

Psalm 73

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Preacher: Phillip Swann

[0 : 00] Good morning.

Good morning.

We've got too many. So around about halfway, I'm going to leave. And a few others as well because we've got a lot. But we're very glad to see Ben and David and others as well.

We trust together that as we come to worship the Lord, we might be aware of his help and presence, his encouragement and his grace.

We're not in the sense that Paul and Peter and the others were, but we are witnesses to the reality that Christ is alive and that he has impacted and brought us to life as well. And so we are those who are children, as it were, of the risen King.

[2 : 09] And our first hymn is going to come on the screen. Come, people of the risen King. Let's come and sing the praises of our Saviour who is living. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.

Let's sing. Let's sing.

The Lord has risen King, who they like to give Him praise. The Lord has shone your hearts to sing, to the morning star of grace.

From the shifting shadows on the earth, we will lift our eyes to Him. Where steady arms of mercy reach, to gather children in.

Rejoice, rejoice, let every child rejoice. One heart, one voice, O Church of Christ rejoice.

[3 : 25] The Lord has shone His holy Son, and that's weeping through the night.

The Lord has shone His holy Son, and that's weeping through the night. The Lord has shone His holy Son, and that's weeping through the night. For His perfect love will never change, and His mercies never cease.

The Father must rule all our days with a certain hope of peace. Rejoice, rejoice, let every child rejoice.

One heart, one voice, O Church of Christ rejoice. One heart, one voice, O Church of Christ rejoice. Come young and old from every man, men and women of the plain. Come those with full or empty hands, find the riches of His grace.

[4 : 47] Means we're eternal song. Yeah. Sweso, Jesuit richß réostic■ Weihe■■■■ In all work, we owe His holy, if weeping through the plain. We hear them call The truth that cries Through every age Our God is all in all Rejoice, rejoice Let every tongue rejoice One heart, one voice O Church of Christ, rejoice Rejoice, rejoice Let every tongue rejoice One heart, one voice O Church of Christ, rejoice Let us therefore come to God with joy and thanksgiving.

Let us pray together now. Our most loving God, our Heavenly Father, our Great Saviour, O Lord, we do have so many reasons to rejoice this morning because your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is risen from the dead.

Lord, we thank you that though death was his goal and mission in life, death and suffering, torture and pain, yet that was not the end.

That was the fulfillment, the accomplishment of his ministry in this world, where he paid for our sin, where he purchased our eternal life, where he did the work which we could never do for ourselves and atoned for our sins, providing full and everlasting and complete forgiveness and pardon.

We thank you that we know that his offering, his sacrifice was acceptable to you because you raised him from the dead. We thank you that he lives forevermore, making intercession for us, working for us, continuing to apply that wonderful salvation into our lives day by day, moment by moment.

[7 : 08] And if it wasn't for the fact that you are alive, Lord Jesus, then we could never be here this morning. We could never approach God. We could never know your loveliness.

We could never know your truth, your power, your grace. We would still be in our sins. We would still be lost. We would still be blind. We would still be hell bound.

It's only because, Lord Jesus, you died and rose again, that we have confidence to approach God and draw near, not with fear and trembling, not with a sense of terror because our sins are so grave, but with a wonderful assurance that we shall be received and accepted because we are loved with an everlasting love.

Oh, Lord, our God, there may be many of us here this morning who feel that we have so little to rejoice in, the pressures and the concerns, the anxieties of this life, the weariness of our bodies and the weariness of our souls.

But, Lord, we ask that our eyes may be lifted up to Jesus, our ascended and glorified Savior, to see that everything that we have and everything that we are is locked in with him, that no matter what we feel, no matter what we are going through, no matter how low or high our hearts may be, Lord Jesus, we are safe and secure in you and no one and nothing in heaven or hell can remove your love from us or cease to make you work and deal with us in grace.

[8 : 51] Oh, Lord, forgive us our sins, we pray. Fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit. Come upon us again that we may rejoice in you and put our hope in you.

We ask that you would speak to us in your word in this time this morning and that you would draw from our hearts not only praise and worship, but that, Lord, you would draw from us faith and obedience, that we may be strengthened and equipped to live for you in these days wherever you have placed us and that we might be used by you to bring glory to your name, Lord Jesus, and be used by you to be that witness, that testifier to the reality that Jesus Christ is a living Savior and a living God.

We ask these things now as we seek your blessing through the name of Jesus Christ, your Son.

Amen. Amen. Well, we've had a wonderful weekend and in a moment or two Philip will be preaching to us but Philip's going to come and read to us from God's Word.

His reading is Psalm 73. And so I'll hand it. Thank you very much for your welcome. It's lovely to be with you this morning.

It's been a great privilege to have a part to play in the September Bible School. I was privileged to come to the very first one back in 1991. And so it's been really lovely to be ministering at the Bible School and also to be with you this morning.

[10 : 30] And I do bring the very warm greetings of the church that I pastor in Llenelli. And they've been praying for you today. And it's good, isn't it, to have fellowship together in the gospel.

Well, our reading is Psalm 73. Psalm 73. Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped.

I had nearly lost my foothold for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong.

They are free from the burdens common to man. They are not plagued by human ills. Therefore, pride is their necklace. They clothe themselves with violence.

From their callous hearts comes iniquity, and evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff and speak with malice. In their arrogance, they threaten oppression.

[11 : 33] Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.

Therefore, their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.

They say, How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge? 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. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed your children.

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me. Till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood their final destiny.

[12 : 33] 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.

When my heart was grieved, and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant.

I was a brute beast before you. Yet, 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 besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[13:35] Those who are far from you will perish. You destroy all who are unfaithful to you. 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. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I'd like you to turn back, please, to Psalm 73 that we read a few moments ago. Psalm 73 is a psalm of incredible, intense honesty.

And we are certainly told by the Lord that we are not to lie. I think we'd all agree with that this morning, from the very youngest to the very oldest. And even if you're not a Christian here this morning, you understand the moral value of truthfulness.

And yet, it's interesting, isn't it, that when we meet together and when we see each other, often on the Lord's Day like this, well, it goes something like this. Oh, nice to see you.

[14:42] And you. How are you doing? Great. And I wonder when it was the last time you actually said to somebody who greeted you in that way that, well, actually, things are not great.

I wonder if the last time was if perhaps you said to someone, if I'm really honest with you, I feel that my spiritual experience is shriveled up and dried. And in fact, if I'm really honest with you this morning, I feel as if I couldn't care less whether I'm here or down the beach.

It's that kind of honesty that's going on in Psalm 73. And it's an honesty that God calls us to in our dealings and encouragement and support and ministry to one another.

Recently, I've been reacquainting myself with some of the hymns of John Newton. I'm sure we all know the story of John Newton, converted. In a remarkable and wonderful way.

And he had a ministry in the Church of England and he ministered in a place called Olney. And while he was there, he wrote many hymns, along with William Cooper as well. And I came across this hymn.

[15:57] It's a hymn I'd never sung before. I'd never seen before. But it's a very powerful challenge along this line of honesty. Bear with me.

You probably haven't heard it before. Sweet was the time when first I felt the Saviour's pardoning blood. Applied to cleanse my soul from guilt and bring me home to God.

Soon as the morn, the light revealed, His praises tuned my tongue. And when the evening shades prevailed, His love was all my song. In vain the tempter spread his wiles.

The world no more could charm. I lived upon my Saviour's smiles and leaned upon His arm. In prayer my soul drew near the Lord and saw His glory shine.

And when I read His holy word, I called each promise mine. Then to His saints I often spoke of what His love had done. But now my heart is almost broke, for all my joys are gone.

[17:07] Now when the evening shade prevails, my soul in darkness mourns. And when the morn, the light reveals, no light to me returns. My prayers are now a chattering noise, for Jesus hides His face.

I read the promise meets my eyes, but will not reach my case. Now Satan threatens to prevail and make my soul his prey.

Yet, Lord, Thy mercies cannot fail. Oh, come without delay. As with Newton, as with Asaph, the writer of Psalm 73, there is a powerful and refreshing honesty about the reality of the Christian experience, which is not that everything is all right all of the time, but that we do pass through times of difficulty and times of struggle.

A reality that often we are slow to be honest about with one another. And yet, by this example in Psalm 73 and many other issues that the Scripture opens up to us, we are encouraged and exhorted to be honest with one another, that we might receive help and comfort.

In Psalm 73, Asaph is reflecting on a time in his life when we perhaps would describe it was a time of backsliding. The reality is that his joy, his delight in God has gone.

[18:51] His perspective on the world around him is no longer seen through the lens of the Christian gospel, but it's been simply through the lens of his own perceptions and his own ideas, which now are skewed and distorted.

He is a discouraged man. And he is going through that which sometimes you experience as a Christian.

The reality about backsliding is that in the Christian life there are often peaks and troughs, there are highs and there are lows. We tend to think of backsliding as suddenly kind of driving off the end of a cliff sort of experience, a sudden distinct moment when we might crash and go into serious free thought, but the reality is very different.

In backsliding, the battle is often up and down. In fact, there are many times during the day when we may backslide and feel ourselves feeling like Asaph and thinking like Asaph.

And of course with it comes, as is Asaph's experience here, much misery. In verse 16 and the second verse 16 which tells us, when I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me.

[20 : 11] And of course when we experience oppressive times like this and we begin to question our profession of faith in Jesus Christ and we begin to envy, as Asaph does in this psalm, the arrogant and the wicked, invariably it affects our living.

And our witness, the command to be salt and light in the world, to be attractively different, to be shining out the reality of Jesus Christ in the midst of, as Paul describes it in Philippians 3, a crooked and perverse generation, all of that gets damaged.

We probably all have known experiences where we've heard someone say, well, you know, I really can't take Christianity seriously because perhaps when I was growing up or I've been in a situation where, oh, so and so or this person in the office, they call themselves a Christian but I've seen them on a night out.

I've heard the things they say, their gossip, their criticism and how damaging a life in the state that Asaph is describing here in Psalm 73 can be to Christian witness.

And of course at times like this, as Newton indicated in that hymn, we are given every encouragement to backslide and every support to move away from God by Satan.

[21 : 47] I think it was Charles Wesley who said, if you would run away from God, the devil will lend you spurs and a whip. And that great challenge that he seeks to bring to your heart and to your mind all of the time, to doubt hit the character of God and the goodness of God.

The pressure with which Satan may bring that against your soul sometimes is profound. Now Asaph is miserable as he looks back and describes his experience.

He tells us in verse 2, as for me, my feet had almost slipped, for I had nearly lost my foothold. He is not speaking really about a little blip in his faith here.

He is speaking about a full on crisis of faith. My feet had almost slipped. I had nearly lost my foothold. It's as if he is saying I had nearly been totally swept away from the faith by this experience. And central to his experience is the issue of envy. Verse 3, I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[23 : 04] We don't know precisely the issues, but it seems that there are difficulties in Asaph's life. And as he begins to look at the lives of those who are not followers of the Lord, who are not Christians, he looks at their lives very superficially and he says, if only I was like them.

You feel that sometimes as a Christian, don't you? The struggles, the battles that you have. And you look at folks, maybe who you work with or you're at college or university with and you say, well at the end of the day, they just seem to be having a great time.

They don't have all the hassles that I seem to have as a Christian. And in our darkest moments, like Asaph, we can envy the arrogant. Now what Asaph shows us here is that when he's in this state, as indeed when you and I are in this sort of state, our assessment of what is going around us becomes distorted.

So he has a false and exaggerated view of those who appear to be having a great time. So for example, in verse 4, we hear him say, exaggerated statements like this about the arrogant and the wicked.

They have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man. They are not plagued by human ills. Now that is simply not true.

[24 : 28] There is no one on this planet who lives their life without struggle, whose body at some time does not malfunction, and who experience burdens and human ills.

But the issue is this, that Asaph in his back sliding, like you and me, has become so distorted, so rebellious really, to the Lord, that everything else seems better.

other. We need to watch ourselves, don't we, when we think like this. Again, you see another statement in verse 12 that demonstrates Asaph's distorted thinking.

This is what the wicked are like, always carefree, they increase in wealth. So in his mind, in his backsliding, those who are not followers of the living God are having a great time. And as for him, well in his experience, he finds himself surrounded, it seems, with all of his troubles. [25 : 33] Just look at verse 14. All day long, I have been plagued, I have been punished every morning. In his darkest moments, Asaph is saying, this is my Christian experience.

And compared to those who live their life always carefree, increasing in wealth, well really there's no competition, is there? So it is no wonder in verse 2 he says, as for me, my feet had almost slipped, I had nearly lost my foothold.

And we experience this pressure ourselves. And it's so bad in Asaph that he comes to a statement in verse 13 that is deeply, deeply disturbing.

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. In vain I have washed my hands in innocence. It's all been pointless. It's all been a waste of time.

The way in which I've lived. My heart, which is central to everything in Christian experience, he says, in vain I have kept my heart pure. He really is in a bad place.

[26 : 43] peace. And this is why Psalm 73 is so helpful and so encouraging and so wonderful to us in our own Christian experience that in its twists and turns and in its riches and in God's providence he allows us sometimes to experience the kind of thinking that Asaph experiences here.

And in many ways Psalm 73 not only containing within it so many helps for the struggling Christian who feels like quitting and walking away from it all.

But it contains within it the example of the need for us to be honest with one another in our growth together in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now verse 16 and verse 17 are really the heartbeat of this Psalm. When I tried to understand all this it was oppressive to me.

By the way that is one of the greatest understatements isn't it? Considering what is going on in Asaph's life. He is coming to the point of abandoning the faith of walking away from the Lord.

[28 : 13] He is surrounded by his troubles and he says it was oppressive to me. The reality is it was utterly devastating to him. And there is almost a hint in between verse 16 and verse 17 that there are moments it seems where there is a silence between those two verses that in some ways captures the reality of how we feel when we are caught up in our backslidings.

We simply feel so isolated and lonely we don't know where to turn. it. And that is why this psalm is so vital because it pricks the bubble so often of our false expressions that everything is fine all of the time.

hope. But then we arrive at verse 17 which is full of hope. It was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God.

Then I understood their final destiny. All of this was Asaph's experience until he says something happened.

There was a critical moment. There was a process. until I entered the sanctuary of God. Entering the sanctuary of God.

[29 : 44] It's an interesting phrase isn't it? It's one in a way perhaps we struggle a little bit with. It's so full of old covenant meaning and understanding.

Asaph as he wrote this clearly was speaking about the experience of entering the temple. Of going into the place where God had promised to dwell amongst his people.

And as he enters that place something wonderful happens to him. True spiritual perspective is restored. then I understood their final destiny.

And it's as a result of entering the sanctuary of God he realizes as he tells us here in verses 18 to 20 the reality of those he was envying. Those who he saw as just simply having a wonderful time. Always carefree. They increase in wealth. But in verse 18 here is the reality he says as a result of entering the sanctuary of God. Surely you place them on slippery ground and cast them down to ruin.

[30 : 57] How completely they are destroyed. Completely swept away by terrors as a dream when one awakes so when you arise O Lord you will despise them as fantasies. Here is the reality about those who he was envying.

Those who he was thinking of allying himself with and joining of leaving and breaking the covenant with the living God. No suddenly he said I realized it and I saw it. These are people under the judgment of God.

People whose lives are shot through and surrounded with profound fragility and frailty. You place them on slippery ground although they are in their boasts about their time their wealth their abundance their excitement their joy their living life to the full.

But here he says the reality is they stand on slippery ground and in their boasts of which they make in verse 11 how can God know does the most high have knowledge they have no time for the Lord at all.

They simply dismiss him but here the reality is in verse 20 as a dream when one awakes so when you arise oh Lord you will despise them as fantasies. You know what it is when you have a dream? [32 : 08] It's great isn't it? You have a terrible dream and something's happening I don't know if you're a teacher it's first day back at school and you stand up before the class and you realize you're naked or something like that and you wake up in a cold sweat and then suddenly you think to yourself thank goodness that was only a dream it wasn't real and here Asaph is saying that this kind of language this taunting of the unbeliever towards God that's what God does it's like someone waking up from a dream and hearing all this stuff he's just dismiss it why it's a fantasy it's not real.

So critically for Asaph in his spiritual discouragement his perspective is transformed. But not only of seeing the wicked and those he was envying for who they really are fragile and under the judgment of God he is also brought back to full experience of joy and fellowship in God.

Verse 25 Whom have I in heaven but you and earth has nothing I desire besides you. See the contrast there.

earth has nothing I desire besides you. How did he begin this psalm? I envied the arrogant. Here is radical spiritual transformation.

Here is the restoration of joy and delight in God. And so that whatever may be happening in this world whatever you might see in the lives of others he is able to say I have found the greatest thing of all whom have I in heaven but you.

[33 : 46] God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever and the great glorious conclusion of verse 28 it is good to be near God.

So clearly entering the sanctuary of God matters doesn't it? And maybe as we read this psalm you say to yourself this morning well if I'm really honest I don't know how many people this morning I've said I'm fine to but in reality I'm really more like Asaph than the image I have projected to people in church this morning.

And as we're beginning to look at this psalm you find yourself drawn to this point of saying but if what Asaph is saying is true in the second part of this psalm there is hope for me.

That the experience that I'm going through of spiritual dryness and rebellion and envying even those who are not Christians and even contemplating walking away from it all the crisis of faith that maybe you're experiencing here this morning that is utterly oppressive to you.

Yet within this psalm you are at least been alerted to the reality that there is hope and transformation for you.

[35 : 07] And that transformation and hope centers of course on that verse 17. It was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God.

Now he mentioned a few moments ago this is old covenant thinking. The temple is central. The worship of God laid down in the law of God prescribed in great detail about days and times and the manner in which worship should be conducted is uppermost in Asaph's mind.

And as he re-engages with that as he enters the sanctuary what would have been his experience? Well from what we know in the Old Testament there would have been the hearing of the law of God. That certainly corrected his perspective of the wicked. That's why he's able to write in verses 18 to 20 about seeing unbelievers as they really are.

What was it that corrected his distorted view of the unbeliever? Surely it was the law of the Lord. As the judgments of the Lord of the law were heard in the temple.

[36 : 26] And again in the sanctuary of God as well as the hearing of the law there was the offering of sacrifice. A most traumatic thing. The temple with the sacrificial system awash with the blood of animals.

A brutal and disturbing sight which we must not sanitize. And the message continually pumped out through the visual spectacle of animal sacrifice to atone or reminding of the need for atonement for human sinfulness before God.

Of the seriousness of sin. Surely this would have driven Asaph to repentance before God. And similarly to have confidence in God.

In the power of his forgiveness and his willingness to forgive and to distort. people. Well we don't know specifically the details but surely the hearing of the law and the seeing of sacrifice and the corporate worship of God's people.

The singing of the praises of almighty God. And the offering of prayers to him. Was central to the matter of the restoring of his soul.

[37 : 49] Now that's where there's a bit of a challenge for us isn't it? Because we are not old covenant people. Two thousand years ago in Bethlehem. Jesus Christ came into our world.

And it is in Christ now that the new covenant has come. And so any understanding we would have of this psalm. How God restores us in our backslidings.

Has to go further than simply saying well it's a it's all a matter about being more regular about going to church. The reality is far deeper than that.

And in many ways the reality is far more wonderful and glorious than just entering a building.

People like buildings don't they? I got many friends who are not Christians who will tell me whenever I'm on holiday somewhere and perhaps there's a cathedral or there's a there's an old chapel.

I like to go in because of the atmosphere. Well there are atmospheres in these places and sometimes the visual things that you see the architecture can be quite stunning.

[38 : 58] But Asaph isn't speaking about that. He's speaking about having dealings with the grace of God. And the mercy of God.

And the compassion of God. And the character of God. And so we must be very careful not to read Psalm 73 just in terms of the need to come to church more.

That can be terribly superficial. My mother's from a village in mid Wales. The church of St. Michael in Paradise.

And you might say never heard of it. Fine. Most people in Wales haven't heard of it. But there was a famous young lady who was born there. She was baptized in the Anglican church there.

Anne Griffiths. Welsh hymn writer. She died when she was very young. And it was said of Anne Griffiths' family. They were so regular in church attendance that when it was harvest or when they were ill the dog who always went to church with them would go on his own three times.

[40 : 07] Church can be like that. You can train a dog to go. So there must be more here. So what is the more that is here? Well clearly and absolutely the first thing that we see here is Asaph's honesty.

You see when we're in this cycle of which is so hidden and so deep and so subtle even though it is so compelling and so powerful that we look at the lives of unbelievers and say like Asaph they have no struggles.

That is so deep sometimes. But we need to follow Asaph's example. Somewhere along the line he broke the cycle. He broke the inertia.

That's why he says in verse 17 this all happened till I entered the sanctuary of God. Perhaps there's a suggestion here that he had been slack in his religious duties. And when you're in this state of spiritual discouragement when maybe spiritual weariness has overtaken you that you find your joy and your delight in Christ as gone and you feel yourself most miserable and really wanting to walk away from it all the very first step really is doing what Asaph is doing.

You have to break the cycle. Break the inertia. And in a way Asaph is doing this by his confession and speaking about it.

[41 : 42] But entering the sanctuary of God what does that mean for us? Well in our old covenant language the sanctuary of God is about the dwelling of God the presence of God.

And for us as new covenant believers central to our understanding of God's presence with us and his ministry to us and his blessing upon our lives is Jesus Christ.

And I believe absolutely that he is the one who Asaph is referring to here. In the Bible school we've looked in the two sessions that I took at Isaiah 40 and we were reminding ourselves in one of those sessions that Isaiah the prophet who writes those tremendous words of comfort and encouragement to a whole nation in rebellion began in chapter 6 when he himself enters the temple and tells us that he saw the Lord in all his glory.

And John tells us in the New Testament that he sees Christ central to all the ministry that Asaph receives that restores his soul and lifts him out of his rebellion and his spiritual depression to the joy that becomes so evident in the second part of this psalm central to it all is Jesus Christ.

For it is Christ who is the restorer of the souls and the hearts of his people. That's why it is far more than coming to a building. It's coming to a person.

[43 : 21] It's coming to one who understands us who identifies with us who speaks to us who cares for us who loves us and who has done more for us than we can ever fully comprehend.

You see what Asaph needs needed in his day and what you need in your day and what I need every day is the big view of Jesus Christ in his majesty and his glory.

Here is the great perspective restorer. Here is the great lifter up of the discouraged and depressed human heart. Here is the view that we need above everything else.

It's why when we come together on an occasion like this as wonderful as it is to meet with one another it is Christ who we want to see more than anything.

I'll tell you an interesting thing. My father died ten years ago this year and I remember visiting him in hospital and while I was there a lady came to see him whose husband had been one of his best friends for most of his ministry and he had died I think probably about ten years previously to that experience and she was talking to my father and she said to him of course when you get to heaven you'll see and she mentioned her husband's name and how wonderful that will be for you Derek and he smiled and he nodded and then when she went he said I don't really want to see and he mentioned his name it's Jesus I want to see but that's the reality isn't it?

[45 : 04] The very thing that we feel indifferent the very one who we feel indifferent to the very thing that we feel our hearts cannot go to is in reality the very one who we need and here is the good news he is more willing to meet with us than we can ever imagine and so as Asaph enters the sanctuary of God in his spiritual discouragement and dryness he comes through the hearing of the law and the sacrificial system through the worship through the praises of God's people to see and experience the beauty of Jesus Christ and that's why for you this morning if you're struggling in your spiritual walk and you find yourself echoing again and again Asaph in his lament it is to Christ that you must go and be reminded of who he is he is the friend of sinners he is the one who comforts the downcast the broken hearted he is the one before whom the bruised reed he will not break the smoking flax he will not quench no he loves to heal he loves to bind up he loves to restore this is his character this is his nature it is not the righteous

I have come to call but sinners to repentance and he is gentle he is kind and he is generous it is absolutely one of the greatest lies of Satan to the backslider that Jesus Christ would not really want to meet you right now because you're so far away from him it is that lie that somehow we must tart ourselves up before we can go to Christ the Jesus of the Bible tells us come as you are come in your confusion in your hypocrisy in your brokenness of heart you come and you come as you are and in coming to him Asaph would have seen through that sacrificial system what we now see most beautifully and clearly in Jesus Christ that not only does he sympathize with us but he is able to heal us and restore us and make us new great thing we were reminded of during the weekend again was the coming of Christ now when one of the things that was referenced was when John the Baptist saw him behold

God's Lamb the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world you see as we come to Christ in our brokenness in our rebellion in our hardness of heart we're coming to one who does not simply say all I can offer you is tea and sympathy we're coming to one who can rebuild because he has broken the power of sin the very thing that distresses us the very thing that caused Asaph to say it was oppressive to me Christ has power to release us he has power to build up again so to our joylessness he can bring joy to our darkness he can bring light to our sorrow he can bring dancing he has power to do it he has authority to do it and he has the heart and the will to do it for his death on the cross of Calvary becomes absolute victory over anything that can separate us from God this is why the glory of the gospel is something that is glorious to the Christian believer not simply bringing us into relationship with God but sustaining us there too many Christians see the gospel as a kind of ticket entrance to a theme park you just need the gospel to get in and then when you're there well there's all these things to keep you amused no the gospel is the very thing that sustains us as Christians all of the time so the news of who Christ is the news of his cross and the glory that he has been raised from the dead for our justification this sustains us and this is what we need to see we need to see

Jesus who he is we need to see the reality of the power of Calvary we need to see the news of the empty tomb we need to see the power of his righteousness that now enclothes us and that we are justified freely by the grace of God we need to see these things we need to see and feel upon our souls again the news that we are loved by God profoundly and deeply and that whatever mess we may be in or however far we may have wandered as one of God's children nevertheless we are righteous in his sight justified through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done and that is why we need to break the inertia that is why sometimes we need to say to someone when they ask us how we are well actually things are not great and we need to learn to respond to one another in that situation knowing that the greatest thing our brother or sister needs at a time like that is a fresh view of

Jesus Christ and so we say to them well I'm glad you've told me this let's talk and you listen and you allow them to talk and you encourage them to say the sort of things that Asaph is saying here and then you begin to point them to Jesus Christ gently and honestly as the friend of sinners not go away and read Hebrews 4 I'm sure you'll find it a blessing but speak to them of Christ speak to them of his gentleness speak to them of his perseverance speak to them of his faithfulness and pray for one another in the restoring of our souls in times of discouragement we are told in Galatians 6 that we are to carry each other's burdens isn't it interesting that we generally apply that to what goes on on the outside

[52 : 03] I'm going into hospital or I've not been well recently or I've got this difficulty in work now those things really matter they do but surely there's a totality in that challenge in Galatians 6 to carry one another's burdens must include times like this and so we encourage one another by speaking of Jesus Christ and we pray for one another and like Christ we do not seek to give up on each other we continually carry one another's burdens we follow one another up how's it going has this week been any better I've been praying for you in my own devotions I read this psalm it was such an encouragement to me can I read it to you and we persevere with one another and we use the means of grace oh yes we may be new covenant

Christians but there is something about verse 17 that reminds us of value of meeting together with God's people till I entered the sanctuary of God and we read in Hebrews 10 of those who have abandoned the practice of meeting together because of the persecution they were experienced and we hear the injunction not to forsake the meeting together of one another yes there is something about times like this as we sing God's praises together and we pray together and we read scripture together and we hear God's word expounded together this becomes an unique occasion here this morning something is going on isn't it that you cannot experience on your own in your own home no we need one another to be together in the worship of God don't neglect it is it just me or have you ever had that experience of a rotten week when you feel dry and dull as dust and your prayer life has gone to the four winds and you drag yourself to church and they give out the first hymn and your heart is sluggish and suddenly you find yourself as you mouth those words listening to your brothers and sisters singing

God's praise and it ministers to you and suddenly in that moment perhaps God visits you and encourages you oh how we need corporate worship yes we need to bear one another's burdens yes we need to take the responsibility to break the inertia and speak to one another but yes we need corporate worship don't neglect the means of grace don't be one of those Christians who would rather stay at home on a Sunday evening and watch songs of praise and gather with God's people to worship him well in conclusion it is no small thing that happens to Asaph is it when he enters the sanctuary of God perspective is restored I understood their final destiny and fellowship is restored verse 23 yet I am always with you you hold me by my right hand and as he looks back to how he was he makes an incredible statement of great humility and honesty in verse 21 and 22 when my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered because that's what it means to backslide I was senseless and ignorant I was a brute beast before you I knew nothing but now I am always with you you hold me by my right hand you guide me with your counsel and afterwards you will take me into glory joy has returned there is no one more miserable than a backsliding Christian they have tasted and seen that the Lord is good and they have run and they have tried to do as God's people in Jeremiah 2 chapter 2 did they they try to dig out wells for themselves a new way a new blessing something different in life to synthesize what they once knew in terms of authentic fellowship and relationship with God and God has to say through Jeremiah these wells you've dug out they're cracked they're broken they don't hold water it's not the authentic thing but after

Asaph enters the sanctuary of God and when your heart and my heart is set afresh on Jesus Christ solid joys and lasting treasures become our experience and he so delights to do this he so delights to restore to rebuild that is his desire that remarkable covenantal promise draw near to God and he will draw near to you whoever comes to me I will never turn away assurance and life is restored to Asaph and is restored to us when we return to the Lord and when we seek his face again this is revival this is reformation and my guess is this morning because I know my own heart this is what you need that fresh view of

[57 : 48] Jesus and his love so think on him today read his word afresh read the gospels see how he deals with that woman of Samaria see how he deals with the woman taken in adultery see how he deals with the beggar and the blind the outcast hear him again in Gethsemane his submission to the will and the purpose of the father as the son incarnate hear those words it is finished hear the tremendous anthem of those angels why do you look for the living amongst the dead he is not here he is risen acquaint yourself with the reality of who Jesus Christ is and by these means of grace he will come to you and by his holy spirit he will write his name afresh upon your heart and fill you with joy through believing he is the restorer of the broken places and the broken hearted he is

Jesus Christ the merciful and the righteous we're going to sing God's praise as we close here this morning in our hymn book it's number 157 it passes knowledge that dear love of thine my saviour Jesus yet this soul of mine would of thy love in all its breadth and length its height and depth its everlasting strength know more and more stand and worship God together 157