

Why Should I Serve God?

Psalm 73:1-28

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Introduction:

As most of you know, I am preaching through the Gospel of Matthew at this time.

- In this series, I have come to a new section in which Matthew presents to us the reality and nature of Jesus' Messiahship.
- The section opens with John the Baptist sending a messenger to Jesus from prison to ask,
 - "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?"
 - Here, the long expected Messiah has come, and John sits in prison.
 - This was not quite what he had expected to be doing when the Messiah came.
 - He had said, "He must increase and I must decrease," but this was a bit much!
 - John was struggling with what Jesus was doing (or not doing).
 - We will see how Jesus answers John...
 - Matthew goes on from here to speak of many others who struggled with what Jesus was doing and who in some cases rejected Him...
 - But Matthew uses these doubts and struggles to show us all the more clearly that Jesus is indeed the true Messiah.

But before I launch into this new section of Matthew's Gospel,

- I want to introduce you to a Psalm that correlates with this section...
 - Psalm 73.
 - This Psalm shows us how a believer (like John) can struggle with what God is doing that just doesn't seem to line up and then be brought to a greater assurance that God is indeed good.
 - We will sing portions of this psalm in conjunction with our Matthew series over the next few weeks, and so today I want to preach from this Psalm.

Psalm 73 begins with the simple confession:

- Psalm 73:1: "Truly God *is* good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart."
 - This is the fact that was questioned by the Asaph, the author of this Psalm, when he saw what God was doing in his day.
- Consider what this confession is saying:
 - "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as a pure in heart."

- “**Israel**” as it is used here, means what Paul calls “elect Israel” or “spiritual Israel” as opposed to “Israel after the flesh”...
 - It is not merely those who are the physical descendants of Abraham,
 - but, as the second line puts it, “such as are pure in heart.”
 - Not those who are merely outwardly or ceremonially purified,
 - but those whose hearts have been purified by the Holy Spirit.
 - In other words, all true believers—God’s people in the fullest sense.
 - The confession is that God is good to them.
- And it should be added that when it says, “**Truly** God is good,”
 - **truly** means that He is **only** good to them,
 - nothing but good and never otherwise—
 - never unmerciful,
 - never even indifferent,
 - but always good.

TRANS> This is quite a confession!

- The question is...

Do you honestly believe this?

- Do you honestly believe that God is good and only good to His own?
 - Do you not easily begin to question His goodness as soon as things do not please you?
 - When God does not seem to be doing what is right in your sight?
 - When the Messiah comes and you (his forerunner) end up in prison!
- Do you not begin to murmur and say in your hearts,
 - “What’s the use?”
 - “Where is God in all this?”
 - “Why should I serve Him?”
- If you are a true believer, I am sure you believe that God truly is good to His people...
 - You know it is true,
 - but I am also quite sure that you have had to struggle with this at times.
 - Psalm 73 presents this struggle in the hearts of God’s people
 - and shows how it is resolved
 - and how we come forth with an even greater assurance in the end.

- It is a very realistic Psalm describing a very realistic struggle that we have as God's people...
 - Let us then study it to help us as we wrestle along in our own pilgrimage.

TRANS> First, this Psalm shows you what causes you to question the goodness of God to you as His own servant and child...

I. You question God's goodness to you when you see the wicked getting along better in this world than you are.

- Asaph admits that he had become envious of them in verse 3:
 - v. 3: "I was envious of the boastful when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."
 - It almost seemed to him that they had it better than he did...
 - He was actually entertaining the thought that it would be quite nice to change places with them!
 - Here he was, struggling along in his service to God...
 - And there the wicked are, flourishing and getting along great!

A. Just look at how he describes them and see if you can't relate!

1. First, he tells us that they seem to be free of trials!
 - a. vs. 4 says that there are "no pangs in their death..."
 - Yes, sometimes ungodly men die in great peace.
 - I know known it be so.
 - You would think that without Christ they would be terrified to face death, uneasy and uncertain...
 - But there are some that, with a seared conscience and the physician's drugs, die in great peace.
 - At the same time, there are many believers who are filled with terror and doubt in their deaths...
 - not all are, but even some of the most godly can suffer in this way.
 - Some of them seem to have a more difficult passage than the wicked who have forgotten God.

TRANS> But this is not all the psalmist sees of the prosperity of the wicked.

- b. He mentions in vs. 5 that they seem to be free of trials in this world...
 - v. 5: They *are* not in trouble *as other* men, Nor are they plagued like *other* men.

- I am sure you know ungodly individuals that seem to somehow rise above the common struggles of this world—
 - They are not troubled with broken relationships, poverty, sickness, failure in their careers, or the doubts and uncertainties that other people experience.

TRANS> But their prosperity does not end with the absence of trials...

- c. Not only are they above the common struggles of life, they are also overflowing with prosperity!
 - vs. 7 explains that they have even more than heart could wish!
 - They have actually risen above their dreams!
 - More and more good things just keep on flowing to them!
 - They have wonderful friendships, happy families, financial independence, success in their careers, good health—
 - everything seems to go right for them!

2. And of course as a result of all this prosperity...

a. These wicked men become very sure of themselves...

- As v. 6 says, “Pride serves as their necklace”
- Pride, biblically speaking, is that frame of mind that you can get along on your own, without God...
 - They wear this pride of self-sufficiency and quite frankly, never seem to be humbled!
 - They never seem to be proven wrong in their notion that they do not need God and can get along quite well without Him...
 - Oh yes, they may tip their hat to Him and even go to church,
 - but clearly they are not those who depend on God or express any real need of him...
 - For them, religion is just a social convention and little more.
 - Their faith is in themselves—
 - and that faith seems to serve them quite well.
 - They have no thoughts of trusting in something in anything but themselves—
 - And why should they?
 - Self has never failed them!

b. Verse 6 also describes them as being covered with violence...

- **Pride** speaks of their connection with God and **violence** speaks of their connection with other men...
 - They trample over their neighbours and use them for their own purposes...
 - not always in a way that necessarily looks all that cruel or selfish—
 - sometimes in a way that is outwardly rather attractive...
 - But the result is that they conquer all who are in their path...
 - Everyone ends up serving them and their interests...
 - They are on top and everyone else is under them, and,
 - as it were,
 - living for them.
3. Verse 8 and 9 explain how they speak from a position of superiority!
- a. Their words are spoken as the oracles of heaven...
 - People regard them as little gods!
 - Their words cause men to jump to action, to tremble, to marvel, to trust.
 - They speak with absolute confidence and certainty, even when they are speaking contrary to what God has said...
 - And because they speak with such confidence and from a position of such success,
 - many people are ready to follow them and believe them!
 - b. The notion that they spread through the earth is this:
 - “I have the answers! I have my act together! I am like God!”
 - And so often, they enjoy something of the reverence of God...
 - They are worshipped in the earth...
 - c. Isn't it sadly true that even Christians often have far too much esteem for these prosperous ones?
 - Do we not see believers admiring them and swallowing up their doctrines?
 - Were many Christians not dazzled by the doctrines of evolution in their glory days?
 - ready to set aside the teaching of God's word to make room for these false anti-biblical teaching that was brought forth with so much confidence?
 - Were many Christians not drawn in to the psychiatrists' call that we need more self-esteem?

- and to the notion that children are basically good and need not be disciplined or restrained?
- And today are there not many who are swept away by feminist doctrines that oppose God’s institution of the family?
- Do we not see many churches ordaining female pastors as if it were the height of wisdom to do so?
- And are others not drawn in by Hollywood—seeing their fashions and their attitudes as worthy of admiration?
- Are foolish actors and actresses not consulted about how to live a happy and successful life—
 - even about things like health, parenting, and marriage?
- Yes, the wicked successful man speaks things contrary to God and so sets his mouth against the heavens...
 - yet he is heard all over the earth.

TRANS> Now tell me, have you never struggled with the success of the ungodly in this world?

- Sure, there are some who are brought down before your eyes, but are there not others who seem to get on quite well?

B. The Psalmist confesses that he was nearly brought to ruin when he saw such persons as these!

1. Verse 2 explains that he was in a very serious struggle because of them!

a. He says,

- v. 2: “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped!”
- In other words,
 - he was on the brink of destruction!
 - He was living on the edge, just about to fall into a life of rebellion!
 - He was at the point of rejecting God when he saw the prosperity of these ungodly ones!

b. His envy was such that he was almost ready to switch places with these prosperous ones!

- He was on the verge of trusting in what they were trusting in—themselves and not God!
 - He was about ready to follow them.

- That is what he means by slipping—
- turning away from the Lord God!

2. In verse 13-14, he explains his frustration with his own experience in life...

- v. 13-14: Surely I have cleansed my heart *in vain*, And washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.
- a. He was labouring away to honour God, but what reward did he get?
 - He had expected things to go well for him if he served God, but instead he is plagued all day long...
 - And though he hopes for a better day tomorrow, instead he finds that he is chastened every morning...
 - Why should he continue serving God?
- b. This is very much like Israel when they came out of Egypt to the wilderness...
 - What was the point of it all?
 - At least they had good food and houses in Egypt...
 - They had come out to serve God, but what did they have to show for it?
- c. Have you ever felt this way?
 - Have you ever thought,
 - “Here I am,
 - struggling along in my service to God,
 - denying myself,
 - struggling to be more holy in both heart and life...
 - But to what purpose?
 - It is just one struggle after another!
 - And there is my ungodly neighbour,
 - attaining all his goals,
 - finding great happiness in his immorality...
 - free of all the worries associated with serving God—
 - free to live his own life...
 - free to pursue his own dreams...
 - free to do as he pleases...
 - What is the point of serving God if it is going to be like this!

TRANS> Surely there are many Christians who struggle with these wicked thoughts...

3. Verse 10-11 seem to refer to God's people in general—
 - how they are continually subjected to the display of the wicked's prosperity—
 - day after day it is paraded before them...
 - a. Verse 10 says: "Therefore his people (God's people) return here..."
 - Return where?
 - Again and again they are brought to see the prosperity of the wicked...
 - They are caused to drink the waters of a full cup down to the bottom—
 - to see again and again how well the wicked get on in this world!
 - And I say, if ever this were true, it is today—
 - where we have so much advertising and so much publicity—
 - Their beauty and success and prosperity of the proud are continually displayed before our eyes on our televisions and our computer screens and in our news papers and in the general talk of our neighbours and families!
 - And many times they are displayed to us in artificial ways—we do not see the happy movie star with the new relationship fighting over property from his previous relationship.
 - And remember, the wicked do not have to be those the world calls wicked—
 - often they are just the opposite!
 - It is not the dirty repulsive wickedness that is so attractive, but that wickedness that says,
 - "I can get along beautifully with God" and that seems to do just that!
 - That is the wickedness that is so dangerous to us and that is continually brought before our eyes!
 - b. And when we see it, it makes us question God's government of the world!
 - v. 11 says, "and they say (God's people who are struggling), "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"
 - 1) Some people think that this is referring to what the wicked are saying about God...
 - but I agree with those who think it refers to what the struggling believer is saying...
 - The wicked are not so concerned that God doesn't seem to notice.

- 2) But the believer is the one who sees all the seeming injustice and incongruity and says:
 - Where is God in all this prosperity of the wicked?
 - Does He not know that these people are rejecting Him?
 - Why does He continue to let them flourish and succeed?
 - Why does He let them continue to speak words of arrogance?

- 3) If He is governing the world,
 - why are His servants struggling those who ignore Him prospering?
 - As the prophet Habakkuk says:
 - “Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, *And* hold Your tongue when the wicked devours *A person* more righteous than he?”

- c. My friends this is a real struggle that you must face in this world!
 - 1) You dare not even speak these things when you are in the middle of the struggle...
 - because you realise how discouraging these thoughts would be to your brothers and sisters in the church...
 - As in verse 15, you say,
 - v. 15: If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

 - 2) Yet, even though you know your thinking is not right, the struggle continues.
 - You try to work it out in your mind...
 - But the more you do, the more difficult it seems to be to explain!
 - Verse 16 says:
 - v. 16: When I thought *how* to understand this, It *was* too painful for me—
 - The word “**painful**” here refers to toil that has no profit—
 - You mind is grinding away to understand it all,
 - but you are just spinning your wheels and getting nowhere!
 - How can you say that God is good to His people when those who are not His people seem to be getting along so much better you are?

TRANS> That is the great question!

- That is the struggle that brings you to brink of ruin!
- But take heart Christian
 - there is a resolution to all this!
 - The psalmist says it was too difficult for him to understand all this **until...!**
 - That word “**until**” is a word of hope!
 - He was struggling and writhing in mental anguish **until...**
 - Until what?
 - Verse 17: “Until I went into the sanctuary of God.”

II. The resolution comes when you go to the sanctuary of God!

- The sanctuary of God is the place where God is worshipped and revealed!
 - In the Old Testament, it was the temple where He revealed Himself through ceremonies and such...
 - Now it is Jesus Christ who is revealed to us in the gospel.
 - He is the Word of God who came to reveal God to us and we learn of Him through the Scriptures.
- When you come to the sanctuary, you get God’s perspective on everything.
 - The problem before was that you were looking at the prosperity of the wicked from a worldly perspective.
 - You were looking at it from the perspective of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life...
 - And from **that** perspective, many of the wicked are getting along quite well!
 - They have and enjoy the things of this world...
 - And as long as you look at things from that perspective,
 - you will never find a solution...
 - But how does your perspective change when you come to the sanctuary of God?
 - When you come before Him to hear His word and behold Jesus Christ?

A. First of all, you see the true condition of the wicked!

1. You see beyond their immediate success to where they are headed...
 - a. After you meet with God, you say:
 - v. 17: “Then I understood their end...”
 - The end is what really matters...

- 1) A person may be travelling down a beautiful highway with all the finest delicacies and delights...
 - but if the road leads to a place of misery and ruin from which he cannot escape, it is not a good road at all.
 - There is a way that seems right to a man, whose end is destruction.
 - In the sanctuary, you see not only the way, but also the end of the way.
 - Just because it is going well now does not mean it is well.

- 2) Similarly, if you are building a great building, it may appear to be a very impressive thing along the way...
 - perhaps is a very large building and perhaps it is built with the finest materials...
 - perhaps there is much skill in putting it all together...
 - But if it is a building that is destined to fall once it is complete—
 - all that labour is in vain—it is chasing the wind—it is spending for nothing!

- b. Verse 18 explains what you come to realise about the end of the wicked after you have come into God's sanctuary.
 - 1) You see that God has set them in slippery places and will cast them down to destruction.
 - In other words, you see that all their present prosperity will not last.
 - Though they seem to be standing quite firm and immovable from a worldly perspective,
 - before God, they are destined to be utterly cast down—by His own action!
 - Notice...
 - It doesn't just say that they will fall—
 - It says that God will cast them down... He will act.

 - 2) In the sanctuary of God, you learn of God's judgement against the proud...
 - You realise that He stands over them with the sword of judgement,
 - ready to execute wrath and justice upon them.
 - In their arrogance, they have renounced His government and refused to acknowledge Him...

- Therefore, they will get what they deserve from Him.
- They are guilty of high treason,
 - refusing the rule of the only one who is truly entitled to it...
 - They will be dealt with for their crime.

3) Understand that this is what every human being deserves.

- In our first father Adam,
 - we have all yielded to the temptation of Satan and declared war against God in Heaven.
 - God has appointed a day when He will judge each person for this.

c. But how do you learn about this judgement?

- You not learn about it by comparing how well Christians get along in this world compared to the non-Christians,
 - You learn about it by coming to the sanctuary of God and hearing His word.
- In the sanctuary, His judgement is clearly declared in two ways:

1) First, it is declared in His law.

- The law tells us that sinful soul must die because of its rebellion against God...
 - and it tells that this death is one of everlasting misery and sorrow, first prepared for the Devil and his angels.

2) Secondly, it is declared in the gospel.

- In the gospel, we are shown how Jesus suffered for our sins in order to save us...
 - But when we see the Son of God, suffering on the cross in the place of sinners, we see the horror of our sin!
 - At the cross, we see sin's penalty publicly displayed in the Son of God bearing the awful shame of our sins—
 - imputed to Him before the eyes of His heavenly Father.
 - And we learn that this is the shame that all those who live apart from Christ will have to bare for all eternity!

2. Alas, it is a dreadful prospect!

a. verse 19 says,

- “Oh, how they are *brought* to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.”
- 1) Are they standing proud and tall today, speaking arrogant words and on top of everything?
 - How suddenly it will all change! And that without remedy!
 - Their condition will entirely reverse on that day when God judges the secrets of every man!
 - They will have to face the glorious majesty of their Maker—the One who made Israel tremble even when they stood at a distance.
 - 2) The Bible speaks of how they will cry out for the rocks to hide them—
 - but it will be too late—there will be no refuge...
 - And what’s more, no one will question the justice of it all when the beauty and glory of the God they spurned is fully revealed...
 - The only marvel will be how we could ever treat one so lovely and so terrible in majesty with such contempt.
 - Yes, all the dark, ugly, twisted secrets of every sinner will be revealed in their filth and blackness!
- b. Verse 20 goes on to say that God will despise their very image...
- 1) It will be as when one wakes up from a dream—
 - Their lives of prosperity in this world will be like a fleeting dream...
 - All their pretended beauty will be seen for what it is...
 - nothing but vileness and vanity!
 - The mask will be pulled away and the wretched vileness will be seen.
 - 2) At the sanctuary, we are able to see what man ought to be...what He was created to be...
 - a) First, we see that man ought to be a worshipper of God because we see how worthy God is of worship.
 - God Himself is revealed to us here and we realize that man really has no purpose but to worship God and give honour to Him...
 - And that apart from that, man is utterly useless and vile in whatever he tries to do.
 - He is missing his main purpose—the most excellent thing and the only thing that He was made for...
 - This causes you to realize that the wicked are missing the whole point of life...

- b) Secondly, we see that man ought to be the servant of God because we see Jesus Christ there who is the perfect man...
- As man, He is beautiful because He lived as man was made to live—only for the glory of God...
 - He did not breathe or step apart from the Father’s will, but did all things to please Him...
 - He obeyed Him, even to the point of the death on the cross.
 - And so it is that human glory and human beauty is not in the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life...
 - It is in conformity to God’s will!
 - It is in living as an extension of the glory of God, in harmony with His excellent beauty and wisdom.
 - At the sanctuary, the beauty of Christ is revealed to us, and though we only see it darkly now because of our own corruption...
 - Yet, we see it and when we see it, it make the beauty of the world pale in comparison.

TRANS> And so after a visit to sanctuary,

- You see both the end and the vanity of the worldly man...

3. How foolish you were to envy them!

- a. You are deeply grieved with yourself for being so foolish as to envy those who are headed for destruction and whose lives are utterly vain....

- Verse 21 says,
 - “Thus my heart was grieved and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant.”
- Yes, once you get God’s perspective from going to the sanctuary,
 - you are utterly ashamed of yourself that your heart should have gone out to desire the place of the wicked.
 - You are embarrassed and ashamed because now you can see.

- b. You confess to God how beastly you were:

- v. 22: “I was like a beast before you!”
 - A beast does not have the capacity to know God or worship God and is not made in the image of God.
 - The glory of man is that He can know God and worship God.

- But when you look at things from the world's perspective,
 - you are like a beast before God, only looking for food and comfort and worldly safety,
 - as if man's life was for nothing more than bodily comfort...
 - as if there were no God to worship and serve.
- Truly such behaviour is both reprehensible and inexcusable!

TRANS> You realise this when you have beheld God in the sanctuary...

- You realise how foolish you were to envy the wicked because you see their end.
- But positively, you realise something else...
 - You realise that even though you have been so beastly...

B. God's goodness towards you remains!

1. Though you have slighted Him by your complaints and wondering desires,
 - a. He continues to pour out His grace upon you.
 - Verse 23 says,
 - “Nevertheless [even though I have been so beastly], I am continually with you; You hold me by my right hand.”
 - Even though your heart was departing from Him,
 - You were still continually with God—
 - As a wondering sheep,
 - He would not let you out of sight but kept you under His eye.
 - Even though your steps nearly slipped so that you fell to ruin...
 - You did not fall because He held you by your right hand.
 - b. And because He has kept you even when you were so beastly,
 - you are greatly confident that He will “guide you with His counsel and afterward receive you to glory...”
 - That is what you tell Him in verse 24...
 - “Guiding you with His counsel” means that He will impart wisdom to you so that you will recover your senses...
 - He will reveal Himself to you and lead you in His way until He brings you into His heavenly kingdom...

- He will keep you in the path of life so that you will not depart from Him.
- c. You know this when you come to the sanctuary because there you are shown God's keeping grace to His people
- There He reveals to you His covenant promise that He will be your God and that you will be His people...
 - There He reveals to you His promise that He will never leave you nor forsake you, but will give you His Holy Spirit.
 - And that the Spirit will guide you into all truth and in the end, glorify you and make you like Jesus—holy and pure...
 - There He reveals to you how He spared not His only begotten Son, but gave Him up for you that you might have the forgiveness of sins!
 - You realise that though you deserve to perish with the wicked, yet God has a different plan for you...

TRANS> How good God is to His own!

- How good He is to you whose hearts are purified by Him!
 - to you who have been given the gift of faith!
 - How could you ever even think of departing from Him!
 - How could your heart envy the wicked when besides seeing the miserable end of the wicked...
 - you also have seen God's goodness to you, and the glorious end He has prepared for you?
2. Can you not confess with the psalmist the words of vs. 25-26?
- v. 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.
- a. What is it you want from heaven or earth once you see what God has given you in His Son?
- When you realize that in Christ He has forgiven all your sins, casting them away from Him forever...
 - And that in Christ, He has destined you for glory so that you will no longer be alienated from God, living for nothing but this world...
 - but restored to your created purpose as a true worshipper and servant of God...

- restored to the beauty of God’s image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness!
 - What else could you desire in all heaven and earth if you have God?
 - What does the world have in comparison to all this!
- b. Oh yes, your heart and your flesh fail...
- You will continue to waver and to wonder because of your corruption...
 - But God is the strength of your heart—the One who will keep you...
 - And He is your portion forever—
 - The one you feed upon, the one who sustains you and supplies with all things you need for eternal life...
 - The One who says, “eat my flesh and you will live forever.”
 - This One is your portion—
 - The worldly man is not your portion...
 - You do not gain eternal life by feeding upon the worldly man and his philosophies and his success...
 - Eternal life comes when the Lord Himself is your portion.

Conclusion...

And so, after all is said and done,

- after the struggle with the prosperity of the wicked...
- you come forth all the more confident and satisfied in God than ever before!
 - The worldly man, no matter how successful, cannot stand up to the comparison with God...
 - But in your weakness, you had to make the comparison and be brought to understand God revealed in the Sanctuary—
 - The goodness of God to His people revealed in Jesus Christ.
 - Yes, the wavering and the doubts may come,
 - but the truth will prevail so that you will finally conclude as the psalmist does that God truly is good to His people...
 - and you will be able to confess with strong faith the words of v. 27 and 28:
 - v. 27-28: For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But *it is* good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works.

- In the upcoming sections of Matthew's gospel,
 - we will see how there were those in Israel when Jesus was revealed in the world who deserted the Lord for harlotry—
 - They were so blind that they chose the prosperity of the world and their worldly comfort and positions instead of the reproach of Christ.
 - Those who are far from Christ will surely perish, for they have rejected the only hope of salvation.
- But may it be the case with each of you that you will see how good it is for you to draw near to God...
 - to come to Christ and trust in Him instead of trusting in the world...
 - And then you will be able to declare all of His works!
 - Instead of being ashamed of your beastly life...
 - You will be able to tell the world how good God is to His people...
 - How He takes them though they be sinners...
 - and how He forgives them and keeps them forever...
 - and how He brings them to perfect glory.
 - For all eternity, you will be able to rejoice in His goodness and will say:
 - “Truly, God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.”
 - Isn't that a wonderful future?
 - Endless experience of His goodness...
 - Endless praise for His goodness...
 - That is your portion as a believer!