

Seeing things God's way

Introduction

One of the most striking and the most encouraging things about the book of Psalms is the honesty with which the psalmists speak, especially when it comes to the challenge of living as a believer in a fallen world. At times the psalmist seems to be full of faith and overflowing with thankfulness, but at other times, he is troubled by nagging doubts which overflow in hard questions and in words of complaint, at least at the beginning, until he comes to see things God's way.

The journey from doubt and fear to faith and thankfulness is characteristic of many of the Psalms, but nowhere more evident than in Psalm 73, our text for this study. As we shall see the psalmist begins by quoting a standard formula regarding God's goodness toward His people (vs1). The sentiment expressed in this opening verse is of course true – God is indeed good to His people – and the psalmist will come to the point at the end of the psalm where he can affirm this great truth again. But the way in which it is quoted and the statement that follows directly afterward, suggests that in the Psalm this most basic tenant of the faith is under scrutiny and in question. "God is good to His people, but"

Strikingly, the life issue that is bothering the psalmist is not simply the fact that he is experiencing hard times despite that fact that he is seeking to live a life that pleases God. That is hinted at in verse 13, but it is not the main problem. The main problem that the psalmist is grappling with is the fact that God, who is good to His people also seems to be good to those who clearly and brazenly turn their backs on Him and who live with no regard for Him. It is the prosperity of the wicked (vs3) rather than the suffering of the godly that troubles the psalmist and that very nearly causes him to stumble in his faith (vs2). Seen purely in the light of daily experience, God seems to be good to everyone and this raises a key question, namely, why bother to be godly at all. In Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 15:19, if being a believer is just a matter of this life, are we not in fact to be pitied rather than envied for our faith?

Although we may not put it quite in these terms (at least not when we are in the company of other believers) the truth is that from time to time we do grapple with this problem in our own lives. We hear the arrogant and boastful claims of those who have no regard for God (vss8-11), we see their success and seemingly carefree life (vs12), and we ask – "Why do the wicked prosper? Is it worth staying faithful to God?" Sometimes, like the psalmist, these questions cause us to stumble in our walk with the Lord and so, like the psalmist, we need to learn to see things God's way and to understand that there is far more to life than meets the eye.

Read Psalm 73:1-28

Investigate

1. What basic belief about God and His goodness does the psalmist hold to? (vs1) Is this basic belief true?
2. What definition does the psalmist give of the godly? (vs1)
3. What does the psalmist mean by 'pure in heart'? (hint: see verse 13)
4. What was it that nearly caused him to slip and fall in his walk with the Lord? (vs3)
5. How does the psalmist describe the wicked and their carefree way of life? (vss4-12). Is this always absolutely true? What does this description tell us about how the psalmist's way of looking at life?
6. How does the psalmist describe his own struggle and dilemma? (vss15-16)
7. What changed the psalmist's perspective and attitude to the seeming injustices of life? (vs17)

2. What other New Testament passage can you think of that teach this same fundamental perspective?



Apply

1. What key things have you learnt from this psalm?

2. In what ways has this psalm encouraged or challenged you?