

As I read Psalm 73, my mind went to The Book of the Prophet AMOS. Not one of the great names OF PROPHECY... Although the children at my first school recognised it! (from the TV children's programme Amos and Andy). AMOS Wrote in 8th century BC when both Israel and Judah were economically upwardly MOBILE.

The ancient trade routes to the East were open, PROSPERITY flooded in, but not distributed fairly. Most went into pockets of a few who grabbed the land of small-holders to create huge estates (FORBIDDEN in the TORAH).

Within a few years the majority of the people were, figuratively speaking...ground into the dust - Amos 5 'They sell the needy for a pair of sandals! They trample on the heads of the poor..as upon the dust of the ground.' 'You oppress the righteous, and take bribes, you deprive the poor of justice in the courts'.

The rich had their religious shrines. DROPPED the name of God...as they turned a BLIND eye to INJUSTICE.

We don't know the date of Psalm 73. But it's NOT DIFFICULT to make the connection between the times of AMOS and our psalm this morning.

Listen again... FOLLOW IT If you want...The text is difficult in parts, so MY VERSION may not always be 100% accurate. May jump the odd verse (for the sake of time or because I couldn't understand it. But I'm trying to give the main DRIFT.)

v3 we'll come back to verse 1 and 2. I saw the prosperity of the wicked. A first hand witness...

v4 They're fit and Healthy. You would find them down at the gym on the treadmill etc.. !

v5, bread enough and to spare..... kids at the right schools... good connections, Not 'plagued'...nothing ever goes wrong...

v6 self-satisfied... flaunted. (like a necklace)

v7 Callous! Hard-hearted! Insensitive to the pain and need all around them. Their minds are on other things - thinking up new kinds of evil.

v8 Disdainful. Enjoy putting people down. Aggressive.

v9 (not sure about the meaning of this.) God is in his heaven... we'll run things on earth.

v11 ... v12 To SUM UP! This is what the wicked are like - carefree and getting rich...

And here's ME (verse 13) Keeping MY heart clean - thinking pure things, washing my hands in innocence - doing the right things...

v14 he has to live with all the injustice going on around him. But back to verse 3? He's not just aggrieved with the 'success' of the wicked.. He's tempted to envy their success. (verse 2) I had almost lost my foothold.

v 15 Nobody to talk to. If I owned up to this, I would have betrayed your children! THE PASTOR speaking! He doesn't want the flock to go through...

v16 All this got me down, until v17 - I entered the sanctuary of God.

At last he gets on his knees! 'then I understood the final destiny of the wicked'. verses 18,19,20 Quote from a paraphrase of Psalm 73 by Abraham Fraunce (17th century) :

*There did I see, O Lord, these men's unfortunate endings,
endings mute, and fit (appropriate) for their ungodly beginnings*

...how they did stand in slippery places, lifted aloft, that their downfall might be the greater! Living Lord, how soon is this their glory dashed, confounded, gone, drown'd in destruction endless! Their fame outworn. their names extinct in a moment... like a dream...

(Compare with Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1 46-55 (8 centuries later) said in a not dissimilar situation, under the oppression of a powerful, bullying, arrogant, greedy, occupying, and still confident, even joyful, in God her Saviour...who scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts, brings down rulers from their thrones, lifts up the humble and meek, etc, etc. In other words a God who stands man's priorities, standards, on their heads. She would know her history! Israel had stood at the graveside of each of the foreign powers which had occupied her...Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and would probably have done the same with deceased Rome. She also had personal confirmation in her own life.... Her God is one who stands human priorities on their heads.

So the Psalmist goes into repentance mode! v21,22.. and comes out the other side... verse 23-26 as Fraunce has it...:

YET Thou held'st my hand, and kepst my soul from the dungeon. Thou didst guide my feet and me with GLORY received'st! (cf Romans 8 . 30. Those he justified them he also glorified..) For what in heaven or earth shall I love or worthily wonder (prize?) but my most good God, my Lord and Mighty Jehovah? (cf heb rews 4.14) We have a Great High Priest who has passed into the heavens. Though my flesh oft faint , my heart oft drowned in horror, God never faileth, but will be my mighty protector...and His Name will I praise, and sing his glory renown'd.

And all the saints said AMEN!

QUESTIONS... Does evil get me down? for evil however carefully disguised to succeed... I must turn my grievance into urgent prayer and painstaking action... Am I tempted to ENVY the prosperity OF ANY KIND - the status, the success, the wealth of the wicked... or just of OTHERS? Answer.... from the hymn Why should I fret my sould with care? 'Since all is Christ's and Christ is mine, why should I have a care? For Jesus is a friend of mine