

When the Grass Looks Greener

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] thanks for having me tonight in your bulletin there's a there's two pieces of paper there's an outline and the Holman version of Psalm 73 my wife said don't double back double side it because I'll be going like this all the time and you need to listen to your wife so that's why you have two pieces of paper I want to pray for us before we look at God's word let's pray Heavenly Father we thank you for your word we thank you that you continue to speak to us through it Father we ask now that you might give us minds to understand your word and hearts to put into practice the things we ought to we ask for Jesus sake amen well some time ago my wife Michelle and I were planning our Christmas holidays together when a friend of mine called Bill got this email and it's going to come up bit by bit on the slide so first slide Kenny says hi Bill I recently purchased a two-bedroom property in the Whitsundays Hamilton Island it's an investment property for people going on holidays the standard rate is \$500 for a weekend or \$1,500 for the week but for good friends like yourselves I've told the real estate agent to charge \$10 for the weekend and 30 bucks for the week to help cover electricity it's a two-level accommodation no lift sorry but it has great ocean views and an open entertaining area down the bottom I've attached a photo let me know if you're interested cheers sounds pretty good doesn't it ocean views Hamilton Island now when you heard that email what was your first thought when I heard that email my first thought was where's my email you know where's my offer of Hamilton Island accommodation for \$10 a weekend in other words I envied Bill to use the old expression I thought the grass was greener on the other side on Bill's side to be exact have you ever caught yourself doing that you know thinking I wish I had what they have I wish that was me it's a common experience isn't it to envy but then I saw Bill's destination from another perspective I saw the attached photo thanks Kenny it's a bird's nest on stilts isn't it too bad if it was windy you'd be in trouble wouldn't you and once I saw it from this perspective I no longer envy Bill anymore and I was much happier about where my wife and I were heading now this little story is like the journey our psalmist takes us on tonight in Psalm 73 we're told that the psalmist name is Asaph and according to 1 Chronicles chapter 16 he was a Levite in Israel as a Levite he worked at the temple which at this stage was basically a tent that King David had set up and Asaph was the leader of the music department if you like at the temple and he got to play the cymbals which sounds like fun now Asaph is credited with writing 12 different psalms though he couldn't have literally written them all because some of them referred to the destruction of the the proper temple much after his time however I think he wrote this particular one because in verse 15 it seems to indicate that he was in a position of leadership where others would listen to him perhaps like the leader of a music department and in verse 17 he enters the sanctuary or the temple which is where he worked either way he would have agreed wholeheartedly with a statement in verse 1 which says

God is indeed good to Israel to the pure in heart verse 1 here is like a creed it's what the Israelites believed about God and it's what Asaph would have believed about God that God is indeed good to Israel to the pure in heart but Asaph confesses that there was a time when he doubted this and that time was when he envied point 1 verse 2 he says but as for me my feet almost slipped my steps nearly went astray for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked Asaph confesses that when he saw the prosperity of the wicked he envied them to envy of course is to wish that you have what others have and by envying them he doubted God's goodness and so nearly slipped from being God's person and here we need to realize an important thing about envy whenever we envy another person we're actually saying that what God has given us is not good enough and so we doubt God's goodness to us that it's not good enough that's what happened to Asaph when he envied the prosperity of the wicked of course when you hear how he describes their life you can understand why he envies them I mean the grass looks pretty green on their side have a look at verses 4 to 5 they have an easy time until they die and their bodies are well fed they are not in trouble like others they are not afflicted like most people and then verse 7 their eyes bulge out from fatness the imaginations of their hearts run wild it's pretty full-on language isn't it the idea here in verse 7 is that they fulfill every desire of their heart and accumulate and consume so much of the good life that their eyes are kind of popping out of their heads they've got so much in other words they have it all and then some they have an easy life no troubles no health issues and everything they want they have now Asaph I think might be exaggerating a little bit here kind of like we do when we envy others one Christmas we bought our son

Timothy or actually it was a family gift a Nintendo Wii it wasn't just for him he had to share it he was five years old at the time and it was a bit of a mistake buying this Nintendo Wii for him because he smashed me at everything it was humiliating but after hours of practice I'm happy to say I can now beat him sometimes but then a friend at his school Brandon got a DS and for those of you who don't know what a DS is it's kind of like a little computer console and when he saw that Brandon had this DS he envied Brandon and he said this Brandon always gets the good stuff I never get anything now Brandon may get more stuff but what Tim said was certainly an exaggeration and I suspect it's similar for Asaph here because it's hard to imagine that every wicked person whether it was an Israelite who ignored God or whether it was a person from another nation who ignored God it's hard to imagine that every wicked person got everything they wanted and that none of them ever had a cold none of them ever had health issues and things like that it's hard to imagine that and so I suspect that Asaph might have been exaggerating a little yet even though Asaph may be exaggerating a little that we could still do seem to have a far better life than he does that we could do seem to have much more prosperity than he does and because they are so prosperous they become arrogant see verse 6 therefore pride is their necklace and violence covers them like a garment verse 8 and 9 they mock and they speak maliciously they arrogantly threaten oppression they set their mouths against heaven and their tongues strut across the earth you see because they have it all they think they own it all their tongues lay claim to the earth and they set themselves against heaven against God what's worse because they seem to have it all some of Asaph's fellow Israelites follow after their wicked ways see verse 10 to 12 therefore his which is God's people turn to them and drink in their overflowing words the wicked say how can God know does the most high know everything look at them the wicked they are always at ease and they increase in their wealth it seems some of God's people had envied the wicked so much so that they chased after their way of life they drank in their words and followed their waves now in verse 10 the phrase overflowing words it literally is overflowing waters so the waters could refer to their words in verse 11 or it could just refer to their prosperous or overflowing life but either way some of God's people were envying them so much so that they followed them now I wonder if you've ever known people like that you know people who call themselves Christians come to church but then the way of the world is well frankly too attractive for them and they say the way people spend money on themselves rather than giving it to church or mission or the poor they see the way people please themselves rather than having to work hard to please God and so they envy the way the world so much so that they turn from Christ to the world have you ever known people like that I'm sad to say that I've known too many like that but what's more the wicked actually seem to encourage God's people to do this they say in verse 11 how can God know does the most high know everything and that is does God really know the best way to live and if you kind of do these things will he really find out about it anyway you see the wicked really are wicked they not only set themselves against God against heaven they also lead others astray yet despite this they have an easy life and even increase in wealth says Asaph in verse 12 and that's pretty depressing isn't it and it makes you wonder whether it's worth trying to you know have a pure heart if the wicked have this kind of life certainly Asaph wondered that in verses 13 and 14

have a look there he says did I purify my heart and wash my hands in innocence for nothing for I am afflicted all day long and punished every morning if I had decided to say these things aloud I would have betrayed your people when I tried to understand all this it seemed hopeless Asaph here in verse 14 is afflicted or punished by what he sees around him it seems like God is being good to the wicked rather than to the pure in heart to Israel and so if God is good to the wicked then why trying to be righteous why bother in our language if the non-Christians ignore God and do the wrong thing yet have a better life than we do what's the point of being a Christian why bother that's what Asaph is thinking here and I wonder if you've ever felt that I have some Christian friends who are married and they've been trying to have a child for years they have sought to please God all their lives and have prayed for a child for years as well but to no avail yet in the meantime their non-Christian friends who aren't married who ignore God who live their own way well they keep falling pregnant it would be easy for our friends to doubt at this point whether it's worth being a Christian whether it's worth following God or another friend of ours she's a godly Christian girl but hasn't found a Christian guy and she she's had offers from other guys who are non-Christians but she said no I'm a Christian so I'll only go out with a Christian yet she has wondered also whether it's worth doing that because if she wasn't a Christian she wouldn't be alone of course our friends know in their head that it is worth being a Christian and Asaph knows that as well remember what he said in verse 15 and 16 he says if I had decided to say these things allowed I would have betrayed your people but when I tried to understand it all it seemed hopeless that is as Asaph says here God I don't want to tell your people that it's not worth following you

I know it is worth following you but gee when I look around it's hard to believe and so he struggles to reconcile what he knows with his head that God is good to his people with what he sees with his eyes that God seems to be good to the wicked instead and he struggles with this he tries to understand he says but in the end it's hopeless he says until that is verse 17 for here he changes his perspective and becomes joyfully content point to verse 17 he says it all seemed hopeless until I entered God's sanctuary then I understood their destiny you see verse 17 is the turning point in this psalm from here on in Asaph begins to see things from God's perspective now no one is quite sure what it was about entering God's sanctuary or temple that made Asaph change the way he saw things it could have been the fact that the wicked weren't allowed into the temple or it could have been the fact that he heard

[12 : 59] God's word being read aloud as he walked in which seems likely given verse 24 but either way Asaph now sees things from another perspective just like I did when I saw that photo of Bill's holiday destination and from God's perspective Asaph now sees the wicked's destiny see verse 18 to 20 he says of the wicked indeed you put them in slippery places you make them fall into ruin how suddenly they become a desolation they come to an end swept away by terrors like one waking from a dream lord when you are rising you will despise their image he says Asaph now sees that while the wicked may seem to prosper in this life they certainly won't in the next they're on slippery ground soon to fall they like a dream which does not last they may strut through the earth in this life and enjoy the dream life now but it won't last for God will judge them he will despise their image sweep them away by terrors and cast them to ruin that's their eternal destiny and that's not something to envy is it what's more Asaph now sees himself from God's perspective he says in verses 21 to 22 when I became embittered you know when I was envied and my innermost being was wounded I was stupid and didn't understand I was an unthinking animal towards you he says Asaph now realizes that when he envied others and had his own little pity party he wasn't thinking straight he was like an unthinking animal for he wasn't looking from God's perspective now it's okay to lament as we've heard over the last couple of weeks it's okay to cry out to God but unless we're looking through God's eyes we won't see clearly we won't think straight we must keep looking at life with his perspective for then we'll see God's goodness to us as Asaph now sees

God's goodness to him verse 23 he says yet I am always with you you hold my right hand you guide me with your counsel and afterward you will take me up in glory who do I have in heaven but you and I desire nothing on the earth but you my flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever they're great words aren't they you see armed with God's perspective Asaph now understands just how good God is he says that God is always with him holding his right hand as a father might hold his child's hand at the right hand was also a symbol of strength and what does Asaph have in his right hand to strengthen him well it's not a coffee it's not a can of red bull it's God himself and this God is always with him to sustain him and what's more God will guide him in this life by his counsel by his word and not only guide and strengthen him in this life but take him to glory in the next that is Asaph's eternal future is secure you see and so he says even if his heart and flesh fail he has

God to carry him to eternity all this is how God is good to him and now that he understands this he can say in verse 25 that God is all he needs in fact all he desires he's now joyfully content you see I remember at primary school I think it was about year four I was in we'd often have to eat our lunches inside at our desks for a certain period of time and then the bell would go and then you're allowed to go out to the playground and play and it was it was a you know it was a sensible idea for safety reason but it was bad because it just bred envy because you know what you did everyone took off their lunch boxes and we kind of just peered over and just checked out what everyone had oh do you have that can I swap me this no way Jose you know stuff like that but one day one day I had something really good I had a Freddo frog and a packet of twisties chicken flavored and so I didn't care about looking around I just kind of sat back in my chair with a sense of contentment you see I knew I had the goods and now Asaph now realizes that he has the goods for he has none other than God himself he says whom have I in heaven but you of all people I've got you God and so the wicked may have an easy life but Asaph has God in this life who will carry him into the next and compared to having God the earth has nothing he desires he's joyfully content you see and so he concludes in verse 27 and 28 by saying those who are far from you will certainly perish you destroy all who are unfaithful to you but as for me it is good to be near God I've made the Lord God my refuge so I can tell about all you do and so

Asaph now comes full circle he now understands that God is good to him to those who are near him for those who are far from God will perish but those who are near God have God as their refuge now and for eternity it's a great psalm isn't it but what about us what are we to do when the grass looks greener on the other side point three well there will be times when we are tempted to envy let me say not just envy the non-christian world but also each other for example there will be times we're tempted to envy our friend who gets a better mark at school or uni than we get or a person who gets the job that we wanted when we're still looking we might be tempted to envy that person has the good looks the nice clothes lots of friends or we may be tempted to envy the latest thing a friend has you know whether it's an iphone an ipod an ipad or i whatever is coming out next in fact as I flick through these pieces of paper here I'm trying not to envy a certain minister's ipad or we may envy that person's gifts and abilities that we wish we had as we get older we might envy that person's good health their together family the money they earn or like our friends who have no children they find it hard not to envy their friends who are falling pregnant or like our other friend who's desperate to find someone to be with it's hard for her not to envy her friends who are getting married you see there will be times when we're tempted to envy and so doubt god's goodness to us so what are we to do when those times come well we're to do the same thing asaph did we're to see things from god's perspective now he entered the earthly temple which helped him to do that which of course we can't do because it's no longer exists what's more jesus replaced it jesus said he was the new temple which he would destroy and raise again in three days in other words we're to look to jesus and his death and resurrection so that we might see from god's perspective for then we will see the destiny of the wicked that whoever does not believe in jesus will perish and not have eternal life and so if you're here tonight then you need to hear that warning if you don't believe in jesus you need to remember what the psalm says in verse 27 that all those who are far from god will perish and you need to talk to someone about believing in jesus who will bring you near to god as his child and when we look to the cross we'll also see the extraordinary goodness of god that he would give his son for us and here i want you to turn to that first reading that simon read for us titus chapter 3 page 969 just have a look there for a moment page 969 titus chapter 3 and verses 1 and 2 paul says to titus make sure you tell these cretins to behave properly and in verses 3 to 7 he gives the reason why and this is where we see god's great goodness he writes verse 3 chapter 3 verse 3 for we ourselves were once foolish disobedient led astray slaves to various passions and pleasures passing our days in malice and envy despicable hating one another despicably hating one another but when the goodness and loving kindness of god our savior appeared he saved us and not because of any works of righteousness that we had done but according to his mercy through the water of rebirth and renewal by the holy spirit this spirit he poured out on us richly through jesus christ our savior so that having been justified

by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life do you see god's extraordinary goodness to us that while we lived disobedient lives that grieve god he gave his son for us he saved us not because of the righteous things we did not because we deserved it we didn't deserve it but he saved us because of his mercy which he poured out on us through his son there's god's goodness you see and as paul writes in romans 8 god did not even spare his own son but gave him up for us all that's god's goodness and by jesus's blood we have been given every spiritual blessing in christ as paul writes in ephesians 1 by jesus's blood we have been adopted as god's children such that god will always be with us never to leave us or forsake us hebrews 13 and it's by jesus's blood that we are given the certain hope of eternal life as it says here in verse 7 you see when we envy we are saying that what god has given us is not good enough we're doubting god's goodness and so when we attempted to do that we need to look back to the cross and see god's extraordinary goodness to us we're to look back and remember how much he gave for us god's goodness is not about how much stuff we have it's about the gift of his precious son by whose blood we have been saved and showered with every spiritual blessing and when we see god's goodness from this perspective then the earth really does have nothing we could desire compared to knowing god our friends who don't have any kids yet as i said would still love to have some and while they lament to god and pray for kids they still trust in god and rejoice in his goodness to them in jesus so much so that they said to me uh one phone conversation something along the lines of they said well if god doesn't give us kids then he doesn't give us kids we just keep remembering he gave his kid for us you see they're living life through god's perspective through the perspective of the cross remembering god's goodness to them which helps them not to envy or doubt but to trust and serve him who gave his kid for them and for us let's pray now gracious heavenly father we thank you for your goodness towards us in jesus we pray that you might forgive us for the times when we have envied the world or even one another and so doubted your goodness that you might not be envied the world or even one another and so doubted your goodness towards us please help us to always see things from your perspective that we may never doubt that the grass is greenest with you we pray in jesus name amen you