



GOD IS GOOD TO HIS PEOPLE

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Psalm 73

'Surely God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart.

INTRODUCTION

God is Good to his people. It's a truth that we read, affirm, and sing. But I think if we're honest with ourselves...there are seasons in our lives that we find this to be a truth very difficult to believe; especially in a world where his people suffer, and his enemies thrive.

Last September, Hugh Hefner, the founder of *Playboy* died in his multi-million-dollar mansion at the age of 91. He lived the self-absorbed life of a hedonist... constant parties, and countless women. He liked to refer to himself as "the boy who dreamed a dream." In addition to his brazen hedonism, he experienced stunning success, making millions off of the lust of men and the objectification of women. Not only that, he used his influence to propel the sexual revolution forward along with abortion rights, and drug use... Truly a godless man, living a healthy, wealthy life, free from care, filled with pleasure, then dying peacefully in his mansion, surrounded by loved ones, at the ripe old age of 91. He had lived the dream.

Roughly a month after Hefner's death, another person died, and her name was Annabelle. But she was not 91, she was only 14. Her life was snuffed out by an armed gunman while she was worshiping God on Sunday morning in a small church in TX. The innocent victim of pure evil, she, along with 25 others,

many of them children, had her life cut short just for being in church.

Day after day, we see the sorrow of God's people, and the prosperity of his enemies; and it causes us to wonder: *"Is God really good to his people?"*

But you know, it's not just what we read in the headlines, it's also what we experience in our own lives. Perhaps you're suffering from abuse, loneliness, illness, poverty, neglect, disease, or depression. And in the midst of your pain, you're doubting God's goodness to you. You're not perfect, but you love God, and you've trusted him as a child trusts a father. But it seems as though he responds with one pain after the next. And in light of that, this truth that we so often affirm; that "God is good", feels terribly hallow. We might not say it, but we feel the hurt, and the bitterness. And although we may try to hide it, these doubts are tearing us apart on the inside.

If that's you, can I encourage you with this truth: You are not alone. In fact, you stand in the company of many of God's children, including our Psalmist. Let's pick up where we left off. Immediately after declaring God's goodness, the Psalmist writes in verses two and three:

²But as for me, my feet almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.

³For I envied the arrogant
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Here in Psalm 73, we witness a man in crisis. A man who, in the face of what he sees and what he feels, is questioning what he believes.

I'd like to invite you to listen to his personal testimony, to feel his frustration, envy, and doubt; then watch in wonder as God takes this man from the depths of doubt to the heights of hope. And if he did it for him, he can do it for you. So let's begin with his spiritual crisis. What is it that's causing him to question

the goodness of God: The prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of God's people.

THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED CAUSED HIM TO QUESTION GOD'S GOODNESS.

Notice the extent of their wickedness.

They're Violent:

⁶they clothe themselves with violence.

⁷From their callous hearts comes iniquity;
their evil imaginations have no limits

⁸They scoff, and speak with malice;
with arrogance they threaten oppression.

They're Proud:

⁶pride is their necklace

⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
And their tongues take possession of the earth.

¹¹They say, "How would God know?
Does the Most High know anything?"

And yet in spite of all their wickedness, see how they prosper.

They're Healthy:

⁴They have no struggles;
Their bodies are healthy and strong.

⁵They are free from common human burdens;
They are not plagued by human ills.

They're Influential:

¹⁰Their people turn to them
And drink up waters in abundance.

They're Wealthy and Carefree:

¹²This is what the wicked are like--
Always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.

He looked around and he saw the wicked were living the dream and in his heart, he was not only troubled, he was *jealous*. He wanted what the wicked had. But his inner turmoil wasn't merely due to the wicked's prosperity, it was also due to his own suffering as one of God's people.

THE SUFFERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE CAUSED HIM TO QUESTION GOD'S GOODNESS.

¹³Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.

¹⁴All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.

¹⁵If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.

¹⁶When I tried to understand all this,
It troubled me deeply.

He'd trusted God, followed him, served and obeyed him, and for what? For affliction after affliction. Notice the relentlessness of his suffering; *all day long* I have been afflicted; *every morning* brings new punishments. Like the relentless waves against the cliffs, he's hit with sorrow upon sorrow. So much so,

that he throws his hand up and cries, “surely in vain have I kept my heart pure.” And compounding the burden of his plight is the psalmist’s ever-present awareness of the scandal of his jealousy and doubts, ever mindful of the devastating effect it could have on God’s children. It’s be nothing short of betrayal.

¹⁵If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.

Can you relate to this man’s pain?

Ever since you were in high school, you’ve been praying for your future spouse. You’ve been dreaming about your wedding. You’ve been looking forward to having a family. Trusting God as you patiently awaited his perfect timing. But as the years go by, you watch as friend after friend finds her prince, gets married, and starts a family; and you’re still waiting. You’ve been faithful. You’ve been pure. And you’re still single. And what makes it even harder, is you see classmates who care nothing for God, who’d lived all their younger years in rebellion against God now appear to flourish with the devoted man of their dreams at their side. And in your heart you envy them. *How is God good to his people?*

You and your spouse have tried for years to have a child. You’ve spent hours in prayer for God to give you a baby that you would love, provide for, and bring up in the Lord but after years of infertility, and three heart-breaking miscarriages, God continues to say no and it doesn’t make sense! You look around and you see thousands of people in this world with pregnancies they don’t even want, but you do, but God says no. *How is God good to his people?*

You’re fired by your boss due to the jealous slander of a coworker. You’re forgotten by your children who’ve grown up, moved out, and moved on. You’re diagnosed with cancer. You’re abused by your caretaker. You’re served the divorce papers. You’re handed the eviction notice. And in your heart, you wonder, *how is God good to his people?*

Have you been there before? Are you there now? Are you, like the Psalmist feeling your feet begin to slip? Here we've come to the lowest point of the Psalm. Here we find this man in a very dark place but thankfully, God in his mercy would not leave him there. Thankfully, this is not the end of his journey. Here in verse 17, we see a clear pivot in this man's downward trajectory from doubt towards faith. and what is that crucial turning point?

HE ENTERS THE SANCTUARY OF GOD

¹⁶When I tried to understand all this,
It troubled me deeply

^{17a}Till I entered the sanctuary of God;

Here in the midst of jealousy and doubt he shows up at church! What about you? When faced with jealousy and doubt where do you run? Here we see our Psalmist run to God. And I think it's important to recognize that he didn't feel like he had to "clean himself up" or "get his act together" before coming to God's house. He entered doubts, bitterness, jealousy and all. And it is there in His Sanctuary, that his faith is graciously renewed.

Let's consider the results of the Psalmist's visit to God's house. I see three:

IN GOD'S HOUSE HE GAINS A NEW PERSPECTIVE

¹⁶When I tried to understand all this,
It troubled me deeply

¹⁷Till I entered the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their final destiny.

As he stood there in the sanctuary of God, something drastically changed but it wasn't his circumstances, it was his perspective. His jealousy melted away as he was reminded of the inevitable destiny of the wicked.

¹⁸Surely you place them on slippery ground;
You cast them down to ruin.

¹⁹How suddenly are they destroyed,
Completely swept away by terrors!

²⁰They are like a dream when one awakes;
When you arise, Lord,
You will despise them as fantasies...

²⁷Those who are far from you will perish;
You destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

The wicked may prosper now, but their prosperity will end in destruction. And God's people may suffer now but their suffering will end in glory. The lives of Hugh Heffner and dear Annabelle raise serious doubts about God's goodness and justice, until we consider their ends. Heffner's prosperity ended in destruction.

²⁷Those who are far from you will perish;
You destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

But Annabelle's suffering ended in glory.

²⁴You guide me with your counsel,
And afterward you will take me to glory.

In God's house he gains a new perspective, and second:

IN GOD'S HOUSE HE REALIZES HIS IGNORANCE

²¹When my heart was grieved
And my spirit embittered,

²²I was senseless and ignorant;

I was a brute beast before you.

Here, with a fresh perspective, he recognizes that his jealous thoughts and doubts are borne out of an ignorance to the truth! How many of you remember the famous Gatorade Commercial “Be like Mike”? Well I, along with millions of other American kids growing up in the 90’s desperately wanted to be like Michael Jordan. I had his jerseys, posters, shoes, cards, and basketballs. I even had my own bottle of official Michael Jordan Cologne! I wanted to be like Mike. Unfortunately, as genetics would have it, *bald* is the only possible way that I am like Mike.

A couple summers ago, around the time Michael Jordan turned 50, I read a big fat biography on Mike, and here’s my greatest takeaway from those 700 pages: I *do not* want to be like Mike. He’s Bitter, Frustrated, Selfish, Cruel, Fearful, and Terribly Lonely. My envy and jealousy of Michael Jordan was merely senseless ignorance.

Do you know what this psalmist has realized? It doesn’t matter how wealthy, healthy, popular or powerful they are; being jealous of the wicked is senseless ignorance. Why? Because their end is always death. I’m reminded of a proverb in the 24th chapter:

¹⁸Do not fret because of evildoers
or be envious of the wicked,
²⁰for the evildoer has no future hope,
and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

Don’t envy them, pity them, and pray for them.

In God’s house, He gains a new perspective. In God’s house, he realizes his ignorance, and finally:

IN GOD'S HOUSE HE AFFIRMS GOD'S GOODNESS

²¹When my heart was grieved
And my spirit embittered,

²²I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.

²³But I am always with you;
You hold me by my right hand.

I am *always* with you. In light of where this guy had been, this is an astonishing truth! *He was a brute beast*. And yet, God did not abandon him. He didn't walk away. God was there holding him, guiding him, *always* with him. The Psalmist almost slipped. He nearly lost his foothold but he didn't! Why? *Because God was with him, holding him by the hand, refusing to let him go.*

Aren't you grateful for a God who's with us not only through the victories, but also through the failures? Aren't you thankful for a God who's holding his people even through the doubts? *especially* through the doubts.

²⁴You guide me with your counsel,
And afterward you will take me into glory.

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart
And my portion forever.

²⁷Those who are far from you will perish;
You destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

²⁸But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;

I will tell of all your deeds.

Here at the close of this psalmist's testimony, we see him resolutely affirm the unshakable goodness of God towards his people. Through this dark and difficult journey of sorrow, envy and doubt, here's what the poet realizes: *God is good, not because He gives us health or wealth, but because He gives us Himself.* And that is infinitely more valuable than anything this world could ever offer...

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart
And my portion forever.

God may not give us a spouse or a promotion or a child or a cure, but God is still good because he gives us something far greater: He gives us Himself.

And this side of the cross, this reality rings with even greater resonance doesn't it? For we have been given God-in-flesh—Jesus Christ—who is always with us, for us, and in us.

Why do the righteous suffer? If we're honest, there is really only one who's righteous. His name is Jesus. And why did he suffer? He suffered for our sins—*the righteous for the unrighteous*—and he did it to bring us to God. Jesus was forsaken by God so that we would never be.

Surely God is good to his people.