

God With Us 2 — In the Wrestling

Sermon File Type	Sermon
Passages	Psalm 73
Sermon Series	Mountain View
Topics	Questions; Presence
Tags	
Date	December 15, 2019

Introduction (Connection):

Invite to Psalm 73

Last week we started our advent series that is focusing in on the presence of God which is the gift of Immanuel, “God with Us,” Jesus Christ.

This morning’s message doesn’t have a “Christmasy” theme per se, but we are going to talk about some themes that tend to resurface around this time every year.

I’ll go ahead and warn you: this is going to be very raw, very real, almost gut-wrenching for some of you.

Tension:

Why? Because we’re going to be wrestling with this question:

Why do the wicked prosper and the pure suffer?

This is one of life’s biggest questions, right? But it isn’t just this question, you can wrestle with all different kinds of tough life questions like...

“Why does a perfectly good God allow evil and suffering?”

“Why does a loving God send people to hell?”

“Why does a righteous and just God allow injustice?”

This is faith-making or faith-breaking conversation, meaning people decide to not believe in God for stuff like this.

I sat in a living room late Thursday night with a couple who tragically lost their unborn baby boy at 24 weeks gestation and they’re asking questions like...

“If God is good, why did this happen? How was this God’s plan for our son, that he be born at 4:09AM and die 27 minutes later?”

You may wrestle with similar questions from events that took place years ago.

Today’s message is titled [God With Us in the Wrestling](#), and we’re going to walk through a Psalm that has ministered to my soul many times.

Psalm 73 confesses what we are afraid to admit, and it helps us be honest before God about the things we wrestle with the most.

Exposition:

Let’s read the first part of this:

***Psalm 73:1-16¹ — “¹ God is indeed good to Israel,
to the pure in heart.***

***² But as for me, my feet almost slipped;
my steps nearly went astray.***

***³ For I envied the arrogant;
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.***

¹ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), Ps 73:1–16.

**4 They have an easy time until they die,
and their bodies are well fed.**

**5 They are not in trouble like others;
they are not afflicted like most people.**

**6 Therefore, pride is their necklace,
and violence covers them like a garment.**

**7 Their eyes bulge out from fatness;
the imaginations of their hearts run wild.**

**8 They mock, and they speak maliciously;
they arrogantly threaten oppression.**

**9 They set their mouths against heaven,
and their tongues strut across the earth.**

**10 Therefore his people turn to them
and drink in their overflowing words.**

**11 The wicked say, "How can God know?
Does the Most High know everything?"**

**12 Look at them—the wicked!
They are always at ease,
and they increase their wealth.**

**13 Did I purify my heart
and wash my hands in innocence for nothing?**

**14 For I am afflicted all day long
and punished every morning.**

**15 If I had decided to say these things aloud,
I would have betrayed your people.**

**16 When I tried to understand all this,
it seemed hopeless.**

Stop there!

The author, Asaph, who wrote a few other psalms as well, starts off this song saying something he knows to be true: God is good.

He's even certain of it = "God is indeed good to Israel, to those who are faithful to God."

"But here's how I'm doing with that... my feet almost slipped..." meaning like he's on the edge of the cliff and things got slippery and it was about to be a disaster.

Why? Because he's wrestling with one of the big life questions: Why do the wicked prosper and the pure suffer?

He's seeing disgustingly arrogant and wicked people getting filthy rich and filling their bellies with the finest foods, and he's struggling with this all the way to the point where he's bringing that to God and saying... "What's with this? How are you good and stuff like this happen?"

Have you ever had one of those times where you know what you're "supposed" to believe about God but you're having the toughest time reconciling it with your current circumstances in life?

"Surely God is good, but why did he or why does he let me be abused?"
"Surely God is good, but why does it seem my body is failing me in every way?"

"Surely God is good, but why didn't he heal my mom of her cancer?"

"I'm supposed to believe this is true about God, but I just can't make sense of it with what's happened in my life or what is happening right now?"

This author is right there with you: "Surely God is good, but I'm wrestling with why, as someone who loves God, I have so little and really wicked people around me have so much?"

They're terribly cocky and mock God all the while getting richer and fatter from eating their fill.

Even their tongues are pictured as smug little punks.

So it isn't just that people are prospering, it is literally that the people God hates are prospering.

Yes, I did just say that: Psalm 5 tells us God abhors the wicked.

So why do they get so much? Why is life so easy for them and hard for us?

You know those emails you get every now and then where some Royal Nigerian offers you a huge investment opportunity or a fortune they can't get out of the country without your help.

I hope you didn't actually give money to that; it's a scam btw.

These extorters are lying to you and countless millions of people.

But guess what... according to a CNBC article earlier this year, whoever is sending these emails still rakes in over \$700,000 a year.²

Isn't that backwards? Isn't that an indication that the world is upside down?

I mean, how nice it must be to enjoy a day where you aren't distracted by a pain-wracked body and a trail of heavy trials that follow you wherever you go.

Or maybe the prosperity of the wicked is waiting for you when you open your computer or scroll through your phone.

² Megan Leonhardt, "'Nigerian prince' email scams still rake in over \$700,000 a year—here's how to protect yourself" (article, CNBC, April 18, 2019), available online <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/18/nigerian-prince-scams-still-rake-in-over-700000-dollars-a-year.html> [accessed online December 12, 2019].

A woman who complains about her children announces that she's pregnant with another, while you wait for just one positive pregnancy test.

A man lives this playboy life lusting after and extorting women and driving fast cars, yet he gets engaged and you're still single driving a busted Honda Accord.³

And the resentment towards them continues to build and build and build... but resentment towards them is ultimately resentment towards God.

God, why didn't I get that promotion? Why didn't I get a fiancé? Why don't I have a child?

Friends, we will always find someone who seems to have an easier life, better job, healthier or more attractive body, or what we long for and can't have, especially when we're already in the wrestling ring of life fighting with really tough questions.

And did you notice how low the author gets in this wrestling match?

v. 13 — Did I purify my heart and wash my hands for nothing?

In other words: Is my believing in and loving God nothing more than mere vanity? What's the point, because I'm the one suffering?

I thought God is good to those pure in heart? This isn't adding up?

Listen to what I'm about to tell you: It's OK to wrestle with tough questions.

³ Italicized quoted and paraphrased from Courtney Reissig, "Why Do Others Get the Good I Deserve?" (article, *Desiring God*, October 4, 2016), available online at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-do-others-get-the-good-i-deserve> [accessed online December 12, 2019].

You aren't a bad Christian; you're a child of God, and sometimes kids ask really hard questions, but our Dad wants all of your questions.

He doesn't want you to wrestle with your questions on your own.

And if you wallow for years in the resentment your questions bring you with no growth or clarity or healing, then there might be room for concern about your own relationship with God.

Like we always say, "It's OK to not be OK, it's just not ok to stay there..." because you don't have to stay there.

Ask the really tough questions, and be careful how you do it. Why?

v. 15 — "If I had mentioned what I'm wrestling with in public to lots of people, I would have mislead and betrayed your people."

Just like joy is contagious, so is resentment.

Wrestle with it in an authentic and genuine way, but not in a way that spreads bitterness to others.

By now, you may be asking, "Ok Brodd, I understand all of this, but what does all of this have to do with God With Us?"

We're getting to that right now.

Look at v. 16 — "For me to understand or get answers to everything that I'm wrestling seemed hopeless... impossible... like, will I ever find an answer to this."

Everything seemed hopeless until when?

v. 17 — "Until I entered God's sanctuary, or his presence. It was there I got clarity and understood the destiny of the wicked."

He wrestles with it all on his own and left to his own thoughts, it's all vanity and despair, and gets him nowhere.

Do you know what you're presuming when you wrestle with these big questions on your own without bringing them to God?

You're presuming that you can find the answers within the borders of your own limited mind.

His own searching was futile until he went to an external source, the source of all truth.

He runs into the presence of God and only in that sweet place does he get clarity and is able to really see himself and the wicked rightly.

Here's what really happens to the wicked... they may have a little fun and get riches and gorge themselves, but their end is destruction.

Psalm 73:18-20, 27 — ¹⁸ Indeed, you put them in slippery places; you make them fall into ruin.

¹⁹ How suddenly they become a desolation!

They come to an end, swept away by terrors.

²⁰ Like one waking from a dream,

Lord, when arising, you will despise their image. ...

²⁷ Those far from you will certainly perish;

you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

God gives him a new perspective on his perception by showing Him where all that ends for them.

And then he sees himself rightly too.

**Psalm 73:21-22 — ²¹ When I became embittered
and my innermost being was wounded,
²² I was stupid and didn't understand;
I was an unthinking animal toward you.**

He sees how foolish he was for thinking that way... he even calls himself a stupid brute.

You can call yourself that but don't call others that.

"Oh you're wrestling with this tough question; the bible says you're a stupid brute for that."

He sees himself finally and gains perspective on what he really has, because he's the one who has real prosperity.

Here is the reason why our believing in the Lord and being faithful to him and seeking him isn't all in vain.

**Psalm 73:23-24 — ²³ Yet I am always with you;
you hold my right hand.
²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me up in glory.**

We always get to be with God!!! God is always with us!!!

He walks with us; he takes us by the hand and leads us through the terrors of the night into the dawning of the sun!

That isn't just speaking of guidance though, it's speaking of nearness like a Daddy with His child.

When I drop my daughter off at preschool each morning, we get out of the truck and she immediately goes for my hand to hold it as we walk through the parking lot because I want to protect her and help her navigate what could be harmful to her by keeping her near me.

God holds on to us!

And then, the infinitely-wise and all-knowing God offers us guidance with his perfect counsel!

And at the end of the day, when everything is said and done and we've crossed that finish line here and stepped through death's doorway, God walks us into the full glory of his presence for the rest of eternity!

This is real prosperity!

This is the true goodness of God!

Did you notice what God used to win the wrestling match for Asaph?

Did God give him an answer to his big question? Did God answer why the wicked prosper and the pure suffer? No.

What does he give Asaph? A clearer, eternal perspective.

If you're wrestling and can't be satisfied with a clearer perspective and have to know the answer to "why," then you will never be satisfied and you will never stop wrestling and you will never know peace.

God doesn't answer why; he didn't explain to Job that the reason he lost everything was because Satan wanted to test him and God allowed it.

But he did offer Job perspective; "Did you put the boundaries of the oceans where they are? Do you command the morning?"

Perspective is what we need... we need to see something higher than what we're seeing now...

And when we finally stop wrestling with our tough questions away from the presence of God and instead bring our wrestlings to God, He gives clarity and a higher perspective.

And in that life-changing, faith-confirming, soul-healing place, we can't help but realize there is nothing worth more than God!

Psalm 73:25-26 — “Who do I have in heaven but you?

And I desire nothing on earth but you.

26 My flesh and my heart fail, (There is no *may* in the Hebrew; it isn't *if* they fail, it's *that* they do fail, and when they fail...)

but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever.” (Not the riches of the wicked, not the pleasures of the world... God!)

You probably know that verse really well...

Are you just now realizing that this is the context of this verse?

This isn't the confession of the comfortable or the exclamation of the soul at ease, this is the war cry of the wrestler!

“I don't want the wealth and the riches that come from wickedness; I don't need to succeed! They can have it all because I know where all that ends. I just want you and nothing else!”

“Even though my body fails, even though my heart gives way... you are what strengthens my heart and my choice portion on the buffet of pleasures forever.”

“To have you, God, is to have everything!”

Sometimes it takes great wrestling with tough questions to get us to the place of seeing him as our strength and portion yet again, but it’s always good for us to get there...

Hear me: even if beholding him as our strength and portion again is the only reason why he let us wrestle with tough questions in the first place!

And so, he makes this resolution that I believe ought to be a resolution we all make today.

v. 28 — “But as for me (Resolved:), God’s presence is my good. I have made the Lord God my refuge, so I can tell about all you do.”

“I have made God where I go to hide away from the wars raging around me and in me.”

“Being near God, walking daily with an awareness of and enjoyment of God’s presence, is the best... it is my good.”

“And so, I’ll tell of all you do, God.”

Application/Challenge:

Can you see what all this means?

This is yet another reason why God sent Immanuel, God with Us.

This is why God dwelled in the tabernacle and the temple and allowed people in.

This is why God himself tabernacled among us in Jesus Christ.

This is why God sent His very presence in His Spirit to be the present and active God with Us Now...

You don't have to wrestle alone!

When you're fighting with life's toughest questions that have gone unanswered for millennia and you're tired, you don't think you'll ever win, and you're hopeless...

Run to God's presence, take your wrestling match to him; don't wrestle alone!

Some of us have yet to walk in all that God with us means, and this is one vital part of it.

How you wrestle with your doubts and fears and tough questions is directly connected to your daily walking in the presence of God in relationship with Him.

My wife and I will sit across the dinner table from some people who have some of the worst things I can imagine happening to them, and they're struggling in their faith, they're doubting God's goodness, and they're in this intense wrestling match.

Is that you today? If so, I'll ask you what I ask them.

Have you talked to God about it?

Have you taken your questions to God, because He is Immanuel... with you, right here, right now... you don't have to wrestle alone.

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

You can't win this match on your own; you are powerless to do so.

Make God's presence your good, run to God's presence to enjoy the eternal refuge.

[Depending on time, insert story about Raelyn]

This is Immanuel, God with us.

[Pray]