will begin to question the goodness of God's plan for our lives when we compare our lives to others (vv. 1-14).

Comparing our lives with those around us is a very "on the field" type of perspective, isn't it? And this is exactly the perspective of the psalmist here in these verses. In v. 3 he writes, *"For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."*

And what is it about others that caused Asaph to begin the question God's goodness to him? Let's look at these verses and see the reasons Asaph envied these people:

- **They are healthy and beautiful.** (READ v. 4)

I mean, they've got everything going for them. Everything seems so perfect. Just pick up a People magazine. All the celebrities are so healthy and beautiful. We think, "If only we could look like that, we could have more success in life."

They don't seem to struggle with sickness and disease, but we as Christians deal with being sick, death, persecution. Why should *they* not have to deal with these things? Another reason to envy these people:

- **They are trouble-free.** (READ v. 5)

Look, I don't know about you, but I've bills to pay. And I so often am scraping things together to pay them all. Let alone have much extra to go out to eat, and buy an extra gadget, or go on a luxury vacation.

But if we compare our salaries with Hollywood stars or the professional athletes, we can become a little depressed. If only I could make that kind of money, then I would be trouble-free too. A third reason Asaph envies these people:

- **They are powerful.** (v. 6-9) READ v. 9

WOW! If only I had such power. They think it, they speak it, and they are able to have it. That would be the life, right? These people boast against the very heavens, and their words influence people throughout the whole earth. Who wouldn't want to be in this type of position?

It makes sense that when we're struggling, we would envy others. But the psalm give us one main reason why this envying can cause us to question God's goodness:

- **They are wicked and get away with it.**

This is ultimately what the psalmist is so concerned about. They're wicked – but still they are beautiful, trouble-free and powerful. And look at verse 10...people turn to the wicked drink up these evil peoples' words. *Not only is their wickedness profitable, but it is well thought of.*

This is the dilemma that the psalmist is in. He wants to have what these people have. Don't you? Last week, Pastor Ken preached from Psalm 1 that teaches that the blessed and happy are those who walk in the ways of the Lord. If you want to be truly blessed, follow the Law of God! But I'm trying to do that, yet I'm suffering, and the wicked seem to be the one who are blessed. What's up with that?

And as the psalmist contemplates all this, he writes in v 13-14, *"Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning."* This guy is living the pure and holy life, and gets nothing but heartache after heartache. *He's starting to think that God really isn't as good as he thought He was.*

Transition: That's what happens when we compare our lives to others. That's what happens when our perspective of life is from the field. So what's the answer? Let's move on in the psalm to see how Asaph gets out of this personal struggle. We learn that...

II. We need to gain a new perspective which comes from being in the presence of God (vv. 15-20).

At verse 15 the psalmist begins to find a solution to his problem. Look at verse 15 (READ)...he thought about just giving himself over to his "on the field" perspective. But he realizes he just can't do that. So he decides to think over (READ v. 16). And as he thinks about it, it's too complex of a problem and he can't figure it out.

The answer comes in the presence of God. v. 17, *"Till I entered the sanctuary of God."*
The solution to this problem is that we need a new perspective which comes from being in the very presence of God.

He went into the sanctuary, which basically means he went into the presence of God. The psalmist went to spend some time with God himself to find some answers. It was at this point that he saw the destiny of the wicked. They are destined for destruction. All those "good" things (beauty, power, money) aren't lasting and are not even the things that will ultimately make you happy. But, those things we thought were so "worthless" – being good and pure – these things now have eternal value.

For Asaph, instead of being down on the field watching the marching band, he's now up in the stands. He can see the big picture. He can see the intent of the designer. And we too must continually be in the presence of God so that we too can see the big picture.

Illustration: When I was in college, I met a great Christian girl. We dated for about a year and a half. We went to church together, we studied the Bible together, we went on a summer mission trip together. I was in love, and I just knew without a doubt that this was the girl I was going to marry.

Then, while we were on the summer missions trip, she broke up with me. What? I mean, this is *me* we're talking about it (ha, ha). Who would do such a thing? And didn't she realize that it was God's plan for us to get married.

So for about the next 6 months after the breakup, I was confused and dazed. I was upset with God for throwing the monkey wrench into my life, especially as my best friend just got married to his girlfriend that summer. It just wasn't fair. So I spent a lot of time trying to change things about myself so that I could convince this girl that I was great and we needed to get back together. But it just seemed to be futile.

Then I remember driving home with a group of friends on a road trip. I was driving, and this girl had fallen asleep in the passenger's seat. And I remember that I started to pray. I was asking God to giving me the reasons why this was happening to me. And as I drew near to God, He drew near to me and began to give me HIS perspective. I had been focusing on what I wanted to happen, and didn't even think about what God's plan were.

And I remember in the darkness and silence of that moment just balling like a baby (trying to clear my eyes so I wouldn't have a wreck). But God was comforting me and telling me that He was good and had my life under control. This was happening to me because I was resisting God's good plan for my life. He had something better for me. And there was such a comfort and joy from gaining that new perspective from being in God's perspective.

At Living Hope Church, we believe that God has given us His vision for the church which is to magnify Jesus Christ by embracing His vision of disciples making disciples. And our mission, which is defined as the things we believe we all need to do in order for that vision to come to pass is summed up by W+2. And the Big W of our mission is a commitment to WORSHIP of our God. We all need to spend time in the presence fo the Lord, and an intergral part of that is coming to this place for corporate worship.

The leadership of Living Hope actually developed a statement about worship:

The essence of biblical worship is that *all* of life should be lived with the goal of glorifying and honoring our almighty, triune God (Colossians 3:17).

At Living Hope Church, our purpose in corporate worship is to encourage our congregation, both as individuals and as the gathered Body of Christ, to passionately love God, to love each other, and to engage the world through making disciples.

Our weekly celebration is meant to be an essential part of a life devoted to God. When we come together we are first and foremost adoring God. Secondly, by coming together, believers are edified, equipped and encouraged to fully embrace a *lifestyle* of worship.

Transition: When we struggle in our lives, when we're in the trenches and viewing life from the field, we need to commit to coming here together to gain a new perspective that only comes from being in the presence of God. That's what Asaph figured out. And as we move on to the end of the psalm, we now learn about how this experience changed Him. In this section we learn that...

III. As we draw near to God, our lives will be changed for the better (vv. 21-28).

- **We are humbled** (vv. 21-22).

At first glance this might not sound like a great, positive change. But true humility brings us to confession. In verses 21 and 22, Asaph expresses his confession to the Lord (READ...).

And why is humility that brings confession such a wonderful, positive change? 1 John 1:9 – *"If we confess our sin..."*

A second change that comes to us from being in the presence of God is that...

- **We become dependent** (READ v. 23).

This too, at first glance, might not seem so positive. But it's only when we're truly dependent on God that he can lead us where HE wants us to go. Listen to what God says in Isaiah 48:17 – *"I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go."*

Another change is that...

- **We gain hope for the future** (READ v. 24).

Being near to God reminds us that He has the last word – he has the victory. Listen to what the Bible says in 2 Tim. 4:18 – *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom."*

It's only through faith in Jesus Christ that we gain true hope for our future. No matter what may trouble us in this life, we know that we have hope of an eternity of God.

And a final change that happens from being in the presence of God is that we learn to truly...

- **We enjoy the Lord** (READ vv. 25-26).

Aren't those some beautiful lines of poetry. Yes, we will still will have afflictions (the psalmist wrote that "*My flesh and my heart may fail*"). But, we possess the strength of the Lord when we dwell with Him. The Bible says in Eph. 1:3 – "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*"

Listen to how this psalm ends with verse 28: "*But as for me, it is good to be near God, I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge.*" We are able to be NEAR God. The New Testament says it like this in James 4:8 – "*Come near to God and He will come near to you.*" And this nearness brings joy and safety ("*refuge*").

And the final phrase of the psalm: *I will tell of all your deeds.*" The end result of being near to God is a joy in telling others about Him. Remember our mission of W+2? The Big W is worship, but we have a second W as well: our Witness. When we are near the Lord – when we truly experience the goodness that comes from being in His presence – that worship will fuel our witness. We will delight in telling others what God has done for us.

WOW! This is such a wonderful psalm, and I hope you understand why it's one of MY favorites.

Conclusion:

So as we close today, I want to synthesize all that we learned today into one cohesive thought:

Only as we draw near to God can we gain the proper perspective of the world: God is good and in control!

Illustration: And remember the story of me in car and experiencing God's presence and gaining his perspective about the girl I though was my destiny? I really did have an immense comfort comfort come into my life and trusted my relationship future to God at that moment. Little did I know at the time that just about a month later, I started dating another girl, and her name was Cynthia. And God couldn't have been any better to me that leading me to this wonderful woman who would actually become my wife. In the midst of my struggle and my sorrow, God changed my life for the better.

But if you really think about this psalm: how from the field perspective it looks like the evil people make out good, and the good people make out bad. The ultimate expression and illustration of this... The crucifixion of Christ...

Nearness to God always helps us maintain a balanced perspective on material things and on the wicked.

We must remain near to God...but how? It is absolutely crucial for us to take some time out of the day, and move into the presence of God.

- Take 5 minutes of silence.
- Find a quiet place that will allow you to focus on the Lord.
- Start by praying and asking God to quiet your heart and enter into your holy time and space.
- Then just be still for at least 5 minutes and allow God to speak to you.

He will draw near to you, as you commit to drawing near to Him.

Only as we remain near to God can we gain the proper perspective that God is good and in control. Only then will we have a proper perspective on the life that erupts around us. Only then, will we be seeing the big picture from the stands, instead of being caught up in the chaos on the field. Only then, will we be able to sing the "Song of God's Presence."