

What You See Changes Everything

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[0 : 00] So this evening we're going to spend a little while looking at Sam 73 and then we'll move on to celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

It's a great Sam. They're all great Sam's, but this is especially great Sam. And it's great because it's so very, very real to us, and it's a really self-reflective Sam.

And self-reflection is a good thing. I guess we can be too introverted and always looking just at ourselves, and of course we're encouraged to do that, but then to look to Christ and to our faith and our Savior.

But I think spiritually it's a great practice and it's something that's very important for us to do spiritually is to be self-reflective and to consider where we are with the living God and the condition of our hearts.

I think the worst thing in the world is to be spiritually mindless and to be kind of blind to our own hearts and to our own need, and just to be treading water spiritually.

[1 : 15] So very easy to do that today. We've got many, many different distractions that will encourage us to be spiritually mindless, to fill our minds and to fill our thoughts with everything other than our relationship with Jesus Christ.

We can be in a thoughtless, sightless treadmill, which is a challenging place to be spiritually. And when we stop thinking, we immediately drift.

It's like switching off the engine in a motorboat. We immediately drift when we stop using our minds, we just start drifting, and we can drift further, very imperceptibly.

We can drift further from the living God and from our relationship of love with Him. This is a great thing to be self-examining. It's a great thing to think about our lives, to think about our progress in Christ, to consider how we've developed in our faith over a period of time, to consider even if we've regressed rather than progressed, I think sometimes that is the challenge, and maybe for us as we get older.

I certainly find that's a great challenge for me, that as we get older, we can regress, we can shrug our shoulders, because, you know, I know this. I've been here before, I've done it.

[2 : 36] We can lose our passion, and we can lose the urgency of knowing and living in presence of the living God.

We're tempted only to see two feet in front of our noses and to lose our spiritual perspective with the busyness of life or with all kinds of different things.

Now the great thing about this Psalm is that God knows that, God already knows that. He knows the danger of drifting that we have in our lives, and He's given us this Psalm to help us to understand that and to move from that position.

He always, as our Lord and Savior, we know that. He wants to help. He reaches out to help us in our need, and yet so often we just try and hide.

We try and hide from Him. We try and do our own thing. We try and fix it by religion, by our effort.

But He wants us to come to Him and confess our need and to take our struggles to Him as the Psalmist did here, and learn from the process that we can share with ourselves in terms of our experience sharing with the Psalmist.

[3 : 52] So we see that the Psalm, it kind of is a progression, and the first part of the Psalm, really, after He makes His introductory comment, which is the summary of the Psalm, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

He then goes on to express and explain His own situation or what had happened to Him. He's giving us a biography, an autobiography of what has happened in His spiritual life.

He was drifting from God. Now, this is Asaph. This is a man of spiritual character, David's musical director, someone of spiritual significance.

We would maybe call him a worship leader today, not in our context, but in many contexts it would be regarded as such. Say, the deep, mature faith, you only need to look at some of the other Psalms he wrote, the Psalm 50 or Psalm 73, right through to 83, he was a man of deep conviction, a man of genuine and deep faith.

And yet, this mature believer experienced spiritual drift. And the Psalm is really honest. This great leader shows and expresses, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it's given to us, poor Asaph, as exposed in front of the Christian world for centuries as to his own heart, but that is God's way, isn't it?

[5 : 19] He's honest and he's vulnerable. And that honesty and that vulnerability is a very important reality for us to remember and to consider in our Christian lives, especially I see here to leaders or to elders or to ministers or to training ministers who maybe feel they need to be stoic and strong all the time and put on a face that everything's well, unhealthy, put on the hypocrites face as Tori was reminding us this morning.

This honesty from a spiritual leader is important that we develop and show and reveal in our lives. And he goes on to explain.

He talks really in that big first section, verses 2 to 12, about the prosperity of the wicked. He looks at people that aren't believers. He looks at people that don't belong to the God of Israel, who haven't been rescued and come under the wing of this sovereign Lord, and he sees them as just having a great time without having faith.

And he really caricatures their lives in many ways. He's comparing himself with them, saying, they've got things much better than I have. But he's exaggerating how good their lives are.

It's because of the way he's feeling. He's thinking, look at them. They've got a great... Everything's going perfectly for them. It's that whole... This is not a biblical phrase, but it's a true phrase.

[6 : 50] The grass is greener and he's seen the grass being greener on the other side. He's seen everything that they're doing is great. And it's a great struggle for me. They seem to have no struggles. They're tremendously healthy.

They're proud, they're confident, they're carefree, they're wealthy. You know, everything, they've got pride as a necklace. They'll be violent and nothing happens because of it.

They scoff and malice. They shake their fists towards heaven. They set their mouths against the heavens. Their tongues strut through the earth. They say, well, and you know, God doesn't know. God isn't interested. And they seem to thrive. They're thriving. Life is great. Oh, what's the point of being a believer? Their life is fantastic.

Mine's rubbish. And it's a struggle for them because he then compares that with his life and with what he sees equally through difficult lens and an imbalanced lens as he does in verses 13 to 16.

[7 : 53] He says, I've in vain have kept my hands clean. In vain have washed. In vain have done these religious rituals. In vain have followed God. I've been faithful to his religious observance.

I've sought to live the way of faith. But it feels like that life is grim. It's like green medicine. Suppose it's good for you, but tastes awful.

It's miserable. It's oppressive. And he doesn't seem to have much joy as he recognizes and thinks of this.

And so is faith wavered. Jesus, faith wavered. He's a great religious leader. But as for me, he says almost as a summary of all of that he's been saying, my feet had almost slipped.

My steps had nearly, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped. Tremendously honest about what he is experiencing.

[8 : 53] He'd almost lost his foundation. He'd become embittered. He was envious. He was covetous of a carefree life. He's plunged into spiritual darkness.

And he's almost slipped. He's almost gone. He's almost away from his relationship with the living God and his salvation. That's his testimony. And you know, that honesty is good.

He's not glorying in it as we'll go on to see, but it's an honest reflection of how he was feeling. And there's a reminder, as we remind this morning, we're not the finished articles.

We haven't all got it together. I know we come at church and we pretend we've all got it together.

And we don't like to give the impression that we're struggling or we're battling. But that's where discipleship and being honest with one another is so significant and so important, his faith wavered.

But then he shares a really encouraging experience in verses 17 to 20. When I thought about how to understand this, it all seemed to me a weary some task.

[10:01] That's how he felt. Maybe you feel that this evening. Your Christian faith is a weary some task. Then he goes on to say, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned that end.

So he did the right thing. That's what he did. He did the right thing. He went into the presence of God. He made his way back into that place in the Old Testament, which was the symbol and the reality of God's presence, the temple, the sanctuary, the place where the people of God met with their God in the Old Testament, where there was the priests, brought their sacrifices to the living God, where there was the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

And he goes to that place because it symbolizes and it reminds him of who his God is, the God who is among the people, the God who is the redeeming, the saving God who has taken his people out of slavery.

And he knows that that's the place to go. Isn't that great? That's good for us this evening because it's reminding us that the place we take our complaints, it legitimizes our complaints before the living God.

It legitimizes us crying out to God in our weakness and in our struggles and our battles, but to go to God with it, to break the silence, to change the line of vision and to focus, not to focus on the comparative realities around us, but to see God's perspective, to see what He sees and to understand what He wants us to do.

[11:39] We go not to a building, not to a physical temple, but we remind ourselves that when Christ died on the cross, which we will be remembering shortly, that as He did so, the curtain was ripped from the Holy of Holies from top to bottom so that our access is also to God, into His nearer presence through Jesus' the way, Jesus' the stairway, Jesus' the door, Jesus' our way into God's nearer presence.

And we remind ourselves that it's because of what Christ has done and as we trust in Christ, we go to the living God, we go to our Father and we take to Him all our needs and all our weaknesses and fears and inabilities and paralysis or whatever it might be.

And maybe this evening you need to take that walk. Maybe you need to take that walk this evening. Maybe you've been procrastinating, staying away from God, doing the religious ritual stuff but not doing your business with the living God and taking that walk and taking your complaints and taking your struggles.

No one else can do it for you. It's the one thing you must do in your own. Just as we remind ourselves in the supper that a person next to you can't eat it on your behalf. You can't eat someone else's meal.

Well, you can, but I'll not do them any good. You know, we all need to eat food to be nourished ourselves and we all need to go into Christ's presence.

[13:13] We have the access to God the Father through the Holy of Holies and that's what we're called to do. Church will only take us fellowship communion, only takes us so far.

There must be that communality but there's also that individuality and as we do so, we also will see a different reality because that is exactly what Asaph saw in the Sam East.

He reminded himself that things were not quite as they seem and he learns about the lost, he learns about himself and he learns about God. He learns about the lost, he says, I went into the sanctuary and then I discerned the end and he recognizes, he uses the same picture, the same illustration, he recognizes not him that's on slippery ground, it's those who are not believers that are on slippery ground and he says, truly you've set them in slippery places.

And there's that, he comes to that place as a difficult reality for us, a difficult truth but we can only see it through the prism of the cross because the cross is where we see God's justice and His love, the reality of judgment.

God is both just and right and the standard of judgment is not comparative, it's not looking at other people and how their lives are going or what their lives are doing.

[14:32] It's a recognition that before a holy God we all stumble and we all fall, none of us, none of us can say, all of us would be in slippery ground, all of us are on slippery ground before this pure and holy God.

That's why Jesus came to be our Redeemer and to be our Savior. No matter how comparatively good we may feel that we are, no matter how successful, how healthy, how rich, how proud we

might be in life, there's this recognition that people are under God's judgment unless they come to Christ who has been judged on their behalf and who has taken the punishment and the wrath of God.

And we recognize that God has absolutely the right to say, depart from me, I never knew you.

But we can know acceptance and belonging because He was, the Son was forsaken on the cross so that we wouldn't be forsaken and that we would trust in Him.

And that's the reality that we remember when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. So there's a lost world, however successful and however popular, however rich people are, there's a spiritual need that it's only by faith, as we're saying to children, we can see and know and understand.

[16:03] So He learned about their end, but He learned also about Himself, really interesting, what He says here in verse 22 and 23, 21 and 22, He says, when my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant, I was like a beast before you.

So He saw that His problem, His own problem was a heart problem. It was a problem with His own heart before the living God and that He had moved from trusting in God to being overly concerned with the circumstances around Him and the lives of people around Him.

And He needed to recognize that He was living. He'd moved towards living without a sense of being God's or being made in God's image.

It was almost like He reverted to being, or not reverted, but acted as if He didn't have a soul, that He was just part of the natural world, you know, like a human animal.

I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast towards you, just like an animal. He lost sight that He was made in God's image. He lost sight that He was beautiful because of that.

[17:20] He lost sight of the salvation that had been given to Him and it's easy for us to do the same thing and to just feel that we're just part of this natural creation.

We're just like everything else and we're all just battling away without any sense of purpose or direction. If we lose sight of who God is and if we allow bitterness into our soul.

About Himself and then also about God in verses 23 to 28. And it's a really beautiful phrase that He uses in verse 22. You would expect Him to say, nevertheless, I am continually with you, or you would expect Him to say, you are continually with me.

But it's interesting, He doesn't, He says, I am continually with you, I'm safe with you. And then He goes on to say, you hold me by my right hand. That's a great picture.

Isaiah, we've used it often here, don't be afraid, put your trust in the Lord, I will hold you with my righteous right hand, the hand of His power, the hand of His action, that He holds us and He protects us and He loves us.

[18:30] It's that great picture, isn't it, of a fatherly figure, big hand holding on to small hand of a child. I've told you this story before, but it's just come to mind.

So, small boy, Glenelg in the West Highlands, my dad decided to take me for a walk one night over the hill to the other side to let our fern.

And after tea, a dinner for our American brothers. After evening meal, because it's light till midnight in the Highlands.

And we started off and went, it was great. I had wee legs as a wee boy. I was only four foot eleven when I left school. That's another story. So, as we, and He was big and strong, big hands.

And as we're getting towards the top of the hill, the mist came down as it does. And we couldn't see anything. And I was very glad holding on to His big right hand.

[19:34] And for Him to lead me, what He didn't tell me was that He was lost too. But I didn't know that and I didn't worry about that.

He had grown up there, so He kind of did know the way home. But He was quite nervous as well.

But it's great, isn't it, that God's never lost. And when He holds us by His right hand, He will guide us and He's always leading us.

Even in your darkest moments as a believer, He's leading you to something infinitely better. He's leading you somewhere where He has made unbelievable provision for you that we will enjoy forever.

And He is the one who's, isn't it great, He goes on to use the illustration of the heart again in verse 26.

God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever. When I ignored you, my heart was pricked in my heart and I was just like a wild animal. But when I came back and I recognized who God was

and His love and His grace and His forgiveness for me, then He recognized that God was His portion forever.

[20 : 42] And that's a great testimony for us also to recognize who God is in Christ that we've come to, and we know more and see more than they saff ever could see because of what Jesus has done.

And we rejoice in that. And we need to remember that He holds us in His righteous right hand and we're always with Him. It's not about our feelings.

Feelings are important, but it's not about how we feel. If we feel close, He's always there with us when we've entrusted our lives and He will guide us and He will receive us into glory. I just finished very briefly with Asaph's own powerful testimony coming from that.

So you've got a progression throughout this, both of teaching and of experimental reality in his life. And again in these verses 23 to 28, he's experiencing his own and sharing his own testimony of renewed intimacy.

You know, he knows that God's holding his right hand and we can know that Emmanuel with us.

[21 : 53] There's nothing for it. There's... So this evening, there's no... If you're struggling, there's no alternative for you as a Christian but to turn back to God.

And it's something that we need to do daily. So we never move beyond the gospel. We never move beyond repentance. We never move beyond that walk where we're going back continually confessing and renewing and gaining strength in our hearts from the living God and knowing Him as our portion.

That's what enables our faith to move from head knowledge to that place that we all long for, His felt presence. That's what we all long for, His felt presence in our lives.

So renewed intimacy is really important and He shares that. Also that renewed perspective where He recognizes that His desire is for the living God.

That's the new perspective He has on what is happening fills His heart with His desire. Nothing on earth that I desire beside you. Everything. Everything. His love is being, His emotional life, His mind and His will has come to recognize that this perspective of the living God is the one that gives Him peace and belonging and forgiveness and hope.

[23 : 17] Remember, this is a public poem, public hymn that is given to us for our own perspective. And He then gives us shared experience.

It's public. And so He says, verse 1, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart, those who recognize that they need redemption and forgiveness and come for forgiveness through the Savior, through the living God that we know in Christ.

And also at the end, He speaks about, but as 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.

So out of the heart, everything flows. This is a, this is a psalm about somebody who's exposed His heart, His bitterness and His struggles and how He's dealt with that and how God has renewed His heart and been His strength.

And it's important to share that experience for Him. God has given Him that inspiration to share that.

[24 : 28] And we recognize the importance of that shared testimony and shared experience. It's good, He says, to be near God.

It's good. He's my refuge. He's often of all the answers. I suspect He went on to have lots of questions and doubts like us all. But the key was always going back, always going back to His God and to His Savior and to get that perspective.

How much more do we have reason to do that through our knowledge of the Redeemer? And it's good then to share that testimony, to tell others of the battles, the journey, the struggles and the answers that come from the living God.

If you're not getting answers from the living God, then keep going back to Him and keep looking for answers and keep listening for what He's saying.

Because I guarantee it that as we live the gospel, we will have missional hearts. We just...

[25 : 33] The gospel is what we need for our discipleship and the gospel is what we need for our mission. And the more the gospel is impacting on our lives, the more it will enable us to recognize that we are part of His kingdom that will bring in the harvest as we share that.

It's the launchpad always moving our own hearts towards Him as the launchpad for mission. And you will be the harvesters as you know Christ working in your own heart and sharing that with

others, not just within the... not only within the church context, but also in the world in which we live something very real that's happening in our lives that we share with others.

I mean, let's pray. Father God, we pray that you would bless us as we think about this great inspired, holy spirit inspired Sam, which takes us on a journey, reminds us that faith in Christ is very different from religion and that we need to be real in our own lives with you, but also share that reality with others and disabuse them, especially those who are not Christians, disabuse them of the notion that Christians either have it all together or are morally superior or are self-righteous or judgmental because that couldn't be further from the truth of what we are as believers.

And may that then be a great starting point for us Lord, teaches us to make that a great starting point for us to share our faith and to share how that misconception is very far from the truth, to be honest about our own need and to point people to our righteous judge for whom they fall miserably short, but also to a glorious loving and righteous Savior.

And may we point people to the cross where justice and mercy meet and kiss mutually.

[27 : 55] May that be our own experience and may be one we share. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.