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Are the Wicked Really Prospering? Consider their End.

June 30, 2019

Sermon Text: Psalm 73

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes 1:5-12

If we have enough time this morning, I want us to turn back again to Matthew 16 where we find Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ:

Mat 16:13-20 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (14) And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (15) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (16) Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (17) And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed

this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. (18) And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (19) I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (20) Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Most of you probably know that this is one plank of Rome's insistence that the Pope is Christ's vicar on earth because they claim the lineage of Popes can be traced back to Peter, the first Pope appointed by Christ. Much has been written on this passage, but frankly I think you will see that it is not at all difficult to see that Peter was not the Rock upon whom the church is built. That is preposterous and I will show you from Scripture that it is.

First, however, I am compelled this morning to direct our thoughts toward a very cunning way in which Satan

works to deceive us. This is vital and absolutely crucial for each of us to clearly understand. Some of you here this morning may be under this particular spell more than you realize and all of us wrestle with it to one degree or another. Let me explain:

- Sin does not always bring immediate visible consequences.
- People who reject Christ often live apparently happy, comfortable lives.
- People who embrace rankly immoral and evil lives are often quite popular and seem to even be very wise, giving what sounds like good advice (you see this in movies very frequently as sexually deviant people are presented as wise counselors in contrast to those narrow-minded religious types).
- The deception then is that we see people who are “nice,” and “happy,” and prospering. They reject Christ. They pursue all kinds of wicked, immoral sins. And this is incredibly dangerous if we fail to “*Consider their End.*”

As Christians, we are told and we read in the Bible that sin leads to death. That God’s wrath is upon wicked

people. But where is this death? Where is His wrath? They all seem to be doing just fine!

Consider for instance the Rich Fool:

Luk 12:16-19 And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, (17) and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ (18) And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.””

Now, during his lifetime this man was not known as “the rich fool.” No. He was envied by people. He was prosperous. He was happy and satisfied. For all appearances, his summation of his life was true: “relax, eat, drink, be merry.” And you can bet that most all the people around him wanted to be like him.

Things went very well for this Rich man during his earthly life.

And so it is today. Jacqueline Kennedy’s estate at Martha’s Vineyard is up for sale - \$65 million and it’s yours. Jackie certainly had a few pretty rough bumps in her life, but all in all,

many people would love to have what she had.

The circumstances in this present life of people who reject Christ and who are even overtly evil very often are quite comfortable and even luxurious.

And so perhaps at school, or in your community, or in this nation of ours, you see people who appear blessed. They have no time for Christ and in fact they hate His Word. They embrace and promote all kinds of sexual perversions. They break God's Law and boast about it. They climb the career ladder to success and enjoy wide popularity right up to the day they die.

And if we are foolish, we will crave to be like them. I need to talk like them. I need to hang with the people they hang with. I need to look like them.

There was a man who lived centuries and centuries ago – probably 3,000 years ago. His name was Asaph and he wrote about how his envy of the ungodly almost, as he said, caused him to stumble. By that I think he means that he almost lost his faith in the Lord. And he tells us all about it in the 73rd Psalm. Listen to him tell it. This is my favorite Psalm and in some ways it is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible for us:

Psa 73:1-28 A Psalm of Asaph. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. (2) But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. (3) For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

(4) For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. (5) They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

(6) Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. (7) Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. (8) They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. (9) They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

(10) Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. (11) And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" (12) Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

(13) All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in

innocence. (14) For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. (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, it seemed to me a wearisome task, (17) until I went into the sanctuary of God; **then I discerned their end.**

(18) Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. (19) How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! (20) Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

(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.

(23) Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. (24) You guide me with your counsel, and **afterward you will receive me to glory.**

(25) Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. (26) My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the

strength of my heart and my portion forever. (27) **For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.** (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.

[We aren't going to make it to Matthew 16! This is too important to not digest thoroughly]

(2) But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. (3) For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

I wonder. How many people who have professed Christ are in this very dangerous position right now that Asaph was in? Maybe some of you? Your steps are right on the edge. You are ready to slip. Into what? Into a disavowal of Christ, a washing of your hands of your faith:

2Ti 4:10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

To be in such a condition is to be on the slippery edge of hell itself, and the Devil is greasing your steps by holding the prosperity of the arrogant and

wicked in front of your eyes. Asaph I think was shuddering as he wrote these words and as he realized just how close he had come to going over the edge:

my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped

Just look at them:

(4) For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek.

(5) They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

Look at the cars they drive. Look at how everything seems to be going their way. They are *prospering!* In fact it seems that more often than not in this present world it is just these kind of people who prosper! Isn't that true? This is the thing Asaph saw. Listen to him once again:

(6) Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment.

(7) Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. (8) They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. (9) They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

(10) Therefore his people turn back to

them, and find no fault in them. (11) And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" (12) Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

These are the *wicked!* Trouble free and getting richer and richer! And on top of that they mock God and defy Him to do anything about it. Then they go back to their life of ease and prosperity and nothing happens otherwise.

Now Asaph let's us in on his dangerous thought process at that slippery edge time:

(13) All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. (14) For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. (15) If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

I have been a Christian for NOTHING! Every single day, following Christ has cost me and all I get is punched and rebuked and treated like dirt. Prosper? Ha! No way.

How close did Asaph come to turning away from the Lord? So close that the words were on his tongue: "If I had said, I will speak thus....", that would have been it.

So what happened? Why didn't he plunge down that slippery slope to hell? Listen very, very carefully and don't miss it. Here is the punch line of truth you absolutely must get hold of:

(16) But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, (17) until I went into the sanctuary of God; **then I discerned their end.**

He prayed. He told the Lord that he didn't understand all this and he didn't see anyway to sort it out. It was then that God turned on the lights for him:

Then I considered their end.

And this is what he saw:

(18) Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. (19) How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! (20) Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

Understand this. Those prosperous people who seem to have it all. Those rich and famous and popular types who mock the Lord but things just keep turning up roses for them - understand this. The Lord has put them in slippery places. They are boasting

and arrogant and give the illusion that they are on solid ground, but here is the truth.

They are on a greased tight rope spread over a bottomless pit into which they are surely going to fall. In a second they will be gone and it will be as if they never existed – like a dream that vaporizes in the morning.

Your enemy the devil, the destroyer, wants to entice YOU to get on that greased tight rope with them. You must not. You must see these people for what they are and to do that, you must *discern their end.*

Remember the Rich Fool? Here is the rest of the story:

Luk 12:20-21 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Consider their end. These people who you are tempted to imitate and be envious of, *consider their end.*

Pro 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

After he came to his senses, Asaph describes what he was like when he was thinking wrongly about the prosperous wicked:

(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.

“I didn’t have any more sense than an animal! I was embittered toward the Lord.” And that is the very condition any of us are in today if we are envious of the wicked.

Finally, after recounting the blessings of the Lord toward him, Asaph gives this powerful summation of it all. Here is true truth:

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

The world is always, always calling us. The god of this world is always sending his children to us to lure us away from Christ. If we are going to stand firm in our faith and persevere to the end of our earthly lives walking with Christ, then we are going to have

to be sure our thinking is straight on these things.

Think of those people – think of them right now – see their faces? The people you envy? The people who are prospering and who you want to be like? The people who boast of their sin and who mock the Lord? They are going to perish. The Lord is going to put an end to them. He will do it in a second.

Step away from them. Keep your eyes set upon Christ.

But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuges, that I may tell of all your works.