

Psalm 73: False prosperity of the wicked



Psalm 73 (72) (Mode 4. 3....4 / 2.....171)

Because of the contrast between the prosperity of those who have no regard for God, and the apparent uselessness of his own fidelity, the psalmist was on the brink of abandoning his faith. However, further reflection led him to see that their prosperity was short-lived and not to be compared with the intimacy that the psalmist experiences with God. He concludes: 'It is good for me to be near God ... to tell all that you have done'.

Truly our God is good to the upright,
to those who are pure in heart.

el [אֱלֹ] ('God') + yashar [יָשָׁר] ('upright'),
not 'Truly good to Israel' [יִשְׂרָאֵל]

As for me, as I walked
I almost stumbled,
I was envious of the arrogant,
of how those who disregarded God were prospering.
They have no pain;
their bodies are sound and sleek.
They are not in trouble.
They are not stricken like other people.

They wear pride as a necklace,
violence covers them like a garment.
Their eyes swell up
as they live on the fat of the land.
Their hearts are full of folly.
They scoff with malice.
From on high they threaten oppression.
They boast that heaven is on their side.
They lay claim to the world.
People follow them and swallow what they say.
They ask, 'How can God know?
Does the Most High take any notice?'

Such are the wicked;
at ease as they accumulate wealth.

So why keep my heart clean,
washing my hands in innocence,
when I was stricken all day long,
punished day after day.

Then I said: 'If I should speak like that
I should abandon the faith of your people.'

I strove to fathom this problem,
too hard for me to understand.

‘Then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun. However much they may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out’(Ecclesiastes 8:17).

‘All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me’(Ecclesiastes 7:23).

‘I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know’(Job 42:3).

Then I penetrated the mystery of God,
and understood where they were heading.

‘Mystery’ translates the Hebrew ‘sanctuary’: the place where God dwells and where God communicates with his people. Metaphorically, it refers to the inner secrets of the divine, hence ‘mystery of God.’

The Book of Wisdom speaks of: ‘The secret purposes of God’(Wisdom 2:22).

You have placed them on a slippery path;
you see that they fall to their ruin.

They will be destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!

It is like what happens
when one awakes from a dream.

You dismiss them, Lord,
as figments of the imagination.

When my heart was embittered,
when my feelings were disturbed,
I was stupid and ignorant.

I was like a brute beast toward you.

‘I have seen the wicked oppressing, and towering like a cedar of Lebanon. Again I passed by, and they were no more; though I sought them, they could not be found’(Psalm 37:35-36).

‘When they say ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them.’

(1Thessalonians 5:3)

Yet I am continually with you;
you hold me by the hand.
You guide me according to your plan,
to a glorious destiny you carry me.

Teresa of Avila writes:

‘Happy is the heart that is in love,
concentrated wholly and solely on God.
For God it renounces every created thing,
abandoning itself, careless of everything.
Its every thought is consecrated to God,
for God fulfils its every desire.
In celebration and festive joy,
it passes through the waves of the tempestuous sea.’

Whom have I in heaven but you?

What does the earth mean to me without you?

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart

and my portion forever.

Indeed, those who are far from you will perish.

You put an end to those who are faithless.

But for me

it is good to stay near you, my God.

I have made you my refuge.

I want to tell of all that you have done.

‘A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere’(Psalm 84:10).

Compare Paul to the Philippians 3:7-9

The ‘Imitation of Christ’(59.4): ‘All things which seem made to give us peace and happiness are nothing and contribute nothing to our happiness if You are not with us.’