

This is the lesson about the evil fat cats
and the poor Christian who felt sorry for himself.

Most Christians, sometime in life, face the problem
of trying to figure out why evil people do wrong
and not only get away with it, but get rich at it,

while people who try to do right have a hard
struggle just to get along.

Why doesn't religion pay off in a visible way?
Why do those who do not serve God prosper
while good people endure privation and trouble?

Our lesson text today is the 73rd Psalm and
the Psalmist digs into this problem and tells
how he solved it for himself, with God's help.

He found difficulty in reconciling the teachings
he had received with what he found in life.
He had been taught that God is righteous, but
when he looked around he found that the wicked
are prosperous, the ~~xxxxxx~~ godly suffer, and
his religion did not seem to pay off.

He was deeply disturbed. It was a matter of life
and death that he find a reasonable answer to
this ironic reality of life. His faith was at
stake. If he lost his faith, his life would be
shattered, for faith was the center about which
his entire life was organized.

As I read this Psalm, I could see myself reflected
in its verses, for I have wondered how the evil
people prosper so well on a number of occasions.
Perhaps you have, too.

But we are told not to fret about evildoers,
because they will receive justice in due time,
while those who trust in God will receive mercy.

There's a big difference in the long run, and
the final score is in favor of belief in God,
by a large margin.

Throughout the Bible we are told that God's
people will endure, but that the wicked will
be of a temporary nature. They are described as
abominable branches, ashes under the feet,
bad fishers, beasts, brass and iron, briars/thorns,
bulls of bashan, chaff, clouds without water,
corn blasted, dogs, dross, early dew that passeth
away, fading oaks, evil figs, fools building up
on sand, moth eaten garments, scorpions/serpents,
smoke, stony ground, wells without water and
whited sepulchres.

None of these descriptions is intended to be
regarded as complimentary, and there are others.

READ PSALM 73

The Psalmist starts off by emphasizing that God
is good to Israel, to those who have pure hearts,
and he knows this.

Still that didn't keep him from almost falling.
His faith was slipping and he knew it.
He was about to fall down because of his jealousy.

Right there he revealed the cause of his trouble.
He had his eyes on the material blessings of
life, and he was jealous of those who had more
than he did. He felt like he wasn't getting
his share.

Life is filled with what looks like inequities.
If you are looking only at the days or the months,
or even the years, you are apt to become discouraged
by what you see and what you have in comparison
with those who don't have faith in God.

The poet admitted honestly that the reason he
was about to fall over the cliff and smash his
faith was his own fault and not the fault of God.
This, in my opinion, was what saved him, because
it enabled him to rise above the foggy thinking
of materialism and the limitations of time to
gaze upon the longer range concepts of
God's plans and purposes.

The temptation that the Psalmist face was the same temptation that every ambitious young man faces at some time or other, not to mention many women and a few older men.

He equated wealth and ease with God's favor and poverty and trouble with God's disfavor. Even many unbelievers do this.

He noted that these fat cats~~x~~ had everything they could wish for. They walked in arrogance with their pride showing all over the place. They oppressed other people, ate the best ~~of~~ steaks, and dressed in \$300 suits, and drove Lincoln Continentals or imported Mercedes-Benz so that everybody would see and envy them.

They were as insolent toward God as they were toward their fellowmen. But they got rich.

It was equally obvious that a Christian might have to suffer because he was a Christian, because he would not join the wicked in their evil ways, and ~~a~~ a Christian is subject to disasters of health, accident and economics.

v.11=== Then the Psalmist asked: "Doesn't God know what is going on?" Doesn't he know that his followers are having all kinds of troubles while Satan's followers are having one whale of a good time and no troubles worth mentioning?

Doesn't God know all of this? If he does, why doesn't he do something to straighten it out? After all, we are the ones who deserve the good things of life, not Satan's people.

Maybe he had made a bad bargain by choosing to follow God. Maybe he ought to reregister and switch parties. He was on the verge of renouncing his faith in God, but he did not really want to become a traitor to his faith.

He worried about it. He stayed awake at night. He stewed around all day trying to find an answer. But this didn't help much. He still fretted.

Before we go on to discuss how he found the answer, I would like to point out that I believe it is part of Satan's plan against God to create and spread this jealousy wherever he can.

Evil people often take on apparently respectable ways in order to attract the good. We have an example of this going on in OC. and USA right now in the Black Muslims.

These people are separatists, in that they do not ~~want~~ want integration or equal rights, but they want ~~a~~ segregation with the black people in charge of the whites and ~~on~~ less important blacks.

They have assumed a puritanical attitude to appear proper, respectable and prosperous for this very reason. They dress well, speak politely, but underneath is ~~an~~ the feeling of hatred and the willingness to commit violence to force their ways. This is having some effect in the community, and it is because the poor black Christians are being intimidated to wonder if their faith is a bad deal.

So the problem the ~~psalmist~~ psalmist faced was not just an old testament story. It is still with us, probably in a number of forms that affect everybody.

The Temple in Jerusalem was the special place of God's presence to the Jews. In the quiet atmosphere of worship the solution to his problems was revealed to the psalmist.

Merely attending a Temple service was not what provided the answer, but while he was participating in a worship ~~xxx~~ experience with other believers in God ~~xxxxxx~~ his heart and mind became receptive to the message and direction of God.

He began to see life from the vantage point of eternity. He looked at things from the background of life and death. Things take on very different values at the end of the road. (Stock mkt. went up when Nixon resigned. Someone said that if it became known the world would end Tuesday, stock mkt. would go up as some greedy investors tried to make a last fast buck out of it.

The psalmist felt that he, not the wicked, were under divine judgment, and although he was on the verge of turning his back on God's way, his predicament finally drove him to God.

He went into the temple of God and there he understood what would happen to the wicked in the end, and there he also understood that God has something better than mere money in store for his people, something that inflation doesn't devalue and a valuable asset upon which we don't pay taxes.

He realized that sitting around feeling sorry for himself and envying the wicked was a foolish waste of time because the wicked are doomed to destruction, and he really didn't want any part of that.

He realized also that his feelings of self-pity were just as much a waste of time and foolish because he had an incomparable treasure in his relationship with God, in his faith in God.

He stopped making a list of things that the wicked had and which he would like to have.

He started counting his blessings instead.

Maybe he went back and read the 23 Psalm and agreed: The Lord is my shepherd, I have all I need.

His perplexities fell into proper focus. He did not find intellectual answers to all of his questions, but he found that fellowship with God provides an adequate resource that enables a person to cope with the difficulties of life.

What are some of these blessings he counted? He was always with God. God held him by the hand. God guided him with his counsel and advice. God would receive him with honor at the end

When his health fails, God remains.
When his spirits sag, God remains.
God is the strength of his heart.
Fellowship with God is a blessing of his forever.

No wonder he asked:
Whom have I in heaven but you, God?
What else do I want on earth besides you, God?

Regardless of what the future held, in heaven or in earth, this man of faith had all that anyone could need or want, a lively experience of the continuing presence of God.
God was his companion, guide, and helper.
He is mine, and I am sure that he is yours, too.

What good is religion? The answer is clear.
Human strength and wisdom are faulty and prone to failure, but God is both strength and sustenance to those who believe, here/ hereafter.

Millions of people spend multimillions of dollars every year going to psychiatrists/psychologists trying to find peace of mind and counsel and guidance for daily living. Some of them perhaps find what they are looking for. Others don't/

But any of these people could get what they are looking for and spending money for, free of charge, if they would attend church and sincerely seek the ways of God.

A healthy faith deals honestly with doubts and unresolved conflicts of ~~xxxx~~ life. A person may find faith any place, but it is more easily acquired in the fellowship of other believers.

That is why regular habits of public worship provides maturing Christians with valuable insights into God's ways with men. That is why God has given us the scriptures and why Christ founded his church.

Neglect of public worship results in poverty of faith, but mere attendance does not in itself provide the insight that we need and want. We must let earthly things fade away in the light of God's presence. Then we will see better.