

Text: Psalm 73:1-28 (Pew Bible pg.575)

Title: “Faith Sings ... When My Faith Slips”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Psalm 73.

ILLUSTRATION – A young lady called me last week to talk about some of the struggles that she was going through ... a really difficult time. She said, “The thing that worries me is that I’m afraid I’m going to turn loose of God, and I don’t want to do that.” Well, we’ll see this morning from the Psalms that has been a challenge for believers down through the ages. To get us started today, let’s just read Psalm 73:1-3.

Now just notice the inscription ... “A psalm of Asaph.” These are “Faith Songs” of saints who lived along ago. The Psalms reflect the faith of the writers, as well as the faith of God’s people through the ages. For many of the psalms, an author is not listed. And for some of the psalms an author is listed ... David, Moses, Solomon, and, in this case, Asaph.

OT scholars have debated whether or not these kinds of inscriptions indicate the author of the psalm, or perhaps it indicates who the psalm was written for, or dedicated to. I will go on the assumption that if there is a statement like “A psalm of Asaph,” that Asaph wrote the psalm, unless the text tells us otherwise.

Who was Asaph? When King David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem he wanted to help the people of God to worship properly. So I Chronicles 15 tells us that David had the Levites (the priests) to recruit some of their talented brothers to serve as singers ... to sing joyful songs of worship accompanied by musical instruments. And Asaph was one of the ones recruited for the choir. But he was more than a choir member; he was a composer/singer/musician. Actually I Chron.16 tells us that Asaph played the cymbals in Jerusalem choir and orchestra. And Asaph passed his musical abilities on to his children because in the book of Ezra the sons of Asaph were involved in the music when the foundation of the temple was laid in Jerusalem.

And his name is ascribed to Psalm 50, 73 and the next 10 psalms as well (through Psalm 83).

So Asaph knew how to compose and sing “Faith Songs.” And he was called upon to sing and play frequently, and as far as we know, Asaph was faithful to help people express their faith in worship ... even when his own faith was slipping. He says in v.2, “My feet almost slipped.”

The Bible says to rejoice in the Lord always. That means that our faith keeps singing, even when our faith is slipping ... or should I say, *especially* when our faith is slipping.

And times like these are confusing to us because we don’t understand a very important truth about our faith ... it is under construction until the day we die. It is a gift from God, but there is some assembly required.

ILLUSTRATION – A couple of months ago at Christmas, many of you boys and girls received toys for Christmas. And many of those toys had to be assembled before you could play with them. I don't know about you, but I have trouble getting some of those toys out of the box.

Well, our faith is a gift from God, but there's some assembly required. The Bible tells us to build ourselves up on our most holy faith. It also says we are to contend for the faith that has been entrusted to us.

And, yes, there are going to be times, like Asaph experienced, when our faith is weak and slipping. The important thing is to keep singing, even when our faith slips. Why? There's a process to faith development going on in our lives.

It starts out with...

1. STABLE FAITH

The psalm opens with a statement of Asaph's steady, stable faith.

Psalm 73:1 (NIV) - Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

This is what Asaph believed when this episode occurred in his life. The word "surely" means that Asaph felt this was true ... truly.

Note: There are different truths that we learn about God, and come to believe about God. This becomes our faith. There is faith in God's *power* (God has to the power to do what He wants or promises to do). There is faith in God's *provision* (God can and will take care of me). There is also faith in God's *person* or character (God will always be right and do the right thing).

In this case, Asaph's faith in God's person is being tested. He's always believed that "*God is good...*" Even more specifically, he's always believed that "*God is good to Israel...*" God has a special relationship with His people Israel. Even more specifically, he's always believed that God is good ... *to those who are pure in heart.*" So God is good, and He always rewards goodness.

Remember, our faith is under construction ... it's being assembled. There are certain things you believe ... you've always believed it. Maybe you believed it without ever questioning it. And maybe you believe it in your head, but you haven't ever really had to stand on it or cling to it in your heart.

So in the ways of God, He will sometimes test us at that point. That's when stable, secure faith gives way to...

2. SLIPPING FAITH

Psalm 73:2 (NIV) - But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

Why?

Psalm 73:3 (NIV) - For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

So there's an inconsistency here. Asaph had always believed that God was good to Israel and to those who were pure in heart. But his faith is being tested because he sees something that causes him to doubt what he's always believed. It appears that there are some arrogant and wicked people who are prospering.

Asaph thinks, "Wait a minute. I thought that God was good, and that He was good to people who are good. But what about those people who are not good. They seem to be the ones getting ahead. What's up with that?"

So his faith is slipping. He's hit a patch of ice on the sidewalk of life and he's losing his footing. Ever done that?

Now what bothers Asaph about this is that the wicked seem to be getting away with their sin, in fact, they are being rewarded for it. And in vv.4-12 Asaph recounts the things that he sees evil people getting away with. Read vv.4-8, 11-12.

Note: There are two real spiritual slick spots that get many believers. One is the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The other is the question, "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

And that's the icy patch that Asaph has hit. And he begins to question the things that he had always believed about God.

Psalm 73:13 (NIV) - Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

"in vain" = What's the use? It doesn't do any good.

Good things are happening to bad people. And bad things are happening to people who are trying to be good.

Psalm 73:14 (NIV) - All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

What a picture! But it's a picture that is all too familiar to us. We think back on the times when we've had one wave of adversity after another crashing down on us. Troubles pile up one on top of another. And we come to the same conclusion as Asaph:

Psalm 73:16 (NIV) - When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me

Literally, "It wears me out trying to figure out. "

If we stopped right here it would paint a very discouraging picture. It would leave us in the pit of despondency.

We need to look carefully at the Asaph's words back in v.2:

Psalm 73:2 (NIV) - But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

What kept him from going down? He did something that put everything in perspective ... he worshipped. Asaph said, "All this was oppressive to me..."

Psalm 73:17 (NIV) - till I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I understood...

He went into the presence of God ... probably as the people of God assembled for worship. He went to church!

Note: This is exactly the opposite of what happens for many of us. We hit a slippery spot in life. We see bad things happening to good people, and good things happening to bad people, and we think, "What's the use?" And it's in times like that that many people quit seeking God ... they quit going to church ... they quit reading their Bible.

No, Asaph said, "All this was oppressive to me. I didn't understand until I entered the sanctuary. Then I understood."

What happened in the sanctuary that caused Asaph to look at things differently? He meditated on the Word of the Lord. He heard the singers, even heard himself sing of the steadfast love of the Lord. Perhaps it was in the words of the songs he and the other singers were singing. Perhaps it was staring at the altar of sacrifice, and the realization of the grace and mercy of the Lord.

ILLUSTRATION - John and I were talking about this this week in our worship planning. It reminded us how important it is that in our worship you are reminded of the things that are true about God, and what is true about you because of these things that are true about God.

And all that leads to...

3. STRENGTHENED FAITH

In worship, things come clear for us. In worship, we get God's perspective on things. In worship, our faith sings, and our faith is strengthened.

Note: What changed things for Asaph. Did he try to just work himself into a more positive mindset? Did he try to find something that would change his feelings? Did he just try to forget his problems? No, he pressed on. What changed everything for him was his understanding.

- **We understand the fate of the wicked (vv.17b-20).**

He understood something about others.

Part of Asaph's problem was that he was looking only at the present. But in fellowship with the Lord everything came into perspective. It only appeared that the wicked would cruise on forever without anything bad happening to them.

Psalm 73:17 - I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

God will deal with them in His time.

Psalm 73:18 - Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.

If God is a just God, then he must punish sin. He will do what is right. He will deal justly with all people. The wicked will face the consequences of their actions someday. God will see to it.

But if you only think about the way things appear now, you can lose perspective. But in the sanctuary Asaph saw things clearly.

Also, in the fellowship with God...

- **We understand the foolishness of our own thinking (vv.21-22).**

He understood something about others, but he understood something about himself. What Asaph discovered was that his trouble was not really the wicked. It was himself.

Asaph was embarrassed by the foolishness of his unbelief:

Psalm 73:21-22 (NIV) - When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

“Grieved” = “grew sour.” “Embittered” = “felt stinging pains.” He acted like an unreasoning animal in God's presence. He had doubted God. He had forgotten the truth of God's Word. He had questioned God. You can sense the remorse and the repentance in Asaph's heart.

This is the ugly picture of what happens to us when unbelief sets in ... when we start thinking things about God that aren't true ... when we stop trusting God. And it will lead to sin every time. The Bible says that whatever is not of faith is sin.

So Asaph repents. That's part of worship. Remembering things that are true about God, and recognizing where we have fallen short.

In the sanctuary we understand something about others, about ourselves and...

- **We understand the faithfulness of God (vv.23-28).**

In the sanctuary this is what Asaph learned and was reminded of about God:

Psalm 73:23 (NIV) - Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.

“Yet” = “nevertheless”

I have messed up, but nevertheless God is faithful. I am still in His presence. What grace!

Remember what Asaph said in v.2: “My feet had *almost* slipped; I *nearly* lost my foothold.” What kept that from happening? “You hold me by my right hand.”

ILLUSTRATION – Slipping around on the ice a couple of weeks ago, it was better when you had something to hold on to, wasn't it.

God was faithful to hold on to Asaph, but also God was faithful to guide him.

Psalm 73:24 (NIV) - You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.

When life is over for the child of God we have the assurance that God will be faithful to take us into the glory of His presence in heaven. Isn't that great!

Psalm 73:25 (NIV) – Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

God is all we have ... and He is all we need. If I have God I don't need all the answers. This is the goal of all that God is doing with respect to our faith ... to get us to the place where we can say with conviction, “God is enough.”

Psalm 73:25 (NIV) – Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

“Lord, if I come to a place in my life where I have nothing but You ... You are enough.”

His faith song is getting louder and louder:

Psalm 73:26 (NIV) - My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Now that word “portion” is an important word. It means your “share of something” ... the part that belongs to you.

ILLUSTRATION – When the Israelites when in to possess the Promised Land, remember that the 12 tribes of Israel all got a special allotment of the land. That was true except for the tribe of Levi ... the Levites. They didn't get any land ... that means they didn't have a place to plant crops or graze flocks. They would be scattered among the other tribes to serve as priests ... spiritual leaders.

Deuteronomy 10:9 - That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as the LORD your God told them.)

They wondered, “What about us? The Lord said, “I will be your portion forever.” I will be enough for you.”