

When the World Seems Upside Down

The Bad Have It Good, and the Good Have It Bad

- Want you know: I believe God is good to his people, to me/you; **vs. 1a**; believe that. But I have to confess: sometimes struggle understand why so many things in world seem upside down. Doesn't bother you when look around, see bad have it so good? Why is it that unbelievers, evil people of world seem have such good, easy life? Doesn't that seem upside down to you? Shouldn't be other way around?
- I think re very wealthy, powerful, influential people, can hire enough lawyers to destroy anyone gets in their way; can ruin families, churches, schools, just because want to. Or I think re violent criminals, drug dealers, human traffickers, who live luxury, swimming in money as direct result of crimes. Or I think re people who hate Jesus, are opposed to gospel – seems they're ones in good health, good jobs, happy homes, nice vacas, easy lifestyle, nothing bad happens them, respected by community – same people who mock Jesus, insult Christians, call us stupid for our faith; call religion crutch for weak; send kids to atheist camps (where train kids disavow religion). Why are these the people God so richly blesses?! **Vs. 4-8, 12**. Seems upside down.
- And if that weren't enough (that bad have so good), then what I really don't understand is why good have it so bad. Why so many Christians have to suffer so much? Why Christianity in this country treated with contempt? Why are our Christian college students ridiculed for what they believe? Why do people who look to Lord for help still find themselves in poverty? Why are good, church-going believers going through such hard times? We're ones who say no to sin; fight temptation; go out of way to do God-pleasing thing. All we get in return is bad jobs, bad pay, troubles with kids, health concerns, insults, setbacks. **Vs. 13-14**. The bad have it good; good bad. Sometimes world just seems upside down!
- **Vs. 16**. Doesn't seem right; not fair. Don't you think so? Book Eccl echoes this same frustration: **"In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness"** (Ec 7:15). Just seems everything world upside down.

In the Sanctuary

- **Vs. 16-17-understood.** Then I saw things differently. Maybe I've been looking at this all wrong; maybe more to see here, that I've been missing. I think I still see pretty often: bad have it good; good bad. But as I enter sanctuary, of God's holy Word, look around, things look different here; almost look upside down.
- In sanct, I see Job: godly man afflicted with terrible sufferings (death children, loss of property, horrible disease). And he began question God why bad good, good bad. But eventually saw through that suffering to something greater, good; which seems upside down. But in the end Job said, **"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know"** (Jb 42:3).
- Or in sanct, I see rich fool in Jesus' parable: had so many crops, tore down barns, built bigger ones, said "Eat, drink, be merry!" But God turned things upside down for him; called him fool, ended his life (Lk 12:16-21). Had it good for awhile, but didn't understand greater good.
- Or in sanct, I see rich man & poor Lazarus. Things really turned upside down for them when rich man died, hell; Laz died, heaven. In that parable, Abraham says to rich man, **"Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony"** (Lk 16:25). So maybe bad don't always have good; good, bad. Things turn. Makes me think all times Jesus said last/first, and first/last (Mt 19:30; 20:16).
- But what really makes me think about is when Jesus said, **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"** (Mk 8:34), which means following Jesus involves crucifixion. Jesus saying every single Christian, you/me, everyone follows him – maybe not lit nailed to cross, but we must, and will suffer. This about as upside down as gets! I know of no other religion in world that teaches that if you practice that religion, your life, from worldly perspective, will get worse. But that's what Jesus teaches! By following him, you will bear a cross; suffer; look at godless world around you prospering in wealth, happiness, and you'll find yourself struggling under weight of heavy, burdensome cross, that your God is letting you bear, all because you follow him. What! That's crazy, backwards, about as upside down as it gets! And certainly contrary to what you'd expect: that God bless good, curse bad. But not always how it works!
- But know something: it's only when I enter sanctuary of God that I begin understand. Just think for moment: hypothetically, what if other way around? What if God sort of mechanically did bless good with good; curse

bad with bad. What if that simple: you sin, then suffer; or if godly, get wealthy. What would world be like? What would motivate our behavior? And where would faith be? Who would really put faith in Jesus (our dear Lord, crucified, risen to save) – who would give rip about Jesus, if God operated on simple, Santa Claus, naughty-nice list basis? I can't actually envision any true Christians in that world; in fact, seems like an upside down world to me, because not the world I see when I enter the sanctuary.

Three Great Truths

- Only when I enter sanctuary do I begin to understand these three great truths. GT1: vs. **18-19, 27**. The bad will not always have it good. Everyone who rejects Jesus as Savior, when they die, will not go heaven, but go hell, forever. That's somber, but urgent biblical truth Jesus emphasized again, again: unbelievers will go hell. Sort of puts things into perspective for me. Who cares if they have easy life; live in lavish luxury, enjoy pleasure/prestige? Jesus: **"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul" (Mk 8:36)**. It only lasts a lifetime, and hell is eternal. So I need to keep that in mind whenever I'm tempted to covet their riches, prosperity – they're going lose it all! And I'd rather have it bad in this life, than have it bad in next life. So, bad will not always have it good; that GT1.
- GT2: vs. **21-22**. This is a confession of sin: sin of coveting prosperity of others; and sin of resenting God for blessing others more than me. Psalmist Asaph admits he was wrong. And I've got do same thing. When I covet prosperity of others and resent God for blessing them more than me, that's a sin. Jesus: **"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Lk 12:15)**. Yet too often I act and think it does! No: I want confess that greed, turn from it. And want turn to Jesus, who fully/freely forgives my greed, ingratitude.
- GT3, most imp truth of all: I have Jesus! **Vs. 23**. No matter what struggles I face, no matter what hardships I endure, I have Jesus. Jesus is always with me. He has promised never leave me, forsake me. He's holding me by me right hand. So whatever crosses I bear or inequities I endure, I have Jesus, helping me through them. **Vs. 24**. Someday I'm going to heaven. Say again. So I'm okay with tough life here on earth; I'm okay with setbacks, health issues, struggles, crosses. Jesus bore cross for me, to take away my sins, bring me heaven – loved me that much! So if following Jesus means I have to bear cross, I'm okay with that, because someday I'm going to heaven. **Vs. 25**. In other words, if I have Jesus, I have everything I could ever want or need. I don't need anything else, want anything else, because I have Jesus. **Vs. 26a**, may go down to grave in death; but **vs. 26b**.

Conclusion

- So, I guess, this is all starting to make sense to me now. I think I get it. It's true: sometimes world seems upside down, when bad good, good bad. And I may be tempted to lament my situation, desire theirs. But when I change my perspective on things, when I turn this upside down world right side up and look at things way Lord would have me look at them, now I realize: unbelievers of this world are without only thing that really matters. They don't have Jesus; don't have his love, his forgiveness, his favor. They don't have Jesus; but I do! I don't envy wicked for things they have; I'm thankful to Lord for what I do have. So no matter how upside down this world may sometimes seem; no matter what this life sends my way; no matter what crosses I may have to bear, I'm content. **Vs. 1a**.

Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph. ¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?" ¹² This is what the wicked are like— always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.

¹³ Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.

¹⁵ If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰ They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing 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 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.