



People always say hindsight is 20/20. And that is true. Because looking backward from completed history gives you all the information you need to make perfect decisions. And so the principle we can extract is this: the more information you have the better decisions you can make.

Now good information is important in all decisions, but especially decisions where a lot is at stake. Let's say you need to make a decision on where to invest some large amount of money. We all ask the same question: what's the best investment? That question reveals the problem with the present. We don't know. Fast forward 15 years and it would be obvious. To make matters worse your present perspective often times points you in the wrong direction. You use that limited information to make what seems like a reasonable decision but in the long run is actually a horrible decision. It was a red herring. Hindsight is always 20/20.

Now here's why we begin this way. Because God asks us to invest in his kingdom. If you are to be a follower of Jesus Christ, then he

asks you to invest in his kingdom all your money, all your time, all your emotional energy, all your loyalty, talents and resources.

Luke 14:33, So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (ESV)

So if you want to invest in God's kingdom you have to go all in. That's what it means to be a Christian, you give your whole life to him.

Maybe you are just here today to listen. You haven't given God everything. You are just considering. Today's message, I trust will help you consider.

There are others here, perhaps who like the idea of giving God everything but you are questioning. Maybe that describes you. And maybe you can even recall back to a time where you followed him with zeal and you were committed in every way. But then something happens. Maybe somebody you respect really disappoints you. Maybe you see evil in the world or in the church and it rocks you in some way.

It's possible to get to this point where you question your all-in investment in Christianity and you say, "Is it worth it to follow you?" God, is it worth it? Is the investment in your kingdom worth it? Does it actually pay off in the long run? Because right now it sure doesn't seem like it. And there is a little re-evaluation that goes on.

Well, turn in your Bibles to Psalm 73. Today we come to a Psalm in which the Psalmist is struggling with this very thing. God, when I look around, when I look at the performance of my portfolio, I'm not seeing a very good return. Other's are getting way better returns. Maybe I made a bad choice? Maybe it's time to jump ship. And we are going to get into the mind of someone who is wobbling. And we are going to see three things as the Psalmist gains perspective:

GETTING PERSPECTIVE

1. The Poison of Envy
2. The Position of the Wicked
3. The Pleasure of the Righteous

Now the Psalmist begins with a formal articulation of his faith, that even in the face of apparently contradictory circumstances, God is good.

Psalm 73:1, Truly God is good to Israel, to those who
are pure in heart.

Sure this is what my religion teaches me. Sure, this is what I am supposed to believe. This is what is in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Catechism. But as for me, let me tell you about a little faith crisis I had.

Psalm 73:2, But as for me, my feet had almost
stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.

Why did you stumble? What was going through your mind?

Psalm 73:3, For I was envious of the arrogant when I
saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Now he's just being brazenly honest. I'm envious of the wicked. What is envy? Envy is wanting somebody else's life. You see they have something better than you and instead of rejoicing in the good they have, you weep over the fact you don't have it. You are obsessed with and you focus on the fact you don't have it.

And that's where the Psalmist finds himself. He's way past trying to fit in the Christian system. In fact, he's wholesale reevaluating. Maybe there's another way to live that's better than this. He's ready to chuck the whole thing. He's looking around and he's saying, "That guy has a better life than I do and he's doing everything you are not supposed to be doing. I'm not sure this whole Christian thing makes sense. Look at all these guys out there that are completely uninhibited by any laws and they are way ahead. This isn't fair.

Now notice, he's envious because the wicked are what? Prospering. God, don't you punish the wicked and reward the good? Why do you

allow such a morally perverse state of affairs to continue on the earth? Because what we are talking about is not meager existence of the wicked.

- They are prospering.
- They have all the ease, comfort.
- They have the milk and honey.
- They are experiencing the good life.

The Psalmist in Psalm 37 observes that the wicked flourish like green grass. We just got back from a vacation and before we left, we had freshly weeded all our planters. Every one of them was spotless. And when we come back, we see flourishing grass springing up everywhere. You don't have to tell them to grow. You don't have to carefully cultivate them and water them. They aren't barely eeking by. The soil of this world is perfect for them. The conditions are absolutely perfect for the wicked to prosper. You just turn your head for second and ten of them have grown up like monsters and are choking out the poor righteous plant you are trying to nurse along.

And the Psalmist continues and tells us what he saw that made him so envious.

Psalm 73:4-7, For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies.

They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

There are at least five things the Psalmist envies here. And these are things that all those who are desiring to live according to God's way are tempted to envy from time to time. Every one of us have been tempted to envy in this way.

1. He envies their wealth
2. He envies their physical appearance
3. He envies their pride
4. He envies their immunity from law
5. He envies their power
6. He envies their freedom.

What human being doesn't think that these are the elusive ingredients to happiness. Every human without exception is on a quest to be happy. We are all are trying to crack the code. Surely happiness is a cocktail of some combination of these things.

Ask yourself, "What do I not have, that if only I did have, I'd be happy." What, 'If Only...' exists in your life?

If only I had this thing, then I'd be happy. Fill in the blank.

- If only I could get rid of this financial strain, then I'd be happy.

Well look over there. The wicked doesn't have my financial strain. He's just loaded to the gills and never has to worry about any of this stuff. Here I am slaving away serving people and I'm surviving off pennies while the wicked is just bloated. The wicked would literally just scoff at the financial deliberations and trade-offs I have to make. Should I try to patch this pair of jeans for the 4th time? Maybe I could eek out a little more life?

The Psalmist says, "He has no pangs until death...", meaning the only pain he's going to experience in this life is death itself. But up until that point, he's going to be worry free. He's gouging the poor, he's taking advantage of people and he's loaded. If I didn't have God's rules hanging over me I could be just like him. And that money makes his life so easy. He hasn't the slightest concern that

us mere mortals have to worry ourselves with. How are we going to afford health insurance and pay the mortgage and fix the car and send our kids off to collage and pay the grocery bill.

If only I could get rid of this financial strain. The wicked don't seem to worry about finances. Why can't I go that route?

- If only I had the perfect body.

I know we aren't supposed to focus on physical appearance. As a Christian we are told that beauty is on the inside. Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart.

Peter tells women, "Let your adornment not be with clothes or jewels or external enhancement, but let it be the hidden person of the heart."

But that internal adornment isn't getting getting you any attention. As we age, our bodies become less and less attractive. And maybe you used to be beautiful in the flower of your youth and you got all sorts of attention and now that attention is beginning to shift to the younger, sleeker, newer models. And there's all this pressure to try and stay beautiful but you say, no, I'm going to focus on the inward person. And as you obey you are ignored.

Or maybe you are beautiful and you are trying to be modest in your dress. Your are intentionally trying to honor God with your dress, you put him first in your mind as you make clothing selections, and you are looking at these girls who are getting all this attention, and they are spending all this money that focuses on the external and you don't and your trying to be content and you think, this is not fair.

This is nothing new. The Psalmist says, "The wicked have perfect bodies. Look at those fat, sleek people who are so fat their eyes swell out through fatness." A few of us are wishing we lived back in that culture. Every culture has had their ideal of what a beautiful body looks like. And in the ANE culture, it's the body that is well-banqueted. Why? Because it's a symbol of having all your needs met. The wicked are rewarded for focusing on the external. Why can't I? If only I could do that.

- If only I didn't have all these restraints.

Look at how they talk to God without consequence. Look at verse 9, "They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongue struts through the earth." They seem to be totally free and immune to the consequences of sin and blasphemy. Maybe there is no God. If God were there wouldn't he do something about this horrible injustice? Maybe the right way is the way of the wicked?

Poisoned by Envy

Do you see the Psalmist here? His mind is poisoned by envy. Envy poisons your ability to enjoy the life you have. Here's how you know envy has you in its grip. Nothing is good enough:

- Your job isn't good enough.
- Your body isn't good enough.
- Your life isn't good enough.
- Your friendships aren't good enough.
- Your marriage is not good enough.
- Your calendar and bank balance is not good enough.
- Nothing is good enough.

You're always finding fault. You're always critical. You can never just

sit down and savor the moment. You can never just sit down and enjoy what's in front of you. There is always something wrong because you're comparing yourself to everyone else.

Here's a good test for whether you are envious. Imagine someone who you like, admire, and want to be like but no matter how hard you try, you have to admit, you will never be like them. What happens when you find out that they really screwed up. Is that comforting to you? Do you actually like to hear about it. You replay it over in your mind to comfort you. That's an expression of envy.

Do you see how sick this is? Envy literally poisons us psychologically and socially and spiritually. Do you not see it?

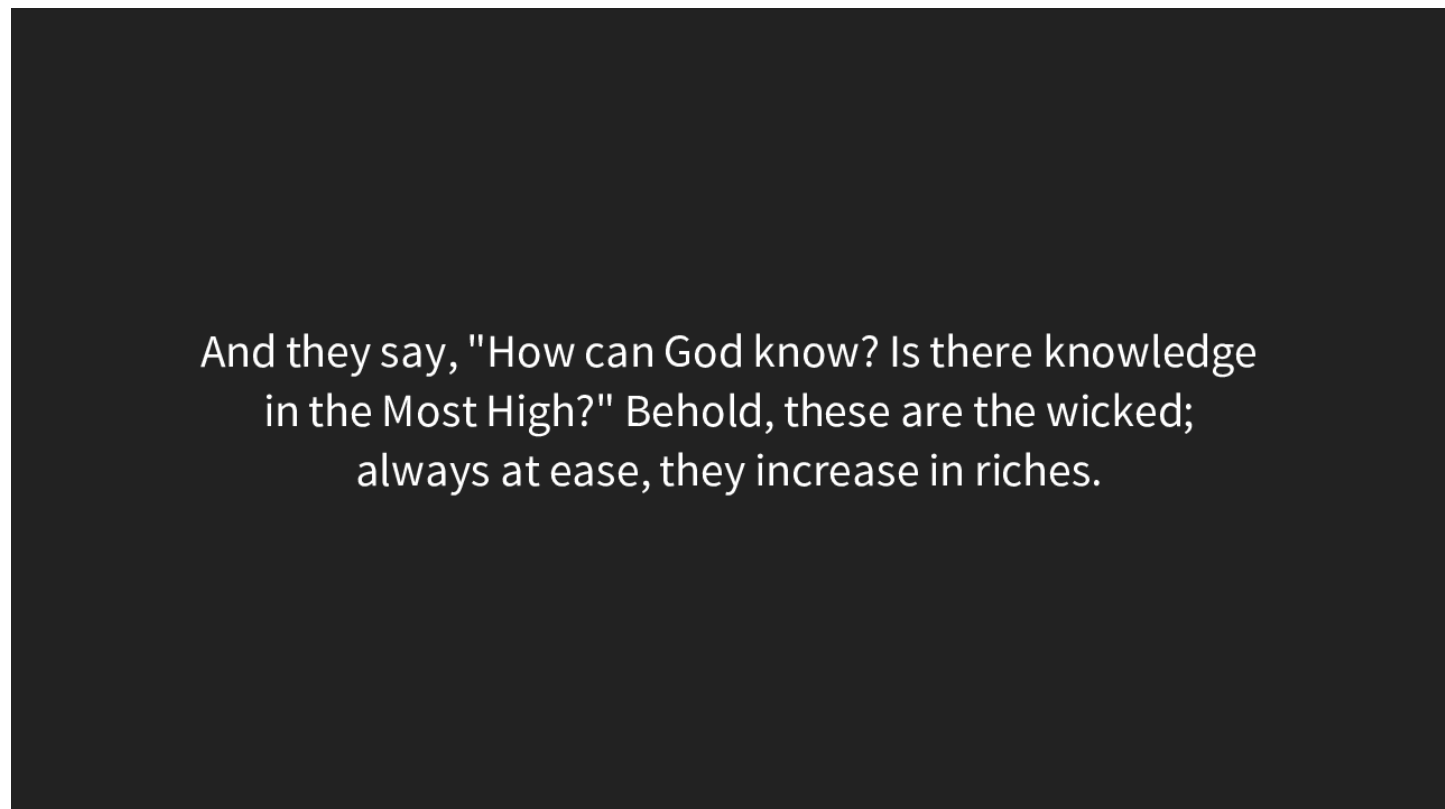
Verse 10 begins with an important word, therefore.

Psalm 73:10-13, Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them.

The meaning of this verse is difficult because when you translate it literally, it makes zero sense: "therefore he turns his people and waters of fullness are pressed out by them."

There are many suggestions given as to how to either amend or interpret the text. The NIV takes a stab at it: "People are drawn by the rich and they drink up the waters in abundance," meaning, the lifestyle of the rich persuades them and they drink it in, they take the bait, hook, line and sinker.

Now, I want to emphasize again the word therefore. Because as soon as you go this way, as soon as you drink in this lifestyle, as soon as you take the bait, as soon as you entertain the idea of living this life that abandons God's ways, the very next thought is ALWAYS this:

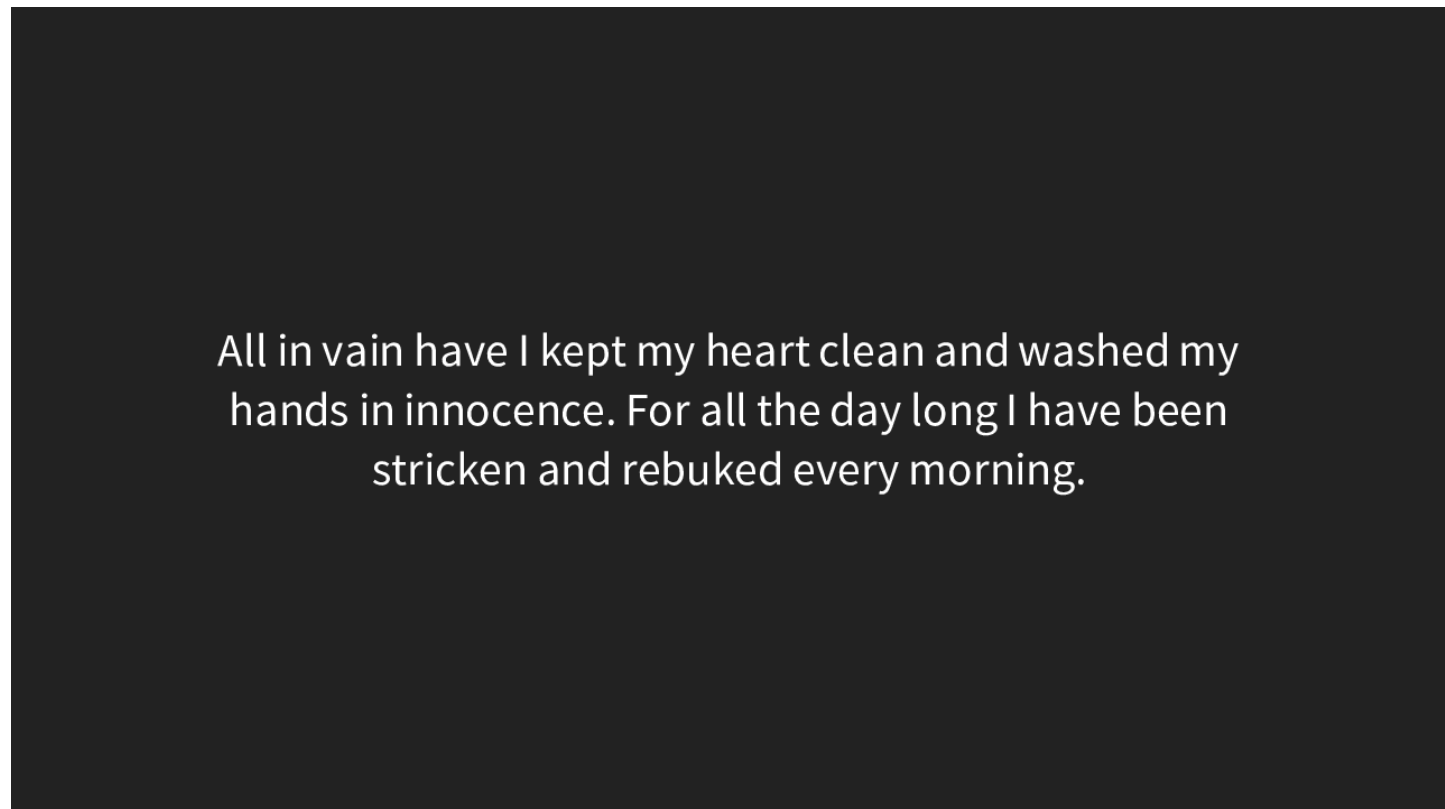


And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

This is always how sin works. As soon as you decide you are going to willfully go against God's law, God feels distant, ancient, irrelevant, and unreal. As soon as we flip the switch mentally, I want to sin, God just poofs like a vapor in our minds. He's not even real. I've done this before and no lightning bolt struck me so I'll do it again. The assessment of God's realness is done most poorly while imbibing the pleasures of sin. Of course your mind won't let you

allow God to exist because what you are doing is 100 percent antithetical to his laws and commands. It's the same problem with admitting you're being selfish. It's obvious to everyone including yourself that you are being selfish but the problem is as soon as you admit it you have to give up what you want. It's denial in its purest form. No, God's not real. He can't be real. And when he's not real, sin is a piece of cake to justify.

And now, from this new atheistic perspective his life feels like a waste.



All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my
hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been
stricken and rebuked every morning.

Here he's looking back at the course of his life and all the religious effort and said, what a waste? Who saw all that work? Who saw those long hours where I worked so hard to love this person or forgive this person and they just turned out to not appreciate anything I did for them.

Is this not the nature of true ministry work? It always goes entirely

unnoticed and almost always feels like a waste. We looked at the Sermon on the Mount and everything Jesus asks us to do requires that we do it without anyone looking. Don't pray ostentatiously. Don't give and sound a trumpet. Don't fast so everyone knows. Just do it secretly.

The Psalmist is saying, "I've done all that for years, and for what?" I haven't indulged myself in worldly ambitions. And for what?

- I'm over here spending all this time in private prayer that nobody sees. Nobody else is doing that or even cares.
- I'm reading my Bible daily trying to hide God's Word in my heart. Nobody else is doing that? And nobody cares.
- I'm trying to give without anyone noticing and because I did it that way, I don't even get a thank you; then this organization over here gives and gets all this media attention and accolades.

"In Vain" he cries out bitterly "I have kept my heart clean." All this adherence to rules and religious duty has soured him. Instead of blessing I get rebuke. People ridicule me. Enough.

We've reached the absolute trough. The Psalmist is in desperate depression trying to make sense of this all.

GETTING PERSPECTIVE

1. The Poison of Envy
2. The Position of the Wicked

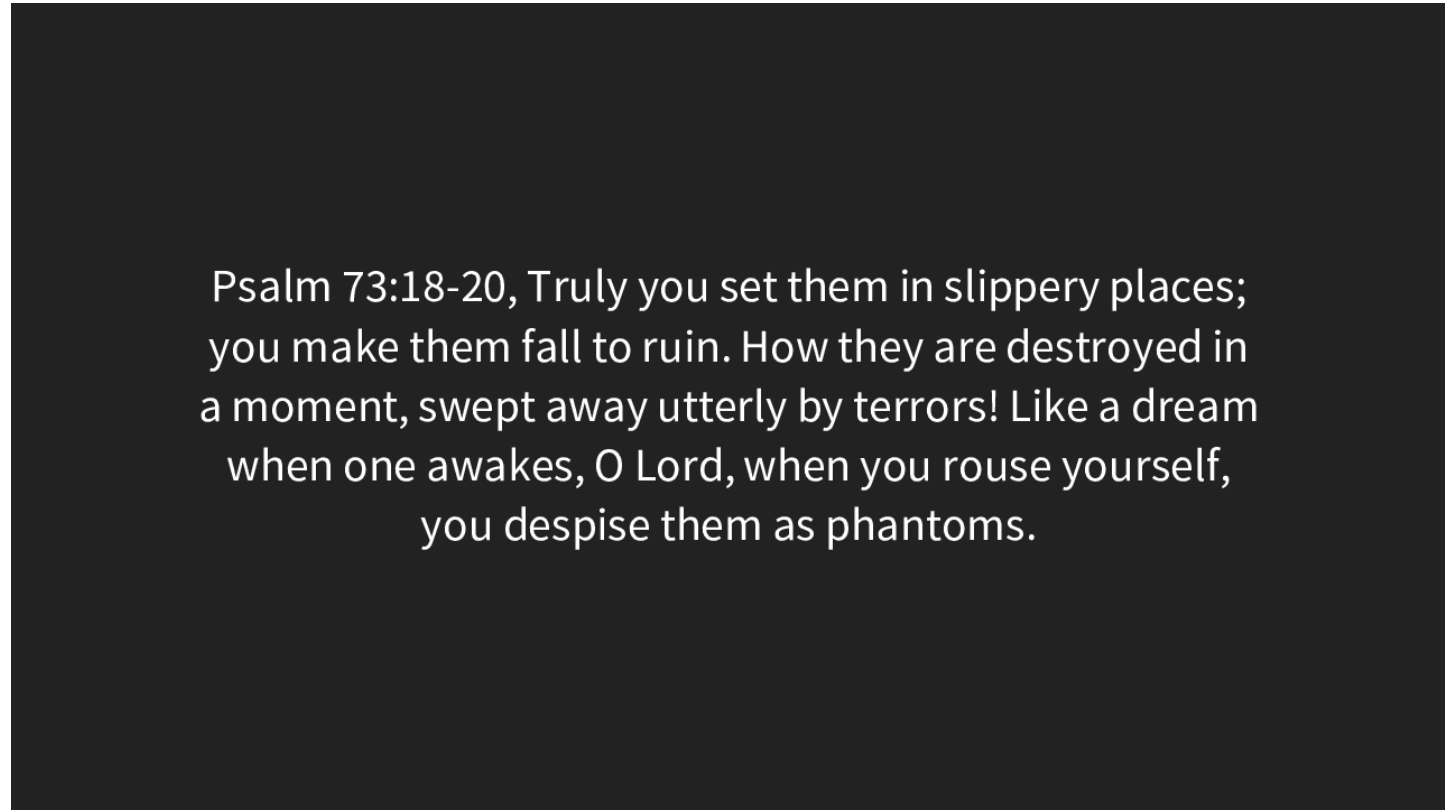
But then something amazing happens.

Psalm 73:16-17, But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

What a great verse! He was almost going to throw in the towel and he decides to give it one last shot. He goes into the sanctuary of God. Going into those walls breaks down his walls. He's able to get

outside of his immediate surroundings. We began by saying that hindsight is 20/20. Well, there's another way to get 20/20 vision and that's by entering into the sanctuary of God. Reading his Word. Looking through the eyes of the one who has 20/20 vision. Going into the sanctuary of God helped him to get perspective. It helped him to see the long view. Where does this go? What does this lifestyle of the wicked produce? What is the result of it all?

There is an end of the wicked that is absolutely NOT worth it.



Psalm 73:18-20, Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in
a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream
when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself,
you despise them as phantoms.

Do you see the picture? Wickedness, evil, fraud is being compared to a slippery place. And that's a great picture. Because it's not like you can't get around on a slippery place. Most the time it's fine. You walk really carefully you can get around. But when you really need it, when all of the sudden you loose your balance and you need something hard to push against, it fails you and you fall and break your bones.

It's not like living the life of the wicked and valuing what he values

doesn't work at all. As a matter of fact, it works gloriously for certain things. But there is coming a day, when men and women will answer before the Lord and they will panic and try to run and they will push off against those things they have built their life upon and find that it is as slick as ice. And they will fall to ruin..

Living your life trying to factor out the Lord, is like trying to run from a Bear on ice covered lake.

It says they will be swept away utterly by terrors. Judgment according to the Bible is terror. Is it not a terrifying thought to think that the God of the universe will judge you. What will he see? Will he approve of what he sees?

And the Psalmist shutters. Here they are wagging their tongues. Taunting. Ridiculing. Mocking God. Is it really possible to evade God? The Psalmist walks into the sanctuary, and he sees their end.

No. God is not a man that he would be mocked. There is an end coming where all men will give an account to God. And what will we say then? What will we say? What will the wicked, prosperous, fattened soul of the scoffer say in that day?

Psalm 49:5-8, Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds
me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the
abundance of their riches?

Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the
price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and
can never suffice, that he should live on forever and
never see the pit.

What's he saying? The lifestyle of the wicked can't save him in the day of judgment. This particular wicked man trusts in money. When you die, your money stays on earth. It's not there to bail you out before the judgment seat of God. You've pushed against it and you slipped. And here's the problem with judgment. You will be asked to

pay a debt that money can't pay. You will come to the debt collection counter. And you might have lots of cash but heaven doesn't take that currency.

It requires an entirely different form of payment. Look at what he says, "The ransom for a life is costly." How much? What's the price? No amount of money will do. In fact, even human sacrifice won't do. You can't even give up your life to pay for another man's debt because you too are in need of a sacrifice. In other words, you can't pay debt with other bad debt. You need something whole. Something of absolute objective value to pay off the debt.

We are in serious trouble.

And on that day of judgment what will you have to pay it? The whole point of Psalm 73 is that there is a payment available. And it's putting all of our hope and confidence in that ransom.

We know from this side of the cross what that ransom is, don't we?

1 Timothy 2:5-6, For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (ESV)

We have been redeemed if we are believers in Christ. And for those of you who have given your life to Jesus Christ, who have made him your Lord and master, who have invested all, who have gone all-in, you have experienced this redemption and will experience it fully on judgment day.

The Psalmist is in the sanctuary of God and he sees all this. And suddenly the contrast between those who have been ransomed and those who have not becomes patently obvious. And everything he was concerned about vanishes. What was I so worked up about? What was I envious of again?

All of that envy he had toward the wicked melts into what might be described as embarrassment. He's embarrassed that he was ever envious.

Psalm 73:21-22, When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.

I wasn't just sad. I didn't just want other people's lives. I resented them for it. I begrudged their lives to them. I was embittered against them. That's what envy is. If I can't have it nobody can.

But the Psalmist finally gets to the point where he can admit it, confess it and be forgiven for it. In verse 21 it says, his heart was pricked. He was grieved. His conscience was able to confess it. He compares his envious state to a beast who is brutish. If you look up the definition of that word 'brutish' you'll see "strongly and grossly sensual."

The brute is programmed to make decisions based on its belly, its nose, its eyes, its sexual desires. It can't think and reason. By definition, it's going to be a short term machine.

And envy and jealousy where you want someone else's life is brutish behavior. His car is shinier. Her wallet is fatter. That girl is prettier. It's brutish. Really? Is that all you're going to care about? Are you really that shallow? Is that the only variable you are going to consider, the immediate pleasures that the body can soak up? The Psalmist says, "Man, that's Brute behavior." Get out of the moment. Stop thinking in terms of immediate gratification of the senses. What's the big picture here?

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The big picture is that there is a type of gratification and satisfaction that is so much more superior to animal satisfaction, being satisfied in Jesus Christ. He describes our mission statement and our theme for the year. You want to know what's better than being a brute? It's being satisfied in the living God. We were made to be most satisfied when we worship and live with God.

Psalm 73:23-26, Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. 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.

Do you want to know what the solution to envy is? It's living before the face of God!

What does that mean? He calls every human being to build their identity on God, to center their life on God, make God the main source of their happiness.

What is the Psalmist doing? He's admiring God! He's praising him. He's worshiping. He's saying, there's nothing in this world that is bigger, better and more beautiful. That's what he means by saying whom have I in heaven but you? What possible thing could I build my life upon that is better than you.

Do you know that in a way worship is the opposite of envy. If you admire someone, if you decide to worship someone, you simultaneously surrender self. You say, I could never be that, and I just admire it. Admiration is happy self-surrender. Envy is the opposite. Envy is unhappy self-justification. Envy says, I should be like that and I can't admire it in someone else because that should

be me. I should be the one who has that or experiences that, not him or her. I want it for me and nobody else.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Let's say you're a musician and you went to music school 20 years ago. Almost everybody else who went to music school with you is doing better than you: producing more music, producing great music, has better connections, making more money, getting more acclaim, putting out more albums, and so on. In fact, you don't even have a job. You're still living with your parents.

How will you feel about that? It all depends on your relationship to God. If you're living before God, then music is a gift, music is wonderful, music is important, and because it's a gift from God you'll be able to admire people who are doing better than you. You'll be able to rejoice in them doing that because you admire the God who made music and see it and the people who play it as a beautiful piece of his marvelous creation. The point is not to make great music. The point is to worship the one who made music itself. And so if the artist is a dead guy, an alive guy, my classmate or me, the point is the same. We are living before God and worship God.

But if you're living before music,

- if music is the reason you get out of bed in the morning,
- if music gives you purpose and meaning in life
- if music gives justification to your existence and lets you know you're worth something,
- if you're living before music

you will not be able to admire anyone happily who's doing better than you. You will resent them; you will envy them. Because they have more of the ultimate thing than you do. He says if you want to

know what your self-justifications are, if you want to know who you really are, follow your envies. You envy people who have the thing you use to justify yourself.

But how foolish. Whom have I in heaven but you? What could possibly be more fulfilling than knowing the living God? Now the Psalmist ends with a final contrast. What's the final evaluation at the end of the day when we compare those who have lived before God and those who have lived before anything else?

Psalm 73:27-28, For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But 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.

Do you see the Psalmist living before the face of God. Making God the thing he cares about, making God the source of identity.

The nearness of God is my good. For me, it is good to be near God. If you find yourself discontent, draw near to God. That's the best advice in the world.

Do you remember the promise of James 4:8. Draw near to God and what? Finish it. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Maybe you feel distant for God and the cares of this world are very enticing to you. You find yourself envious of the world. What do you do? Draw near to God. Are you doing that? Are you praying to him? Are you reading his word? Are you hiding his word in your heart? Draw near to him and he will draw near to you.

Thomas Chalmers wrote an article once entitled the expulsive power of a new affection and in that article he argues. The only way you can unseat an attractive sin is to find something more attractive. If you are dying of thirst you'll drink dirty water. But I guarantee you'll drop that dirty water in a second if I show you a bottle of clean water. Draw near to God. Enter into his sanctuary. We will close with the simple words from Proverbs 23.

Proverbs 23:17-18, Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

There is no future for the wicked. There is not future for the sinner.