

Dear Friend,

There is a question that has plagued those who trust in the promises of God, who are his people for millennium. It shows up on almost every page of the Psalms. The entire book of Job is written in part to answer it. The reason the apostle Paul could not initially believe that the crucified Jesus was God's Messiah was due to how he answered the question. The question appears in various forms and with different emphases but its most basic form is this: Why does it seem that bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people? If God is just and if he loves his people and if he is opposed to the wicked as the Bible so clearly teaches, than why is it that so often God's people suffer while those who are indifferent to him or oppose him prosper?

Anyone who is paying attention can easily identify numerous current examples of this apparent injustice. The married couple who cannot have children are amazed at all the unmarried single women having children. This becomes even more troubling when the couple considers that God is the one who forms every life in every womb. The Christian mom is killed by the drunk driver who walks away from the accident without a scratch. The young woman who is planning on serving God as a missionary is struck down by a rare, undetected congenital heart defect while another young woman who cares nothing for God lives a happy and fulfilled life and dies at 90 surrounded by 3 generations of loving family members.

Probably the classic statement of this problem is Psalm 73. In the middle of the psalm (vv. 12-14) Asaph says, "This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning." You can hear the complaint. I seek to be faithful to God and all I get for my trouble is trouble but my neighbor who is an atheist and who mocks God has a beautiful house, wife and children. He's perfectly healthy, has a great job and goes on the best vacations. Everyone loves him.

How does the Bible answer this problem? In Psalm 73 the author discovers the answer to the problem of this apparent injustice when he goes into the temple to ask God what is going on. When he goes to God he discovers two great facts. First, the prosperity of the wicked is precarious and temporary. In vv. 18-20 he says that when he entered God's sanctuary he "...understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies." The wicked are as permanent as your dreams when you wake up. God is going to one day treat them like dreams, of no consequence. In Psalm 37 God says it this way, "...evil men will be cut off... A little while and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found... the Lord laughs at the wicked for he knows their day is coming."

The second thing that the Psalmist discovers is that while his life at the moment is full of difficulty and trouble yet God has never left him and is always with him. He, as a

believer, has the most amazing future awaiting him that he cannot even begin to compare the present trouble to the future joy. Listen to how he says it in vv. 23-25, “Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire but you... God is my portion forever.” He realizes that just as the prosperity of the wicked is temporary so is his trouble. Even in the trouble God is with him and at the end of all things he will be with God forever. This is exactly what Paul says in Romans 8:18, “I consider that our present troubles are not even worth comparing to the glory to be revealed to us.”

Because there is final judgment and a new heavens and a new earth, we do not need to be troubled by the apparent injustices in this life. One day all the wicked would exchange all the happiness they had in this life to be released from hell for just one day. One day all the trouble that the righteous experience will produce a greater weight of glory in heaven for them (2 Corinthians 4:18-19). John Calvin understands this clearly when he says: “...since we see the pious laden with afflictions by the impious, stricken with unjust acts, overwhelmed with slanders, wounded with abuses and reproaches; while the wicked on the contrary flourish, are prosperous, obtain repose with dignity and that without punishment—we must straightway conclude that there will be another life in which iniquity is to have its punishment and righteousness is to be given its reward.” Psalm 37:7-9 tells us how to live in the face of these present absurdities: “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn away from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the earth.”

Being still and waiting with you,