

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 Truly God is good to Israel,  
To such as are pure in heart.  
2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;  
My steps had nearly slipped.  
3 For I was envious of the boastful,  
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For there are no pangs in their death,  
But their strength is firm.  
5 They are not in trouble as other men,  
Nor are they plagued like other men.  
6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace;  
Violence covers them like a garment.  
7 Their eyes bulge with abundance;  
They have more than heart could wish.  
8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning  
oppression;  
They speak loftily.  
9 They set their mouth against the heavens,  
And their tongue walks through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return here,  
And waters of a full cup are drained by them.  
11 And they say, "How does God know?  
And is there knowledge in the Most High?"  
12 Behold, these are the ungodly,  
Who are always at ease;  
They increase in riches.  
13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain,  
And washed my hands in innocence.  
14 For all day long I have been plagued,  
And chastened every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"  
Behold, I would have been untrue to the  
generation of Your children.

A Psalm of Asaph.

Asaph was the chief of sacred music (1 Chron. 16:5).

4 And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel: 5 Asaph the chief,... Asaph made music with cymbals

1 Chron 25:1-2: 1 Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was: Of the sons of Asaph:

16 When I thought how to understand this,  
It was too painful for me—  
17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
Then I understood their end.

18 Surely You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.  
19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as  
in a moment!  
They are utterly consumed with terrors.  
20 As a dream when one awakes,  
So, Lord, when You awake,  
You shall despise their image.

21 Thus my heart was grieved,  
And I was vexed in my mind.  
22 I was so foolish and ignorant;  
I was like a beast before You.  
23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
You hold me by my right hand.  
24 You will guide me with Your counsel,  
And afterward receive me to glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven but You?  
And there is none upon earth that I desire  
besides You.  
26 My flesh and my heart fail;  
But God is the strength of my heart and my  
portion forever.

27 For indeed, those who are far from You  
shall perish;  
You have destroyed all those who desert You  
for harlotry.  
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 Your works.

Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied according to the order of the king.

1 Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart.

The upfront conclusion of Asaph's meditation - TRULY GOD IS GOOD, regarding a struggle that happened in his heart. Pure = clean, single, without mixture - Psalm 1

In other words, God is nothing but good to his covenant people. Asaph came to realize that in spite of the incongruities of life (described in verses 3-14), God is good.

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

When it came to connection and perception of the foundation of my life - my walk - When it came to traction and moving forward in my walk - in both I was almost - nearly a goner!

In the Bible the idea of your foot slipping off the mountain really is a way of describing being eternally lost. Asaph is saying "I almost lost my faith. I almost experienced the complete destruction of all of my spirituality and faith.

What gave him spiritual vertigo. What rocked his world, what almost took him off his rails - what threw him for a loop - brought upon him such doubt in his beliefs - What could get this anointed - prophetic worship leader to almost call it quits, throw in the towel - Asaph goes on to say -

3 For I was envious of the boastful,

Envy is to want another person's life instead of your own - Prosperity and Power of the Godless - envy - jealousy - green eyed monster - no pleasure - undermines the good things in your life

When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. 8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them. 11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches.

The bodies of the wicked are "healthy and strong" (v. 4). The old rabbis used this word "firm" or "fat" to describe the columns that supported big buildings. They suggest that the wicked are strengthened, not weakened.

The wicked enjoy visible happiness. Externally, they parade their pride like necklaces. They show off their violent deeds, including those they got away with, like clothes.

The wicked enjoy internal prosperity just as much as their external happiness. They have been so satisfied that their eyes bulge out from fatness. They want for nothing. Their wicked imaginations come to life. Not only are they free from external threats, but they even enjoy peace of mind, completely untroubled by a good conscience.

Asaph saw the ungodly life as the good life. They are always at ease; they always increase in riches. They are rewarded for their wickedness by a God who seems to be as unknowing as the wicked say that He is.

13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. 14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.

Personal - motivation revelation - slipped in - I'm in it to have God serve me, not me serve God. This is about earning the blessings of God - and it is not happening!

Asaph is being honest about his own personal desire for relief from the pain and gaining pleasure

This isn't working out the way I think it should work out. We are getting exactly the opposite of what we deserve, what I want. In fact I am getting so mad about I am tempted to tell others (next gen) - living a good life is a waste of your time, talent and treasure - too much pain involved in holiness

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

Asaph almost published this song too soon, before he got to verses 17-28 in his heart. Almost a False prophet

16 When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—

The wrestle, the battleground of faith - faith - what you believe comes from a combination of thinking and experience - if you are religious and all you have is the what (doctrine) and not the who (experience), then when you are in the world and your experience contradicts the doctrine - experience has the upper hand.

Doubts come when personal experience makes what your mind knows unreal to your heart. This is a terribly painful internal struggle -

One of if not the most powerful influencers of what you believe, is wanting to be accepted, adopted, and adored by a group of people.

Faith is not opposed to reason. Faith is not holding onto something in spite of the evidence. Faith is holding onto something in spite of the appearances.

Deal with doubt - faltering faiths - between the two - thinking and experience - so he goes to the Sanctuary

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

Perspective - big picture - overview - Temple = Jesus - washing - substituiary sacrifice - bread - light - prayer - worship - word - presence of God - Glory of God - experiencing - being accepted, adopted, adored by God - with others.

In doubts - engage with God - "Lord God, I don't know if you're there, but if you are there, you're a person and you can hear me. I need your help."

18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.

I almost slipped - lost my footing - because I wanted to join them on their ice rink - work boots to roller skates

19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.  
20 As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

compare footholds - They might be living the dream now, but their reality is a nightmare. Common grace - salvational grace - worship - eternal or temporary - believe God is real or not there/doesn't care - both faith.

You never, ever have to choose between belief and non-belief. You cannot disbelieve in God without believing in something else.

In other words, you can't prove there's a God, no, but you can't prove there's not a God. Therefore, every place you go is putting your foot on something in an act of faith.

Asaph is saying, "The reason I can trust my faith is, even though my faith is shaky, their faith is impossible."

Sheldon Vanauken when he was struggling as a college student with whether he should be a Christian or not, wrote, "I saw a gap between the possible and the proved. How was I to cross that gap. I didn't want to jump in faith. If I was going to stake my whole life on the risen Christ, I wanted proof. I wanted certainty. I wanted letters of fire across the sky. I got nothing, but then I realized ... my God! Then I realized there was a gap behind me as well. I suddenly realized, of course, there'd have to be a leap of faith to acceptance because I couldn't prove Christ was God, but by God there was no certainty or proof that he was not. Therefore, to even go back was a leap of faith. This was not to be borne. I could not reject Jesus without great faith. When I realized it would take enormous faith just to reject Jesus, I knew what to do. There was only one thing I could do. Once I saw the gap behind me, I flung myself over the gap toward Jesus."

21 Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind. 22 I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

Asaph is aware that his heart had strayed from the Lord - lost sight of His unconditional love and kindness - and it crushed him. His fear of the Lord - faulted. Willfully ignorant - acting like an animal

Animals seem to have no concept of eternity. They live their life for momentary pleasures, satisfying natural urges. When Asaph forgot about eternity he was truly like a beast before God.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. 24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.

I acted like an animal. You've treated me like a son. - Grace - presence - strength - direction - reception - live the dream

Doubt - because we don't want to meet Him - experience God - because we have to give up control  
 25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.  
 26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 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 Your works.

Jas 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Sermon on the Mount - matters of the heart and being relational with God - ends with -

Matt 7: 24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.  
 26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Reorders the priorities - the concerns - the matters of his heart. Death will take away every ounce of prosperity on earth - God is the eternal inheritance of those who believe, trust, surrender, their life (control) to Jesus.

Doubt - struggle - became the catalyst to deeper faith and spiritual growth - Doubting Thomas - God is not afraid of your doubts - they are a scheme of the devil, that when brought to God - when examined under the light of the Gospel - always backfire.

When Thomas gets through his doubts, he says, "My Lord and my God!" Almost every commentator on the book of John I know says that is the loftiest, the most direct, the highest confession of faith by any human being in any of the Gospels.

Jesus said - destroy this Temple, and I will raise it in three days - speaking of Himself - when you doubt go to the resurrected Jesus - put yourself in Him - start with the Gospel - prayer - word - praise - people

Truly God is good