

Theme: God desires for our prayers to be filled with brutal honesty, expressing our questions and doubts, but with a willingness to let God open our eyes to the truth so that our perspective might be changed.

I. Intro – Match Point

- A. A 2005 Woody Allen movie
- B. It is really a running debate with *Crime and Punishment*
- C. Allen disagrees with Dostoevsky - crime can pay
- D. There really is no justice in the universe
- E. Psalmist in Psalm 73 struggles with the same questions

II. The Structure of Psalm 73

- A. The key word - 'surely' וַיֵּשֶׁר
 - 1. This word appears in v1, v13, v18
 - ¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart... ¹³ Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence... ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. Psalms 73:1, 13, 18
 - 2. This splits the Psalm into three clear sections
 - a. The problem
 - b. The transition
 - c. The solution
- B. A prayer recounting struggle and meditation
 - 1. Note the early verses are not really a 'prayer'
 - ¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied

the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. Psalms 73:1–4

- 2. A past tense recounting of struggle & meditation
- 3. This process is a significant part of UnCommon prayer

III. The Problem - The Prosperity of the Wicked

- A. The first "surely" - God is good to Israel/pure in heart
 - Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. Psalms 73:1
 - 1. This is his theology - and it is true!
 - 2. God is good to His people - all the time!
- B. But - the Psalmist is struggling
 - ² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Psalms 73:2–3
 - 1. God is good - BUT I am struggling (v2)
 - 2. FOR - If God is good, why do the wicked 'prosper'?
 - 3. Even worse - prosper is 'shalom' - blessed peace!
- C. A description of the peace of the wicked
 - 1. A life free of troubles
 - ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Psalms 73:4–5
 - 2. A life full of pride and evil
 - ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous

hearts comes **iniquity**; the **evil** conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸ They **scoff**, and speak with **malice**; in their **arrogance** they threaten oppression. ⁹ **Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.** Psalm 73:6–9

3. A life of influence over others

¹⁰ **Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.** Psalms 73:10

4. A life of mocking God

They say, “How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?” Psalms 73:11

5. Summary - a carefree life of wealth

This is what the wicked are like — always carefree, they increase in wealth. Psalms 73:12

D. Wrestling with the blessed wicked

1. If we are honest, we see very similar things
2. Think of many Hollywood & music stars
3. How can this be if God is good?

IV. The Transition

A. The Psalmists struggle - envying the wicked

1. Walking with God is useless
Surely **in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain** have I washed my hands in innocence. Psalms 73:13
2. I am plagued and punished - not blessed
All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. Psalms 73:14
3. Note clear contrast with v1, 13-14

¹ **Surely God is good** to Israel, to **those who are pure in heart.** ¹³ **Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;** in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ **All day long I have been plagued;** I have been punished every morning. Psalms 73:1, 13–14

B. The transition - this can't be right

1. I can't say this - it would lead people astray
If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed your children. Psalms 73:15
2. Resolution - through worship and prayer
¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Psalms 73:16–17
 - a. He tries to think through it - but this does not help
 - b. Answer comes in the sanctuary - prayer & worship
 - c. These things must be wrestled through in prayer
 - d. We need community - answer comes in corporate worship

V. The Solution

- A. The hidden reality - the wicked are in great trouble
¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰ As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. Psalms 73:18–20
1. He thought they were blessed - they are not!
 2. They are on slippery ground - not him (v2)
- B. A change of heart in the Psalmist

1. An aggrieved heart, a brute beast before God
²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Psalms 73:21–22
2. Yet - God does not reject Him!
²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Psalms 73:23–24
3. God receives him - even when His heart is wrong

C. A new realization

1. Our heart is not our strength - God is!
 Psalms 73:1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
 Psalms 73:7 Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. (NIV has 'minds').
 Psalms 73:13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
 Psalms 73:21 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,
 Psalms 73:26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
2. God Himself is our treasure - not a carefree life!
 - a. To be with God is what matters
²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
 Psalms 73:22–23, 25
 - b. God Himself is our good - our treasure

²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds. Psalms 73:27–28

1. What matters is not carefree life, but being near God
2. God is good - He gives Himself!

VI. Applying the Word

A. Are we honest in our prayers with God?

1. Do we wrestle through things like the Psalmist?
2. Or do we try to solve questions on our own?
3. Am I honest about my envy, fears, doubts, anger?
4. These questions can only be answered in prayer
5. Prayer is communication - talk through them with God!
6. He will not push you away as you talk with Him

B. Do we see God is our treasure?

1. Do I ultimately desire God - or a comfortable life?
2. Am I willing to let God search my heart like this?
3. God Himself - not His blessings - are our treasure

C. Concluding hymn - Be Thou My Vision

UnCommon Honesty In Prayer

Psalm 73
 March 10, 2013
 Be Thou My Vision
 Numbers 6:24-26