

## Introduction

- I find this kind of Psalm hard to deal with:
  - I know the right answer, what we are **meant** to feel, and as a consequence I find it hard to discern much less give expression to what I really feel!
- But I think I have, from time to time, **envied the arrogant & prosperous**:
  - for instance, a guy I worked with - EPCC - deployed from BT, all the back-up of the software engineering dept he worked for!
  - sports cars, business meals, high-powered computer hardware...
  - no interest in God at all - and none the worse for it, apparently!
  - envy wasn't on my sleeve; I didn't stop going to church over it; but, looking back, **I allowed my priorities to be altered by contact with him...**
- Envy can be the up-front, self-aware, raging envy that Asaph felt here
  - or it can be less obvious, under the surface, present but more hidden from ourselves... some of us don't stop and think how we are feeling about everything!!
- But **it is nonetheless dangerous for our spiritual foothold!**

## Story of the Psalm!

- Asaph has looked around him and seen that the arrogant and wicked seem to prosper:
  - (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.*
  - (12) *This is what the wicked are like - always carefree, they increase in wealth.*
- **And he cries: "Its not fair!"**
  - and in their their "getting away with wickedness", they seem to multiply that evil
  - because they've got away with it once, they'll do it again... and again...
  - see how through vs.4-11 there is this repeated: "They this, they that..."
- He's looking on at the wicked, but his concern in the first part of the Psalm is with his own faith:
  - (2) *But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold*
  - (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. (15) If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. (16) When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me*
- Why?
  - because God's promise is that his children will know his blessing
    - *I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (God's promises to Abraham in Gen 12:2,3)*
    - *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. (God's promise to Israel on Sinai; Ex 19:5)*
  - he is - **apparently** - not enjoying that blessing, those covenant promises
  - so, is his faith a sham?
  - "is there something wrong with me? Is there - dare I say it - something wrong with God? Is he real?"

## Reality Check!

- The turning point is his entering the sanctuary (**probably pre-Temple, but could be in Temple**), for worship
  - *David left Asaph and his associates before the ark of the covenant of the LORD to minister there regularly, according to each day's requirements. (1 Chronicles 16:37)*
  - *All the Levites who were musicians - Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives - stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and*

*playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. (2 Chronicles 5:12, at dedication of the Temple)*

- Here's Asaph, someone right at the heart of the worshipping life of the congregation:
  - he's the organist, the choir, the music group!
  - and its **him** who is feeling this alienation from God
- The turning point is more than just the 1000BC equivalent of coming to church:
  - it is that... change and transformation, encounter with God does occur as come to worship with other believers in church
  - but its not just that
- For, in coming to the sanctuary, he is forced to do a reality check:
  - for the sanctuary spoke volumes on two things...

### 1. God is a holy God

- holiness in the altar, the need for sacrifice; holiness in the separation into holy of holies and outer court; holiness in regulations for washing that the priests had to observe; holiness the tablets of the Law, God's standards, in the covenant box...

### 2. God wants to meet with us

- yet the whole point of the sanctuary was to make possible that encounter, that relationship with God! It even sat in the middle of the camp during the Exodus... the Temple was in the heart of Jerusalem, the capital and central city
- So Asaph comes to worship... and is reminded that God is holy, he can't meet with the wicked, but he does meet with those who come to him in humility, depending on his grace for their entrance
  - and *"then I understood their final destiny"* (v.17)
- Contrast v2 & v18: **who is on slippery ground now?**
  - he had been looking at the surface, and felt unsure, felt insecure...
  - but now, having had reality revealed to him again as he came to worship, he sees that only in God is their true security
  - the wicked are those whose foundations are dodgy!
- That initial **reversal** between the **first half of the Psalm and the second** continues:
  - in vs.19,20 it is the wicked who are facing ruin and destruction, rather than the security they seemed to enjoy in vs.4-12; see eg.v9!
  - and where Asaph was cast down and in despair in at the start of the Psalm, he is now secure, confident and at peace in the arms of God
  - indeed, so much has the transformation of perspective turned things round that we have here an incredible description of the life lived in-step with God, utterly different to the start of the Psalm!

### Held, Helped and Hoped (v.23,24)

- **held**, safe now, v.23b
- **helped**, guided, directed for the future, v.24a
- and with a **hope** for the future, of God's presence, of his rule, of his glory! v.24b
- Not a "pie in the sky when you die" faith either
  - he's not saying: "I can grimly bear this now in the hope of something better beyond the grave"
  - *"...earth has nothing I desire besides you"* (25)

## Conclusion

- We can't always feel like the end of the Psalm:
  - we aren't necessarily losing our faith if we do!
- But even when it is not how we feel, the truths spoken here are in fact the reality:
  - God, the holy God, has crossed the great divide of sin and come to meet with me
  - for Asaph, he saw the reality of that as he entered the sanctuary
  - for us, more deeply and more truly, we see that in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus, the presence of Jesus the great high priest in the heavenly Temple
  - the same transformation Asaph knew is opened up for us in our encounter with Jesus
- And our hearts desire is most fully met in Jesus Christ.
  - let's finish with Paul's words to the Philippians, 3:8-11, and make them our prayer:
    - (8) *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ* (9) *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.* (10) *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (11) and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*