
The Righteous and Their Money

Psalm 73; Ephesians 1:3-14

Introduction This morning Russ tackled the issue of the wicked and their money. My assignment tonight is to spend some moments looking at the other side of what really is the same coin: the righteous and their money. Our text has been Psalm 73, a Psalm that many consider to be a microcosm or a summary of the entire Psalter. All of the major themes of the Psalms are represented in this stunning Psalm. Few Psalms capture a composite picture of our human existence and the creature's relationship to the Creator as this one does.

This morning we saw that the prosperity of the wicked and the seeming ease of which they are prosperous, all the while shaking their fist at God, can be a source of discouragement, frustration and disillusionment, especially when those who embrace God are seemingly encumbered with the difficulties and hardships of life. It is tempting to question the goodness and greatness of God when the wicked seemingly live life to its fullest without any repercussions to their flagrant rejection of God. This discouragement and frustration came to its end for Asaph when he entered the sanctuary and discerned the ultimate end of the wicked. Asaph sees that the prosperity of the wicked is a mirage. In the end, those who are far from God are destroyed. In his recognition that God will not allow the guilty to go unpunished, Asaph repents of his faithlessness and embraces God's goodness. And our response to this reality is to make God our highest delight and most sought after treasure, our greatest good. God is something to be desired above all else, including material prosperity that is in seeming abundance for the wicked. In the face of the success of the wicked, we savor the supremacy of God.

Questions What, then, is the relationship between the righteous and their money?
How are the righteous to think about their money?
How are the righteous to act with their money?

In considering these questions, we want to unpack Psalm 73 in terms of the righteous and their money. And then we will attempt to understand what we've learned through the lens of the New Testament, especially Ephesians 1:3-14.

Altered Vision (Psalm 73:15-22)

We've seen in Psalm 73 that Asaph's answer to the frustration of his own suffering while the wicked prosper lies in casting his gaze upward to God and forward to the future. In casting his gaze upward and forward, Asaph's present, his understanding of his relationship to God and men, and his passions and desires are radically altered. And that is what we want to do this evening. The radical change for Asaph occurred when he entered God's sanctuary. This reality carries along the rest of the Psalm. Let us read this section of Psalm 73 again.

Asaph's Place Among God's People (vs. 15, 16)

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 (the prosperity of the wicked), it seemed to me a wearisome task,

Asaph's Entrance Into the Sanctuary (vs. 17)

17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end...

Asaph's Discernment of the Wicked's End (vs. 17)

then I discerned their end...

Asaph's Repentance (vs. 21, 22)

Down to verse 21...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.

Notice the chronology here. Asaph recognizes his place among God's people, he enters the sanctuary, he discerns the end of the wicked. Asaph repents, fully cognizant that what seems unfair, if it is interpreted outside of God, reduces good men to animal behavior and vile thoughts. This chronology is important because it provides the context for the following verses. So much so, that Asaph's language and demeanor necessitate Asaph's place among God's people, his presence in the sanctuary, and his repentance for his lack of faith.

The Portion Anticipated (Psalm 73:23-28)**God With Us (vs. 23)**

23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

Again, Asaph uses the language of the sanctuary... it is here that he is "with God" continually. And we begin to see *why*, when Asaph entered the sanctuary, the tempting glow of the riches of the wicked and the sense of frustration it causes begins to dim. It is no wonder that Asaph is driven to repentance. It is here in the sanctuary that God meets Asaph in holding his "right hand". Notice it is God who is holding Asaph's hand and not Asaph holding God's hand. Asaph is not self-sufficient, but is the recipient of divine grace.

Not only does Asaph belong to the people of God, Asaph belongs to God himself because God has redeemed his people. And if we understand anything at all about the remnant's relationship with God in the Old Covenant, we will recognize here that the Psalmist sees "belonging to the generation of God's children", being in the sanctuary, and being "with God" as all part of the same reality. To belong to the generation of God's children is to be with God's people in the sanctuary. And to be with God's people in the sanctuary is to be with God himself. And it is in the sanctuary that he dwells with his people. In the sanctuary, God resides with his people. We hear, as the Psalmist's heart begins to soar, the echoes of the promise to Abraham, "I will be your God and you will be my people".

God's Wisdom (vs. 24)

Verse 24: You guide me with your counsel

Because God resides with the Psalmist, God's Wisdom is his shepherd. This divine wisdom that has been granted to Asaph is not only looking upward to God, but forward looking into the future.

God's Grace (vs. 24)

24b and afterward you will receive me to glory.

With these divinely given eyes of faith, Asaph not only discerns the end of the wicked, Asaph see his own end in glory. Asaph is on the receiving end of God's grace in the future and it is what Asaph discerns about *the end* of the wicked AND *the end* for God's people that controls his thoughts and behavior in *the present*.

God's Communion with His Creatures (vs. 25)

25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

God's wisdom and His redemption are producing change in His people as they gaze upward and forward. Not only are the thoughts and behavior radically transformed but the desires as well. Few passages in scripture capture the passion and delight of the creature enthralled and consumed in communion with the Creator. Asaph, in the sanctuary of God's presence with his redeemed people, in view of what has been done for him in the past and will be done for him in the future, sets God as the ultimate object of his heart affections. When Asaph says "nothing on earth", the prosperity of the wicked has been blinded from his sights in His upward and forward view of God.

God's Sustenance of His Creatures (vs. 26)

26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Such a statement is reminiscent of Isaiah, who, upon seeing the glory of God filling His temple became so cognizant of his own creatureliness and sinfulness he blurted out "Woe is me, I am undone". Habakkuk who says "though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, yet I will take joy in the God of my salvation". Job, who says "though He slay me, yet I will hope in him". Jacob who says "I've seen God face to face and yet my life has been delivered". Asaph, in the sanctuary, says "my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." These eyes of faith that see the wicked's end and the saints future delight are not his own. This divine life, the divine wisdom, and the divine delight are not self-derived or self-conceived. These are gifts from God. Asaph's faith is not His own even to the point where He recognizes the delight and passion of His heart isn't something he concocted. It is of divine origin.

God is my portion forever

So much could be said about that word “portion”... we’re only going to touch on one aspect of it tonight. But this is the word that is central to our specific task of “the righteous and their money”. Few words describe the saints’ delight in God as the word “portion” in Scripture.

Inheritance

Portion is descriptive of the inheritance Israelite sons received by birthright as well as the inheritance Israel received in being given the land of Canaan. The inheritance was the material goods and land ownership that was received after a family member’s death. Inheritance was huge for the Israelites. To have no inheritance was to not have a place among God’s people. To have no inheritance was to have no part in the covenant.

Sustenance

Portion, as it is used in scripture, also brings to mind bread and wine... the abundance of the food and the feasts that were symbolic of the inheritance. Closely related to portion, inheritance, bread, and feasts is the firstfruits, the first and best of the harvest from the inherited land. We could develop some thoughts about The Lord’s Table and Christ as the Bread of Life and still be within the purview of this word portion.

Use of the word portion, then, brought to the mind of the Israelite the satisfaction, delight, and celebration of the divine inheritance that had been given to them. God the almighty benefactor gave to Israel the beneficiary the material goods and spiritual blessings as an inheritance in the Promised Land.

Portion vs. Prosperity of the Wicked

And “portion”, in Psalm 73, is the parallel and contrast for prosperity and riches. To have a portion as an Israelite was to be prosperous, and in some cases quite rich. Lives were spent in the pursuit of making the most of one’s inheritance. Since inheritances were not supposed to change hands, the money to be made and the success to be had depended largely on *how* one utilized and exploited the inheritance one had.

For all we know, the prosperity of the wicked of which Asaph had in mind in his own circumstance may have involved use of inheritance and birthright. Material success in an agricultural economy would probably have included inheritance and birthright. Regardless, by the time we get to verse 26, Asaph no longer prizes the material prosperity of the wicked. Asaph has undergone radical change. Asaph has been to the sanctuary and his affections are upward and forward. He has seen the end of the wicked and their prosperity. He has seen the end of the saints in glory. But not only is Asaph’s vision upward to God and forward to the future, Asaph’s affections and desires are upward and forward as well. God is my portion *forever*. “God is my portion”...that’s present tense. This is Asaph in the sanctuary within the generation of God’s children. But the present desires and affections that know nothing of earth and have nothing but

heaven extend into *forever*. What God has done for Asaph in the redemption of the past and what he now is doing for Asaph in the sanctuary guarantees Asaph's end in glory and it's there Asaph places his affections.

God's destruction of the wicked (vs. 27)

27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.

The wicked have no such guarantees. In fact, Asaph's discernment of the end of the wicked sees their prosperity ending with them. "You put an end" is the same language as verse 15 "I discerned the end." The end of the wicked will be at God's hand and they will perish. And notice the spatial feature of this language: "those who are *far* from you". Asaph is still speaking from within the sanctuary. Those who are wicked do not belong to God's people; they are not in the sanctuary; they are *far* from God.

God's redemptive acts proclaimed (vs. 28)

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.

Again, notice the spatial language that Asaph is using to describe his present situation. Asaph is in the sanctuary. To be in the sanctuary, to be where the holiest place was, was to take refuge in God. And *why* is it good to be in the sanctuary near God? It is good to be in God's presence in order to tell of all God's works. What works? God's works in redeeming a people for himself. God's holding of Asaph's right hand. God's granting the divine wisdom that discerns the end of the wicked and the glory of His people. God's life giving grace that sustains the passions and desires of his people for himself. Those works Asaph is compelled to proclaim in the sanctuary.

So, what does this look like in the New Covenant? How are we to understand Asaph's frustration and satisfaction?

The Portion Realized (Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:3-21; 3:8-17)

As we read this, I want us to notice many of the same themes as in Psalm 73.

Notice the prosperity language: 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... verse 5...In love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose... or Wisdom...of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose... or Wisdom..., which he set forth in Christ...verse 11...In him we have obtained an inheritance... In him we have obtained "a portion", having been predestined according to the purpose of him... or "Wisdom"... who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory...13 In him you also...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance... or "our portion"... until we acquire possession of it, to the praise

of his glory... verse 17... Paul prays that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance... or the riches of his glorious portion... in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.....verse 22... he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 3: Notice not only the prosperity language, but the temple language: 3 (we) were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus... verse 13...now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... verse 18.. for through Christ we both have access in one Spirit to the Father...verse 19... you are the fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God... verse 21... in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

And Ephesians 3: Verse 8... Paul preaches “to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ... verse 9...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known...verse 12... in whom we have boldness and access with confidence... verse 16... according to the riches of the Father’s glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...

What are these passages telling us about the “prosperity”, “sanctuary”, “wisdom”, “redemption”, “sufficiency” and “portion” of Psalm 73?

Christ our Blessing

Here in Ephesians there is new significance for these themes of Psalm 73. These riches and this inheritance that God has granted us in his wisdom are present in Christ himself. Notice the “in him” and “through him” in this passage. We tend to pass over this prepositional phrase “in Christ” as if it is merely a tag to Paul’s thought... a tag that shows qualified description. But this is not how this phrase is functioning in this passage or any other Pauline passage for that matter. “In Him” is the primary and defining object. So that in verse 3 when Paul says we have been “blessed” in Christ, it is not merely a blessing that comes via Christ, which is certainly the case. But more importantly the

blessing is Christ himself.

Christ our Inheritance

This holds true throughout the entire passage... and among Paul's conclusions is this: Redemption and forgiveness have been lavished on us as God's riches. Paul understands our prosperity to be upward and present and forward and future. Our prosperity is in the heavenlies because our prosperity is already Christ himself who is seated at God's right hand. Yet we do not yet possess this inheritance in its fullest sense... we *have obtained* an inheritance and we will yet acquire possession of this inheritance. We may be still on earth, but because we are united to Christ, we are able to participate in our heavenly inheritance.

Church as Temple

Not only does Ephesians place Christ as *the* riches that have been poured out on God's people but chapter 2 calls the church "a temple". We are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens. We are being joined together and in Christ we are growing into a holy temple in the Lord. This is in following with Christ calling himself the new temple that would be raised in three days. Throughout the New Testament, the corporate assembly of the saints is called the temple" and the dwelling place of God.

Church as Recipient of God's Wisdom

Further, it is God's wisdom that pours out his blessings to his people through Christ. Not only is Christ the object of God's wisdom, but so is the church. And it is God's counsel or God's wisdom in Christ's work of redemption in the fullness of times that produces eternal life in us. (This should give us pause to those who wanted to suggest that our election before the foundation of the world is merely academic).

The Christian's Altered Vision (Psalm 73:15-22)

The significance for Psalm 73 is this: Those whose right hands are being held by God are those who have been adopted as sons in the Son from before the foundation of the world. The God of Psalm 73 has been identified in the cross and resurrection as Christ the Lord. Israel's portion, including the promises given to Abraham regarding inheritance, has been fulfilled in Christ in the New Covenant. It is Christ who is the fulfillment and embodiment of the land flowing with milk and honey.

When we, as adopted sons, gather as the temple or the sanctuary of God, it is here that we cast our eyes upward and forward. It is here that we are reminded of Christ's death in which we are able to discern the end of the wicked. It is in Christ's death that we become cognizant of our sinfulness as creatures. It is here in God's indwelling presence of His sanctuary that we come to the end of our self-sufficiency and we repent. It is here that we are reminded of Christ's resurrection and it is in the resurrection that we are able to see an incorruptible inheritance and a future glory in the heavenlies with Christ forever.

The Christian's Portion Realized (Psalm 73:23-28)

Because the temple is where God dwells, it is here as the temple of God Immanuel dwells with us continually. It is here that he holds the right hand of the redeemed. To be here

among God's people as the temple of God is to be with God himself. When we gather as the temple of God our hearts begin to soar and we begin to hear the future echoes of a time, when at the throne of the Lamb we hear Him say, I AM their God and they are my people.

Because we have had the eyes of our hearts enlightened, as we draw near to God as his dwelling place the temple of God as the people of God, we are able to discern the end of the children of wrath and we are able to see Christ as our present and future inheritance. Christ is our portion... that's present tense. Christ is our portion *forever*...that's future tense. It is this inheritance, the ultimate riches we have in Christ himself that change our thoughts, our behavior, and our desires in the present. Our treasure is in the heavenlies. And our hearts are there as well.

It is when we see Christ as all we need or will ever need that the prosperity of the wicked is put in proper perspective. We no longer prize the material prosperity of the wicked. Our hearts and our flesh may fail, but Christ is our all-sufficient inheritance. Our *worth* is found only in Christ.

Lessons

If Christ is my all-sufficient inheritance, both in the present and in the future, my reliance and sufficiency will not be in the material.

When we draw near to God in the corporate community of the saints and see our inheritance in Christ and the imperishable that awaits us the despondence over the success of the wicked begins to fade and our dependence on our material gain begins to diminish in repentance.

When we come together as an assembled temple our wallets are out, open, and raised to the heavens.

As we've already seen in this series, our wallets are closely related to our hearts. As we draw near to God together as a sanctuary with our eyes upward and forward, our wallets – and when I use the word “wallets”, I'm using it as a summary for all of our material wealth – our wallets are right there with us gazing upward to God, and looking forward to the inheritance in Christ. Not only do we repent of our longing for the prosperity of the wicked, we repent of our self-dependence on the wallet. As our hearts melt of their self-sufficiency so does the sufficiency of the wallet. When we say “Whom have I in heaven but Christ”, our wallets chime in “there is nothing on earth I desire but you”. Just as our hearts soar to the heavens, finding in God a refuge and in Christ our portion, our wallets do as well. Is this not the putting off and putting on of Psalm 73? Just as we shrink back in repentance of our despondence over the prosperity of the wicked, we positively respond with our own prosperity for the temple dwelling of God his church. It is against the backdrop of our inheritance in Christ and the people of God as the temple of God that Paul says “let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need”. When what we have been given in Christ, including the material blessings, is guided by the inheritance we have in Christ, we do not come into the assembly with clenched fistful of dollars or tightly bound wallet. This leads to the next lesson.

In seeing the end of the wicked and seeing the glory in Christ that awaits the believer, we share our prosperity in the assembly.

Christ as our portion is not merely out there in the future. It has implication for the present because Christ already is our inheritance. Our wallets are not our own. They are Christ's. And because they are Christ's, they are part of this building up the temple, the people of God.

Our money and all of the material blessings we enjoy are shadows of the blessings we have in Christ and pointing forward to our final inheritance in Christ.

And there is something to be learned in Christ's being the fulfillment of Israel's portions. Those material blessings of the Old Covenant that were wrapped up in the riches of birthright and inheritance pointed forward to the One who would be given the divine birthright and inheritance and in doing so becomes Israel's portion. The material blessings were a shadow of the blessings found in Christ. Our money and all of the material blessings we enjoy are shadows of the blessings we have in Christ and pointing forward to our final inheritance in Christ. When was the last time we pulled out a \$1 dollar bill and thought: this is a shadow of what I already have in Christ and what I will have in Christ? Our inheritance or our treasure in heaven is Christ himself... our corruptible riches here on earth should point us as a "shadow" or "type" to our true riches in Christ.

"Worry", "anxiety" and "frustration" over earthly prosperity can be identified as sinful idolatry.

There is nothing we lack that isn't found in Christ... which is why "worry", "anxiety" and "frustration" over earthly prosperity can be identified as sinful idolatry. Such frustration involves a subtle yet deadly shift in our reliance to the material as our "portion", rather than Christ, in whom God has already provided everything we "need".

Christ is not only the source of our material, corruptible wealth, He is also the endpoint and source of our giving.

We give, not primarily because it is commanded, but because our existence is completely dependent on Christ as our portion. God gives us our wealth. That wealth points me to Christ. The stewardship of whatever wealth I have (or don't have!) flows from where my heart is. Our giving isn't just gratitude to God for his giving it to us. It is recognition that He alone is the source of our wealth and is the endpoint of our wealth and we are merely stewards of it. None of it is ours. With our money, we participate in the repentance and worship of the corporate assembly. There *is* eternal significance attached to the activity and response of our wallets. This is why, when we come as Asaph did into the presence of God in his people that we come with wallets that are out, open, and raised to heaven.

It is in what we call the “eschatological” and “christological” context that our “giving” get its fullest meaning.

This too points us forward to the day when our portion, our satisfaction in Christ will be consummate. It is in what we call the “eschatological” and christological context that our “giving” get its fullest meaning. Revelation 5:12 tells us that we give our riches first and foremost because Christ is worthy of it as the one who was slain for the ransomed or redeemed people of God. We give because we have been lavished with all spiritual blessings in Christ, and we constitute a people in whom Christ delights. We honor God with our resources because He is our treasure and we are His treasured possession. Christ is not only the giver, but he is the gift, the inheritance, giving up the wealth of heaven to become the wealth of man’s poverty. And as we give, we incarnate the Giver in the expansion of the inheritance, spreading the Wealth in Christ to those in poverty.

**Lessons
Applied**

We must ask ourselves:

Do our material possessions speak to us of Christ who is our inheritance, in whom are found the true riches?

Do we participate in the sanctuary with our prosperity?

Do our material blessings make us long for the eternal glory in Christ and point us to that imperishable inheritance that is only in Him?

Are we satisfied and content in His immeasurable riches?

Do our riches and material blessings become inseparable from our "proclamation" of the work God has done for us in Christ’s death and resurrection?

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.

Conclusion