

Series: GREATER THAN...July 1, 2007

GREATER THAN MY DISAPPOINTMENT
Psalm 73

I. INTRO

A. Over the years, I've married a *lot* of people. And when I marry a couple, I usually try to meet with them a number of times before hand—basically to give them a **reality check!** See, when we get married, we don't usually have a really good grip on reality. We do that almost in every arena—we come to a new job, a new home, buy a new car—thinking mainly of the advantages and **benefits**, not the price tag and limitations. When we marry, we dream of intimacy, of what being married to this person will do for us, mean for us.

-In short, we have **expectations**. Of what **they'll** do and what **we'll** do. How clean they'll be, how efficient they'll be, how mature and well-adjusted and kind they'll be. And we think, "Whatever they **aren't**, my love is strong enough to cover that! We'll just sit down and have a logical discussion about our differences. Ten minutes oughta cover it! And, of course, I know these couples are on love drugs. They're not really hearing what I'm saying.

1. I'm not being negative on marriage. Not at all. I'm just saying that people have great marriages--not because they've found the perfect person—their dream person—but because they've **paid a price!** They've shed some blood; forced themselves to communicate when they'd rather lock themselves in the bathroom! They've made more compromises and heard more truth than they thought they'd have to.

-It's only when the dream of a magic marriage gets shattered that two people can build a **great** marriage.

2. We don't just come into marriage with these kinds of expectations. We come into parenting with dreams like this—that all of our hard work and sacrifice will pay off with kids who go through minor rebellions, but became what we've always dreamed they'd be. We find out that they tend to copy our bad habits, not our good ones. And they have expectations of us—that we can't meet.

3. I recently heard a saying that I thought sums things up quite well. **In a life time, we go through a thousand funerals—and some of them are for people.** All of us—even pessimists—are born dreamers. We have dreams of comforts, of friendships, of intimacy, of success, of the experiences we'll have had by the time we reach 30, or 40, or 50.

-And often we have funerals for those dreams. And it's disappointing. **Really** disappointing. Heartbreaking, really.

B. At the center of all these broken dreams and disappointments is God. We come into some kind of a relationship with Him—and we have very definite expectations. That life will be **measurably** better with Him than life **without** Him. Our problem comes when we define **better**. Less hurt, less poverty, less disease, less betrayal. And more. More of everything. More love, success, happiness, dreams fulfilled.

-But life doesn't usually go that way. Not for long. And we think, "But, I thought...I mean, I hoped, I-I-I prayed..." And we have this sneaky thought, "Wow! Not only did life disappointment me, God has disappointed me too!"

-And I need to tell you—***you are not the first one to have that thought! It was recorded in the Bible almost 3000 years ago!*** And so I want to talk about disappointment.

II. LIFE ACCORDING TO APPEARANCES

A. The specific passage I want to tap into this morning is one found in Psalm 73. It was written by a man named Asaph—a Levite—and worship leader. He was the Blaise Pascal of 1000 B.C. for all the worship services held by David and Solomon. And he writes about his disappointment—how at one point his personal life seemed to defy every worship song he ever wrote about God.

1. Asaph tells us his own story here of how he got fooled. In vs. 1, he basically says, "I know the truth now about life--that God is extremely good to His people. That people who ***keep their hearts pure*** experience a continuous stream of life that stretches into eternity."

-Then in vs 2 he says, **But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone (Psalm 73:2 NLT).**

What he's saying is that he came ***very*** close to walking out on God. Defecting to the enemy. And he tells us why:

For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness (Psalm 73:3 NLT).

-Two key verbs. ***I saw*** and ***I envied***. He looked at people who seemed to flaunt their lifestyles in God's face—and life was going ***very*** well for them! But for him? Someone who loved, worshipped and wrote songs about God? ...Not so good. He was disappointed with his life.

2. My dad used to have a saying, "He could fall into an outhouse and come up with a rose in his teeth." Have you ever met people who just seem to always fall into great situations? Asaph's problem was that it was the people who didn't give a rip about God whose loves we're going so well. Listen to how he puts it:
I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else. They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty. These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for. They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others. They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. "What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?" Look at these wicked people—enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply. Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain. (Psalm 73:3-12 NLT).

-Asaph noticed something: When people are arrogant and cruel and heartless, God ***still*** cares for them.

He treats them differently than they treat Him. Jesus actually talks about this—that the Father

...gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:45 NLT).

-And Asaph's reaction—and ours—is: **That's not fair!** Not only were they **not** experiencing anything that resembled trouble—it appeared that their pride and boasting and cheating paid off.

-It didn't even stop there. The apparent injustice between their evil hearts and fat-cat lifestyles was causing others to think, "Either God doesn't notice this stuff—or He doesn't care!"

3. What's hidden in Asaph's comments here are his expectations. **We** have expectations.

*We have a dream for our lives, for a career in music will go, or how a new venture in business will succeed.

*Some of you walked down an aisle with someone—with dreams of intimacy, companionship—being loved, cherished and valued. And you **tried**—but it didn't turn out like you planned. Maybe you're single, and you've had dreams about meeting Mr. Right—but so far you've only met Mr. **Wrong!**

*Or you had children—and as their lives budded—then blossomed—you had dreams for what they could do, how proud you'd be of them, how close you'd feel to them.

But right now, it looks like it's all headed in precisely the wrong direction—and you have this awful feeling inside that there's gonna be a train wreck.

4. So, like Asaph, you're sitting in the front row at a funeral. Your dream is in the casket. You look out the window at the funeral parlor, and someone else is having a parade, sitting on the back of the convertible waving to the crowd. They're struttin' their stuff! "I did it! **I'm** the glorious winner!" And **that** hurts.

- B. Sometimes, as Asaph points out, it's much more sinister than me burying my dreams while others enjoy theirs. It's when the Tony Sopranos seem to get ahead.

-Have you ever seen the drawings they sometimes have for kids to work on in restaurants while the family's waiting for their food? There's a title at the top that says, **WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?** And they've drawn raccoons riding bicycles through the trees, a beaver snorkling his way up the sidewalk, kids eating ice-cream out of shoes. It's kind of an informal IQ test. I get the feeling that that Asaph is drawing this absurd scene and then asking, **What's wrong with this picture?**

1. That's question that almost took Asaph, this awesome worship leader, down. Listen to Asaph's agonizing words as they're recorded in The Message: **What's going on here? Is God out to lunch? Nobody's tending the store. The wicked get by with everything; they have it made, piling up riches. I've been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me?**

A long run of bad luck, that's what— a slap in the face every time I walk out the door (Psalm 73:11-14 Msg.). Do you sense a little bitterness there?

2. How many of you would honestly say you've had similar thoughts? You've seen good people suffer, bury their dreams—while others, sometimes people who are violent, warped, arrogant, or self-sufficient, seem to be getting away with wrong stuff. Their cars start every morning; their carpet doesn't wear out; their dogs get house-trained in a single week—and their kids become the class valedictorian?

-Like Asaph, if you approach life with a video camera and a calculator—it will give you a splitting headache! Asaph specifically said,
" So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is (Psalm 73:16 NLT)!

3. Asaph had another problem. As a believer in God, as a prominent worship leader, **who do you talk about this stuff with?** He says,
If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people (Psalm 73:15 NLT). Ever been in that trap? You want to talk about how disappointed you are at some point with God or the way He works, but you think, "How do I talk about my struggles without creating disillusionment for someone else?"
 -The bottom line for him—maybe you and me—is, **can I love, serve, worship and follow a God who does things in ways I DON'T understand?**

- C. The advantage Asaph has is that he had this thought through before he wrote this Psalm. And he saw that the biggest problem was... **himself!** His envy. What almost caused him to lose his footing the apparent inequity he saw; it was a problem of perspective in his own heart. In vs. 3 he clearly says that the reason he almost defected was:
...I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness (Psalm 73:3 NLT).

1. Envy can actually feel quite good when you take it to church. It's actually one of the devils favorite weapons against us when we're suffering—going through hard times. The definition of envy is,
"A painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another JOINED with a desire to possess the same advantage."
 -James, half brother of Jesus and Early Church leader writes:
But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice (James 3:14-16 TNIV).
 -Doesn't sound good, does it? Even when you think you're being envious on behalf of people who are good and seem to deserve better...like **you**...envy, and it's sister sin, **jealousy**... is still wrong and still destructive.
 Please understand, it's a **really** good thing to get your feelings out, to express your frustration. God can handle that! But **then** you have to look at your own heart and sort out the contents.
 -James continues,

“What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the spirit God has placed within us is filled with envy? But he gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires. (James 4:5-6a NLT)

Envy doesn't **have** to control our hearts.

2. Asaph himself tells us what the problem really was. He had his eyes on the wrong people—and he **envied** their success, their money, their healthy bodies—the fact that **their** dreams for their lives seemed to be coming true.

-Do you know what I think happens to a lot of us? We see people in the corner office and think, "**I'd** like the corner office!" We visit friends, drive through developments, look at what's sitting in driveways, what people wear to parties, what other's children appear to achieve. We see someone else's leadership position, or someone getting attention or becoming friends with someone **we'd** like to be friends with. And we **notice**. We watch. We think, "Hmmm! I'd like some o' dat!"

-Can I just be thoroughly transparent here? I would have to admit that at different points in my life as a pastor and leader, I've been **watching** and **envying**—not wicked people—but friends who seem to be further ahead. I've wanted to say, "Hey, that's **my** dream you're living! Give it back!" Ever done that?

-At first our envy or jealousy has good taste. We fight off the bitter angry thoughts that go with it. But over time, Satan sucks us in—and our hearts start to get sour and bitter and **angry!** If we're honest—angry at God. **How could you, God? How could you! Why would you let someone else have what I want when you and I both know I'm much more deserving!**

-How many of you think you can be envious or jealous of someone and still love them? You can't. Jealousy and envy are a form of hatred. James makes it clear—they're of the devil—and if you don't identify them and repent of them, they will rot your heart. The real problem isn't how well others are doing; the real problem is **MY** attitude about it!

III. THE ANTIDOTE: PERSPECTIVE

- A. Know when Asaph got rid of the splitting headache he was carrying around? Let me read what he says:

When I tried to understand all this it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny (Psalm 73:16-17 NIV).

1. For Asaph going to the Sanctuary was like going to work—like at Wal-Mart. But maybe, like a lot of religious professionals—he **missed** it. The **sanctuary of God** is not a building. It's the place where you meet God face to face—and suddenly you see yourself and life for what it is.

-Wherever that was for Asaph, he suddenly understood that you can't write the obituary for your life, your success, your dreams—based on a single slice of time.

- a. **Whatever** happened in that meeting between God and Asaph, when it was over, his headache was gone. He had something that we dare not try to live without. **Perspective.**

Perspective is the ability to see things in their relative importance. Many of you have seen my favorite image of this. If you hold 2 loonies too close to your eyes, almost everything else gets blocked out. You need ***perspective***.

-Perspective tells us that people more important than money and stuff. Perspective tells us that making things right is more important than our ego. Perspective tells us that pleasing God is more important than pleasing people. Perspective tells us that ***no*** career is worth wrecking a family over. Perspective tells us that God is way more perfect and just and loving than we can imagine.

-And perspective tells us that when you see laughing snapshots or video clips of someone else's life...or dream--that's really all it is. A clip. And you ***dare*** not compare yourself, your life, your significance or your happiness to a visible ***slice*** of someone else's life. You don't really ***know*** their life.

-See, the most important message ***perspective*** gives us is precisely the message of this Psalm. ***LIFE IS NOT AS IT SEEMS!***

b. Specifically, Asaph understood that ***this*** life is not all there is, and that when we see glimpses of other's lives--it doesn't tell the whole story. Where people start is not where they end up.

c. Remember his comment at the beginning?

But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone (Psalm 73:2 NLT).

-Notice what he now says about the people he had gotten so bitter and angry about: had been envying.

Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning (Psalm 73:18-20 NLT).

d. This is what Asaph learned. There is a final accounting for every person who walks on this planet. And you will ***never*** see that accounting this side of eternity. What we see here doesn't tell the full story of life—our lives, or someone else's life.

-There are people who are sailing down the road—sometimes simply ignoring God—sometimes blatantly defying Him. On the outside, at least for a time--it appears like they're living the high life. In God's eyes, they have infinite worth—and He's far more gracious than us—He gives time.

-But ultimately, as it says, people who live this way are on slippery ground. Life goes faster, they grow to ignore the danger signs telling them that the bridge is out ahead--and the end becomes more and more inevitable. ***LIFE IS NOT AS IT SEEMS.***

2. And there's a part to perspective that Asaph learned—and that we need to learn—***really*** need to learn. As believers in God, we sometimes have this false notion that God shares ***our*** dreams for a cushy life. That coziness is next to Godliness and God is obligated to give us an enviable life. But when you take a walk with God in the quietness of this sanctuary—you realize

that this life is not about getting more...and getting more comfortable. It's about us growing the character of Jesus inside—whatever it takes to do that.

-Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. God *is* the Giver of every good thing. He cares about our health, our jobs, our feelings of worth and significance. But it's much broader than that. We have a choice: We can demand that He do certain things for us, and then get resentful and sullen when He doesn't. Or we can go Him and say, "God, I'm getting a headache--and I need your perspective."

- B. One of the things Asaph saw when God gave him perspective was quite troubling. He saw himself much more clearly. See, he had been judging others—talking about others as **them!** "Those sinful, evil, wicked, awful people out there!" Ever done that? Kinda prided yourself in how **good** and **deserving** you are compared to **THEM!!!**
1. Asaph, worship leader, lover and worshiper of the Almighty, realized that his envy and bitterness was just as bad as their blatant disregard for God. He says, **Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you (Psalm 73:21-22 NLT).**
 - a. See what happens? First we look at a **select** group of people—usually a few that are doing well. We look at ourselves and fall into this slimy pit of self-pity. And if we don't get out **quickly**—we get bitter. And bitterness contaminates the most important thing in life—our relationship with the Father—paid for with Jesus' blood. Envy, jealousy and bitterness puts us on the same slippery ground as the people we're judging—the people we think we're **better** than.
 - b. Asaph, now with perspective, says, "God, I see it now! I was bitter! Truth is, I didn't even know what I was talking about. I was like an ignorant **animal**. The specific animal mentioned in the original Hebrew is a hippopotamus. He's saying, "God, before our conversation, I was like this plump colossus of stupidity that spends its life wallowing shoulder deep in mud, yawning, eating seaweed, and tipping over canoes."
 2. He then travels where **we** need to travel--into the amazing world of gratitude. He begins to list all the things in his life that he had somehow overlooked when he got his eyes on the money and comfort of people who had built their lives on deck of the Titanic. **Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand; You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever. Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you. But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do (Psalm 73:23-28 NLT).**
 - a. He was looking at stuff; at comfort; at good luck. In his envy, he had missed what it means to have God by your side, 24/7—that God walks

hand in hand with us through life—and from there right into eternity. He says, “I almost traded Him in—for money, stuff and comfort!”

- By the way, have you really thought about what it means to have the God who made everything—with you constantly? Ever put a price tag on that?
- b. In the middle of all the dreams for his life, he had somehow missed what it meant to have God lead his life—around all the dead ends and deserts and dry holes. Ever thought about what it means to have an infinitely wise God—who knows precisely what the future holds—lead you, hand in hand, through life?
- c. These next words almost feel like holy ground to me.
Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever. (Psalm 73:25,26 NLT) I get the feeling that this man who had led worship so long just humbly lifted his hands to God and said, “Oh Lord. How could I have been so blind!
 How could I have envied the lifestyle and trinkets of people who hurt you--when I have **YOU? Your love is better than LIFE!**
 -And that became his hope. It’s **our** hope. Whatever life brings, whatever dreams crash and burn—and **whoever** breaks our heart--God, His presence, His power, His life, His grace—can **never** be taken away. That’s our hope.
- d. As a kind of reminder to us, Asaph says, “Please remember--sin brings death; **all** sin. Even envy and bitterness. It complicates life—and will put you on this slippery downward path to a place you **really** don’t want to be!
 -So, when your eyes begin to stray, when you begin to feel sorry for yourself, that life is rough and God isn’t being fair—get someplace where you can regain your perspective! Just stay close to God. Look to Him when life gets confusing.
- e. And Asaph, the worship leader, the poet, the fellow struggler, kept his promise. He promised God that he would tell of all his deeds—help others find perspective. And in this Psalm, he had the guts to be honest enough to do that. Not too many people are willing to be that transparent. He was. And I’m glad.
3. Some of you this morning are deeply disappointed by life. It looks like your dreams are laying in pieces around you—and the dreams of others are flourishing. Your immediate thought is just like this poet’s.
 “Life isn’t fair. **God** isn’t fair! I trusted Him—and **He disappointed me!**
 -Without sounding calloused, you probably need to look deeper. If your dream was based on a spouse, a boyfriend, a parent, a child—it’s important to know that one of the things we **don’t** have control over—and that God chooses **not** to control—is others. Their decisions. Their choices. Their thinking. You can **love** others, **help** others, **walk** with others, **pray** for and with others. But you can’t control them—make them do what you want. Please don’t blame God and get

bitter over choices they make. What you see now is not necessarily how things will end. So, don't write the conclusion, yet.

-I don't know what your broken dream is—or what it means. And, truth is, you don't either. I have found in my own life that a broken dream is sometimes actually a **break-through**. A breakthrough into a place where God does his best work. And God **is** at work—more powerfully than you'd ever dream. He's with you, even when you don't feel his presence. What He needs most from you is your trust and your cooperation. That He—and what He's up to—is way, way, **WAY** greater than your disappointment. You **need** that perspective.

-Perspective helps us what we just **can't** see right now. I Cor. 13 says that at this point in time we see things as if we're looking through a fog. We don't see ourselves clearly. We don't see others clearly. We don't see our circumstances clearly. So—we have to trust the One whose hand we're holding.

4. Perspective also helps us to love others instead of envying them. There's a really, **really** important question you and I need to ask: Do I—do you—love people who have **more** than we do? More money, more friends, more house, more car—more of what **we** want. Or...**or**...does them having more move them into the category of a competitor? Where we somehow have to justify in our minds why **we** should have what they have and why **we** are justified in having a bad attitude about the whole thing.

Can I just be quite straightforward here? Unless a **lot** of us who love and follow Jesus see things a whole lot more clearly, the undecided--the lost of this world will never be won. Jesus said that the **Kingdom** is the pearl of great price—the **most valuable** thing in the universe. Not stuff, success, prestige, or security.

- a. I for one am so **glad** God doesn't immediately knock down those who get off track—cause I'm one of them! And He doesn't because he loves them and gives a lot of space for them to come home. He simply asks us to grow in our love and decrease in our envy!
- b. Perspective also helps us see one of God's most priceless gifts to us. A relationship. Being loved by a love that will not let you go; by One who doesn't just **watch** our lives from afar—but who does life with us. The love of a Father who grabs and holds your hand, just like we do when we're walking our kids across a busy street. One who is the strength of your life when everything else falls away.

IV. **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Bottom line issue. Be careful **who** you watch—and **what** you watch. Remember it's a video clip—not the whole story--of their life or yours. Don't bury your dream or declare God's love a colossal disappointment based on a CAT scan of a tiny era of life!

-At one point, it appeared that Jesus' entire mission had been a failure—and that all was lost. But that was Friday! Sunday was a-coming! As we celebrate Jesus' death with bread and wine—remember that His dream wasn't buried, it was planted. And it was followed by amazing, eternity changing life!