

PRAYING YOUR DOUBTS BEFORE GOD!

Our psalm this morning was written by a godly man named Asaph. The Bible says he directed the choir when David was king. The Bible says he spoke as a prophet and he wrote inspired hymns that have been sung by God's people for three thousand years. This psalm, Psalm 73, has always been on the top of the charts of favorite psalms. Asaph was a godly man, a skilled musician, and a sound theologian.

And yet, by his own confession in this psalm, he also had his doubts. What caused those doubts was the fact that it seemed as if the bad guys, the wicked, had it made and the good guys, God's people had all kinds of bad things happen to them. He is not alone with those thoughts. Job was a godly man in the Old Testament, and all kinds of bad things happened to him, he doubted God's justice. "Why would God let these things happen to me?" The prophet Habakkuk had the very same thoughts that Asaph expressed. He said, "**Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?**"

Do you have doubts like that as well? Do you sometimes wonder why God is letting you experience the hardship you are experiencing in your life? Do you wonder if God really has a plan for your life? Sometimes you have those doubts, but you are afraid to even speak them aloud. If you speak them, then the doubts are real, and you don't want to doubt! The psalmist teaches us this morning what to do with those doubts. We can pray them before God. And in praying them before God, he shows us to acknowledge our doubts, to doubt our doubts, and when we doubt, to look up.

A. Acknowledge your doubts

Can you open your bulletin to the psalm this morning? I want to show you some wonderful things about this psalm. And I would suggest that you don't leave this psalm alone this week. Pray it every day. Meditate on it. Immerse yourself in it. I've been doing that over the last few weeks and I can't wait to share this with you.

First let's get a road map to see where Asaph goes with this psalm. Notice that he starts with his doubts and he ends with faith. Verse 2 says, "**But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.**" We would say that his faith was hanging by a thread. But do you see where he ends up? Faith wins out over his doubts. Look at verse 26. "**My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**" No matter what else happens, I know God will not fail me. All I need, all I will ever need in my life, is to know my God and Savior.

Now look again at verse two. "**But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.**" He is standing on the rock of God's promises, but his feet are slipping and he is trying to hold on in the middle of this storm of doubts that he has. Then look at verse 18. "**Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.**" It seems like the wicked have it made, but they have no firm ground to stand on. They have no rock to hold onto, so that the least little setback in life can destroy them. Now look at verse 23. "**Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.**" Do you hear what he is saying? When I feel myself slipping and I can't hold on to God, then I know that God will hold on to me. God will not let me fall. Isn't that comforting in your doubts? God is holding on to you!

But let's get back to the beginning. The first thing Asaph does is to acknowledge to himself and to God that he has doubts. He describes vividly the life of the wicked and how they have it made. He is like someone who is sitting in the doctor's office and who picks up a *People*

magazine, looking at all the glamorous people. At fifty, they still look young and ravishing. They are sitting in mansions by their swimming pools or basking on a beach in an exclusive resort. They have it made! They look so healthy! And here I am, sitting in the doctor's office with this reoccurring nightmare of sickness in my body. I can hardly pay my rent. Nobody likes me on Facebook anymore. This is how Asaph feels, and he puts his feelings, his doubts, into words. ¹² **This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth.** ¹³ **Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.** ¹⁴ **All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning."**

Have you ever felt like that? Sure you have. You flunked your test in school when you worked so hard and the kid next to you said he didn't study and got an A. You sprained your ankle the day before your team played the sectional game to get you into the state tournament. Your friend at work got a dozen roses from her husband on Valentines' Day and you got nothing more than a "Happy Valentine's Day."

God, I hate my life. I hate working long hours and having nothing to show for it. I hate not having someone who really loves me and cares for me. Every time I watch a romance on television, I can't help but wonder why there's no one in my life who really loves me. I hate getting old and looking at wrinkles and feeling awful when I wake up in the morning, when people ten years older than me look better and feel better than I do. Why does life have to be so unfair? Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people? **"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.** ³ **For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."**

Friends, when you doubt, you don't have to get nasty with God. You don't have to speak to him from a rebellious heart. But if you have doubts, it is better to acknowledge them than to stuff them as if they don't exist. He has big ears and a bigger heart and God will listen to your doubts. But then, what do you DO with them?

B. Doubt your doubts

Look at verse 21-22 in Asaph's psalm. **"When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you."** Do you hear what Asaph was confessing? He's saying, "When I thought these things and felt these things in my heart, I was like a dumb animal!" He is teaching us to doubt our doubts.

Our heart says, "What good does it do to believe in God? What difference does it make in my life? God, don't I deserve better than this?" Think about that for a moment. Remember that you are no less sinful than anyone else in the world. I hope that you believe that, because it is true. You have committed just as much adultery in your heart as any Hollywood movie star. You have been greedy in your heart for money just as surely as any of those billionaires on Wall Street. So should believers have it better off in the world than unbelievers? The Bible never makes that promise. In fact, just the opposite, the Bible says that when a tsunami hits or a hurricane or a fire or a plague, the believers will be swept away along with the unbelievers. God doesn't target unbelievers and he doesn't target Christians, either. Doubt your doubts. Question your doubts to see if they hold up under scrutiny.

Our heart says, as Asaph's heart said, "But why do the wicked prosper? Why do they have it made?" Really? Is that really so? Well, *People* magazine says so, so it certainly must be true! Asaph writes in verses 18-20: **"Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies."** Why would you envy the wicked? When the market crashed in the Great Depression, people who lost their fortunes in the stock market jumped out of skyscrapers to their death. You see, they had it made, but they didn't have anything to fall back on. Without God in their lives, without God's promises, they were living on slippery ground with no one to catch them when they fell. Doubt your doubts!

In verses 16-17, the psalmist says: **“When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.”** What does that mean to “enter the sanctuary?” In the Old Testament, it meant that the psalmist went up to the temple to know God and to enter his presence. But what does it mean for you today? I remember this moment as if it happened yesterday. I was about twenty years old and knew just enough German that I could talk to my Aunt (Tante) Ida. Tanta Ida was a simple, wonderful Christian lady. She once scolded my Grandmother because she didn’t have her psalms and prayers memorized. Who will read them to you when you can’t see anymore? And what if you can’t hear? At age 94, she could hardly see through eyes clouded with heavy cataracts. That day I visited her, she was depressed. She said she had nothing to live for. Her husband died when she was only fifty. She couldn’t get out of her cramped apartment. She couldn’t see. She was frail and weak. She couldn’t even go to church. “I have nothing,” she said, “nothing at all.” After about what seemed like a minute of silence, I said to her, “Tanta Ida, you always have the Savior.” And a grin broke across her face, and she said, “Ach, ja. And the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, and the Holy Spirit, and they joy of salvation.” In that moment, she saw Jesus in his promises. She entered the sanctuary. You see, the unbeliever has nothing to fall back on when life is not good. You do. You have your Savior! So doubt your doubts, and then look up.

C. When in doubt, look up.

Can we read verses 23-26 together? **“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing 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 see what God has given us in Jesus? The psalmist says, “You hold me by my right hand.” There is a beautiful story in the New Testament about Peter and Jesus. The disciples were rowing across the Sea of Galilee when a storm came up and threatened to overwhelm their boats. Jesus came to them walking on the water. At first they thought he was a ghost. When he identified himself, Peter asked if he could come to him on the water. He got out of the boat and took a few steps. Then he saw the wind and became afraid and he began to sink. He called out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. Don’t you see? Jesus rescues you even in the middle of your doubts! So when in doubt, look up! Look for Jesus to help you!

The psalmist writes: **“You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.”** There is no promise in the Bible that says that Christians will have an easy life here on this earth. There is promise after promise after promise that for Jesus’ sake, God will take us into glory and give us exactly the opposite of what we deserve. We deserve eternal hell. We deserve nothing but misery on earth. What does God give us instead? He holds on to us with his firm and powerful hand through the miseries of this life and then he takes us to glory. Paul wrote in Romans 8:18: **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** Do you see what God has prepared for you in heaven? When the circumstances of life roll over you and cause you to doubt, look up and see what God has planned for you!

The psalmist says: **“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”** In some ways, I am looking forward to growing old and feeble and frail. Why would I say that? Because when I get to be like my Tanta Ida and there is nothing left for me in this world, then I will be holding on to the only thing that really matters. I will be holding on to Jesus. I will enter his sanctuary every day and know that when all else fails, Jesus is more than enough. The challenge at this time of my life is to lose my focus on Jesus because I have become enamored with the unimportant things in my life. So when you are in your wheelchair, look up! And when you are where you are in your life right now, look up!

I hope you have enjoyed this psalm as much as I have. Go home and pray it all week. Acknowledge your doubts. Doubt your doubts. And when in doubt, look up! Amen.