

## Introduction

1. Arrival in 2012, I helped recruit outside chapel speakers and the question was raised “What should I speak about...”
2. What is the Lord doing in your life right now? I plan to expose myself to my own test and do that with you this morning: What is the Lord doing in my life right now.

From R.C. Sproul theologian in 2017:

Recently a friend asked me ... “What’s the big idea of the Christian life?” He was interested in the overarching, ultimate goal of the Christian life.

To answer his question, I fell back on the theologian’s prerogative and gave him a Latin term. I said, “The big idea of the Christian life is *coram Deo*. *Coram Deo* captures the essence of the Christian life.”

This phrase literally refers to something that takes place in the presence of, or before the face of, God. To live *coram Deo* is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.

To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze.

Sproul, R.C., *What Does ‘coram Deo’ Mean?*, Ligonier Ministries, November 13, 2017, <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-coram-deo-mean/> accessed 27 July 2020.

3. I chose Psalm 73 because it is becoming one of my favorite passages in the Bible. But it is important for me now because it is unlocking a critical part of my Christian sojourn which has eluded me for some time—a part I want to share with you now.

## LET US PRAY

1. Psalms 73 fits into the category of wisdom psalms.
2. I think wisdom psalms are good per se, but even more maybe to gain wisdom in times such as these.
3. We want to be used by God as a church to produce a group of people who “walk in wisdom.”
  - (a) We **do not want to produce** a group of people who believe that following God, becoming like Christ, and serving Him is a matter of “**do this**” and “**don’t do that.**”

- (b) Several years ago, **Major Ian Thomas** wrote a book, “The Saving Life of Christ” where he notes this philosophy where people become Christians, and they think (and may be taught) that it is a matter of **exchanging one set of moral values** for another. This is part of it but not it.
- (c) It is true that God gave us **10 commandments** and not 10 **recommendations or suggestions**. However, even Jesus showed us in **Matthew 5** that even these foundational truths have **thicker, wiser** applications than we understand.

Psalm 73: Leads to a type of **wisdom** where the Lord God becomes “**Our One True Desire**” which leads to “**our Desire to Live Coram Deo**”—**TOTALLY BEFORE HIM**

Psalm 73:1 begins “Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.”

1. From the start, we are told that God is good to those who are **pure in heart**. The word “**heart**” appears **7 different** times in this psalm. It is a psalm that is meant to challenge our very hearts.
2. This is a wisdom psalm about the significance of “**heart attitudes**” and underscores the relative **insignificance of** our circumstances.”
3. Jesus noted the importance of a pure heart in the blessings/beatitudes in Matthew 5:8: The **pure in heart shall “see God.”**
4. Derek Kidner: a pure heart is a **heart totally devoted** to God.
5. It is what **the older scholars** use to call living life “**coram deo,**” to live life “totally before God.”

But what about the **heart condition** of the psalmist who was writing this psalm?

“<sup>2</sup> But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.”

This statement in a sense is the “**what question.**” What was going on in the heart of the psalmist? He was **stumbling**—we will **find out later that this was only the beginning** of his **confession of sin**—superficial stuff--STUMBLING

Then he describes a series of “**why statements.**” Why were his feet almost stumbling and steps nearly slipping?

The psalmist was **ENVIIOUS of wicked people**, their **attitudes, their acquisitions** and their status in life:

<sup>3</sup> For I was **envious** of the arrogant when I saw the **prosperity** of the wicked.

<sup>4</sup> For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are **fat and sleek**.

<sup>5</sup> They are **not in trouble** as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

(Earthly wealth has its benefits: better food; housing; medical care; security or the ability to buy security)

So what the wicked had, prosperity (wealth), health not impacted as much by normal life issues (**objective factors/external factors**) then **descends** into "**heart attitudes**," (subjective factors) that are not worth being envious about.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore **pride** is their necklace; **violence** covers them as a garment—ROUGH PEOPLE

<sup>7</sup> Their eyes swell out through fatness; their **hearts** overflow with follies.  
OT folly includes more than just foolishness, but moral failure

<sup>8</sup> They **scoff** and **speak** with malice; loftily they **threaten** oppression.  
Speech and manner of speaking is impaired.

<sup>9</sup> They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

It is fair to conclude that the perspective of the wicked is to avoid suffering at all costs and to inflict suffering on others as a way of life.

**REMEMBER:** THE PSALMIST WAS **ENVIIOUS** OF THIS!

This is quite a contrast for those who believe in God.

**1 Peter 4: 13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

**ROMANS 8:16, 17** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The **psalmist initially suffered** from at least **2 temptations** that we also **face today** as followers of Christ.

1. First, he was living and assessing life from a “**horizontal view**” rather than a **vertical** or heavenly viewpoint. He did not have God’s mind or wisdom as to life on earth, particularly in terms of the “apparent” success of the wicked.

**LOOK AROUND TOWN; LOOK AROUND FAMILY; LOOK AROUND CHURCH?—Neighbors, Newspapers, Fellow Congregants?**

2. Second, he did not understand the future end or a heavenly mindset: (eschatology). It is absolutely critical to live and assess life from an **eternal mindset**.
3. We need to gauge our daily life on earth from God’s perspective; that life on earth is short, preparatory, and should be lived from a heavenly perspective: remember the **prayer and passage** that inhabits almost every language: **thy kingdom come**.

Another problem with the wicked is that their repeated actions and superficial successes impact culture; impact others who stand by and watch:

<sup>10</sup> Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them.

<sup>11</sup> And they say, “How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?”

<sup>12</sup> Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

These ideas are true today. One writer notes, there is the “popular worship of success.”

More important: the **moral actions and testimony** of **believers and non-believers** give **false or true testimony** of God and his **omniscience**.

This all becomes a bit too much for the psalmist who concludes:

<sup>13</sup> All in vain have I kept my **heart** clean and washed my **hands in innocence**.

<sup>14</sup> For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.

At this point, the psalmist speaks with "**pathetic self-centeredness**" and a "**From Below**" perspective on life.

And it **brings into question the motivations** of his **heart** and life's purpose: is it riches, vainglory, earthly fame,...

**Pascal**: "Our imagination **so magnifies the present**, because we continually think about it, and so reduces eternity, because we do not think about it, that we turn eternity into nothing and nothing into eternity." (136)

Compare this to David in Psalm 26: 1-7 when he saw evil people:

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity,  
and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

<sup>2</sup> Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my **heart and my mind**.

<sup>3</sup> For your **steadfast love** is before my eyes, and I walk in your **faithfulness**.

<sup>4</sup> I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites.

<sup>5</sup> I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.

<sup>6</sup> I wash my **hands in innocence** and go around your altar, O LORD,

<sup>7</sup> proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds.

For David too, this was a matter of the heart. Yet his starting point was trusting the Lord and walking with integrity. He openly rejected the ways of **the wicked man** and came to very different conclusions about the **motivation and practice of having "hands of innocence."**

David here avoided (unlike Adam) approaching, hanging out or being near the forbidden fruit.

David enjoyed a “from above” perspective, unlike the psalmist in Psalm 73.

## Part II

The psalm and psalmist begin a different tack or perspective starting with verse 15 which is very good news to us also.

<sup>15</sup> If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

Different things are happening here:

1. The psalmist is on the **cusp/beginning of repentance**. And here there is a change of mind and heart going on.
2. It shows the importance of our responsibilities to the body of Christ and how these responsibilities can act as a guard against our flesh at times. The cause of his initial **“pause” in speaking and further despair was the witness to the community** of believers. This is a good starting point for our thoughts and actions even though they come “from below.”—it is a special, **holy, audience** and witness.
3. But, it also shows that when the psalmist had spoken intently but privately about his feelings and attitudes such honest reflection of his heart led to huge success and blessing.

Honesty with what we think and feel before the Lord can result in formulating a proper “thought life” and “prayer life.”

His thought life actually **“shocked him into a better frame of mind” and it was a “moral** not mental change” taking place. (Kidner)

The psalmist continues:

<sup>16</sup> But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

<sup>17</sup> until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

<sup>18</sup> Truly you set them in **slippery places**; you make them **fall to ruin**.

<sup>19</sup> How they are **destroyed in a moment, swept away** utterly by terrors!

<sup>20</sup> Like a **dream** when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you **despise** them as phantoms.

A **most severe separation**. It **smacks of Matthew 7:23**: I never knew you.

The psalmist now **casting vertical/heavenly perspectives on earthly/horizontal realities**.

His thinking is becoming **more eschatological**.

These wicked are like a dream, destined to be forgotten by God.

Forgotten by the One who is the true, the good and beautiful.

Forgotten by the one who defines reality.

CT Studd's famous quote is appropriate here: "only 1 life will soon be past; only what is done in Christ will last."

**Today we must also** enter into **God's sanctuary** (not necessarily a temple), but a life of living temples individually and collectively. We need to pray and read God's word; pray and fast; pray and live in community; pray and...

### **Part III**

This part leads to the conclusion: I call it Asaph's **James 1 experience**: looking deeply **into the mirror** and **not forgetting what** one saw.

It was the beginning of a new self-reflection, again of his **heart**.

<sup>21</sup> When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in **heart**,

<sup>22</sup> I was **brutish** and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.

Verses 21, 22 speak of a heart that was embittered, pricked, brutish and beastly. This is a **far-cry from v. 2** when he simply confessed things like stumbling or being in slippery places.

1. Just as there is **progressive revelation**, I think there is sometimes **progressive repentance** from sin.

2. Don't get me **wrong**. I **John 1:9** is still in force. When we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us. But,
3. The **Holy Spirit goes beyond** just a wrong word or action to **examine our hearts**, our attitudes and motivations. That is what is happening here I think.

Kidner: verses speak of "**envy**" or "**grievance**" by the psalmist. "There is nothing so **blinding than the two**...This was the nerve the serpent had touched in Eden to make even Paradise appear an insult." (291)

But look what God does when we turn toward Him:

<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you **hold** my right hand.

<sup>24</sup> You **guide** me with your **counsel**, and afterward you will receive me to **glory**.

<sup>25</sup> Whom have I **in heaven** but you? And there is nothing **on earth** that I **desire** besides you.

Kidner:

1. God "grasps" or holds us; God "guides" or counsels us; God will receive us (prepare us?) for glory.

**Confession and repentance** changes everything. It started when we first came to faith. This is great news. News better than even the end of covid-19.

<sup>25</sup> Whom have I **in heaven** but you? And there is nothing **on earth** that I **desire** besides you.

With **Jesus our only desire**, the **results** even on **earth are quite remarkable**:

The desire for God results in:

- Feeding the hungry;
- Clothing the naked;
- Giving shelter to the homeless;
- Caring for the sick;
- Visiting the prisoners;
- Freeing the slaves;



As the great Christian songwriter Michael Card once wrote: "**With Jesus our only** possession, then giving becomes our delight."

### **Conclusion:**

<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart **may fail**, but God is the **strength<sup>th</sup> of my heart** and **my portion** forever.

The psalmist answers in part the **riddle of Ecc. 3:11**, where Solomon records that God has **placed eternity** into the human heart."

Only the **Eternal God** can fill an **eternal soul** that He has made.

As Augustine noted: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you alone."

<sup>27</sup> For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.

<sup>28</sup> 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**.

1. In verse 15, the psalmist could only keep his mouth closed, **protecting** God's people;
2. After confession and repentance and taking God as his refuge, in verse 28, there is **now proclamation**. (Kidner)

Personal sin and struggles and opening up to God's spirit: my neighbor; saying sorry to Alicia.

Jesus: Our desire and significance.