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 HCC: Summer in Psalms
 Psalm 73

- A. Image: Orchid's story broke my heart.
- I. Wrongdoers prosper (73:1-12)
 - B. We believe that those who do right should prosper
 - C. Yet those who do wrong prosper (73:1-12)
 - D. Text: Psalm 73:1-12
 - 1. Asaph saw the prosperity of the wicked
 - a. The wicked made Asaph envious (73:3)
 - b. The wicked have healthy bodies (73:4)
 - c. The wicked experience no trouble (73:5)
 - d. The wicked are popular (73:10)
 - 2. We see wrongdoers prosper
 - a. A couple conceives after a one-night stand, while married couples may never conceive.
 - b. A co-worker gets promoted because he goes to happy hour with your boss every Wednesday night while you struggle to get noticed.
 - c. Those with questionable lifestyles receive notice.
- II. The prosperity of wrongdoers makes us lost in doubt (73:13-16)
 - A. Asaph questioned the benefits of following God
 - 1. Although Asaph maintained an upright lifestyle, he experienced suffering (73:13-14)
 - 2. Although Asaph didn't express his doubts, he wrestled internally (73:15-16)
 - B. We question the benefits of following God
 - 1. Despite our faithfulness to God, we have yet to experience his blessing
 - 2. We wonder: "Why are we still single?"
 - 3. We wonder: "Why is my body suffering from a chronic illness?"
 - 4. We wonder: "Why does the drunk driver walk away from a crash while no one moves in the other car?"
- III. God uses the church to help us regain our spiritual bearings (73:17-26)
 - A. The sanctuary reminds Asaph of humanity's fate (73:17)
 - 1. The sanctuary was where Israel gathered to worship God.
 - a. God's presence dwelt in the temple
 - b. The only way to come into God's presence was through sacrifice
 - 2. Those who do wrong will perish (73:18-20)
 - 3. Those who trust God will enjoy his presence (73:21-26)
 - B. The church reminds believers of their destiny
 - 1. We are a people saved by grace
 - 2. God's presence will never depart from us
 - 3. The wicked will receive their just deserts
- IV. Allow the church to serve as your spiritual compass
 - A. A compass helps you when you are lost

1. It helps you locate where you are
 2. It helps you know where to go
- B. Reflect upon on how communion reminds you of the gospel story
- C. Talk about what God teaches you in our time together [Small Group Ministry]
- V. When we regain our spiritual bearings, we are better able to others to Christ (73:27-28)
- A. You recall the fate of nonbelievers (73:27)
 - B. You share what God has done (73:28)
 - C. Closing Image: Despite JM's loss, he continued to share his faith with others.

MANUSCRIPT

Orchid's story broke my heart. I met her a few weeks ago in a village four hours plus from a third-tier city in China. Orchid is from a people group named the Bonou. The Bonou like many other unreached people groups live primarily in villages that are hard to reach. We had to drive on some pretty narrow roads and rough terrain in order to reach her village.

Orchid became a believer in college. After becoming a believer, she dated a nonbelieving boy. A night of impropriety led to her getting pregnant. When she discovered she was with child, she also discovered that her boyfriend wasn't single. He was already married with children of his own. This led to them separating and her giving birth to a baby boy, whom she has had to raise on her own. If that wasn't enough, her ex-boyfriend's wife has now threatened legal action against Orchid. All these tragic events led Orchid to return home to her village with a faith in Christ, but also the shame of being a single mom. When we spoke to her, she seemed to believe that no one not even God could forgive her. There are no believers in her village or even surrounding villages. As I said, she is part of an unreached people group. This means no other believers and no church to remind her of God's love.

I thought to myself: "Why did this happen? Why did such a tragic thing happen to a person who has placed her faith in Christ? Why didn't her ex-boyfriend share in the burden of raising a child? Why did he get away with it? It seemed so [pause] wrong..."

It reminds me of this morning's Scripture passage. It seems like wrongdoers prosper. **Wrongdoers prosper.** Those who break the rules get away with it. Their victims suffer while they experience no consequence.

This bothers us. **We believe that those who do right should prosper.** Those who follow the rules should receive blessing. The nice guy should get the girl. The nice girl should get the guy. The one who studies hard should get high marks. The one who shows up to work early and leaves work late should get the promotion. Those who do right should prosper.

Yet those who do wrong prosper. Those who break the rules and get away with it seem to never experience harm. The rule breakers are seen as shrewd. When people find loop holes in rules, it is praised. Those who do wrong prosper.

An ancient worship leader named Asaph observed the same thing. Like every good musician, Asaph turns this observation to song. He writes this song in the form of a Psalm. The person who compiled the book of Psalms begins book three with Asaph's Psalm. Book one begins with Psalm one talking about the blessed and the wicked. Book two begins with a Psalm 42 about depression. The third book begins with Psalm 73. It is a psalm that ponders the question of how the world works. If you haven't turned there already, then please turn with me there. Psalm 73. Psalm 73.

Asaph saw the prosperity of the wicked. The wicked in the OT were those who broke law as defined in the Torah – the first five books of the Bible. He saw that the wicked were the ones getting richer and fatter. This began to bother him. He writes in verse 3: *“For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”* Asaph describes what he sees in the first section of the Psalm. But instead of going through every observation, I'll just spend some time on three of them.

First, **the wicked have healthy bodies.** Look with me at verse 4. It says: *“For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek.”* When Asaph saw the wicked, he saw

people who were healthy. They don't have to break their back in hard work in the hot Israeli sun as they gathered the year's harvest of wheat. They always had enough to eat. They never faced any kind of health trouble until death knocked on their door step. Their bodies as a result are "fat and sleek". Today, we would say: "Trim and cut". They could afford health supplements that extend their lives.

Second, **the wicked experience no trouble**. They don't seem to have any issue with the law when they break it. Look with me at verse 5: "*They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.*" The wicked don't have to worry when they getting punished. All they ask is: "How much will it cost to make it go away?" They're the ones who can afford to hire lawyers when their children break the law and get them out of any time of penalty. The wicked experience no trouble because with a little money and some connections make it go away.

Lastly, **the wicked are popular**. Although they make questionable life-style choices, everyone wants what they have. Verse 10 says: "*Therefore his people turn back to them, and find "no fault in them."*" Asaph found that all of Israel wanted to mimic the wicked. Instead of turning to God for their example, they turned to these rule breakers. When Israel saw these people taking advantage of the poor, worshipping idols, or indulging their sexual appetites. Israel wanted to be like them.

We see wrong doers prosper. A couple conceives after a one-night stand, while married couples may never conceive. A co-worker gets promoted because he goes to happy hour with your boss every Wednesday night while you struggle to get noticed. Those with questionable lifestyles receive notice. Our checkout stands sell magazines depicting actors and

athletes who have engaged in gross moral negligence to sell clothing or food products. And we want to buy the things that they wear or eat.

What happens when we see wrong doers prosper? How does it make us feel?

The prosperity of wrong doers makes us lost in doubt. When we see rule breakers blessed, we wonder: God, where are you? Are you seeing this? Why is it that these wicked people never seem to suffer the consequences for their actions? **The prosperity of wrong doers makes us lost in doubt.**

It made Asaph doubt too. **Asaph questioned the benefits of following God.** He wondered: if the wicked prosper, then what's the payoff for being righteous? What's the point of following God if there is no blessing? **Asaph questioned the benefits of following God.**

What made Asaph question? Although Asaph maintained an upright lifestyle, he experienced suffering. He believed that doing all the right spiritual things should have protected him from suffering. Read with me in verse 13 thru 14: *"All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning."*

Every morning, Asaph would recite the Shema to himself in the morning. He committed time to memorize the Torah so that he would keep his heart from sin. He would wash his hands prior to worship at the temple. He brought the right sacrifices: burnt offering, sin offering, and guilt offerings. He led the people in song as they ascended the stairs of the temple to worship. He did everything right.

Despite all his piety, Asaph felt stricken. He may have suffered some kind of illness. That knee was sore from walking up all those stairs to the temple has now become painful.

Every step shot pain up his leg. Why would God do this to him? When he goes to the temple in the morning: his supervising priest would say: "You're late again! Didn't you know worship service already started." Despite all his efforts to follow God, none of it seemed to pay off. Every day became a drag.

Yes, he was stricken. Yes, he was rebuked. But he never said a word to anyone.

Although Asaph didn't express his doubts, he wrestled internally. He was an internal processor. He would rather think it through before verbally sharing with anyone. Verse 15 says: *"If I had said, 'I will speak thus', I would have betrayed a generation of your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to be a wearisome task."*

Asaph knew his position as a priest. He was a spiritual leader. He couldn't express his doubts and his questions. If he did, then he might possibly lead the people of Israel astray. Instead the questions kept rumbling around in his mind. He kept on wondering: "Why is each day such a drag? How come everyone else seems to be doing so much better than me? Does God even see my suffering?" It ate him up inside. It drained him of his strength. It sapped him. That's why this thinking became a "wearisome task".

We question the benefits of following God. We wonder if following Christ is worth it? When we perform a cost benefit analysis, we see the cost and see little of the benefit.

We read our Bibles, pray regularly, and attend church every week. We see no change. We see no blessing. Despite our faithfulness to God, we have yet to experience his blessing.

We may wonder: "Why am I still single?" The thought of dating a non-believer has never crossed my mind. Yet there is no one in church that seems interested in me. I've always

been upright in my conduct with the opposite sex. I help out with our youth group. I've disciplined youth for years. I deserve to be in a dating relationship.

We may wonder: "Why is my body suffering from a chronic illness?" Every day, I work out. As I've grown older, I've changed my diet so that I don't eat as much. Veggies and Fruit are a regular staple in my diet. I've traveled to other countries to share the gospel. Why do I have to suffer from this chronic pain? Why do I need to take these medications each day? God, haven't I done enough for you! Why am I suffering.

We may wonder: "Why does the drunk driver walk away from a crash while no one moves in the other car?" The drunk driver had a little bit much to drink at the bar with his friends. Instead of someone driving home, he decides to drive himself. As he gets on the freeway, he hits another car. A student was training to be a missionary doctor in another car. She had spent years preparing for the moment when she would be able to serve in a clinic out in the bushes of Africa. She had done stints in Congo, Ethiopia, and Somalia. All of the training and aspirations ended with one person's decision to drive while intoxicated. Why would God allow that to happen?

The question: "Why do wrong doers prosper while those who are good suffer?" eats at us. It consumes us because it doesn't seem right in the way that we would run the world. If doing wrong pays off, then why should we follow Christ at all.

How does God reply to Asaph's questioning and doubts? What is the Biblical principle that helps us when we struggle with the same question?

God uses the church to help us regain our spiritual bearings. When someone gets lost, typically a person needs to get their bearings again. To get one's bearings is to locate where

they are. For many of us, this would mean whipping out our smart phones and opening up a map app: Apple Maps or Google maps. Then we compare where we are to different landmarks: road intersections, buildings, gas stations, and etc. Before we get somewhere, we need to know where we are.

To help us regain our spiritual bearings when lost, God uses the church to help us regain our spiritual blessings. God uses the gathering of his people to help them wrestle with doubt. His answer isn't just a systematic theology on suffering. He doesn't write to Asaph a statement in reply to his questions. Instead, people called out from the world gathered to worship God helps him remember where he is. For Christians, our gathering together as church helps us regain our spiritual bearings. Worship orients us. **God uses the church to help us regain our spiritual bearings.**

The sanctuary reminded Asaph of humanity's fate. As Asaph pondered this question: "Why do the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer?", he entered the temple. When he entered the temple and pondered about it, it snapped him out of a daze. It reminded him ultimately of who God is and the fate of man. **The sanctuary reminds Asaph of humanity's fate.**

Read with me in verse 17: *"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end."* The sanctuary is where Israel gathered together for worship. The gathering place was first a tent setup by Moses in the wilderness. Later, Solomon built a temple in the city of Jerusalem. The setup of the temple was much like other ancient temples. It comprised of an outer court and inner court. There was a building there facing east. When you entered the building you would enter into first the holy place. In the inner chamber, there would be a holy

of holys. In a pagan temples, you would find there an idol of some sort. But in the temple of Israel, you would find a box. Within the box, you would find two stone tablets delineating the covenant between Israel and God. More importantly, God's presence dwelt above this box.

God's presence dwelt in the temple.

As Asaph thought about God dwelling in the temple, he probably heard the various livestock being herded into the temple for the morning sacrifice. He could hear the mooing of cows and baaing of sheep before they were prepared to be offered on the large altar at the entrance of the temple. **The only way to come into God's presence was through sacrifice.** It was through the blood of an animal that Israel could restore its fellowship with God.

What dos the sacrificial system remind Asaph? It reminded him of God's holiness. He is not like a human being. He is set apart and distinct from all creation. No one can completely understand his ways. Unless atonement is made, no one could enter into God's presence.

Those who do wrong will perish. Asaph reflects in verse 18: *"Truly you have set them on slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms."* [May require elaboration] Although the wrongdoers may prosper now, they will eventually perish. While one may be able to extend one's life weeks, months, or years. Death will eventually claim them. At that time, they will experience God's wrath in the end.

What is the fate of those who trust in God? **Those who trust God will enjoy his presence.** Asaph recognizes though the righteous may suffer now, their eternity is secure in God. He writes in verse 22: *"I was brutish and ignorant, I was like a beast toward you.*

Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

He recognizes his smallness and God’s bigness. Asaph writes: I was brutish and ignorant. While Asaph may question, he doesn’t know everything. Only God does. We will never understand why things work out the way that they do. But God does and we have to trust that it is ultimately for good. We may not understand why the world operates the way that it does, we know that for those who trust God they will spend eternity with him. For God is continually with us whether in life or death. [Needs work in explanation]

While we don’t gather in a temple to worship God, we gather together in the church. **The church reminds believers of their destiny.** The gathering of believers on Sunday mornings remind them of where of they’ve been and where they’re going. It reminds believers of their past and their future. **The church reminds believers of their destiny.**

It reminds us of our past. **We are a people saved by grace.** If it weren’t for the mercy of God, then we wouldn’t even have the opportunity to be saved. Because we were sinners, we were destined for an eternity apart from God. Not only did sin separate us from God, but it even upset creation. Due to sin, there are tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquake. Creation itself suffers under the effects of sin. If we are truly corrupted by sin, then we would be unable to respond even to God unless he graciously revealed himself to us. Not only did God graciously reveal himself to us, but he provided for the punishment for human sins through his son Jesus Christ. Due to his death on the cross, there does not need to be any more sacrifice

given at the temple. He is the final sacrifice. Grace is a gift. Unless we realize that grace is unmerited favor, then we can never comprehend every blessing as a gift rather than merit. **We are a people saved by grace.**

Church also reminds us of our future. **God's presence will never depart from us.** We experience an intimacy with God now in part through the dwelling of the Spirit. When we placed our faith in Christ's saving work, the Holy Spirit indwelt us. He guides us and gives us power to walking under his instruction rather than the flesh. He produces fruit. His presence is a reminder to us that God will not depart from us either in this world or the next. **God's presence will never depart from us.**

Yes, we know our fate. But we also understand the fate of those who do not believe. **The wicked will receive their just deserts.** Those who choose not to place their faith in Christ will experience eternal separation from God. If they want no part of God now, then will have no part of God ever. Their end will be an eternal suffering apart from the goodness of God. While they may prosper now, they will receive their due judgment. Tony Evans once made the statement: "For the unbeliever, this world will be the closest that they'll ever get to heaven. For the believer, this world will be the closest that they'll ever get to hell."

What should we do? In light of this principle: knowing that the church helps us regain our spiritual bearings, how do we respond? What should be our reaction?

Allow the church to serve as your spiritual compass. Allow the gathering of God's people to provide your orientation. Permit the worship service to speak to you. **Allow the church to serve as your spiritual compass.**

A compass helps you when you are lost. When you are lost, you need to make sure that you have a correct orientation. You need concrete facts. The compass when correctly calibrated will always tell you which direction is north.

Since the compass is faithful in pointing north, you are able to depend on it to point you in the right direction. **It helps you locate where you are. It also helps you know where to go.** The directions: north, south, east, and west will be directional markers to help you when you plot a course especially in the wilderness.

How can you allow the church to serve as your spiritual compass? One of the important elements that you'll find at a Gospel preaching churches is communion. At HCC, we celebrate communion at the first of every month. We'll celebrate communion together later this morning. As we take communion, reflect on how communion reminds you of the gospel story. It's interesting that Jesus used something so sensory to remind us of our covenant with him. The bread is something that you can actually smell, see, taste, feel, and hear. As you hear the bread crumble in the pastor's hands, it reminds you of the Christ's body broken for you. When you put the wafer in your mouth, you share the meal with all the other baptized believers that we are all the same family redeemed by Christ. Not only are the same family, but we are also eating in unity. We state: "we are reconciled with other believers." When you partake in the juice, you are reminded also of Christ's blood shed for you. There is no forgiveness for sin unless there is shedding of blood. It causes us to think about the great price that was paid to restore our relationship with God. As we hold the cup in our hands, it also should make us think about how we might have transgressed against the Lord, but the fact that we hold the cup we

will always be forgiven. We partake in communion now because it makes us anticipate the future when we will enjoy this meal with our Lord.

We also allow the church to serve as our compass, when we share about what God has done in our lives. **Talk about what God teaches you in our time together.** As we go through the worship service, how is God encouraging you during this season? What truth of God have you found beneficial for this season? How is he challenging you? Is there a sin that God is moving you to confess? Is there someone you have to reconcile with?

As you answer these questions, you have an opportunity to share with your small group members. That's why our small groups conduct sermon-based study. When you meet together as a small group, you reflect together on what God has done in your life. The reason why we share with other believers is so that we can rejoice together as a community. It also gives us an opportunity to provide accountability. We want to be able to spur each other on in our spiritual journeys.

What happens when we regain a correct spiritual orientation? What is the effect of recognizing the sovereignty of God?

When we regain our spiritual bearings, we are better able to point others to Christ.

Once we remember that we are called to a God who is far beyond us, we can direct others to him. Only when we recall who we are and where we're going can we provide spiritual direction to others. When we regain our spiritual bearings, we are better able to point others to Christ.

With correct spiritual bearings, you **recall the fate of nonbelievers.** Asaph sees more clearly the fate of the wicked. He writes in verse 27: *"For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you."* It should break our hearts to

know that our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family are on their way to an eternity from God. This should motivate us to share the gospel with them. For we desire for them to have the same hope that we do in Christ.

When we are correctly spiritually oriented, we also share what God has done. **You share what God has done.** Asaph writes this in verse 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.”* When we draw near to God and recall where we are, we make God our spiritual refuge. As believers, we trust that God works all things for the good of those who love him. This means even the greatest trials can be an opportunity for good. Although we may never understand why we undergo such difficulty, we trust that God will use it to further his kingdom. [Think of expansion]

At the tail end of my trip, I met a believer from a Bouyi village, whom I will name JM. The Bouyi are another unreached people group in southwest Asia. Like the Bonou, they live in remote areas. Some go to cities for work. JM became a believer years ago while going through some baptism material on his own. But things were not easy for him. He lost his wife, who was a believer, to illness. Now he has to raise his teenage daughter on his own. Without a doubt, the loss of his wife was extremely difficult. His family now pressures him to get married even with an unbeliever. But JM has remained steadfast to his conviction that he will marry a believer. JM is a subsistence farmer. This means that he farms just enough so that his family can survive off the land. One would assume that he worked every day on the field. But his schedule surprised me. He shared that he worked on his fields Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Mondays, he would go with another brother to share the gospel in nearby villages. On Wednesday, they would meet together to pray and review how the outreach went. Friday,

Saturday, and Sundays he reserved for various gathers for believers. Despite JM's loss, he continued to share his faith others.

When we see wrong doers prosper and it causes it to doubt. Allow the church to serve as your spiritual compass. When you regain your spiritual footing, you'll begin to point others to Christ.

A Lutheran once said: "Someday the mystery of suffering ... of madhouses, mass graves ... of widows and orphans [will] be illuminated. Someday [will] come the 'hereafter,' when we shall learn all the answers. Someday the paralyzing contradiction between justice, on the one hand, and life's [apparent] game of chance, on the other, [will] be reconciled. Someday the tension between rich and poor, between the sunny side of life and the gloomy zones of horror, [will] be equalized." We look forward to that day.