

STAYING SANE AS BELIEVERS IN AN AGE OF DARKNESS

I. PSALM 73: A PSALM OF ASAPH

¹⁶ David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments: lyres, harps and cymbals. ¹⁷ So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel; from his brothers, Asaph son of Berekiah; and from their brothers the Merarites, Ethan son of Kushaiah (1 Ch. 15:16-17, NIV).

II. ASAPH'S STRUGGLE

VV 1-2: ¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

- My steps have **held fast to your paths**; my feet have not slipped. (Ps. 17:5, ESV)
- But I had nearly **lost confidence**; my faith was **almost gone** (Ps. 73:2, TEV)

2. Lesser Authorities

a) Human beings

VV 3-4: ³ For I **envied** the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴They have no struggles (*"they seem to live such painless lives,"* NLT); their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven (*"they speak as if they rule in heaven,"* NET; *"they set their mouths against the heavens,"* ESV; *"they speak evil of God in heaven,"* TEV), and their tongues take possession of the earth (*"lay claim to the earth,"* NET; *"strut across the earth,"* HCSB). ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance (*"drinking in all their words,"* NLT; *"eagerly believe whatever they say,"* TEV; cf Dt. 32:2 [NIV]—*"Let my teaching fall like rain..."*). ¹¹ They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" 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 (*"So why have I have kept my heart pure? Why have I kept my hands from doing wrong?"* NCV). ¹⁴ All day long I have been **plagued**; I have been **punished** (*"rebuked,"* ESV; *"chastened,"* NJKV) every morning.

- ²⁸ At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, ²⁹ so that **the Levites** (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. (Dt. 14:28-29, NIV).
- **V 16:** When I tried to understand all this, it was **oppressive** to me...

- **V 21-22:** When my heart was **grieved** and my spirit **embittered**, ²² I was **senseless** and **ignorant**; I was a **brute beast** (“an unthinking animal,” HCSB) before you (“toward you,” NCV; “with you,” CJB).

III. ASAPH’S SANITY IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

VV 3-7: ¹⁵ If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ **till I entered the sanctuary of God (“the precincts of God’s temple,” NET); then I understood their final destiny.** ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰ As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory (“will lead me to a position of honor,” NET; “at the end you will receive me with honour,” TEV; “leading me to a glorious destiny,” NLT). ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But 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.

- ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ **Because of these, the wrath of God is coming** (Col. 3:5-6, NIV).
- ²³ This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his **wisdom** or the strong man boast of his **strength** or the rich man boast of his **riches**, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he **understands and knows me**, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD. (Jer. 9:23-24, NIV)

IV. “TILL I ENTERED THE SANCTUARY”

¹⁶When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ **till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I *understood* their final destiny.**

¹They brought the ark of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and they presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before God. ² After David had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD. ³ Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each Israelite man and woman. ⁴ He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to **make petition**, to **give thanks**, and to **praise the LORD**, the God of Israel: ⁵ Asaph was the chief... They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals, ⁶ and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God (1 Ch. 16:1-6, NIV).

¹David and the army officers selected some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to prophesy as they played stringed instruments and cymbals. The following men were assigned this

responsibility: ² From the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asarelah. The sons of Asaph were supervised by Asaph, who **prophesied** under the king's supervision ("*who proclaimed God's messages whenever the king commanded,*" TEV) (1 Ch. 25:1-2, NET).

- Ps 37, Ps 84

¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, **have mercy** on me, a sinner.' (Lit *be propitious to me; "turn Your wrath from me,"* HCSB). ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk. 18:13-14)

- "The Rabbis mention the following five acts as belonging to the offerer of a sacrifice: the laying on of hands, slaying, skinning, cutting up, and washing the inwards. These other five were strictly priestly functions: Catching up the blood, sprinkling it, lighting the altar fire, laying on the wood, bringing up the pieces, and all else done at the altar itself. The whole service must have been exceedingly solemn....But this was only the commencement of the service. Women might bring their sacrifices into the Great Court; but they might not perform the second rite—that of laying on of hands. This meant transmission and delegation, and implied representation; so that it really pointed to the substitution of the sacrifice for the sacrificer. Hence it was always accompanied by confession of sin and prayer....In all private sacrifices, except firstlings, tithes, and the Paschal lamb, hands were laid on, and, while doing so, the following prayer was repeated: 'I entreat, O Jehovah: I have sinned, I have done perversely, I have rebelled, I have committed (naming the sin, trespass, or, in case of a burnt-offering, the breach of positive or negative command); but I return in repentance, and let this be for my atonement (covering).'¹

V. TRUE SANITY

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a **fool** that he may become **wise**. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. (1 Cor. 3:18-19a, ESV).

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ*. (London: James Clarke & Co., 1959), 112–114.

