

True Treasure

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Welcome to Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. If you are new or visiting with us, welcome. We are glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats but because we are following after Jesus together as one community and as we follow after Jesus together we've become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it which means that God has something to say to everyone in his word whether we've been Christians our entire lives, whether we maybe have been Christians for a few months, whether we would call ourselves not Christians, whether we have doubts or questions or objections to Christianity, God comes and speaks to all of us in his word and so that's why we come every week and take a look at what God has to say to us. We are finishing up a series in the book of Psalms and as I've been telling you the book of Psalms is the hymn book and the prayer book of God's people in the Old Testament, the Israelites, and continues to be used as all of the New Testament, all of the Old Testament by God's people in the New Testament, the church. It's a guide for us in how to worship God, how to talk to him, how to pray and like any song book it has all kinds of different angles on it, all different ways we could think about it or look at it. And one thing we talked about last week was the fact that the Bible, the Psalms, talk about our emotions. God uses them to shape our emotions, to help us understand what to do with them, how to have right emotions, how to stir up all kinds of emotions that we need to have, godly emotions, how to deal with emotions that come and surprise us. And as the Psalms do that, one of the things that's unique about the Psalms, maybe not unique but true, it's true of other parts of scripture, is that it's incredibly raw and brutal and honest. The psalmist doesn't pull punches about what it's like to live life in this world. In fact, I would suggest that the Psalms are more honest about the life of faith, about the Christian life than we are sometimes. The psalmist is more likely to call a spade a spade than we are. And we're going to come to a passage this morning, Psalm 73, which talks about one way in which the psalmist has doubt. The Psalms are a reminder to us that God knows that we struggle with doubts. He knows that sometimes we wonder if it's a good idea to continue following after him. Sometimes we wonder if it would be easier and better to just step away, to not be call ourselves a Christian anymore. And God also knows that when we look around at the world around us and we see people who aren't following God, and we see how well they're doing in their lives, we're tempted to wonder whether it's really worth it or not. And because the Psalms are so brutally honest and raw, the psalmist is going to bring that specific struggle before us this morning in Psalm 73. And when we see people who aren't following God and are doing well, we're tempted to give up on the Christian life and give in to sin. We're tempted to give up on the Christian life and give in to sin. And so it's with that that we come to Psalm 73. I'm going to read it now. You can follow along in your worship guide. It's printed near the back or in your Bible or on your phone. And as we come to God's Word, remember that He tells us that His Word is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb, and it is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And that's the reason that we come to God's Word reading now starting with verse 1. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Verse 4. 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.

Verse 10.

Therefore, His people turn back to them and find no fault in them. 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.

[5 : 02] Verse 13. 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.

If I had said I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. 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. Verse 18. 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. Oh Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast toward you. Verse 23. 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.

[6 : 06] 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.

Verse 27. 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. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you again, as we do every week, for your word that you've given to us.

That you haven't left us alone, but you've spoken to us. And we thank you even more that you don't ask us to plaster on happy faces. You don't ask us to pretend.

You don't ask us to ignore our doubts. But instead, you name them for us. And you help us to see them and discuss them and address them.

[7 : 14] We ask that you would come this morning and that you would help us to do that very thing. That you would use your word to speak clearly to us. That we would leave understanding it more and knowing and loving and trusting you more as well.

So, we ask these things not because we have earned them, but because Jesus has earned them for us. And so, we ask them in his name. Amen. If you are a sports fan at all, you know one of the great frustrations of sport fans.

Especially, I would say, if you're maybe a football fan or a basketball fan. Not just one of the great frustrations, but one of the great excuses. If your team doesn't win, there's always an easy scapegoat, right?

You can always blame the refs. In fact, this is something that people constantly discuss and get outraged about. There was a bad call in this game or that game.

We experienced it recently last year with the Broncos. There was a big uproar about one of their games against the Kansas City Chiefs. And how if the ref had made a different call at a different time, they would have stopped the momentum from the Chiefs and the Broncos would have been able to win.

[8 : 28] I'm sure many of you are going to carry that bitterness with you for years to come. And one individual compares Psalm 73 to exactly that.

This is the psalmist accusing God of being a terrible ref. When he looks at the world around him, he has his head knowledge.

Verse 1, Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But then when he looks around, what he knows in his head doesn't seem to be true of the world around him. That's what he thinks is true.

He says theologically God's good to Israel, but it just doesn't seem to be true in his experience. In his experience, it seems like God actually is not good. He's making some terrible calls. And so that's why in verses 2 and 3 he tells us, His feet had almost stumbled.

His steps had nearly slipped. Why? Because verse 3, I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. God knows that there are many times when we're going to question his goodness.

[9 : 30] And God knows that there are times when we will look around and wonder if being a Christian is really worth it. And God knows what the psalmist sees in verse 73, that sometimes it seems like it's people who don't follow God who prosper and flourish the most.

And so that's where we get what the psalmist heads into in these following verses. He sees all these terrible calls that God's making. There are these evil people, these wicked from verse 3, verse 4.

They're incredibly healthy. They have no pains until death. They don't experience the problems that other people experience, verse 5. And they do this even though they are violent and proud, verse 6. Even though they're filled with foolishness, verse 7. They seem to have all they need to eat and more. Their words are terrible, verses 8 and 9. And yet it seems like God isn't doing anything about it.

Instead, they're prospering. And so this leads the psalmist to have all kinds of doubts. We saw in verse 3, he's envious. He wonders why those people have these things and he doesn't.

[10 : 47] He's tempted again to wonder if God is really just. Verse 11, how can God actually know everything? If God was truly omniscient, if he was all-knowing, why would he allow these things to happen? And then he wonders, verses 13 and 14, if it's really worth living the righteous life.

If it's really worth the sacrifice of following after God. If this is what he gets for it. Now, not all of us may face this kind of doubt, although I'm sure many of us do some of the time, and maybe all of us have at some time.

But there's many kinds of situations and places where we look around and we see that those who don't know God, who don't follow God, who don't trust him, appear to be doing exceptionally well. Now, it might just be a place where it feels unfair.

It may not have anything to do with sin. It may be you and your spouse have struggled to have children and you see people who are not Christians all around you who are having children all the time. And you wonder, how in the world could God be just?

I've given my life to him. I'm following after him. And yet he's giving his blessings, not to me, but to other people. You may be facing all kinds of medical needs as you reach a certain age and you look around your friends who are the same age that you are, people who don't love God and follow God, and they seem to be having these carefree, active lives.

[12 : 04] And you wonder, God, why haven't you given that to me? I'm the one who's following after you. You might be struggling to pay and finance your life in retirement and you see people around you who have not a care in the world.

And you wonder why God did not help you store up in the same way that they did. It might be that you're struggling to find a job that has purpose and power, work that's actually going to pay enough for you to support yourself and your family.

And it seems that the doors are closing. And yet you see people who do violent things and deceitful things. And it seems to be not a problem at all for them to find a job that gives them enough.

Maybe it's something that is the result of sin. You've committed, you've followed God to be ethical in your business. And it only seems to be harming you rather than helping you.

All you're doing is falling behind. You've decided to honor God by remaining faithful in your marriage. And you look around and you see people who've chosen to not do that.

[13 : 12] And it seems like they are having an amazing life. You go and you watch videos about and movies about people whose lives become better when they forsake their marriages.

And so you wonder, why is God asking me to do that? Maybe you have decided you are not going to commit your life to work.

You're actually going to observe a Sabbath. There are going to be times when you rest. And all it does, it seems to be getting you behind as other people sprint ahead. Maybe you've embraced God's call to sexual integrity and faithfulness.

And when you're at work, your coworkers are constantly discussing the sexual experiences that they're having. And it seems to be harming them in no way. And so you wonder why these are the blessings that other people are experiencing and you are not.

The psalmist here in Psalm 73 sees that the righteous suffer and the wicked flourish and he is confused. He's confused and that's what leads him to this envy.

[14 : 18] Verse 3, this questioning of God and his goodness. And then his wondering whether it's really worth it. He says in verse 13, all in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in

innocence.

All this trouble that I've been taking to live a faithful life and do what God's asked me and commanded me to do has been for nothing. Because when I look at the world around me, it's clear that the calls that God's making, when God is a ref, he's actually giving the blessings to the wicked. And so that's why we're told in verses 2 and 3, his feet had almost stumbled, his steps had nearly slipped. Why is God allowing the world to work in this way? Why did he tell us in Psalm 1 that if you're righteous, you're going to be like a tree planted by streams of water and everything you're going to do is going to prosper, but not so the wicked.

If that's true, why does the world look as it does? And the psalmist is honest enough to say this and write it down, and God is good enough to us and knows enough that we're just dust to put it in the book of the psalms.

And the psalmist comes with the entirety of his doubts and his fears, and he brings them to God. But then he has a turning point.

[15:51] He has a new perspective, and what is it that brings his new perspective? Well, verse 16, he tells us how difficult this is. I thought, how would I understand this? It seems to be a wearisome task. He's exhausted with thinking about this.

Verse 17, until. Until what? What is it that gives the psalmist clarity? Until I went into the sanctuary of God.

In other words, the psalmist was overwhelmed and confused, tempted to abandon God in his ways until he showed up to worship. And when he showed up to worship, he gained a new clarity and a new perspective.

It's like someone who's not been able to see for a long time. Things have been getting blurrier and blurrier. And maybe you experienced this if you're someone who wears glasses like me. The first time you got them, you put them on, you thought, wow, everything is much more clear than it's ever been in the past.

And I can see farther away than I've ever been able to see before. That's what happens to the psalmist here. When he shows up to worship, he's able to finally get a new perspective.

[17:08] He's able to see reality as it is. So I'll just pause here for a second and say part of the reason that we come to worship every Sunday is it helps us get back in touch with reality.

That we live in a world where we have all sorts of messages being given to us all sorts of, all the time, some of which are true and some of which are not true. And we come to worship every Sunday because God has commanded us to, but also because he loves us.

It's for his glory and it's also for our good. He uses worship to help us remember and understand what is most true in this world. He uses worship not necessarily to change our circumstances, but he uses it to change our perspective.

And that's what happens here to the psalmist. He has all these questions about God. He sees the circumstances around him. He comes into the sanctuary. His circumstances don't change. He doesn't suddenly become someone who's fat and sleek, verse four.

He doesn't necessarily become someone whose eyes swell out through fatness, but he does become someone who understands. Because, verse 17, what is it that he gives him new vision?

[18:21] He discerned their end. In other words, the psalmist begins to have an eternal perspective of everything that he's seeing around him.

And that's what he tells us in verses 18 through 22. How is it that I can make sense of the fact that the people around me who don't follow God seem to be flourishing?

What is it that worship helps me understand? Verse 18, Truly you set them in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin. Verse 19, 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. Before, the psalmist was maybe only remembering part of Psalm 1.

The part of Psalm 1 that says that the righteous are going to prosper. Everything that they're going to do is going to prosper. But he'd forgotten the other part of Psalm 1. That the wicked are like the chaff that the wind blows away.

[19:28] And so we see why Psalm 1 is the introduction to the Psalter because it's the psalm that sets out at the beginning that there are only two ways to live. And that those who follow after God will live with God.

But those who rebel against God will perish. And so the psalmist sees that all these things that are happening to the wicked, their wealth, their prosperity, their health, is temporary.

And while they experience it now, God's judgment is coming. And so while he thinks he's tempted to believe that God is a poor ref making bad calls, he actually sees that God is the ultimate ref making good calls.

Verses 18 and 19, these are people who are not going to get away with what they're doing forever. And so their prosperity is only for a moment. If someone is prospering, no matter how much they're prospering, if they don't know God, it will all disappear in a moment.

It's of little value. On the other hand, the psalmist doesn't just understand the end of the wicked, he also understands that God is with the righteous. Verses 23 and 26, The psalmist realizes something that maybe some of you have experienced at times, especially if you're a parent.

[21 : 18] There are times when you have a child and the child wants maybe your things, your possessions, your support, your finances, but the child doesn't want you.

A child is interested in the things rather than the relationship. When the psalmist comes into worship, he understands that he has been interested in the things that God can give him, but he's not been interested in God.

He's been interested in the things that God can give him, but he's not been interested in God.

Notice what he doesn't say in verses 23 through 26. Oh, I understood that God is actually going to give me a blessing on faith in a few years, and if I just wait for it patiently enough, I too will also prosper in my health and my finances.

No, he doesn't see God's justice as giving him what he sees the wicked as having. Instead, he realizes that God's offer to him isn't stuff, but God offers him himself.

As one person puts it, what the wicked get is this wealth and this health. What the psalmist gets is God. The wicked get health and wealth.

[22 : 43] What the psalmist gets is God. And so the wicked get health and riches temporarily. The psalmist gets God permanently. The wicked get riches and health temporarily.

The psalmist gets God permanently. Verse 23, he has God's presence. He gets God. He's in the sanctuary.

In the Old Testament, the sanctuary would have been the place that represented God's presence among his people. And that foreshadows when God would become even more present with his people.

We don't have a sanctuary anymore. The curtain of the temple was torn in two when Jesus died because Jesus came to be God's presence with us. That if we have any doubt of God's presence in his relationship and his love for us and with us, we only need to remember that his presence, as the psalmist experiences it in part in the sanctuary, we see it and know it in full because Jesus came and actually lived as a man on this earth in a human body with us to show us God's presence.

Now you might be thinking, well that doesn't do me a whole lot of good, right? Jesus isn't here right now. But Jesus tells us in John 16 it's actually better that he would leave because he's given us the Holy Spirit to guide us in all truth is what he says in John.

[24 : 16] And so the psalmist has God's presence here. We, people in the New Testament, have God's Holy Spirit that he gives us to guide us and be with us and comfort us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to obey God.

It enables us to do what God's commanded us to do. If we're in difficult circumstances like the psalmist and discouraged and afraid we can pray to God to send his spirit to help us.

If we don't know what to do God tells us in James chapter 1 that we can pray to God and he will give us wisdom. Notice the psalmist doesn't say that he looks at the wicked and he sees all the wisdom that they have.

He doesn't even say that he sees the peace and joy and contentment that they have. All he can see is their health and their wealth. 24, you guide me with your counsel.

God gives us his word to show us how to walk in this world. And that's not what the wicked have in Psalm 73. Instead, they have a very bad surprise waiting for them because verse 19 they're destroyed in a moment.

[25 : 26] And then finally, verse 24, afterwards you will receive me to glory. The psalmist realizes that while the wicked will perish, while they've set in slippery places, he is in a solid place.

Because he's taken refuge in God even though he doesn't experience all the benefits and prosperity that he wants to experience now, he has the hope that he is going to be with God forever. That when he dies, God's going to receive him to glory. He's going to take part in the new creation. When God comes and makes everything right in this world, the psalmist is going to be a part of that. And so he has something greater, far greater, and far more glorious than those in the world around him that he looks at. That's the realization he has as he comes and he comes into the sanctuary and discerns, verse 17, therein.

He understands that God is bringing judgment and destruction on the wicked, but bringing salvation to the righteous. And so that's how he comes to understand, to give this new perspective.

[26 : 38] He has an eternal perspective now on the circumstances around him. Again, his circumstances haven't changed, but his perspective has. Coming and worshiping God helps him to understand what is most real and most true in this world.

I said earlier, if some of you are parents, you've had this experience potentially of a child being interested in your stuff, but not in you. But you also know if you've interacted with young children that often the opposite is also true, especially when they're small and little, that they will choose their parent over anything.

That a young child, the weaned child that we talked about last week in Psalm 131 would rather be with its mother than with anyone else, no matter how much wealth and health and prosperity that they have.

And that's what happens to the psalmist here. I am continually with you, verse 23. He would rather be with God than have all the prosperity with someone else.

He'd rather be with his parent than anywhere else. He understands that there's something more important and valuable than wealth and status.

[27 : 58] If you're not a Christian, this psalm is telling us no matter how much money and health you have, you lack God now and you will one day have ultimate poverty.

No matter how much health and wealth you have, you lack God now and you will one day have ultimate poverty. If you are a Christian, it doesn't matter how much you lack.

You have God now and you will have him forever. It doesn't matter how much you lack, you have God now and that is ultimate wealth.

Notice that the psalmist's solution is not for God to give him things he doesn't have now, but for God to be with him and for him. And so if you're struggling as the psalmist is, if you're struggling in verse 3 being envious of the arrogant and the prosperity of the wicked, if you're struggling with verse 11 wondering if God is truly just, if he truly knows what's going on in this world, and if you're struggling with verse 13 wondering if it's actually worth it to live a holy life, then on the one hand you're in good company here with the psalmist.

But God never leaves us where we are. He always takes us somewhere and he does that in this psalm. And he shows us that our hope and our trust is not in a change in circumstances, but a change in perspective.

[29 : 41] The psalmist here reassesses what is valuable and worthwhile. Verse 1, he says, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

So theologically he believes in God's goodness, but experientially in his heart he does not see it or know it until he comes to the very last verse.

If you've heard me teach and preach for a while, you know I'm a big fan of bookends. And the word good shows up in the first verse and the last verse. Verse 1, this good is just a theological statement that's completely divorced from the psalmist experience.

I know God's good. I don't see it because he seems to be giving his goodness to everyone else. In 28, the very last verse, he now knows, but for me it is what?

Good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of all your works. As he goes through this psalm, as he pours out his lament, as he reassesses everything in the perspective of eternity, the psalmist gets a new definition of what good is.

[30 : 59] And so he can say, not just with his head, but with his heart, verse 1, truly God is good to Israel. Why? Verse 28, because it is good to be near God.

I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of all your works. His refuge is the one who protects him. And he's telling of all of God's works.

That's part of what he's doing in the sanctuary. And so as he understands that God is his safety and his hope and his treasure, that the things that the people around him have that he doesn't have are temporary and the things that he has that they don't have are permanent.

He's able to take refuge in God and sing of God's works. Now for those of us who are in the New Testament, the people of the church, taking refuge in God, we would talk about this as having faith in Christ.

In the Old Testament, he knew that God was the one who was going to save him, that would receive him into glory, verse 27. But he did not know exactly how that was going to happen.

[32 : 11] We now know that God's refuge to us is a refuge that he gives us through Jesus. That because Jesus had no refuge when he died on the cross, because God poured out his wrath and his punishment, the destruction in verse 19 that the wicked received, Jesus received on our behalf, we can look to Jesus as our refuge.

And no matter what happens, no matter what other people have that we don't, we know that that's something that we cannot lose. While wealth and health are things that we can.

And the work, verse 28, that we tell of, the work that we praise God for more than anything else is his work of sending his son, of sending Jesus to live as a man in this world, to live a perfect life that we didn't live.

to die the death that we deserved so that everyone who has faith and hope and trust in him would be able to be near God, to make the Lord God our refuge and tell of all his works.

If you were following the news last fall, you may have not just heard about the Broncos, but you may have also heard a strange story in the world of art history.

[33 : 34] There's an artist named Banksy, it's his nickname, and he painted a painting called Girl with a Balloon, and it was sold at auction for 1.4 million.

And there's many auctions that happen. This was at an auction house, I think, somewhere on the east coast, probably New York City, and usually these auctions end without event. The person who wins the auction takes their prize.

They take what they've earned and paid for and bought, and they keep it. They have it. But something very different happened at this auction. As soon as it was over, and this 1.4 million dollar purchase was completed, an alarm started going off in the auction house.

And immediately after the alarm went off, the painting started dropping out of the bottom of the frame. And as it came out of the bottom of the frame, it came out in pieces. In other words, as soon as this buyer purchased the painting, it was destroyed.

Come to find out, the artist had planted a shredder in the frame, and he had decided that if his painting was ever set up for auction, he would destroy it. And so he waited until the moment when it was done, he planted someone in the audience, and they had a remote control that they could press it.

[34 : 52] So as soon as the purchase was complete, the artwork would be destroyed. This great investment, this 1.4 million dollar purchase, was gone in an instant.

The psalmist is telling us in Psalm 23 that if we put our hope in health and wealth and prosperity, it may work for a time, but it will be gone in an instant.

that what seems precious to us will be destroyed. Those who put their hope and their investment and their trust in God will have something that cannot be destroyed and that will last forever.

And so Jesus tells us in Mark chapter 8, in calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he, that is Jesus, said to them, if anyone would come to me.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

[36 : 04] For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? 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.

Please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you're a good Father. You don't give up on us when we doubt you and we question you.

But instead, you've given us the words to do that very thing. But you also don't leave us in our doubts and our questions, but you call us to hope and faith to follow after you and walk in the way

that Jesus has set for us to walk.

And so we ask as we struggle with doubts and fears, as we wonder whether you're good and just, that you would use your word and your spirit to build us up and give us faith and trust in you as we understand that what you've given us is more valuable than anything else and that what we envy from others are things that will not last and cannot satisfy.

[37 : 27] We ask these things not because we have earned them, but because Jesus has earned them for us and so we ask them in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.