

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH
October 22, 2017 Morning Message
Psalm 73
“Do you feel yourself slipping? Enter the Sanctuary”

MESSAGE OUTLINE

- I. Introduction – The Slipping Psalmist - Verses 1-2
- II. The Struggle of Temporal injustice: Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? - Verses 3-14
- III. The Sanctuary – Verses 15-17
- IV. The Solace of Eternal Justice: God will judge the wicked and save His people – Verses 18-20
- V. Conclusion – The Secure Psalmist – Verses 21-28
- VI. Closing Questions
 1. When you are slipping, where do you go?
 2. Where is your sanctuary?
 3. Are you far from or near to God?

PURPOSE OF THE MESSAGE

If you are slipping or struggling today, this message is for you. One of the greatest characteristics of the Bible is that it doesn't veil the questions, struggles and weakness of God's people. If you feel distant today, and like you are slipping away from God, and perhaps doubting His goodness and faithfulness toward you, you may feel like you don't belong here. Based on this morning's message, if you are slipping, this is exactly where you need to be. I invite you to come with me into the sanctuary, the holy place. I am calling you to come with me to the Holy Scriptures, the very revelation and Word of God, to regain your footing and hope. Jesus invites those heavy laden and laboring under the burdens of life to come to Him to find solace and rest. He is extending that invitation to you this morning. Come and see our God. See how He loves us, and how He knows us, and oh how much He cares so deeply for us. Not that we deserve His kindness, and His benevolence. He sovereignly chose for His own pleasure and purpose, to express His mercy and goodness and kindness to us, unworthy sinners. I invite you to the sanctuary, to come and worship this Sovereign God who loves, who has compassion, and comes to us in our struggles, our weakness, and our frailty, and lifts us up. Let's begin by reading together Psalm 73.

73 A PSALM OF ASAPH.

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.

³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, “How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?” ¹² This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. ¹³ Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.

¹⁵ If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; 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 They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, 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. 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.

INTRODUCTION: The Slipping Psalmist

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. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Jesus said that the pure in heart are blessed, for they shall see God. Those who are pure in heart see God as He truly is. They understand that He is good, in particular to His covenant people. The Psalmist begins this Psalm with his conclusion. After God had cleansed his heart, He saw that God is always good to his people.

To understand this Psalm, we need to understand what the Bible teaches us about the heart. It's not just that sentimental part inside of us that falls in love. The Scripture describes the heart as much more substantive and significant. Proverbs 4:23 exhorts us: **Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.** Mark 7:20 Jesus said “What comes out of a person is

what defiles them.²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder,²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.” The heart is our core being. It is the seat of our emotions, our thoughts, our intentions, our desires, our dreams, our wants, and our motivation. It is the driver of decisions, actions, and words. It sets the direction of our life. And because we are born into this world as sinners, its default condition is deceitful and impure.

So what is the effect of this impure heart? When hearts are contaminated with thoughts of envy, and pride, and selfish desires, we begin to slip and stumble, and lose our spiritual footing and balance, and we move away from God. The battle is always in the heart. Jeremiah said that the heart is deceitful. It can mislead us. The common adage of following your heart is bad advice. The problem is not the heart, but it is the impurity within the heart. Because we are sinners, our hearts become hard and deceitful. We need a cleansing. We need purification. We need a change of heart. We need truth to cleanse us and set us free. And we need the grace of God to capture and subdue our hearts and bring us into submission to His truth.

The fact is that God good. He is always good. There is never a time that He is not good. And He is always specifically good to His covenant people. In that great letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul reiterates the goodness of God by stating in chapter 8 that God works all things together for good to those that love Him, the called, the elect, His children. God is always good, and especially good toward His people.

But His children don't always see Him as good. If we don't guard our hearts, and they become contaminated, we will begin to question His goodness. This was the Psalmists struggle. His vision of God had become clouded and perverted by his own desires. All of us will face this temptation to doubt God's goodness. It comes from our hearts because though we know Christ, we are still in a battle. We wrestle with untrue thoughts about our God. And when we allow them to linger in our mind, and we begin lean on our own understanding, we begin to slip.

This is what was happening with the Psalmist. He said “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. His heart was contaminated with envy. His struggle grew from his own evaluation about how God deals with wicked people.

The Struggle of Temporal Injustice vs 3-12

³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; Their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, “How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?” ¹² This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.

The Psalmist observed the prosperity of wicked, independent, proud people, and he began to construct a story about them. When our hearts are contaminated, our discernment is skewed. Did you notice the exaggeration in his story? No struggles, no burdens, free from human ills, always care free, and always wealthy. The story is not fully accurate. Though the Psalmist had skewed thinking, there is still a difficult issue presented in this Psalm. The good things that happen to ungodly people is perplexing. How is it that proud and arrogant people that do not even acknowledge God live lives filled with good things, and many God-fearing people suffer terrible things? It seems that there is an untouched class of human beings in this world that have the money, the power, the comforts, the luxury, the prosperity, and worldly success and applause. They seem to be insulated from problems. And typically, they don't thank God, but rather they credit their own wisdom and hard work for their success. Some even take advantage of the poor and the weak to help them profit even more. They are self-driven, self-exalted, and self-satisfied. Though some of them might occasionally give lip service to God, their lives are characterized by ambition and self-centered thinking. They blaspheme or just ignore Almighty God. They take credit for their success, or point to godless luck as the source of their prosperity, and conclude that because of their life status, they are ok. They have no thought of judgment or accountability before a Creator. They live to please themselves, and have no apparent negative consequence. This was Psalmist's struggle. How can a just God bless such depraved, wicked, and rebellious people?

Another God-fearing man, Job, had similar struggles.

Job 21 ⁷Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? ⁸Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. ⁹Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. ¹⁰Their bull breeds without fail; their cow calves and does not miscarry. ¹¹They send out their little boys like a flock, and their children dance. ¹²They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. ¹³They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol.

It's a valid question. The Psalmist summarizes his frustration with this statement in verse 12

¹²This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.

And in this state of mind, he falls into self-pity as he considers his own life:

¹³Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.

It seems that his efforts to keep himself pure and do what is right held no value. Living for God, and seeking to live a righteous life is a burden. It only leads to further rebuke and chastening from God. In the mind of the Psalmist, God seemed to be quite unjust in his dealings with men.

That brings us to verse 15.

¹⁵If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children.

Even in the midst of his doubts and struggles, the Psalmist had the presence of mind not to ventilate his frustration to God's people. He knew that such accusations would have been heard as mutiny and betrayal.

William S. Plumer, a theologian from the 1800s offers this insight on verse 15: "If we cannot explain God's ways, let us say nothing until such time as we can get the key to unlock the mystery of his providence. Often, we best glorify God by silence. The chief design of some trials doubtless is to shut our mouths. Blessed is the man who has grace to learn the lesson. In that state of mind, he may come to know something. All true wisdom among men consists in being docile, and in implicitly submitting to the teachings of God. Men adopt a false principle when they say, "We may as well speak out all we think and feel."

Modern psychologists encourage us to ventilate and express all our thoughts, doubts, and feelings to anyone who will listen. The Psalmist knew better. He was aware he was slipping and struggling. He thought it best to keep these thoughts to himself until he could come to a better place. There is a time to speak, and to ask questions, and to discuss. There is also a time be still and quiet.

Perhaps you have questions and doubts about the justice of God. Do you struggle with the way He sovereignly distributes hardship and ease? Does it trouble you? Listen to the experience of this Psalmist as he thought about this: ¹⁶When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply

Verses 15-17 The Sanctuary

If you are troubled this morning, God knows and understands your struggle. Through His written revelation, He addresses this struggle head on. The most glorious and hopeful word in this Psalm emerges in verse 17. The word **Till**. This is the pivot point in the Psalm. What follows is our instruction on what to do when we are confused and troubled about our problems, and can't seem to find God's goodness in our situation.

¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

The Psalmist entered the sanctuary. At that time, it was the temple, the place that housed the ark of the covenant, the Word of the Lord, the place of sacrifice and corporate worship. And while there, the Psalmist gained understanding and a change of perspective.

As new covenant believers, we have an invitation to come boldly to the throne of God in our struggles to gain help from God. We have the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit with us, and can enter that sanctuary anywhere at any time.

Hebrews 4: ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

If you are confused, and doubting, and slipping, realize you have one who has gone before you that sympathizes and understands your weakness. Though He was tempted as we are, He did not yield to that temptation, but overcame. And that same One, the Son of God, entered into that heavenly sanctuary as our mediator and high priest. On the cross, He offered Himself as the

perfect sacrifice needed to remove and forgive our sins so that we can now come into the presence of a holy God. Our sin is our problem. It separates us from our Creator. We are contaminated, unclean, and ignorant. But the good news is there is One who came and died for sinners, so that they can be forgiven and cleansed from those sins, and enter the sanctuary to get the help that they need. That is why if you are in Christ, you can come boldly and know that if you ask for help in the name of Jesus Christ, you will gain the understanding, forgiveness, strength, and help that you need. Jesus Christ is our sanctuary. And we partake of His provision and grace as we pray in His name, listen to the counsel of His Word, remember His sacrifice when we come to His table, and sing His praises with His people.

What you need, beloved, when you are slipping, and doubting, and confused, is God's perspective. And you will find it in the sanctuary. Come and be washed and cleansed. Come apart from the buzz of life and behold the goodness of your God. Come and be refreshed and encouraged and strengthened. This occurs when we humble ourselves, and cry out to the only One who can give us what we need. And if you will come close to Him today, then our good Lord will receive you and grant you cleansing and understanding.

Verses 18-20 The Solace of Eternal Justice: God will judge the wicked and save His people

The Psalmist entered the sanctuary, and God granted him the bigger picture concerning the final destination of the wicked.

¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; 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 They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

The Psalmist had a limited view clouded by his envy, and had lost his awareness of the big picture. In the sanctuary, God cleansed his heart and revealed the bigger picture. The Psalmist understood that this life on earth is brief compared to eternity. God showed him the fate of the wicked. The Psalmist needed to see this, and we need to see the same truth. If you are outside of Christ today, this Psalm describes your condition. You are on a slippery path to destruction, greased by the pleasures and desires of this life. You are racing toward judgment, where you will be held accountable for every idle word and sinful action. Every proud thought will be displayed and judged by a holy God. It will be a shock, like waking from a pleasant dream into the reality of everlasting punishment. God will crush you and send you to a punishment fit for all of your thoughts and actions. As we consider the eternal destiny of the wicked, and appreciate that if we are in Christ, we have been spared this fate, it will silence all of our thoughts of injustice and unfairness with God. God's righteous wrath will be poured out upon the wicked as they are cast into the lake of fire to suffer unceasingly forever, and we will be spared and be eternally blessed in the glory and presence of our God and Savior.

Verse 21-28 Conclusion – The Secure Psalmist

As the Psalmist entered the sanctuary, and God showed him His justice and His mercy, it brought him to a keen awareness of his ignorance and foolishness.

²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

Whenever we enter the place where God dwells, with are confronted with our mortal, weak reasonings and thoughts in comparison to an eternal, sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, almighty God of heaven. At times we will feel that we have been no wiser than an animal. We will come to see that it is our ignorance and lack of sense that has caused our grief and bitterness. And in that sanctuary, God cleanses our hearts and enlightens our minds to the truth. In understanding, we find hope, comfort and assurance.

As we come to know God as He truly is, we indeed have great solace and security. Listen to the Psalmist as he breaks into praise for the kindness and nurture of God's care:

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. 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.

What this man came to understand is that when a person has God as his portion, he has all he needs. This temporal life will often fail us. Believers get sick. They die. They are sometimes forsaken and betrayed by family. They are persecuted and killed. But when God is your portion, you truly need nothing else. He is with us in this life every day by faith, and when we die He takes us into glory to see Him face-to-face. When God purifies our hearts and we see Him for who He really is, He is all that we want. He is our inheritance. Why would we want or need anything else?

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.

In contrast, those who are far from God are on a constant search for meaning and fulfillment. They move from one pleasure to the next, and get caught in vain and empty pursuits. At a glance, they may look to be healthy, wealthy, and wise. But when you see the full picture, they are on a party bus that's about to plunge into a bottomless pit of fire, divine judgment and destruction.

Our God provides a refuge for His people. It is Himself. He is our sanctuary. And He has provided the means for us to be close to Him. Every Lord's day, His Word is opened and proclaimed. This is His means of bringing us understanding, and the big picture. We have godly pastors and counselors that will help direct our thoughts to His Word, and help us see the big picture. My heart breaks for many believers who are seeking emotional religious experiences without seeking to learn and understand His Word. Note that the Psalmist was set back on firm ground when he understood the truth. If you are struggling today, I encourage you to reach out to someone who is wise in the Scriptures, who can help you know the living God through His

Word. The transformation and cleansing of our hearts occur as we understand and obey the Scriptures.

As we come to know and truly see God, we will tell others of His greatness and His deeds. He is worthy to be praised and glorified for who He is and what He had done. The Psalmist moved from self-pity and confusion into great joy and comfort. You can do the same.

In closing, I have three questions for consideration:

1. When you are slipping, where do you go? Where do you go when you are burdened and heavy laden? If you know the Lord, I urge you to enter the sanctuary often. In the words of the hymn, What a friend we have in Jesus, the hymn writer laments “Oh what peace we often forfeit, or what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer” God has not left us orphans. Jesus has made the way for us to be near to God. God forbid that we not avail ourselves to His presence and fellowship.
2. Where is your sanctuary? Brothers and sisters, if the Lord has joined you to this church, then your fellow members are the body of Christ. Your sanctuary is with us. We gather together several times a week to meet with the Lord together. Once a month commune together at His table as we remember our Savior and His sacrifice at Calvary for us. We join our voices and hearts in prayer in Wednesday evening. Several brothers meet every Sunday morning with pastor to share and pray for the church. Every Lord’s day, we gather in the morning to worship our God and hear from His Word, and then in the evening to celebrate His church. You have a sanctuary right here. Enter consistently and regularly, and allow the Lord to comfort and cleanse and encourage you in your life joys and trials.
3. My last question. Are you far from or near to God? William Plumer I his commentary on this Psalm stated “Sanctified affliction is a blessing, and unsanctified prosperity, a curse. It is better to die in faith than to live in unbelief.” If you are here this morning, and you have not bowed the knee to Jesus as Lord, then you are far from God. I urge you to awaken from your dream or fantasy that you are ok, and see the reality of your condition. Outside of Christ, you are a sinner in the hands of an angry God. Apart from Christ, you will awaken from this mortal life, perhaps before the end of today, and face the judgment and wrath of a holy God. The good news is this: That same God that we will all face has provided a refuge from that judgment. He sent His Son into this world to bear that wrath and punishment for sinners on the cross in behalf of every person that will put their faith in Christ Jesus; His life, His death, His resurrection, and His coming again. You can get off the party bus headed for destruction, and enter the sanctuary today to be cleansed and become God’s friend and not His enemy. If you hear His voice calling you, come to Christ today and be saved.