

Worship as Pastoral Care, Psalm 73

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Have you ever needed an attitude adjustment? Most people head straight for comfort food, vacation, entertainment, Prozac, music or some other method. All these are simply band aids, that do not go deep enough to solve any of the real problems that need adjustment.

Worship is one of the ways God has provided to battle against destructive ideas which find a lodging place in our minds. I am amazed at how terribly vulnerable we are to destructive thoughts about ourselves, our mates, friends, work, the future and even our past.

God gives us worship to heal us and set our feet upon the rock of His Truth. Worship is some of the best pastoral care available.

Asaph, one of the writers of the Psalms, had an experience in the temple which illustrates how this works. In Ps 73 we see him getting bent out of shape by satanic ideas. Worship bends him back.

He records his pity party in vs1-3

‘Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked.’ Ps 73:1-3

His message is: “God is good to Israel, but He is not good to me. The unbelievers are fat and prosperous, while I am slipping.” At this point, Asaph is the mentor to all who cast a glum atmosphere in the church. You’ve seen them. They can’t smile, even when they are singing the most liberating jubilant song in the book. The pity party continues:

‘They are not in trouble as other men’ nor are they plagued like mankind, v5

And...

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning (v13-14)

Asaph’s perspective is all messed up and he doesn’t get straightened out until verse 17:

“UNTIL I CAME INTO THE SANCTUARY OF God; Then I perceived their end.”

It was not until Asaph came into the temple to worship that his perspective on life straightened out. Worship is what keeps us away from the pity parties, the evil thoughts, the rebellion, the bitterness and the anger which are in constant assault against us.

Notice the change of mind that Asaph experienced. He concludes the Psalm with a note of courage and joy.

“Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; Thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works. (vs25-28)

God, in His everlasting love, has provided worship as a means to battle against satanic destructive ideas which are always crouching at the door of our minds. One of the purposes of gathering is to consciously dislodge any evil thoughts and replace them with the counsels of God. The result of focusing our minds on God is to restore us to right thinking about God’s ways and purposes.

And what does this meditation accomplish? Packer says it well:

‘Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; Be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.” J.I. Packer, Knowing God, p14

As we fix our attention Godward, goodness flows . And, as we do, we will say with Asaph, ‘The nearness of God is my good.”v28. He is the Great Shepherd of our souls, adjusting the attitudes that so often bend in the wrong direction. So, come with Joy to the house of the Lord. This is why David could say with authority, ‘I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” (Psalm 122:1)