

A Crisis of Faith

Asaph's crises of faith (Psalm 73)

Intro

I like going to coffee shops and spend time connecting and talking with people. Some share my Christian faith; some are exploring and questioning faith. Then there are a few who have left the faith. Also I have met some who are disappointed with the church and others who have had a crisis of faith.

Sometimes this happens to people of faith during difficult times; life might seem unfair and unbearable. Your faith in God may dwindle and a lack of hope creeps in. Dealing with a crisis in your life may also lead to a crisis in your faith.

Psalm 73

There is a powerful biblical example of what can happen when a believer gets his or her eyes off the Lord and focuses on transient things rather than eternal things. It is found in Psalm 73. This Psalm contains the confession of David's worship leader, Asaph.

Asaph confesses that he almost lost his faith when he lost his eternal perspective. It happened when he did something that all of us tend to do from time to time – he took his eyes off the Lord and put them instead on non-believers. When he did so, he noticed the prosperity of the non-believers and began to wonder if his devotion to God was really worth the effort.

Psalm 73:1-3, *“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”*

Has that ever happened to you? When you look at the arrogant and wicked and it seems they are better off than you. Surely it has passed through your mind. I think it has happened to all of us from time to time.

Struggling with the Prosperity of the Wicked

It's the end of the month, and the bills are piling up. You're writing cheque after cheque. Suddenly, you realize you don't have enough to pay the rest of the bills. You sigh in exasperation, wondering when you will ever be able to catch up with what you owe.

As you sit there staring at your depleted chequeing account, you begin to think about your colleague at work. He is a profane person, with a mouth like a sewer. He could care less about God. He is unfaithful to his wife. He ignores his children. Yet, he never seems to have a worry. He lives in a beautiful house, drives a fancy car, and eats at the finest restaurants.

Your heart begins to fill with envy and perhaps anger. You feel like crying out, “Lord, I serve you faithfully, and all I ever seem to get in return is trouble. My colleague at work is a bad person, and he doesn't seem to have a worry in the world! What's wrong? Is my church offering a waste of my money? Is my faithfulness of no concern to you? The way things are going; I might as well serve the world and get some enjoyment out of life!”

Sound familiar? Well, this is exactly what happened to Asaph. He lost his *eternal perspective*, got his eyes on the wicked, and fell into self-pity.

Asaph's Downfall

It's amazing how irrational we become when we allow self-pity to take over our thinking. When it happened to Asaph, he started fantasizing about the rich. He began to tell himself that the rich "*never struggle, they are healthy and strong,*" (Ps. 73:4), always increasing in wealth, never facing the problems of other people.

All of which, of course, is utter nonsense. In fact, the opposite is true. The rich often tend to have far more problems than the humble. For one thing, they must constantly be worried about their money — how to protect it and multiply it.

It was while Asaph was caught up in this fantasy world that he committed a sin against God. He was disrespectful toward the love and faithfulness of God by exclaiming: "*Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning*" (Psalm 73:13-14).

Asaph's Turning Point

Asaph was literally on the verge of losing his faith. His spirit was in turmoil. He was wrestling with doubt – feeling sorry for himself. The wrestling match continued until... "*Until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end [the end of the wicked]*" (Psalm 73:17).

Asaph at this point is vague; we don't know what caused him to change. He does not tell us what happened to him when he went to the Lord's house, except that his eternal perspective was restored. Was it a song that touched his heart? Could it have been a Scripture reading or a message? Perhaps it was a word of encouragement from a discerning friend. It might even have been a death in his family. We just don't know. All we know for sure is that something touched his heart and reminded him of the eternal destiny of the wicked.

He states that he was reminded that the wicked walk in "*slippery ground*" and that they may be cast down at any moment, being swept away by "*sudden terror*" (Psalm 73:18-19). In other words, Asaph was reminded that life is very transient — here one moment and gone the next.

The Impact of Death

Recently it was the twentieth anniversary of Princess Diana's death. Her death had an enormous impact on the world. Here was a woman who had it all — everything the world dreams of having. She had beauty, charm, wealth, fame, and influence. She had the "good life." Yet, in one terrifying moment, it all disappeared. She was reduced to equality with all of us — a mortal person gone to meet her Creator.

It was a sobering event. It drove home the transitory nature of life. I'm sure it caused many people to pause and think about eternity for the first time in their lives.

The Bible says that most people live in life-long fear of death. In fact, the Bible puts it even stronger than that. It says that most people live in “*slavery*” to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). This is the reason that a death in the family, or the death of a friend or a celebrity, always has such an impact. It reminds us of our mortality, and it triggers in us the eternal perspective.

Asaph’s Faith Restored

I think it is interesting to note that once Asaph’s eternal perspective was restored, he looked back on his struggle with doubt and marveled over how foolish he had been. He concluded that he was as “*senseless and ignorant*” as a beast (Psalm 73:21-22).

Asaph wrapped up his psalm by praising the Lord for His faithfulness in words reminiscent of the Apostle Paul when he wrote, “*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Timothy 2:13).

Asaph expressed his restored priorities in memorable words in Psalm 73:25-28:

*Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
My flesh and my heart fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
For, behold, those who are far from You will perish;
You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.
But as me, the nearness of God is my good;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
That I may tell of all Your works.*

The solution to Asaph’s crisis of faith was the restoration of his eternal perspective. He was reminded that this life is fleeting, passing by quickly. He realized that he may never see justice in this life, but one day justice will prevail. He realized that he had been called to live by faith and not by sight.

Another Test of Attitude

Let me give you one last test for determining whether or not you are living with an eternal perspective: How do you feel about the Lord’s return? This is an acid test that will determine whether you are in love with the world or the Lord.

The attitude of the person who is in love with the world can best be expressed in these words: “I want the Lord to return, but...” There is always a “**but**.”

“I want the Lord to return, but I want Him to come after I have made a million dollars.”

“I want the Lord to come, but I want Him to come after I’ve made the cover of *Time* magazine.”

“I want the Lord to come, but I want Him to come after I’m 90 years old and have experienced all that life has to offer.”

What these people are really saying is, “I want Jesus to come, but I don’t want Him messing up my life!” They are in love with the world. If you truly love Christ, you will want to be with Him. You will talk with Him in prayer. You will fellowship with Him in His Word and in worship.

At times we become so attached to this world and this earthly life that we lose the eternal perspective. The Apostle Paul reminds us of our focus. He said, *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory”* (Colossians 3:1-4).

Conclusion

I suggest that the next time you let your eternal perspective slip, remember Psalm 73 and read it. When you finish, reverse the numbers and go to Psalm 37. There you will find a powerful summary of what Asaph learned. It is a psalm of Asaph’s mentor, King David.

David says, *“Do not fret because of evildoers... for they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb”* (verses 1-2). He tells us what to do instead: *“Trust in the Lord, and do good... delight yourself in the Lord”* (verses 3-4). Over and over again he warns us not to fret over evildoers.

Are you focused on this world? Are you attached to it, or do you have a sense of the fact that you are only passing through, heading for an eternal home? This life is transitory. This life is only a prelude to eternity.

A great man of God named Leonard Ravenhill, who was a prophetic preacher from England. Right before he died, he sent a card to a pastor and urged him to memorize the message and live it daily. The message printed on the card was simple but yet profound: *“Lord, keep me eternity conscious.”*

Everyone goes through difficult trials and situations in life, and losing faith can happen when you least expect it. Acknowledge that you are hurting and acknowledge that you are losing faith. Show God that you are paying attention to your feelings and are trying to listen for His guidance. Don’t run away from your problem or pretend that it isn’t happening. This will only cause a stronger decrease in your faith. Talk with other believers about how you are feeling. A trusted friend or Pastor can lend an ear when you need help in a crisis of faith. We need each other; we need fellowship and to pray for each other through those trying times.

Speaking of getting rich - this is what Hollywood actor Jim Carrey had to say, *“I hope everybody could get rich and famous and will have everything they ever dreamed of so they will know that it’s not the answer.”* How true.

By the way, Carrey has given his life to Christ and has found the answer.