

Desire

Those of you who have heard me speak before know that I like to talk about unusual things. Whenever I have a chance to teach I try to talk about something that you didn't even know was in the Bible. My lessons tend to be about things that get overlooked, or are rarely discussed, or that have been forgotten about.

The reason that I do that is because I want to *teach* you something. I want you to go away from our time together having actually learned something. I have no interest in telling you something that you understand well and have heard a thousand times before. That accomplishes nothing; you go away knowing exactly what you knew when you walked in. What I want to do is to show you something new; that way when you leave you will depart with more knowledge than you had when you walked in. I want to educate you, and that means teaching you new things – and so I spend a lot of time trying to find new things to teach you.

But today I want to take a different approach. When I prepared today's message I took a step back. What is the most important thing that I could teach you? If I only had this one opportunity to address you – if this was the only chance I ever had to tell you something – what would be the best thing to tell you? What is the one thing that is more important than everything else?

If you are not a Christian then the most important thing I can tell you is the gospel. If you do not know Jesus then the most important thing for you to know is that you have sinned against a holy God. You have wronged God, and God is not happy about it. All of us are guilty before God. We have all lied; we have all cheated; we have all taken that which is not ours; we have all lusted; we are all guilty. None of us are perfect – and that is very bad, because God requires absolute perfection 100% of the time. All those who have wronged God will be judged by Him after they die. They will face God's unending wrath and will spend eternity in a terrible place of eternal fire. It is a truly horrible fate.

But there is hope. God knew that we were all guilty and He knew that there was no way we could ever pay the price for our sins. So God did something truly remarkable: He sent His Son Jesus to Earth. Jesus lived a perfect life and then died a cruel and torturous death on the cross. When He died, He did not die for His sins (for He had no sins of His own); instead He died for ours. He took the punishment that we deserved – and that makes salvation possible. All those who repent of their sins and believe on Jesus will have their sins forgiven. When they die they will not face the wrath of God; instead they will live forever in a place of joy and peace. On the one hand is eternal life; on the other hand is eternal torment. That is the choice.

So, for those of you who are not Christians, that is the most important thing that you can ever be told. You will never receive any information that is more important than the gospel. The gospel has the power to change your fate – not just in this life, but for all of eternity. It is the only thing that can save you from the wrath of God. It is the only thing that can deliver you from death.

But what about the rest of you – those who *are* Christians? There are many people here who have been Christians for decades. They know the gospel and have shared it with other people. They not only attend church, but have served in church. They've read the Bible and know what it teaches. They are seasoned veterans. What is the most important thing that I can tell *them*? If I only had this one chance to address those who already know Christ, what would I tell them?

And that brings us to **Psalm 73**. This particular psalm has something important to tell us – in fact, it may contain the most important thing that a Christian can ever be told. There are a lot of priceless truths in the Bible, but this one is truly life-changing. This truth also happens to be rare. In these last days, this particular teaching is not taught very often. The reason is simple: this psalm says something that we do not want to hear.

The teaching that I want to bring out is found at the end of the psalm, but to get there we have to go through the entire chapter. It won't do to skip to the end; we need to take the entire journey.

In this psalm, Asaph laments the prosperity of the wicked. He is appalled that the wicked lead really great lives:

Psalm 73:1: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.
2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.
3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

Asaph tells us that he actually *envied* the wicked. He was jealous of their prosperity. The wicked were living very luxurious lives, and that drove Asaph crazy:

Psalm 73:4: "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.
5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.
6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.
7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish."

The wicked were leading truly *great* lives. They weren't in trouble like other people. They weren't plagued with problems. Most of all, they had more than their heart could wish for. They truly had it all. Even though these people were proud and violent, they had it made. In fact, these people had it so well that their success emboldened them to speak out against their fellow man *and against God Himself*:

Psalm 73:8: "They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.
9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.
10 Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.
11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?
12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches."

At this point Asaph is absolutely beside himself. The wicked are speaking against both God and man. They oppress others and they mock God. Yet, despite all of this, they are actually *prospering*. They are increasing in riches. They are doing *really well* for themselves.

If we were honest with ourselves we would have to admit that we often share Asaph's frustration. In our own day there are wicked people who have incredible power and great wealth. We know exactly what Asaph is talking about, and we have thought the same kind of things that he is thinking. Asaph is astonished at how successful the wicked are – and we are equally astonished. In our society it seems like evil is advancing on a daily basis. Terrible men are doing terrible things, and somehow instead of being punished for it they become more wealthy and more powerful. We look at the things that people are getting away with and we shake our heads. We see righteous people suffering and wicked people prospering, and it just baffles us.

Asaph is equally puzzled. He starts to think that his righteousness has been an utter waste of time:

Psalm 73:13: "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in

innocency.

14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

Asaph has cleansed his heart – but despite this, he is plagued with problems and adversity. Yet the wicked, who have given themselves over to wickedness, find wealth and peace. It just isn't fair. Asaph wonders if being righteous is just a big waste of time. What good does it really do?

This entire subject was very painful to Asaph, until he remembered something:

Psalm 73:15: “If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.

16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.

19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.

20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.”

Yes, it is true that the wicked were successful. It was true that they didn't have the same problems that other men had. It was true that they were wealthy and prosperous. But there was one more piece to the story – a very important piece. Asaph finally remembered the ultimate end of the wicked. He remembered that one day the wicked would have to stand before God and give an account of their lives. They would have to answer for every crime, every lie, every sin, and every evil act. Even every idle word would be judged. Nothing would be left out, or skipped over, or overlooked.

On that day the difference between the righteous and the wicked will be extremely obvious. The righteous have their sins covered by the blood of Jesus, so when they are judged they will be declared innocent and let go. They will inherit everlasting life, joy, and peace. They have nothing to worry about; their future is absolutely secure.

The wicked, though, are a different story. They have not repented and they have not believed. Their sins are not covered. When they are judged they will be found guilty, and they will face the unending wrath of God – and they will face it for all the endless ages of time. They will be cast into a place of fire and torment and they will never be let go. Their future does not contain peace; instead they face a fate that is horrible beyond words.

When Asaph remembered this, it changed his outlook on life:

Psalm 73:21: “Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.

22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.

24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”

Asaph remembered that God was always with him – both in the easy times and in the hard times. He knew that God was there, guiding him and holding him. Asaph also knew that one day God would receive him up to glory. Better days were coming, and he knew it.

Now that we know the story, ***we can finally get to the point*** that I would like to bring out. We find it in the very next verse:

Psalm 73:25: “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I

desire beside thee.

26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.

28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.”

Verse 25 contains the heart of this chapter; it is the sum of the matter. In fact, it is the key to life itself. When Asaph looked over the entire situation he said that ***God was all that he really wanted.*** Sure, the wicked had prosperity. Their lives were easy and they had wealth and success. Things went well for them. All of that was true – and on top of that, that the lives of the righteous were difficult.

But Asaph did not care. The prosperity of the wicked didn't appeal to him. Their riches were not tempting. He didn't want their money, or their power, or their success, or any of it. *All he wanted was God.* God was enough for him. In fact, God was the only thing that he desired. Nothing else really mattered. Let the wicked have their prosperity; Asaph had something better because he had God. Asaph might never have wealth, or success, or fame – *but it didn't matter because Asaph had God.*

This is the point that I want to focus on. You see, if we were honest with ourselves I think we would have to admit that Asaph's attitude is rare. If God took away everything that we had and left us with nothing but Himself, I think there would be outrage. I think people would be rioting in the streets. We would be profoundly upset. We would feel wronged. This idea that “God is all that you need” is nice in theory, but in practice – if it actually came down to that – we just don't believe it. There are an awful lot of things that we want in life, and the truth is that God just isn't enough for us. We would never dream of saying “There is nothing on earth that I desire except for God”. In fact, that very idea is *unthinkable*.

The reason this is so unthinkable is because many people treat God as some kind of bill that they have to pay off every month. They have divided their lives into two categories: the part that they have given to God, and the rest that they have kept for themselves. They understand that God wants something in exchange for salvation, so they try to pacify God by tithing and going to Church and volunteering now and then. They give God “His cut” and do what they want to with the rest. You might say that God is a chore, like vacuuming the floor. It's a box that you check off.

For a lot of people, the only reason they want God in their lives at all is to save them from Hell and to rescue them whenever things go wrong. Other than those two things, they would be quite happy if God left them entirely alone. What they really want in life is money, and fame, and power. They have things that they want to accomplish in life. They have wishes and desires. They may try to appease God by doing religious things now and then, but their lives are really just about themselves.

But that is *not* the deal that God wants. God doesn't want a tenth of us; He wants *all* of us. He doesn't want our money, or our stuff, or our time; what He truly desires is *us*. He wants to own our heart. This is how Jesus put it:

Mark 12:29: “And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”

According to Jesus Himself, the greatest commandment of all is to love God with *all* your heart, and *all* your soul, and *all* your mind, and *all* your strength. *That is what God wants from you.* That is what God requires from you. Nothing less will do. God does not want “His cut”; He wants absolutely

everything. He doesn't want to become a part of your life; He wants to *become* your life.

You see, when we become saved, God requires us to declare spiritual bankruptcy. We can't say "Well, God, if you will save me then I'll give you ten percent of my life, but the other ninety percent is mine. You do what you want with your cut and I'll do what I want with the rest." That is not going to work. What God actually wants is this: "Lord, I completely surrender myself to You, and I belong to You now. You are the master and I am the servant. I will do what You want me to do: I will go where You want me to go, I will think what You want me to think, and I will believe what You want me to believe. I will hold nothing back. I sacrifice my dreams and desires and replace them with *Your* dreams and desires. I now have but one purpose in life: to glorify and honor You."

Have you ever heard the phrase "Give your life to Jesus"? That isn't supposed to be a metaphor. Becoming a Christian literally means that our life doesn't belong to us anymore. God doesn't want us to follow our dreams; instead He wants us to follow *His* dreams. God doesn't want us to follow our desires; instead He wants us to follow *His* desires. God wants us to reach the point where the only things that we want are the things that He wants, and the only things that we desire are the things that He desires.

God wants us to see ourselves as servants – servants of God. He wants us to look at everything we have and everything we are and ask this question: how can we use it for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom? He wants us to see ourselves as stewards and to use our resources for His benefit. When we became saved our old man of sin was crucified with Christ, and we became new creatures. We have a new purpose – a very different purpose. God has called us to devote all of our passion and energy and love to God. We're literally living for Him now. The old ways are over.

That doesn't mean that God requires us to give 100% of our income as charitable donations. What it does mean is that we are to live our lives in a very different way. We are to see ourselves as stewards of God's property – as managers of His resources. Our lives aren't about us; they are about God. We are servants on a mission, and that mission is to glorify God and advance His kingdom.

This doesn't mean that it is a crime to be rich; Abraham and David both had great wealth. It also doesn't mean that it is a crime to have nice things. But it does mean that *riches must never own our heart*. Asaph was able to look at the prosperity of the wicked and honestly say that it just wasn't appealing to him. He didn't want any of it because he had something better. Let me repeat that: the riches and prosperity of the wicked meant nothing to Him because He had God, and *God was better than everything that the wicked had put together*. The wicked may have had wealth, but *God* was his portion.

You might say it is something like being in love. When you are in love with someone, that person becomes your whole world. You are obsessed with them, to the point where they are on your mind constantly. You want to spend all the time that you can with them, and you want to talk with them as much as possible. You are obsessed with pleasing them. Your whole life starts to become centered around them – around what they are doing, what they are seeking, and what they want. The reason you are so obsessed isn't because you have to be, or because you feel like you should be; it is because you genuinely want to be. It is a natural outflowing of your heart. It just happens.

That is where God wants us to be. When God says that He wants us to love Him with all of our heart, He meant it. It wasn't a metaphor. God wants to become our whole world – not because He ought to be, but because we simply can't imagine any other kind of life. He wants our whole life to be centered around Him – what He is doing, what He wants, what He is saying. He wants to dominate our heart to such an extent that all of this just happens. Everything else just fades away and becomes unimportant.

The apostle Paul had this attitude. There was just one thing he wanted in life, and that was to know Christ. His love for God was so great that everything else was utterly meaningless to him:

Philippians 3:7: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,
9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:
10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;
11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”

Asaph desired one thing in life, and that was God. The Lord didn't just have part of his heart; He had *all* of his heart. Nothing else really mattered. Likewise, the apostle Paul counted everything as loss so that he might know Christ. Paul loved God so much that He was *all* that Paul longed for. Nothing else mattered.

Now, I'm not going to ask you if you have arrived at the place that Paul reached. I'm not going to ask if you can honestly say that Christ is your all-consuming passion. I am going to ask this, though: *is that the kind of person that you want to be?*

You see, if you *want* to be that kind of person then you *will* be that kind of person. If you seek it you will find it. If you cry out to God and beg Him to change your heart then He will. It may take time and it may not happen overnight, *but it will happen*. God is very willing to give you a heart that is perfect toward Him.

But *do you want it?* You see, there are a great many people who don't. A lot of people really prefer to give God a cut of their life and then keep the rest. They don't want to completely give themselves up to God. They want to hold on to their desires, to their wants, and to riches and fame and power. They don't mind having God *in* their life, but they don't want God to *be* their life. They don't mind serving God now and again but they have no intention of changing their perspective. They don't want to be completely and solely dedicated to serving God. That's not what they want.

It is what God requires, though. People are fine with the idea as Jesus as Savior, but they don't really like the idea of Jesus as Lord. We don't mind giving God “His cut”, but we have a big problem with giving God everything. However, the truth is that becoming a Christian is an all-or-nothing deal. God wants all of you, and He will be satisfied with nothing less.

In the famous Parable of the Sower, Christ warned that there would be a whole class of people who would become fruitless. The reason they would bear no fruit is because the cares and riches of this world would draw their heart away from God:

Mark 4:19: “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

God can fix this problem; He can give you a new heart. The question is this: *do you want it?* Do you really want to be passionately dedicated to God, or do you actually prefer the cares and riches of this world? The choice is yours – and the consequences will last forever.

This is not a minor issue; it is the acid test. This is how the true sheep are differentiated from the false sheep. This is how you can tell if your salvation is real or is just a mirage. This is where the truth comes out. Yes, if you want you can choose to hold onto your heart. You can decide to keep your life. You can continue seeking after riches and power and all the other things that are forever tempting us. You can do that – but as the apostle John warns us, the price is high:

I John 2:15: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

You see, if Christ truly has our heart, then the things of this world aren't going to be able to tempt us because they're not what we want. The problem is that many people would much rather have the things of the world. We don't actually want God. Sure, we'll come to church and serve God and maybe even give God a cut of our income, but *we don't actually want Him*. We'll include Him in our lives if we have to, but we don't *really* want Him. The world is what really has our heart.

So yes, you can continue your love affair with the world – but it will cost you everything. Those who love the world will pass away with the world – but those who have actually given their lives to Christ will abide forever. It really is an all-or-nothing deal: God will not be satisfied with a “cut”. If He cannot have it all then He will not accept any of it. Either we truly belong to God or we don't. If our heart belongs to the world then it doesn't belong to God, and that is a serious thing.

Asaph was clear: his heart really did belong to God. The only thing that he desired in all the world was God Himself; riches meant nothing to him. Paul's heart also belonged to God: he was willing to count everything as loss so that he might know Christ.

Where do you stand?