

I Won't Be Overwhelmed | Week 2: Limping Forward

Text: Psalm 73

Sunday, January 18, 2015

I. Introduction

- A. Not from a clinical standpoint - that's not my training
- B. Goal: En-couragement for those facing depression and suffering, and equipping for those who know people facing depression and suffering.
- C. Last week:
 1. Walk it out - A shorthand for, "Get over it" or "Pull yourself together." What I mean is to begin putting one foot in front of another. That you are not powerless in the battle with your emotions.
 2. I can recommend counselors/therapists

II. Psalm 73

1 Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.

- Depression's Lie: God isn't good. God is punishing me.
- A battle we all face - event the most devout:
 - Having a theological knowledge that God is good, yet questioning in our hearts if we really believe that.
 - This does not mean there's something wrong with you. Here's why...

2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.

- Asaph (or David) questioned God's goodness. Why?
- A man of God whose writings were included in scripture questioned God's goodness.

3 For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4For they have no pangs until death; They're not suffering
their bodies are fat and sleek.

5They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

- What prompts Asaph's question of God's goodness is watching bad people who have no troubles revel in prosperity.
- He becomes envious of the those who have no heart whatsoever for God - people who are proud, whose hubris stinks before God, and those who are decidedly opposed to cultivating godly lives.
- Sufferers envy those who enjoy carefree, frivolous lives.
- We want to be set free from the weight of pain sitting atop our chests.
- Pain so relentless that we'd flirt with betraying God in order to achieve relief.
- Listen to the brazenly blasphemous way these people think and speak about God (people whom godly Asaph envies)...

6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.

7 Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.

8 They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.

9 They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.

10 Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.

11 And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

12 Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches. Now listen closely to the next verse...

13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.

- In other words, "The pursuit of a godliness has not led me to the good life." "The work of purity and faithfulness is been a waste of time."
- Remember the opening verse: "God is good...to those who are pure in heart." Purity of heart has led to disillusionment in Asaph's life.
- So Asaph's feeling the heavy weight of temptation to abandon God's ways...

14 For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"

I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

- But the Spirit stifles these dangerous longings within him.
- The thought of betraying God and his people keeps him from going any further down that dark path.
- Some people feel condemned and ashamed for flirting with blaspheming God in their times of pain. But God isn't mad at you! You might think your faith is faulty, in disrepair, that something is wrong, or maybe even false.
- Yet, the Spirit keeps you from committing yourself to this dark paradigm. Be freed, my limping brothers and sisters! Your faith is real and vital! Living in tension isn't sin! It proves that you have faith! You're fitting to remain faithful. Fights are hard! Your faith is legit!

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

- Asaph's was still confused by this dilemma, though.
- Life in God isn't sterile, antiseptic, predictable. It's often messy and confusing.
- ...not because God is messy and confusing, but because we live on the front lines of two warring powers: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. And living in this war requires wisdom and finesse.

17 until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.

18 Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.

19 How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!

20 Like a dream when one awakes,

O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

- Now we arrive the heart of what "walking like Abram" means, as it relates to last week's message on Genesis 12. We must make our way to the sanctuary. Of course, in King David's day, when this psalm was written, the person who wanted to worship God had to enter the Tabernacle. But we worship on the other side of the cross, the bright side. We don't have to go to a place, per se, to be with God. The Spirit resides in the souls of all who believe in Jesus.
- And it's in God's presence that our equilibrium is restored. It's with Jesus that we begin to think straight and see straight again. Asaph was awakened to his foolish longings. He realized he was flirting with death. Everyone who suffers urgently and often needs these "awakenings," which means that we must purpose each day to be in God's presence.
- But something surprising happens to Asaph when he consults with God...

21 When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,

22 I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.

- God shows Asaph his heart. He was "pricked in heart." Pain had calloused over his heart in ways that were imperceptible to him. Long seasons of pain and depression can do that to a person. He realized was that he had been resisting God all along.

- You see, when we're in pain, we often plead our case before God, reminding him of our innocence, that we don't deserve to suffer. But God pulled back the veil, flooding Asaph's heart with the light of his truth.
- Asaph wasn't as innocent as he thought he was. He was "brutish and ignorant...like a beast toward" God.
- But pain has its advantages. God can redeem it for his glory and your growth. Depression doesn't have to have the last word.
- Tim Keller: "Do you want to know who you are, your strengths and weaknesses? Do you want to be a compassionate person who skillfully helps people who are hurting? Do you want to have such a profound trust in God that you are fortified against the disappointments of life? Do you want simply to be wise about how life goes? Those are four crucial things to have - but none of them are readily achievable without suffering." - Tim Keller
- Anecdote: "*God saved us from ourselves.*"

23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.

24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.

- He goes from being brutish to surrendered. Lead-able. He's tender to the Lord. This doesn't mean his turmoil has subsided, but he's thinking clearly and living yielded to God. Just look at what he says next as this Psalm resolves...

25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

- Asaph makes the ultimate realization. This brings us back to what good things God gives to his servants who pursue pure-hearted-ness: The good thing that God gives us is himself because only he satisfies.
- But we have to see this. Pleasure obscures this fact.
- Notice that Asaph admits that his strength will fail. This is a fact about all humanity. None of us have the resources to live skillfully without Christ. But God is greater.
- Strength to overcome is given to those whose lives pivot on a person: Jesus.
- But even more than strength to overcome, Asaph is satisfied with the giver of that strength alone. And this is one of the big ideas that sufferers have to grasp - that we all must grasp. God is the source of strength and hope and comfort. But God does not exist for this. Those gifts are given to those who make God their heart's home.
- Jesus is ultimate. Jesus is supreme. Jesus is the reason. Jesus is our purpose. Jesus is our King. Jesus is to be our highest treasure.

III. Challenge

- A. Remember that hope takes practice. It must be built. I recommend creating a daily structure of worship. Don't wait for motivation to come. It won't.
 1. Daily scripture readings in the Psalms and Gospels;
 2. Pray the Psalms each day (Fill your mouth with God's words);
 3. Faithfully and actively participate in church gatherings (sing; confess, pray, learn)
 4. Ed Welch: "Repetition bores fools, but the wise view it as essential to the human soul."
- B. Believe that God supports the hearts of those who dedicate themselves to purity.
 1. God provides the strength to carry on.
 2. What is purity? Purity is not perfection. It is the practice. For the sufferer, purity is the practice of facing the things that pain exposes in our hearts and bringing those things to God. (more on this next week)

- C. Keep in mind that “The goal isn’t to overcome depression, but engage it with a growing knowledge of Jesus.” (Ed Welch) Counter-intuitive but true. Jesus must be the target. Know him and learn about yourself as you grapple with your depression.
- D. Your feelings and instincts are not your lord. You don’t have to submit to them!