

“Seeing the Big Picture by Going to Church” Bible text: Psalm 73
 For New Horizon URC, by Pastor Rand Lankheet
 August 27, 2017, second sermon

Introduction: Some time ago, immigrant to this country told me what happened in his homeland.

He said that corrupt people are now the leaders of that country. These leaders are not concerned about the living conditions of their people. Rather, they are concerned about themselves. They are becoming wealthy while they are leaders.

For example, at one time that country had a small air force, with a few military airplanes.

But, under those new leaders, each of the airplanes have been shipped out of the country.

The corrupt leaders transferred ownership those planes to themselves.

Then they sold them and put the money into their own bank accounts.

Meanwhile, he said, the ordinary people of the land are suffering. And they are getting poorer.

-This is something similar to what the man Asaph observed in his own day. He writes about it in

Psalm 73. He writes in verse 1: “I saw the prosperity of the wicked people.”

Basically, he saw people all around him getting fabulously rich.

Getting rich, not by working hard, by using their talents, by using their minds.

But getting rich through corrupt and deceitful ways. [Look at vs. 7-8, vs. 12. Read.

Like the rulers in that country I mentioned earlier, some people in Asaph’s day were getting rich by wicked schemes. And through violent and oppressive means.

And what can the believers do? Today, in many corrupt countries, if you stand up against

corruption, you can be killed. You can be taken away to prison. You might never be seen again. We're seeing that today, for example, in the land of Venezuela. A once prosperous country. Now, essentially, a dictatorship. If Christian people oppose this corruption, they are threatened with violence.

"Keep quiet," they are told, "If you don't keep quiet, your home will be robbed, your family will be beaten, and you will be taken away to prison."

So it was in the time of Asaph. What were these corrupt people saying?

According to vs. 8, they were scoffing, that is, mocking. They were speaking in pride and arrogance. Even against God Himself! [Read vs. 9. It's a real problem in our world today, in many countries. Not only is corruption so bad. But good people, often, are forced to keep quiet. If they can, some will leave the country. Some of the brightest and the best people in many lands, have left, immigrating to Europe and to North America. While that is understandable, it leaves the country in even worse shape.

And for the Christians in those places, well, some of them start to compromise their values,

their standards. Others, keeping their standards, become poorer and poorer. They suffer more and more.

-The man Asaph was experiencing that in his own day. He was falling into despair.

He was tempted to give up, maybe, even, to compromise his standards. [Read vss. 13-14.

While evildoers were becoming richer and richer, Asaph was becoming poorer and poorer.

Even though Asaph was trying to live for the Lord, ...

Even though he was trusting in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,
He was getting poorer.

Asaph admits something in verse 1. He was starting to become "envious" of those wicked

people. It seems like he's starting to think that maybe he should live like them!

-And there's something even worse!

Asaph is starting to doubt God's sense of justice. If God is truly righteous, if God is truly just

and fair, Asaph wondered, why is God letting those wicked people get so rich?

[Read vss. 2-3.

Well, as we've noted, this kind of corruption in society isn't anything new... and it isn't just out in the wicked world.

Within the ancient country of Israel, this same corruption, at certain times in their history,

was very widespread.

-1 Samuel chapter 8 tells us that the two sons of the prophet Samuel were corrupt prophets.

They got rich by living on bribery...forcing people to pay them bribes.

Then they promised to give favourable judgments, in favour of wicked people.

-Later in Israel's history, during the time of some of the later prophets, it was even worse.

Get a sample of this from the prophet Micah. [Read Micah 7:1-4.

But at the same time, most of those corrupt Israelites were claiming to be believers.

They claimed that the LORD, Yahweh, was their God...and the God of their children.

Yet, most of them were involved in corruption...from the leaders down to the lowliest citizen.

-Now, Asaph was living many years earlier; in his day corruption wasn't as bad as it was later.

Yet, even in his day, there were certain high-ranking people, getting rich by corruption and fraud. And there was Asaph, working honestly, being faithful to God.

Yet, he was staying poor. It seems that also, his health was suffering. [Read vs. 14.

So in this psalm, Asaph is saying: “Lord, it just doesn’t seem fair!

Lord, do you see all this corruption, why are you allowing it? //

2. But in the midst of his discouragement, and his envy, God speaks to Asaph.

God *reassures* him. Look at vss. 16-17... [Read vs. 16-17.

To get his answers, to put everything into perspective, Asaph goes to church!

We read that Asaph went into “the sanctuary of God.”

-Now, Asaph probably was living in Jerusalem. He served under King David, and perhaps also under King Solomon. Maybe the Temple had already been built.

Or else there were holy sanctuaries set up in and around the city.

God had told the people of Israel, that there, He would make His presence known.

Maybe Asaph gazed upon some altar, where atoning sacrifices were made for the sins of the

people. Remember that those OT altars were pointing to Jesus. The lambs, and bulls and goats, were pointed forward to Jesus...the true Lamb of God.

The only one, who ultimately takes away the sin of people.

To get answers, to make sense of his mixed up world, we could say that Asaph went to church!

He went to the place where people would assemble on the Sabbath Day.

Perhaps in that holy place, Asaph heard God’s law being read. Or a portion of the Torah.

One of the first five books of our Bible today. The priests may have been reading...

By hearing that Word, and participating in worship, Asaph was reminded of the Lord's justice.

And he was reminded that, ultimately, the Lord will bless His people.
 -Maybe there in the church of his day, Asaph heard the story of Noah and the Ark. How God was very patient with the wicked people of that day...how he sent Noah to preach to those people...but, finally, God's judgement fell on them. They were swept away in the Flood.

Yet, believing Noah, and his wife, and his sons, and their wives, were saved.

They were blessed, when about a year later, God led them out of the Ark.

And blessed them with a new earth, to be fruitful in it.
 -Or, maybe Asaph heard again about how his ancestors were held as slaves in Egypt.

How Pharaoh was very rich, and obtain even more riches by forcing the Israelites

to work as his slaves, cruelly oppressing them.

Pharaoh was warned by Moses, to let God's people go free. But Pharaoh refused....

For a time, God's people suffered under cruelty and violence. They suffered much.

But, finally God said, "That's enough! Pharaoh you are going to pay for your sin."

And God delivered His people.

-So Asaph, being in the church of his day, heard the Word of the Lord.

And look what he says: [Read vss. 17-20.

Why do we go to church today? Why do we come here?

Well, we come here, first and foremost, to praise the Lord, to thank Him for all his mercies.

But then, another main reason for us going to church is this:

We come here to have the Lord put within us, a correct view of life. Life in this sinful world.

In this world, we can become so discouraged, at times.

We might even become bitter about the bad things that happen to us:

“Why me, O Lord....why are you allowing evil people to oppress me?

And while they are so cruel, they are getting rich.”

Or we might complain about our own situation:

“Lord, I am trying my best to live for you. But why I am not getting ahead?

And why do you allow me to suffer?”

Even sometimes we might think this way: ‘Maybe I should just give up and become like the

unbelievers. Life might be easier for me.”

But it is at church, gathered together, and hearing his word, that the Lord says this:

“Yes, at times, life is unfair.

Sin and Satan and sinful people have made a terrible mess of things.

And because of all that, life sometimes is very unfair.

Sometimes you as a Christian will be mistreated. You will suffer.”

But, then the Lord reminds us:

“But, dear child: understand that I am working out my plan in this world, and in your life.

My judgement, though it is delayed, will not be denied.

My judgement will eventually fall on the corrupt, on the violent.

Ruthless leaders and wicked people, ultimately will be condemned.”

When will that judgement come? Well, we often want it to come quickly.

But, it might take many, many years. Or, some corrupt, wicked people will soon get caught. The Lord uses his agents in law enforcement, in government, and in the court system.

But, ultimately, God’s full judgement comes when Jesus returns to the earth.

On that final day, the Bible says everyone will give an account of his deeds and his words.

And God says that those who have trusted in Him, in His son Jesus, will be vindicated.

The Bible says on that day we will shine like stars, as the righteousness of Jesus fully covers us.

And what will then happen to the the wicked, the corrupt, the proud?

The Bible says that in God's perfect justice, they will be thrown into the lake of fire.

To be punished forevermore.

-Brothers and sisters, let us again find our hope in the Lord.

Life is not always fair to us when we are trying to do the right thing.

Sometimes ordinary life is very unfair.

But today, once again, you have come to the right place.

With Asaph, you have entered into the sanctuary of the Lord. You've come here to church.

Through Word and Sacrament, through prayer and praise to God,

I hope that your strength is renewed.

And that you can go back out into the world, for another week of work and service.

-As we go out, let's read Asaph's final testimony. [Read verses 25-26. **Let us pray.**

