
Seduced, Reduced & then Brought Back

Psalm 73

Dan Turner

Introduction *Good means so many things to so many people. A child with a kite thinks windy weather is good. The adult with golf clubs does not think so. Giddy girls at the theater playing High School Musical thinks the movie is good. Brawny boys would rate it differently. Piping hot pasta with succulent seafood to my wife is good and yet to my 7 yr. old daughter it is not. Good means so many things to so many people*

Now this observation is not overly stimulating and significant until we talk about God – God is good. What this phrase means and whether or not we believe it is the theme for this morning’s message.

Please open your Bibles to Psalm 73.

An Overview of the Psalm

To gain a clear view of and set the agenda for this morning’s message let’s first look at an overview of Psalm 73.

v.1 GOD IS GOOD

v.2 But I... (breaks with Israelite tradition) = Drift

v. 23 But I... (breaks with alternative lifestyle) = Repentance

v. 28 GOD IS GOOD

This is no mere individual Psalm. Ps.73 carries much freight. It puts forth a meta-narrative. It traces the big picture not only of the Israelites but all of God’s people. The movement of this story is a movement of faith into, through and out of confusion. It is marked by weakened faith as well as joyous trust. It is a presentation of a struggle with God and a wonderful communion with God.

This is a story that reflects our Parents in the Garden of Eden (that is, Adam & Eve; cf. Gen.3:1-5). This is a story that mirrors both you and me. This is a story of a heart seduced, reduced and then brought back. (pray)

The Premise Pronounced

v.1

Verse one lays down the premise of the psalm. Here in this opening statement we come to a well-known truth for an Israelite. *“Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart”*. From generation to generation the Israelites taught what they were taught from the Torah “God is good”. This basic understanding of the LORD’s nature was received down through the centuries as an indisputable tradition.

Back in 1961 in the classic *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer said of the goodness of God, “The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick

sympathy...By His nature He is inclined to bestow blessedness and He takes holy pleasure in the happiness of His people.” (p.82).

According to v.1, we also notice at whom the goodness of God is aimed. The phrase “to Israel (i.e. those who are pure in heart)” tells the reader that the goodness of God leans toward the covenant community. This promise of v.1 is for those who genuinely are God’s people; those who believe His Word in an obeying way.

The Problem Presented

v.2-16

V.2-16 now put forward the problem for this psalmist. In v.2-3 we hear him say, (read).

In a confession of sin

v.2-3

The “*But as for me*” at the beginning of this unit seems to suggest that the established truth for the Israelite in verse one was problematic. His personal experience on the one hand and Israelite tradition on the other don’t fit together. He was taught from an early age that “God is good to Israel”. And yet, as he grew up and lived life his experience told him that this “Sunday School theology” wasn’t altogether accurate. In the midst of this confusion what does the psalmist do?

The confession in v.3 “*I was envious*” lets us in on the condition of his heart. He was experiencing a desire of something so much that he lost trust and contentment in the goodness of God. And as a result of this defected and defecting desire we see his actions. He began to look around for alternatives. These alternatives were substitutes of genuine grace and goodness that were found among the affluent. Listen as I read v.4-11.

In a description of the affluent

v.4-11

In these verses we come across a group called “They”. These people are described as healthy, wealthy, beautiful and brutal. They are the ones who have much pleasure and little pain. Verse 11 describes their experience in one of two ways. They believe that either God is good to the wicked or God is irrelevant so it matters not how one thinks and lives. The conclusion either way is this: From this group’s viewpoint wicked works & sin satisfies.

In tension with Truth

v.12-16

Now as we get to v.12-16 we step into the epicenter of the psalmist’s difficulty. Let’s watch this story unfold as I read v.12-16 (read).

The words “*Behold, these are the wicked*” give us the sense that the psalmist doubts his upbringing. He describes the wicked in v.4-11 in a way that suggests that the teaching he received as an Israelite was wrong. In effect, he is saying “my education and the tradition passed on to me by my pastor and my parents tell me that these people are the ones who would suffer. The book of Proverbs teaches that “the way of the wicked is hard”. Psalm one teaches me that the wicked perish. Yea right! It doesn’t look too hard to me. If that is what is meant by “perishing” I’ll take a piece of that”.

The phrase “*All in vain have I...*” demonstrates how he is thinking. It is apparent that now he has been seduced to the wicked’s “superior way”. Life now for him could be summed up by the song “How can it be so wrong when it feels so right?” He measured life not by faithfulness but by pragmatism (that is, does this lifestyle work?) and immediate gratification (that is, will decisions yield sensual rewards?).

Will this drift continue for someone in God’s covenant community? Can the psalmist continue yielding to the seduction of the world?

The heart of an attentive listener begins to beat with exhilaration and anticipation as v.14-16 are read again. Listen closely. (read)

Sobriety starts in these verses. Restlessness begins. Thoughts of hurting the community of believers (the next generation) haunt the psalmist. He thought about how his words and ways shaped by seduction would betray God’s people and influence the children.

As he pulled away from desirable, attractive, alluring wickedness, v.16 shows him still not in repentance. He tries on his own to figure out what is happening in his soul. Why does he crave evil? Why would he want to follow the beautiful and brutal outside the covenant community? He labors under these types of questions with little success...little that is, until verse 17.

The Pivotal Point

v.17

A decisive time

Finally v.17 comes and we arrive at the pivotal point in the psalm. (cf. John 4:23; Matt.12:6)

“*Into the sanctuary*” the psalmist went. Entering the holy place where God’s holiness and people’s hope reside, the sinner was brought to repentance and his discernment was brought back. His insight of the alternative lifestyle (of v.2-13) was clear and correct. Notice the shift in the direction of his thinking and talking. In v.17 he stops the horizontal thinking and starts the vertical thinking & talking.

Life for him now was before the face of God. Truth he had accepted as reality before now was reality again. In the sanctuary a purified perspective was given. This we see in v.18-28 (read).

The Purified Perspective

v.18-28

The purified perspective gave the psalmist:

- *Ability to see the future of the wicked (v.18-20)*. It was easy now for the psalmist to stop pursuing the alluring alternatives.
- *Grief necessary to regret his sin (v.21-22)*. It was easy (though painful) now for the psalmist to be sad over his stupid and rebellious infatuation.

- *Capacity to recognize God in the midst of the mess (v.23-24).* These verses are beyond price. He now is able to see where God was when he was rebelling. The expression “*I am continually with You*” introduces a foundational truth. This statement is not a resolution but rather a statement of fact. In other words, the psalmist is talking about God’s faithfulness not the psalmist’s fidelity or determination. The talk shifts to the pronoun “*You*” telling us that the speaker see himself not as an agent of change but as a recipient of grace. **YOU HOLD, GUIDE & THEN RECEIVE ME – WOW!** Life is a gift; not an achievement.
- *Desire for God and God alone (v.25-26).* The psalmist came to see that his strength and portion is found only in the LORD. Out of transformed perspective comes transformed passion.
- *Conviction that God is good to His people (v.27-28).* We have come full circle by noticing the contrast with v.2. At the outset of this psalm the goodness of God seemed like a farce. Now, the goodness of God is realized as a reality. Distance leads to death. Nearness leads to good. He will now unashamedly tell of all God’s works.

In conclusion, drawing from Psalm 73, hear and heed the following five exhortations for your good and His glory. **Conclusion**

1. *First, be alert to your own signs of early drift.*

(Things like envy, lust or jealousy. Remember sin begins in the heart with a preference for anything over God and then acting on those preferences. See 1John 2:15-17; 5:21)

2. *Second, be aware of and honest about your personal vulnerabilities.*

(Where do you see and perhaps look for v.4-11 = credible counterfeits = advertisements and programs on T.V., Window shopping at the Mall, catalogs and popular magazines, internet, etc. See Pr.7:8; Rom. 6:13)

3. *Third, be persuaded that full and forever is far better than partial and passing.*

(The teaching on the preference of God over all “riches and pleasures of life” See Lk.8:14; Heb. 11:25)

4. *Forth, be convinced that sanity comes in the context of community. Insanity is found in isolation.*

(The doctrine of Christ and His church as the new and abiding sanctuary. See John 2:19; 4:23; Matt.12:6; 1Cor. 3:16)

5. *Fifth, be confident that God’s grace keeps and perseveres God’s people.*

(The teaching that God’s grace perseveres God’s people. This is largely done by awakening His people to the fact that God is supreme and sin is a sham. See Jer.2:12; Heb. 11:24-26; James 1:14-15)

(Transition into member restoration)



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The Chapel Pulpit • <date> Sunday Morning

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