

# PSALM 73

This psalm, and the ten that next follow it, carry the name of Asaph in the titles of them. If he was the penman of them (as many think), we rightly call them psalms of Asaph. If he was only the chief musician, to whom they were delivered, our marginal reading is right, which calls them psalms for Asaph. It is probable that he penned them; for we read of the words of David and of Asaph the seer, which were used in praising God in Hezekiah's time, ~~149~~2 Chronicles 29:30. Though the Spirit of prophecy by sacred songs descended chiefly on David, who is therefore styled “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” yet God put some of that Spirit upon those about him. This is a psalm of great use; it gives us an account of the conflict which the psalmist had with a strong temptation to envy the prosperity of wicked people. He begins his account with a sacred principle, which he held fast, and by the help of which he kept his ground and carried his point (v. 1). He then tells us,

**I.** How he got into the temptation (v. 2-14).

**II.** How he got out of the temptation and gained a victory over it (v. 15-20).

**III.** How he got by the temptation and was the better for it (v. 21-23). If, in singing this psalm, we fortify ourselves against the life temptation, we do not use it in vain. The experiences of others should be our instructions.

## ~~149~~ PSALM 73:1-14

### UNSANCTIFIED PROSPERITY

#### *A psalm of Asaph.*

This psalm begins somewhat abruptly: *Yet God is good to Israel* (so the margin reads it); he had been thinking of the prosperity of the wicked; while he was thus musing the fire burned, and at last he spoke by way of check to himself for what he had been thinking of. “However it be, yet God is good.” Though wicked people receive many of the gifts of his

providential bounty, yet we must own that he is, in a peculiar manner, good to Israel; they have favours from him which others have not.

The psalmist designs an account of a temptation he was strongly assaulted with — to envy the prosperity of the wicked, a common temptation, which has tried the graces of many of the saints. Now in this account,

**I.** He lays down, in the first place, that great principle which he is resolved to abide by and not to quit while he was parleying with this temptation, v. 1. Job, when he was entering into such a temptation, fixed for his principle the omniscience of God: *Times are not hidden from the Almighty*, <sup><301></sup>Job 24:1. Jeremiah's principle is the justice of God: *Righteous art thou, O God! when I plead with thee*, <sup><211></sup>Jeremiah 12:1. Habakkuk's principle is the holiness of God: *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, <sup><313></sup>Habakkuk 1:13. The psalmist's, here, is the goodness of God. These are truths which cannot be shaken and which we must resolve to live and die by. Though we may not be able to reconcile all the disposals of Providence with them, we must believe they are reconcilable. Note, Good thoughts of God will fortify us against many of Satan's temptations. *Truly God is good*; he had had many thoughts in his mind concerning the providences of God, but this word, at last, settled him: "For all this, God is good, *good to Israel, even to those that are of a clean heart.*" Note,

**1.** Those are the Israel of God that are of a clean heart, purified by the blood of Christ, cleansed from the pollutions of sin, and entirely devoted to the glory of God. An upright heart is a clean heart; cleanness is truth in the inward part.

**2.** God, who is good to all, is in a special manner good to his church and people, as he was to Israel of old. God was good to Israel in redeeming them out of Egypt, taking them into covenant with himself, giving them his laws and ordinances, and in the various providences that related to them; he is, in like manner, good to all those that are of a clean heart, and, whatever happens, we must not think otherwise.

**II.** He comes now to relate the shock that was given to his faith in God's distinguishing goodness to Israel by a strong temptation to envy the prosperity of the wicked, and therefore to think that the Israel of God are no happier than other people and that God is no kinder to them than to others.

**1.** He speaks of it as a very narrow escape that he had not been quite foiled and overthrown by this temptation (v. 2): “*But as for me, though I was so well satisfied in the goodness of God to Israel, yet my feet were almost gone* (the tempter had almost tripped up my heels), *my steps had well-nigh slipped* (I had like to have quitted my religion, and given up all my expectations of benefit by it); *for I was envious at the foolish.*” Note, 1. The faith even of strong believers may sometimes be sorely shaken and ready to fail them. There are storms that will try the firmest anchors.

**2.** Those that shall never be quite undone are sometimes very near it, and, in their own apprehension, as good as gone. Many a precious soul, that shall live for ever, had once a very narrow turn for its life; almost and well-nigh ruined, but a step between it and fatal apostasy, and yet snatched as a brand out of the burning, which will for ever magnify the riches of divine grace in the nations of those that are saved. Now,

**3.** Let us take notice of the process of the psalmist's temptation, what he was tempted with and tempted to.

**(1.)** He observed that foolish wicked people have sometimes a very great share of outward prosperity. He *saw*, with grief, *the prosperity of the wicked*, v. 3. Wicked people are really foolish people, and act against reason and their true interest, and yet every stander-by sees their prosperity.

**[1.]** They seem to have the least share of the troubles and calamities of this life (v. 5): *They are not in the troubles of other men*, even of wise and good men, *neither are they plagued like other men*, but seem as if by some special privilege they were exempted from the common lot of sorrows. If they meet with some little trouble, it is nothing to what others endure that are less sinners and yet greater sufferers.

**[2.]** They seem to have the greatest share of the comforts of this life. They live at ease, and bathe themselves in pleasures, so that *their eyes stand out with fatness*, v. 7. See what the excess of pleasure is; the moderate use of it enlightens the eyes, but those that indulge themselves inordinately in the delights of sense have their eyes ready to start out of their heads. Epicures are really their own tormentors, by putting a force upon nature, while they pretend to gratify it. And well may those feed themselves to the full who have *more than heart could wish*, more than they themselves ever thought of or expected to be masters of. They have, at least, more than a humble,

quiet, contented heart could wish, yet not so much as they themselves wish for. There are many who have a great deal of this life in their hands, but nothing of the other life in their hearts. They are ungodly, live without the fear and worship of God, and yet they prosper and get on in the world, and not only are rich, but *increase in riches*, v. 12. They are looked upon as thriving men; while others have much ado to keep what they have, they are still adding more, more honour, power, pleasure, by increasing in riches. *They are the prosperous of the age*, so some read it.

[3.] Their end seems to be peace. This is mentioned first, as the most strange of all, for peace in death was every thought to be the peculiar privilege of the godly (<sup>4873</sup>Psalm 37:37), yet, to outward appearance, it is often the lot of the ungodly (v. 4): *There are no bands in their death*. They are not taken off by a violent death; they are foolish, and yet die not as fools die; for *their hands are not bound nor their feet put into fetters*, <sup>4183</sup>2 Samuel 3:33, 34. They are not taken off by an untimely death, like the fruit forced from the tree before it is ripe, but are left to hang on, till, through old age, they gently drop of themselves. They do not die of sore and painful diseases: *There are no pangs, no agonies, in their death, but their strength is firm* to the last, so that they scarcely feel themselves die. They are of those who *die in their full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet*, not of those that *die in the bitterness of their souls and never eat with pleasure*, <sup>4923</sup>Job 21:23, 25. Nay, they are not bound by the terrors of conscience in their dying moments; they are not frightened either with the remembrance of their sins or the prospect of their misery, but die securely. We cannot judge of men's state on the other side death either by the manner of their death or the frame of their spirits in dying. Men may die like lambs, and yet have their place with the goats.

(2.) He observed that they made a very bad use of their outward prosperity and were hardened by it in their wickedness, which very much strengthened the temptation he was in to fret at it. If it had done them any good, if it had made them less provoking to God or less oppressive to man, it would never have vexed him; but it had quite a contrary effect upon them.

[1.] It made them very proud and haughty. Because they live at ease, *pride compasses them as a chain*, v. 6. They show themselves (to all that see them) to be puffed up with their prosperity, as men show their ornaments. *The pride of Israel testifies to his face*, <sup>4873</sup>Hosea 5:5; <sup>4183</sup>Isaiah 3:9. *Pride*

*ties on their chain*, or necklace; so Dr. Hammond reads it. It is no harm to wear a chain or necklace; but when pride ties it on, when it is worn to gratify a vain mind, it ceases to be an ornament. It is not so much what the dress or apparel is (though we have rules for that, <sup>507b</sup>1 Timothy 2:9) as what principle ties it on and with what spirit it is worn. And, as the pride of sinners appears in their dress, so it does in their talk: *They speak loftily* (v. 8); they affect *great swelling words of vanity* (<sup>408b</sup>2 Peter 2:18), bragging of themselves and disdain all about them. Out of the abundance of the pride that is in their heart they speak big.

[1.] It made them oppressive to their poor neighbours (v. 6): *Violence covers them as a garment*. What they have got by fraud and oppression they keep and increase by the same wicked methods, and care not what injury they do to others, nor what violence they use, so they may but enrich and aggrandize themselves. *They are corrupt*, like the giants, the sinners of the old world, when *the earth was filled with violence*, <sup>401b</sup>Genesis 6:11, 13. They care not what mischief they do, either for mischief-sake or for their own advantage-sake. *They speak wickedly concerning oppression*; they oppress, and justify themselves in it. Those that speak well of sin speak wickedly of it. *They are corrupt*, that is, dissolved in pleasures and every thing that is luxurious (so some), and then they deride and speak maliciously; they care not whom they wound with the poisoned darts of calumny; from on high they speak oppression.

[3.] It made them very insolent in their demeanour towards both God and man (v. 9): *They set their mouth against the heavens*, putting contempt upon God himself and his honour, bidding defiance to him and his power and justice. They cannot reach the heavens with their hands, to shake God's throne, else they would; but they show their ill-will by setting their mouth against the heavens. *Their tongue also walks through the earth*, and they take liberty to abuse all that come in their way. No man's greatness or goodness can secure him from the scourge of the virulent tongue. They take a pride and pleasure in bantering all mankind; they are pests of the country, for they neither fear God nor regard man.

[4.] In all this they were very atheistical and profane. They could not have been thus wicked if they had not learned to say (v. 11), *How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?* So far were they from desiring the knowledge of God, who gave them all the good things they had and would have taught them to use them well, that they were not

willing to believe God had any knowledge of them, that he took any notice of their wickedness or would ever call them to an account. As if, because he is *Most High*, he could not or would not see them, <sup><820></sup>Job 22:12, 13. Whereas because he is *Most High* therefore he can, and will, take cognizance of all the children of men and of all they do, or say, or think. What an affront is it to the God of infinite knowledge, from whom all knowledge is, to ask, *Is there knowledge in him?* Well may he say (v. 12), *Behold, these are the ungodly.*

**(3.)** He observed that while wicked men thus prospered in their impiety, and were made more impious by their prosperity, good people were in great affliction, and he himself in particular, which very much strengthened the temptation he was in to quarrel with Providence.

**[1.]** He looked abroad and saw many of God's people greatly at a loss (v. 10): “Because the wicked are so very daring *therefore his people return hither*; they are at the same pause, the same plunge, that I am at; they know not what to say to it any more than I do, and the rather because *waters of a full cup are wrung out to them*; they are not only made to drink, and to drink deeply, of the bitter cup of affliction, but to drink all. Care is taken that they lose not a drop of that unpleasant potion; the waters are wrung out unto them, that they may have the dregs of the cup. They pour out abundance of tears when they hear wicked people blaspheme God and speak profanely,” as David did, <sup><1313></sup>Psalm 119:136. These are the waters wrung out to them.

**[2.]** He looked at home, and felt himself under the continual frowns of Providence, while the wicked were sunning themselves in its smiles (v. 14): “For my part,” says he, “*all the day long have I been plagued with one affliction or another, and chastened every morning*, as duly as the morning comes.” His afflictions were great — he was chastened and plagued; the returns of them were constant, *every morning* with the morning, and they continued, without intermission, *all the day long*. This he thought was very hard, that, when those who blasphemed God were in prosperity, he that worshipped God was under such great affliction. He spoke feelingly when he spoke of his own troubles; there is no disputing against sense, except by faith.

**(4.)** From all this arose a very strong temptation to cast off his religion.

[1.] Some that observed the prosperity of the wicked, especially comparing it with the afflictions of the righteous, were tempted to deny a providence and to think that God had forsaken the earth. In this sense some take v. 11. There are those, even among God's professing people, that say, "*How does God know? Surely all things are left to blind fortune, and not disposed of by an all-seeing God.*" Some of the heathen, upon such a remark as this, have asked, *Quis putet esse deos? — Who will believe that there are gods?*

[2.] Though the psalmist's feet were not so far gone as to question God's omniscience, yet he was tempted to question the benefit of religion, and to say (v. 13), *Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain*, and have, to no purpose, *washed my hands in innocency*. See here what it is to be religious; it is to cleanse our hearts, in the first place, by repentance and regeneration, and then to wash our hands in innocency by a universal reformation of our lives. It is not in vain to do this, not in vain to serve God and keep his ordinances; but good men have been sometimes tempted to say, "It is in vain," and "Religion is a thing that there is nothing to be got by," because they see wicked people in prosperity. But, however the thing may appear now, when the pure in heart, those blessed ones, shall see God (<sup>4188</sup>Matthew 5:8), they will not say that they cleansed their hearts in vain.

## ~~4185~~ PSALM 73:15-20

### THE END OF THE WICKED

We have seen what a strong temptation the psalmist was in to envy prospering profaneness; now here we are told how he kept his footing and got the victory.

**I.** He kept up a respect for God's people, and with that he restrained himself from speaking what he had thought amiss, v. 15. He got the victory by degrees, and this was the first point he gained; he was ready to say, *Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain*, and thought he had reason to say it, but he kept his mouth with this consideration, "*If I say, I will speak thus, behold, I should myself revolt and apostatize from, and so give the greatest offence imaginable to, the generation of thy children.*" Observe here,

**1.** Though he thought amiss, he took care not to utter that evil thought which he had conceived. Note, It is bad to think ill, but it is worse to speak it, for that is giving the evil thought an *imprimatur* — a sanction; it is allowing it, giving consent to it, and publishing it for the infection of others. But it is a good sign that we repent of the evil imagination of the heart if we suppress it, and the error remains with ourselves. If therefore thou hast been so foolish as to think evil, be so wise as to *lay thy hand upon thy mouth*, and let it go no further, <sup>(~~486~~)</sup> Proverbs 30:32. *If I say, I will speak thus*. Observe, Though his corrupt heart made this inference from the prosperity of the wicked, yet he did not mention it to those whether it were fit to be mentioned or no. Note, We must think twice before we speak once, both because some things may be thought which yet may not be spoken and because the second thoughts may correct the mistakes of the first.

**2.** The reason why he would not speak it was for fear of giving offence to those whom God owned for his children. Note,

**(1.)** There are a people in the world that are the generation of God's children, a set of men that hear and love God as their Father.

**(2.)** We must be very careful not to say or do any thing which may justly offend *any of these little ones* (<sup>(~~486~~)</sup> Matthew 18:6), especially which may offend *the generation of them*, may sadden their hearts, or weaken their hands, or shake their interest.

**(3.)** There is nothing that can give more general offence to the generation of God's children than to say that *we have cleansed our heart in vain* or that it is vain to serve God; for there is nothing more contrary to their universal sentiment and experience nor any thing that grieves them more than to hear God thus reflected on.

**(4.)** Those that wish themselves in the condition of the wicked do in effect quit the tents of God's children.

**II.** He foresaw the ruin of wicked people. By this he baffled the temptation, as by the former he gave some check to it. Because he durst not speak what he had thought, for fear of giving offence, he began to consider whether he had any good reason for that thought (v. 16): “I endeavoured to understand the meaning of this unaccountable dispensation of Providence; but *it was too painful for me*. I could not conquer it by the



strength of my own reasoning.” It is a problem, not to be solved by the mere light of nature, for, if there were not another life after this, we could not fully reconcile the prosperity of the wicked with the justice of God. But (v. 17) *he went into the sanctuary of God*; he applied to his devotions, meditated upon the attributes of God, and the *things revealed, which belong to us and to our children*; he consulted the scriptures, and the lips of the priests who attended the sanctuary; he prayed to God to make this matter plain to him and to help him over this difficulty; and, at length, he understood the wretched end of wicked people, which he plainly foresaw to be such that even in the height of their prosperity they were rather to be pitied than envied, for they were but ripening for ruin. Note, There are many great things, and things needful to be known, which will not be known otherwise than by going into the sanctuary of God, by the word and prayer. The sanctuary must therefore be the resort of a tempted soul. Note, further, We must judge of persons and things as they appear by the light of divine revelation, and then we shall judge righteous judgment; particularly we must judge by the end. All is well that ends well, everlastingly well; but nothing well that ends ill, everlastingly ill. The righteous man's afflictions end in peace, and therefore he is happy; the wicked man's enjoyments end in destruction, and therefore he is miserable.

**1.** The prosperity of the wicked is short and uncertain. The high places in which Providence sets them are *slippery places* (v. 18), where they cannot long keep footing; but, when they offer to climb higher, that very attempt will be the occasion of their sliding and falling. Their prosperity has no firm ground; it is not built upon God's favour or his promise; and they have not the satisfaction of feeling that it rests on firm ground.

**2.** Their destruction is sure, and sudden, and very great. This cannot be meant of any temporal destruction; for they were supposed to *spend all their days in wealth* and their death itself had no bands in it: *In a moment they go down to the grave*, so that even that could scarcely be called *their destruction*; it must therefore be meant of eternal destruction on the other side death — hell and destruction. They flourish for a time, but are undone for ever.

**(1.)** Their ruin is sure and inevitable. He speaks of it as a thing done — *They are cast down*; for their destruction is as certain as if it were already accomplished. He speaks of it as God's doing, and therefore it cannot be resisted: *Thou castest them down*. It is *destruction from the Almighty*

(~~2015~~ Joel 1:15), from *the glory of his power*, ~~509~~ 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Who can support those whom God will cast down, on whom God will lay burdens?

(2.) It is swift and sudden; their damnation slumbers not; for *how are they brought into desolation as in a moment!* v. 19. It is easily effected, and will be a great surprise to themselves and all about them.

(3.) It is severe and very dreadful. It is a total and final ruin: *They are utterly consumed with terrors*, It is the misery of the damned that the terrors of the Almighty, whom they have made their enemy, fasten upon their guilty consciences, which can neither shelter themselves from them nor strengthen themselves under them; and therefore not their being, but their bliss, must needs be utterly consumed by them; not the least degree of comfort or hope remains to them; the higher they were lifted up in their prosperity the sorer will their fall be when they are cast down into *destructions* (for the word is plural) and suddenly *brought into desolation*.

3. Their prosperity is therefore not to be envied at all, but despised rather, *quod erat demonstrandum* — *which was the point to be established*, v. 20. *As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord! when thou awakest*, or when they awake (as some read it), *thou shalt despise their image*, their shadow, *and make it to vanish. In the day of the great judgment* (so the Chaldee paraphrase reads it), when they are awaked out of their graves, thou shalt, in wrath, despise their image; for *they shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt*. See here,

(1.) What their prosperity now is; it is but an image, a vain show, a fashion of the world that passes away; it is not real, but imaginary, and it is only a corrupt imagination that makes it a happiness; it is not substance, but a mere shadow; it is not what it seems to be, nor will it prove what we promise ourselves from it; it is as a dream, which may please us a little, while we are asleep, yet even then it disturbs our repose; but, how pleasing soever it is, it is all but a cheat, all false; when we awake we find it so. A hungry man *dreams that he eats, but he awakes and his soul is empty*, ~~208~~ Isaiah 29:8. A man is never the more rich or honourable for dreaming he is so. Who therefore will envy a man the pleasure of a dream?

(2.) What will be the issue of it; God will awake to judgment, to plead his own and his people's injured cause; they shall be made to awake out of the sleep of their carnal security, and then God shall despise their image; he

shall make it appear to all the world how despicable it is; so that the righteous shall laugh at them, <sup><816></sup>Psalm 52:6, 7. How did God despise that rich man's image when he said, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!* <sup><129></sup>Luke 12:19, 20. We ought to be of God's mind, for his judgment is according to truth, and not to admire and envy that which he despises and will despise; for, sooner or later, he will bring all the world to be of his mind.

## <sup><173></sup>PSALM 73:21-28

### DEVOUT CONFIDENCE

Behold Samson's riddle again unriddled, *Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*; for we have here an account of the good improvement which the psalmist made of that sore temptation with which he had been assaulted and by which he was almost overcome. He that stumbles and does not fall, by recovering himself takes so much the longer steps forward. It was so with the psalmist here; many good lessons he learned from his temptation, his struggles with it, and his victories over it. Nor would God suffer his people to be tempted if his grace were not sufficient for them, not only to save them from harm, but to make them gainers by it; even this shall work for good.

**I.** He learned to think very humbly of himself and to abase and accuse himself before God (v. 21, 22); he reflects with shame upon the disorder and danger he was in, and the vexation he gave himself by entertaining the temptation and parleying with it: *My heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins*, as one afflicted with the acute pain of the stone in the region of the kidneys. If evil thoughts at any time enter into the mind of a good man, he does not roll them under his tongue as a sweet morsel, but they are grievous and painful to him; temptation was to Paul as a thorn in the flesh, <sup><117></sup>2 Corinthians 12:7. This particular temptation, the working of envy and discontent, is as painful as any; where it constantly rests it is the *rottenness of the bones* (<sup><140></sup>Proverbs 14:30); where it does but occasionally come it is the pricking of the reins. Fretfulness is a corruption that is its own correction. Now in the reflection upon it,

**1.** He owns it was his folly thus to vex himself: "*So foolish was I to be my own tormentor.*" Let peevish people thus reproach themselves for, and

shame themselves out of, their discontents. “What a fool am I thus to make myself uneasy without a cause?”

**2.** He owns it was his ignorance to vex himself at this: “So ignorant was I of that which I might have known, and which, if I had known it aright, would have been sufficient to silence my murmurs. *I was as a beast (Behemoth — a great beast) before thee.* Beasts mind present things only, and never look before at what is to come; and so did I. If I had not been a great fool, I should never have suffered such a senseless temptation to prevail over me so far. What! to envy wicked men upon account of their prosperity! To be ready to wish myself one of them, and to think of changing conditions with them! *So foolish was I.*” Note, If good men do at any time, through the surprise and strength of temptation, think, or speak, or act amiss, when they see their error they will reflect upon it with sorrow, and shame, and self-abhorrence, will call themselves *fools* for it. *Surely I am more brutish than any man,* <sup><2RD></sup>Proverbs 30:2; <sup><18E></sup>Job 42:5, 6. Thus David, <sup><12D></sup>2 Samuel 24:10.

**II.** He took occasion hence to own his dependence on and obligations to the grace of God (v. 23): “*Nevertheless, foolish as I am, I am continually with thee* and in thy favour; *thou hast holden me by my right hand.*” This may refer either,

**1.** To the care God had taken of him, and the kindness he had shown him, all along from his beginning hitherto. He had said, in the hour of temptation (v. 14), *All the day long have I been plagued;* but here he corrects himself for that passionate complaint: “Though God has chastened me, he has not cast me off; notwithstanding all the crosses of my life, *I have been continually with thee;* I have had thy presence with me, and thou hast been nigh unto me in all that which I have called upon thee for; and therefore, though perplexed, yet not in despair. Though God has sometimes written bitter things against me, yet he has still *holden me by my right hand,* both to keep me, that I should not desert him or fly off from him, and to prevent my sinking and fainting under my burdens, or losing my way in the wildernesses through which I have walked.” If we have been kept in the way with God, kept closely in our duty and upheld in our integrity, we must own ourselves indebted to the free grace of God for our preservation: *Having obtained help of God, I continue hitherto.* And, if he has thus maintained the spiritual life, the earnest of eternal life, we ought not to complain, whatever calamities of this present time we have

met with. Or, 2. To the late experience he had had of the power of divine grace in carrying him through this strong temptation and bringing him off a conqueror: "I was foolish and ignorant, and yet thou hast had compassion on me and taught me (<sup>scribd</sup> Hebrews 5:2), and kept me under thy protection;" for the unworthiness of man is no bar to the free grace of God. We must ascribe our safety in temptation, and our victory over it, not to our own wisdom, for we are foolish and ignorant, but to the gracious presence of God with us and the prevalency of Christ's intercession for us, that our faith may not fail: "*My feet were almost gone, and they would have quite gone, past recovery, but that thou hast holden me by my right hand and so kept me from falling.*"

**III.** He encouraged himself to hope that the same God who had delivered him from this evil work would *preserve him to his heavenly kingdom*, as St. Paul does (<sup>scribd</sup> 2 Timothy 4:18): "I am now upheld by thee, therefore *thou shalt guide me with thy counsel*, leading me, as thou hast done hitherto, many a difficult step; and, since I am now continually with thee, *thou shalt afterwards receive me to glory*" v. 24. This completes the happiness of the saints, so that they have no reason to envy the worldly prosperity of sinners. Note,

**1.** All those who commit themselves to God shall be guided with his counsel, with the counsel both of his word and of his Spirit, the best counsellors. The psalmist had like to have paid dearly for following his own counsels in this temptation and therefore resolves for the future to take God's advice, which shall never be wanting to those that duly seek it with a resolution to follow it.

**2.** All those who are guided and led by the counsel of God in this world shall be received to his glory in another world. If we make God's glory in us the end we aim at, he will make our glory with him the end we shall for ever be happy in. Upon this consideration, let us never envy sinners, but rather bless ourselves in our own blessedness. If God direct us in the way of our duty, and prevent our turning aside out of it, he will afterwards, when our state of trial and preparation is over, receive us to his kingdom and glory, the believing hopes and prospects of which will reconcile us to all the dark providences that now puzzle and perplex us, and ease us of the pain we have been put into by some threatening temptations.

**IV.** He was hereby quickened to cleave the more closely to God, and very much confirmed and comforted in the choice he had made of him, v. 25, 26. His thoughts here dwell with delight upon his own happiness in God, as much greater then the happiness of the ungodly that prospered in the world. He saw little reason to envy them what they had in the creature when he found how much more and better, surer and sweeter, comforts he had in the Creator, and what cause he had to congratulate himself on this account. He had complained of his afflictions (v. 14); but this makes them very light and easy, *All is well if God be mine*. We have here the breathings of a sanctified soul towards God, and its repose in him, as that to a godly man really which the prosperity of a worldly man is to him in conceit and imagination: *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* There is scarcely a verse in all the psalms more expressive than this of the pious and devout affections of a soul to God; here it soars up towards him, follows hard after him, and yet, at the same time, has an entire satisfaction and complacency in him.

**1.** It is here supposed that God alone is the felicity and chief good of man. He, and he only, that made the soul, can make it happy; there is none in heaven, none in earth, that can pretend to do it besides.

**2.** Here are expressed the workings and breathings of a soul towards God accordingly. If God be our felicity,

**(1.)** Then we must have him (*Whom have I but thee?*), we must choose him, and make sure to ourselves an interest in him. What will it avail us that he is the felicity of souls if he be not the felicity of our souls, and if we do not by a lively faith make him ours, by joining ourselves to him in an everlasting covenant?

**(2.)** Then our desire must be towards him and our delight in him (the word signifies both); we must delight in what we have of God and desire what we yet further hope for. Our desires must not only be offered up to God, but they must all terminate in him, desiring nothing more than God, but still more and more of him. This includes all our prayers, *Lord, give us thyself*; as that includes all the promises, *I will be to them a God. The desire of our souls is to thy name*.

**(3.)** We must prefer him in our choice and desire before any other.

[1.] “*There is none in heaven but thee*, none to seek to or trust in, none to court or covet acquaintance with, but thee.” God is in himself more glorious than any celestial being (<sup>1806</sup> Psalm 89:6), and must be, in our eyes, infinitely more desirable. Excellent beings there are in heaven, but God alone can make us happy. His favour is infinitely more to us than the refreshment of the dews of heaven or the benign influence of the stars of heaven, more than the friendship of the saints in heaven or the good offices of the angels there.

[2.] *I desire none on earth besides thee*; not only none in heaven, a place at a distance, which we have but little acquaintance with, but none on earth neither, where we have many friends and where much of our present interest and concern lie. “Earth carries away the desires of most men, and yet I have none on earth, no persons, no things, no possessions, no delights, that I desire besides thee or with thee, in comparison or competition with thee.” We must desire nothing besides God but what we desire for him (*nil praeter te nisi propter te — nothing besides thee except for thy sake*), nothing but what we desire from him, and can be content without so that it be made up in him. We must desire nothing besides God as needful to be a partner with him in making us happy.

(4.) Then we must repose ourselves in God with an entire satisfaction, v. 26. Observe here,

[1.] Great distress and trouble supposed: *My flesh and my heart fail*. Note, Others have experienced and we must expect, the failing both of flesh and heart. The body will fail by sickness, age, and death; and that which touches the bone and the flesh touches us in a tender part, that part of ourselves which we have been but too fond of; when the flesh fails the heart is ready to fail too; the conduct, courage, and comfort fail.

[2.] Sovereign relief provided in this distress: *But God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever*. Note, Gracious souls, in their greatest distresses, rest upon God as their spiritual strength and their eternal portion. First, “*He is the strength of my heart*, the rock of my heart, a firm foundation, which will bear my weight and not sink under it. *God is the strength of my heart*; I have found him so; I do so still, and hope ever to find him so.” In the distress supposed, he had put the case of a double failure, both *flesh and heart fail*; but, in the relief, he fastens on a single support: he leaves out the flesh and the consideration of that, it is enough that God is *the strength of his heart*. He speaks as one careless of the body

(let that fail, there is no remedy), but as one concerned about the soul, to be *strengthened in the inner man*. Secondly, “*He is my portion for ever; he will not only support me while I am here, but make me happy when I go hence.*” The saints choose God for their portion, they have him for their portion, and it is their happiness that he will be their portion, a portion that will last as long as the immortal soul lasts.

**V.** He was fully convinced of the miserable condition of all wicked people. This he learned in the sanctuary upon this occasion, and he would never forget it (v. 27): “*Lo, those that are far from thee, in a state of distance and estrangement, that desire the Almighty to depart from them, shall certainly perish; so shall their doom be; they choose to be far from God, and they shall be far from him for ever. Thou wilt justly destroy all those that go a whoring from thee, that is, all apostates, that in profession have been betrothed to God, but forsake him, their duty to him and their communion with him, to embrace the bosom of a stranger.*” The doom is sever, no less than perishing and being destroyed. It is universal: “*They shall all be destroyed without exception.*” It is certain: “*Thou hast destroyed; it is as sure to be done as if done already; and the destruction of some ungodly men is an earnest of the perdition of all.*” God himself undertakes to do it, into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall: “*Thou, though infinite in goodness, wilt reckon for thy injured honour and abused patience, and wilt destroy those that go a whoring from thee.*”

**VI.** He was greatly encouraged to cleave to God and to confide in him, v. 28. *If those that are far from God shall perish, then,*

**1.** Let this constrain us to live in communion with God; “*if it fare so ill with those that live at a distance from him, then it is good, very good, the chief good, that good for a man, in this life, which he should most carefully pursue and secure, it is best for me to draw near to God, and to have God draw near to me;*” the original may take in both. *But for my part* (so I would read it) *the approach of God is good for me.* Our drawing near to God takes rise from his drawing near to us, and it is the happy meeting that makes the bliss. Here is a great truth laid down, That it is good to draw near to God; but the life of it lies in the application, “*It is good for me.*” Those are the wise who know what is good for themselves: “*It is good, says he (and every good man agrees with him in it), it is good for me to draw near to God; it is my duty; it is my interest.*”



**2.** Let us therefore live in a continual dependence upon him: “*I have put my trust in the Lord God, and will never go a whoring from him after any creature confidences.*” If wicked men, notwithstanding all their prosperity, shall perish and be destroyed, then let us trust in the Lord God, in him, not in them (see <sup><HB></sup>Psalm 146:3-5), in him, and not in our worldly prosperity; let us trust in God, and neither fret at them nor be afraid of them; let us trust in him for a better portion than theirs is.

**3.** While we do so, let us not doubt but that we shall have occasion to praise his name. Let us trust in the Lord, that we may declare all his works. Note, Those that with an upright heart put their trust in God shall never want matter for thanksgiving to him.