

Decision Making

Psalm 73

INTRODUCTION:

The life you experience in many ways is the sum total of the decisions you make.

The average person makes 70 conscious decisions every day. That 25,550 decisions a year. Over 70 years that's 1,788,500 decisions. You put all that together and that's basically your life.

You are where you are today mainly because of the decisions you have made. 20 years from now you will arrive at the destination your decisions carry you to.

Interestingly, the number one influencer of the decisions is not the info you are given, it is your **state of mind** when you make the decision.

The sad fact is - most of the biggest decisions a person makes are made from a BAD state of mind.

- Change jobs - most people quit their job when they are in a lousy state of mind.
- Change Spouses - most people decide to divorce when they are in the lowest emotional state they've ever been in.
- Change Churches - most people leave their church when someone has frustrated them and gotten them bent out of shape.

Think about the biggest decisions you have ever made - how were you feeling? Did you sense the closeness of God? Did you have a healthy perspective on life and eternity?

I want to show you a better way to approach decision making from Psalm 73.

TEXT: Psalm 73 (ESV)

A Psalm of Asaph.

Asaph was a Levitical musician appointed by David to serve in the tabernacle he wrote 11 psalms that are recorded in scripture. (1 Chron. 6:31–32, 39)

¹ Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

Now this was a proverbial statement that was frequently quoted in Israel. It was something like when we say, "God is good". But notice what Asaph says next...

² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.

He is saying, “I was beginning to seriously question whether or not God was truly good... as a matter of fact I was about to make a really bad decision based on my doubt of God’s goodness”.

You see - when you look at the world and you see things going well for the ungodly and things going bad for the godly you tend to assume one of two things:

- a. God is powerful but not good - Perhaps God is on their side. Perhaps God favors the immoral, the unjust - it sure looks that way sometime.
- b. God is good but not powerful - Maybe God wants to help but there is just nothing he can do about it.

Well we are going to see in our text that neither of those are true and we are going to learn how to put ourselves in the healthiest place prior to making a significant decisions.

Some decisions are NOT that significant. For example: My daughter asked me recently whether I thought she should get blue mermaid tail or a green mermaid tail. It really doesn’t matter. Just decide.

But then there are some decisions that have massive repercussions for you and generations to come.

The problem is - sometimes those big decisions are thrust on you. You don’t have time to get your head on right before making the call.

Asaph presents us with two postures for decision making. One bad, the other good.

- The first one he calls - Outside the Sanctuary
- The second is - Inside the Sanctuary

He begins by describing his perspective Outside the Sanctuary then in verse 17 he says, “until I went into the sanctuary of God” from that point on his entire perspective changes. Let’s look at each one...

1. Outside the Sanctuary

A. Taken by Envy

³ For I was **envious** of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Tim Keller says that every human society that has ever existed—whether it’s a nation, a race of people, a church, basketball team, or group of 8th grade girls—has been characterized by pride at the top and envy at the bottom.

Envy is one of the most natural of human emotions. Give two kids a cookie and they immediately start comparing who got the biggest cookie.

If one cookie is fractionally larger, the little cookie kids starts drawing conclusions about the love of the parent, the justice of the world and the wicked pride of the big cookie child.

The fact is, parents are no better. They see someone drive to church with a nicer vehicle and they start drawing the same conclusions about God. They question God's love, the question God's justice, they start incriminating the guy in the nicer car.

See how Asaph does it...

⁴ For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek.

The wicked people are physically healthier than us godly people. Don't you find it interesting that in biblical times wealthy people were marked by being overweight. Today you typically assume if someone is overweight they don't have time or money to go to they gym. The can't afford crossfit right?

⁵ They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

Sometimes it seems like the IRS has a personal vendetta against some of us, but not the wicked. They seem to accumulate wealth effortlessly.

⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

That's a difficult verse to interpret but basically it means that they speak as though they live in Heaven when they speak to the rest of us down here on Earth.

I can't help but think of the "Rich Man" of Jesus parable - he dressed in purple and fine linen and faired sumptuously every day. His life was a Heaven of an existence. Then there was Lazarus his life was hellish.

Not only was Asaph taken by envy...

B. Tempted with Disillusionment

¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. ¹¹ And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" ¹² Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

That is a mistake that so many make - they draw theological conclusions from a limited, practical observation.

- God has allowed me to get away with a few things... so he must approve.
- I have accumulated wealth so God must be ok with the means I choose to accumulate it.

Psalm 50:19–21 (ESV)

19 “You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. 20 You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son. 21 These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

God is saying, “don’t take my silence as approval - sometimes I’m simply taking notes”.

Asaph was taken by envy... tempted with disillusionment...

C. Tended toward Frustration

13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. 14 For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. 15 If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed the generation of your children. 16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

Asaph is saying, “I’m not sure it’s worth the trouble”. Maybe if you can’t beat ‘em, you ought to join ‘em.

FOUR REASONS NOT TO MAKE DECISIONS OUTSIDE THE SANCTUARY:

1. **We tend to grab at straws.** Anything seems better than where we are now.
2. **We tend to see only two options** - there is almost always a third.
3. **We tend to rush to conclusions** rather than investigate the facts.
4. **We tend to prefer the most damaging option** because it brings the most radical change.

But then something happens that radically changed his perspective in verse 17...

17 until I went into the sanctuary of God;

Now the sanctuary of God was the place of God’s manifest presence. It encompassed the whole of three sections of the tabernacle and later the temple. It was a place where God would be manifest and worshipped.

We are told that God dwelt between the downturned heads and the outstretched wings of the Cherubim over the Arc of the Covenant.

Within the Arc was the law of God, a bowl of manna and Aaron’s rod that budded. Covering the arc was a screen called the, “Mercy Seat”. It was there that the blood of the sacrifice would be sprinkled on Yum Kippor, “The Day of Atonement” symbolizing how the death of a substitute satisfies the righteous requirements of the law.

Above the mercy seat God has manifested himself to Israel as a Pillar of Smoke by Day, and Fire by Night.

Asaph says, “When I went into God’s presence my perspective radically changed”.

Like King Hezekiah in when he received the letter from Sennacherib King of the Assyrians.

2 Kings 19:14 (ESV)

14 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.

Asaph and Hezekiah did what we ought to do when we are plagued by confusion, doubts, and distress. Take it to the Lord.

Notice what happens...

2. Inside the Sanctuary

Inside the sanctuary Asaph saw three things differently...

a. Perspective is Broadened -

17b. then I discerned their end.

Previously, Asaph only saw what was before him. But in the presence of the Lord he saw things from God’s perspective. He was reminded that there’s a payday someday.

18 Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. 19 How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! 20 Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

ILLUSTRATION: I’ve always loved the way John Wesley described this (updated)— You hear that an uncle you didn’t know you had has died and left you millions upon millions of dollars, and you are summoned to the bank to collect it. About 1/2 mile from it, your car breaking down on the way to the bank... you don’t shake your fist at God; look enviously at everyone else’s car. You skip your way to the bank! That 1/2 mile walk becomes the most joyous walk you ever took!

When you come into God’s presence you are reminded that this life now is as close to hell as you will EVER GET.

ILLUSTRATION: I watched a video last week about a man who was trying to sound super deep talking about how the Optimist see the glass as always half full... while the pessimist views it as half empty. We ought to always look on the bright side and see it half full... I would suggest a third option...the Christian doesn’t see it as half full or empty.. the Christian looks at his life through Gospel lens and realizes that he deserves to be in Hell... and guess what... HE’S NOT!!! So it really doesn’t matter how much water is in the glass... the glass isn’t in hell!

Not only is your perspective broadened...

b. Perception is Deepened -

²¹ When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, ²² I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.

LISTEN: When you make a decision from a bad state of mind you make animalistic decisions. You just tend to gravitate toward immediate gratification, or relief from pain. That's what animals do. You are created in God's image. You should have a deeper perception than that.

²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

When we get in God's presence she begins to show us things from His point of view, His perspective. We see life differently.

His perspective is broadened, his perception is deepened...

c. Passion is Stirred -

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

ILLUSTRATION: Joni Eareckson Tada, quadriplegic who lost complete control of her arms and legs in a diving accident she had as a teenager. She said, "I am OK with losing the use of my hands and my feet for the last 60 years.... I wouldn't change a thing, because it brought me nearer to God." Could you say that?

LISTEN: God isn't most glorified because you are able to drive a Mercedes and you are happy. Everyone who drives a Mercedes is happy. The world is in awe when you can drive a 15 year old Honda with a smile on your face.

ILLUSTRATION: A missionary named Allan Gardner sailed to an island off the coast of South America in the 1800's. He was supposed to be join within a few days by other teammates and a bunch of back-up supplies. He stayed there, isolated, for several weeks and ended up starving to death. They found his body and his journal later, and the last thing he had written in his journal, on the day before he died, was Psalm 34:10: "I am overwhelmed with the sense of the goodness of God." Can you say that when the ship doesn't show up?

CONCLUSION: It has been called the worst moment in TV History. 2015 Steve Harvey is the host for the Miss Universe Pageant. The fateful moment came when Steve had to announce the winner. He opened the envelope and declared the winner to be Miss Columbia!

What happened next was painful to watch. Especially when you've seen it before... because you know what's coming... Miss Columbia is crowned, she's waving that wave she's practiced all her life... then Steve reenters the stage.

And you know what's going to happen... the crown will be taken away and given to Ms. Philippines.

LISTEN: When you come into the presence of God you are reminded that life is a lot like that.

Those who wear the crown today, won't wear it tomorrow. And the real coronation is only seconds away!

CONCLUSION: You never know when a life changing decision will be thrust upon you. So let me ask you three things?

1. SALVATION: Have you come into the sanctuary and noticed the blood over the mercy seat?
2. PRAYER: Do you return as often as you can to dwell in God's presence alone? Like David do you say, "Better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere?"
3. CHURCH: Do you gather with God's people so that the Word can be preached to you on a regular basis?