

**Theme: A Forward Look of Faith**

- 1. Remembers the gracious hand of God in our lives.**
- 2. Looks to the Word of God for divine counsel.**
- 3. Regards God as our dearest treasure.**
- 4. Makes known His Works.**

**Text: Psalm 73:23-28 (NKJV)**

**Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. <sup>4</sup> Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.**

*In the name of our Savior Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, dear fellow redeemed.*

With the close of the old year and the opening of the new, many of our neighbors in the world were looking back over what had transpired in the days gone by and also looking ahead to what will be in the days to come. As children of God the practice of looking back and looking to the future is not something that is reserved for only once a year, but is to be carried out every day of our lives.

With the passing of each day we mournfully look back as we take note of our many transgressions with which we have offended our God and plead for His pardon through Jesus Christ. Also, mindful of God's lovingkindnesses and tendermercies, which He shows us each and every day of our lives, we remember the LORD with thanksgiving and praise for His countless blessings. And then, there is the forward look of faith, relying on our Savior God to ever be with us to graciously bless us in our life of devotion and service to Him until the ending of our earthly days.

The believer who wrote Psalm 73 was in that mode of looking back and looking forward in faith. In the verses preceding our text, the psalmist Asaph lowered his head in sorrow when he thought about how he almost stumbled and slipped in his life to the point of completely forsaking the LORD. For he found himself envying wicked and violent unbelievers who scoffed at God, and yet who prospered in life with riches and ease. They were seemingly breezing along through life without a care or a trouble. When comparing this to all the trials and tribulations that Asaph suffered as a child of God, he was tempted to think that all the cleansing of his heart and his devotion to leading a pure and decent life in word and deed was in vain. He thought to himself, what's the use of being a believer when the unbeliever has it good in life. Whereas as a child of God he suffered a life of afflictions.

Have we not all entertained questions and doubts about our life with God when things were not going so well in our personal lives, in our marriage, in our family, and out in the world? Has not our flesh deceived us at times to think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence where unbelievers are sitting? Like with the psalmist, all this would draw us away from the LORD. But then, thanks be to God who wakes us up to see how vain and how wrong-headed it is to think this way, and He enables us to have a forward look of faith.

First of all, that forward look of faith involves remembering the gracious hand of God at work in our lives. In verse 23, Asaph writes concerning himself and the LORD, "Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand." Think of what is happening here with Asaph. Because of discontent and envy, he was about ready to turn his back on God and join the unbelieving world. Yet, in spite of this, God didn't turn His back on Asaph and forsake him. Rather, the LORD lovingly and mercifully continued to

be there for him. Holding Asaph by the hand, so to speak, the LORD led him to repent of his foolish way of thinking and then comforted him by absolving him of his sin for Jesus' sake.

When we look down the road of life and think of how our sinful nature will cause us to stray many times from the path of God with the danger of completely forsaking Him, what a tremendous comfort it is to know by faith the abiding presence of God and His gracious hand repeatedly reaching out to us through His Word and Sacrament to lead us back and restore us to His fold by His pardoning grace.

God's abiding presence and His outstretched hand is also reassuring to us when in the future an unexpected trial hits us like a ton of bricks. With God overseeing and governing our lives, leading us by the hand down the road of life, we have the confident trust that He will never take us down a path that will prove eternally harmful to us. And when the going gets tough, He will lift us up in His arms and carry us along, giving us the needed strength to endure it. And not only that, trusting in His Word of promise we know that God will use all those trials of life to work together for our good.

The forward look of faith also involves looking to God's Word for divine counsel. The psalmist says of the LORD in verse 24, "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." As far as the unknown future is concerned, one of the knowable factors in life is that we can be sure we will encounter various kinds of problems in our lives. And when they occur, we may not always have an answer for them. And so, we will need good counsel and advice.

You and I know that in this day and age there are all kinds of counselors in the public and private sector. However, there is a big drawback when those counselors of the world do not acknowledge God and His Word as holding the key to the solution of our problems. If they are only relying upon worldly wisdom in order to give advice, their counsel may not always be so helpful. Rather, it could do more harm than good.

The one sure and unerring source of counsel that we can confidently rely on to help us in the many different areas of life is the LORD. As children of God we have come to know and believe that His Word of divine wisdom is like a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. The Lord Jesus said concerning His Word of counsel and our use of it, "blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it" (Lk.11:28)!, that is, happy are those who give ear to His Word and embrace it for their lives.

The apostle Peter said concerning Jesus who is the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, "You have the words of eternal life" (Jn.6:68). At any future time we can confidently rely on the LORD to supply us with divine counsel that will not only guide and direct us for the blessing of our lives in this world, but will also keep us on the path that finally takes us to that eternal life of glory in heaven. So then, in the days, week, and month to come when you are in need of counsel, first and foremost keep in mind that God provides us with all sufficient counsel through His Word. Search it out in Holy Scripture and apply it to your daily lives. And if you are having difficulty finding a needed word of counsel in the Bible, ask the pastor to help you.

Still another factor that involves a forward look of faith is regarding God as our dearest treasure. The psalmist says of Him in verses 25 & 26, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Remember, Asaph's fleshly mind was tempting him to think that a life apart from God where there is temporal prosperity and ease is where it's at in life. But then, he was reminded of the final and ultimate end of the unbeliever, saying of them in verse 27, "For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those desert You for harlotry." What will it profit us to gain whatever the world has to offer us if in the process we loose our life with God and our future with Him in heaven?

In the hymn that we just sang, we voiced this sentiment, "Earth has no pleasure I would share, yea, heav'n itself were void and bare, if Thou, Lord, wert not near me. And should my heart for sorrow break, my trust in Thee can nothing shake. Thou art the Portion I have sought; Thy precious blood my soul has

bought” (LSB 708 st.1). A life of fellowship and holy communion with our Savior God mean everything to us. He is our best and kindest friend who loves us to the very end. He is the One who has marvelously made us, faithfully preserves us day by day, has redeemed us unto Himself by His unconditional love, sanctifies us so that we can walk in the way of Christian love, and will finally glorify us in that future world of heavenly splendor. There is no one and nothing that can compare to what the LORD our God means to us. He alone deserves to have first place in our hearts. And He above all else is the One we live our lives for in all the days that lie ahead.

Knowing all that we know about the LORD, rather than allowing ourselves to be pulled away from Him by all the cares and concerns, and by all the attractions and distractions in the world, we want to ever draw near to Him in faith. The psalmist confirms for us how truly beneficial this is when he says in verse 28, “But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD.”

It is good for us to draw near to God in faith as we look to the future, for although there are many things about the days ahead that are unknown to us, yet we know by faith that God’s gracious hand will always be at work in our lives to govern them according to His eternal will and purpose. When we are straying from His paths, He will always be there for us to draw us back to Him by His Spirit and bless us with His gift of forgiveness. When we are experiencing problems and are looking for guidance, it will be good for us to draw near to God and listen with a receptive spirit to His divine counsel. This we will do, because we trust that His Word works blessings in our lives and leads us down the path of eternal life.

The final thought that the psalmist leaves us with as we are looking to the future as believers is the resolve to declare to others all the works of the LORD. Dear fellow Christians, please consider why it is that God did not take us home to heaven during this past year, but continues to give us life and breath in this world. Is it not so that we might declare to others all His gracious works and thus draw them to the LORD in faith so that they too might be blessed with His rich grace and mercy? Every single day that the LORD leaves us on this earth we have a mission to carry out as His dear children and that is to do all that we can to see to it that the word about the wonderful works of our Lord and Savior God are made known to others. With the coming of each new day, may God grant us the grace to keep this mission in mind and to be active in carrying it out.

And as we look to the future, may it ever be a forward look of faith in our Savior God. Amen.

- **Pastor Mark Gullerud**