

Date	August 29, 2010
Series	The Meeting in Jerusalem
Title	Is it worth it? (God's goodness on trial)
Big Idea	Divine goodness is not prosperity, but presence.
Text	Psalm 73
Speaker	Roger Valci

Introduction:

For many years, I ordered a magazine entitled, "Christian History". It took a figure or moment in church history and then made an entire issue about it. I loved it because in one issue, I could master a working knowledge of a key historical topic in church history. Recently, to my disappointment, the magazine folded. I had just paid a 3 year subscription so I was told that they would transfer my payment to my Christianity Today subscription, the parent organization. I thought that seemed fair so I agreed. Then I noticed that stopped getting my Christianity Today stopped coming. 1 month...3 months...6 months...12 months. I would make phone calls explain the scenario and nothing would change. Finally, I had to speak to a manager and say, "This was your arrangement." "I am the customer." "How are you going to serve me?" For if any organization fails to meet a stated expectation, they will complain saying, "This is not worth it" and then they will take their business elsewhere.

You know what I am talking about. **When people fail to deliver on their word, we begin to doubt their credibility.**

Your **plumber** tells you over the phone that he will be at your house by 8am and you wait all morning for him only to see him knocking at your door at noon.

Your **airline** tells you that your plane will depart at a certain time and you look up at the screen in the airport terminal and all you see is the word, "Delayed."

Your **salesman** told you in the showroom that your new car would not need servicing for the first 30,000 miles, yet you find yourself back at the dealer to fix another unexpected surprise.

We live in a world of promises, expectations and hopes and when people fail to meet up to their word, we grow cynical, we become frustrated and we doubt saying to ourselves, "This is not worth the hassle."

What is true for consumer goods is certainly true with our **relationships**.

How many quarrels in **marriages** have arisen by one party or the other because certain expectations were not met?

Or take **children** as an example. Has your child ever looked up at you with those baby blues and said, "But Daddy you told me that we would go to the park after my nap."

Whether we realize it or not, people grasp hold of our words and set their hopes, their ambitions, their schedules on our stated intentions.

Then there is **our relationship with God. Have you ever been disappointed with God?** You thought He promised you one thing and so you allow your hopes to increase, your mind to dream, your heart run with enthusiasm only to find that your expectation never materialized. What do you do now? If the business world, we go to customer service department and voice our complaint, perhaps even to return a product and get our money back. **But where do you go when you are at odds with God? What do you do when the facts of faith do not measure up with the facts of life?**

It is these all too familiar, but never stated, questions of doubt we find ourselves this morning. It is down this road that our text leads us. And if we were honest with ourselves, we can almost hear these words coming from our lips, **"Is it worth it?"** This is not the life I dreamed of when I came to faith. **"Is it worth it?"** (Let's begin in prayer).

The QUESTION of God's goodness:

Turn in your Bibles to **Psalm 73**. We first notice the author of our text, **Asaph**. Asaph was one of David's chief musicians in the tabernacle. He lived a good moral life in accordance with the laws of Moses and spent his time serving God's people in the sanctuary. In today's world, we might call him a pastor. After David moved the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he enlisted **well respected, passionate, people of integrity** to fill God's house with praise and worship. In David's mind, Asaph was just the person for the task. You might consider him **the "Jason Gawel" of the church.**

Asaph begins his psalm with a **statement of fact, a doctrinal statement of belief about a particular characteristic of God, His goodness. "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart"** (Ps 73:1). But then he immediately goes on to state his dilemma or his crisis of faith. **"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. (Why?) For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked"** (Ps 73:2-3). *What is it that caused Asaph's doubts? What was it that almost caused him to throw in the towel of his faith? What object almost caused him to stumble in his faith?* The answer is summarized this way: **"If God is good, then how can the wicked prosper?"** **What he saw in reality didn't measure up to his knowledge of faith. His doctrine, His Bible, His understanding and experience of the person of God, His philosophy of life told him that if I live a good life, if I am obedient life to God's commands and serve him faithfully, then I should succeed. Conversely, those who choose to walk their own way, who live life without God, who set their own course in life, they should suffer.** Yet, when he walked outside the door of his house, when he surveyed the land, when he looked who had the BMW's and who didn't, he saw

that the opposite was true. The facts of life did not measure up with the facts of faith. **The wicked, the ungodly, the selfish are flourishing and it is the righteous who suffer.**

*In 1789, 14 years before Lewis and Clark began their famous expedition to the west, a fur trader from Canada, **Sir Alexander Mackenzie**, set out in an effort to find a water route to the Pacific. His valiant group followed a mighty river (now named the Mackenzie) with high hopes, paddling furiously amid great danger. Unfortunately, the river didn't empty into the Pacific, but into the Arctic Ocean. In his diary, Mackenzie called his discovery the "**River of Disappointment.**"*

Like Mackenzie, Asaph found himself afloat on the river of disappointment. His theology and experience were conflicting and he began to doubt the goodness of God. **If Yahweh is a good God, a moral God, the creator of all material things, he thought, then why do the wicked prosper?** He then goes on to list the details of his complaint against the wicked.

In **verse 4** he notices they are **healthy** and free from disease.

Verse 5 he observes their **wealth** enables them to spend leisurely time at the beach while the righteous work all 5 day in under the hot sun.

Because of this, according to **verse 6**, they adorn themselves with **pride** like women wearing a fine string of pearls and they clothe themselves with **violence acts**. *When you don't play by the rules and don't care who gets mowed over in the process, when you have no regard for causalities and desire only the straightest path to success, when the bottom line is the profit margin and that is all that matters, then **pride** and **violence** are the vices are your life which enable your pocket book to grow and grow.*

According to **verses 7-9**, the source of such activities arises from a **hardened heart** that arrogantly **blasphemes God** and **lays claim to both heaven and earth (Ps 73:9-10)**. These are people of immense greed.

As so the wicked prosper often at the expense of the righteous and we ask ourselves, "**Is it worth it?**"

A wealthy man went duck hunting with one of his employees named Sam, As they traveled down the highway, Sam drove over a nail and his tire went flat. He pulled over to the side of the road and began to exchange the flat tire for the spare. In the process, he accidentally hit his finger

and let go with some bad words. He quickly fell to his knees, asking God's forgiveness, "Lord, it's so difficult at times to live the Christian life," he prayed. Sam" said his boss, "I know you're a Christian. But tell me, why do you struggle so? **I'm an atheist, and I don't have problems like that.**"

Problems like that... What kind of problems does Christian have that atheist or the ungodly do not?

How about explaining why your kid can't play **soccer on Sunday** in the city league while his friends go off and play because you have chosen to honor God's pattern and keep The Meeting a priority?

Where's the logic in **tithing**?" Let's be honest. Can your budget really take that big of a hit? To make matters worse, how about the pressure of honoring your **building pledge** while business is declining?

Walking the straight and narrow path sure seems dull. Everyone has **habits**, what makes mine so bad that I have to quit?

I know my **marriage** is bad. Whose isn't? Why should I try so hard to make it good?

It is too hard **to read the Bible** and too boring. Can I just read a Christian novel instead?

The hard path of **consistent and meaningful prayer** life is just too much work to attain.

How many times do I have to go to **The Meeting**? Can't I simply be a CEO Christian – Christmas and Easter only?

All issues and struggles that the atheist, the ungodly, the wicked never has to deal with.

Like a good church boy, Asaph tried to live a righteous life, but in his heart he envied the wicked for their lack of struggle with the things of God. And I believe if we are honest, there are times when we do too.

Trying to find comfort in his miserable state, Asaph turns **to the people of God for answers.**

Verse ten reads, "**Therefore his people (not "their people" as the NIV suggests) turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.**" Surprisingly, **Asaph discovers that THE PEOPLE OF GOD are caught up in chasing after the prosperity of the wicked.** Their enlightenment, their wealth and their success captivate the people of God and so they drink up their lifestyles in abundance. When Asaph confronts the people of God about his concerns in verse 10, they say to him in verse 11, "**How can**

*God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" (Ps 73:11). **Essentially, the people of God tell Asaph, "Don't take your doctrine so seriously Asaph. God is not taking account of every little detail in life. Don't be a stiff. Let loose and live easy."** Folks, hear my words when I say, "Your view of God determines how you live." The idea some activities can be done outside of His knowledge leads to a life that believes it can get away with minor infractions of the faith.*

Asaph concludes his findings in **verse 12, "This is what the wicked are like — always carefree, they increase in wealth." "If this is how life of faith is," he says, "then I feel like quitting."** Twice he mentions the **vanity**, the meaningless effort he put forth to live a godly life in **verse 13**. Then in verse 14 he says, **"Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence." "All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning"** (Ps 73:14).

Asaph then tries to find someone to share his troubles with, but where can the pastor go for help? Whose shoulder can he cry on? According to verse 15, he decides to keep all his troubles inside for if he voiced his true doubts, he might have led God's children astray. Not wanting to add company to his misery, he isolates his struggle to the unseen world of the soul.

"Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart." Yet, if this is true, then why are the righteous suffering and wicked prospering. Everywhere I turn I find my theology clashing with the realities of this world. **"When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me"** (Ps 73:16). Asaph begins to doubt. **Doubt comes into our lives when the thought we believed true for our lives never materializes (2x)**. Asaph's doubt leads to discouragement and from this state he asks, **"Is living a godly life worth it?"** After looking at the well being of the wicked and the struggles of the righteous, the stark reality he concludes up to this point is that, **"No, it is not worth it."**

The PLACE to find God's goodness:

The company of **the discouraged** is a very noble company. Not too long ago, the Hayden Planetarium in New York City issued an invitation to all those who were interested in applying to be a part of the crew on the first journey to another planet. **Eighteen thousand people applied.** They gave the applications to a panel of psychologists, who examined them thoroughly and came to the conclusion that in the vast majority of incidents, **those who applied did so because they were discouraged with their lives here and hoped they could find a new life somewhere else.** Discouraged people are **distant people.**

Ask any person in distress **what have they done to get out, what books have they read, who have they talked too, where did they go for help?** Most times, they will not be able to answer you **because they have not tried.** Let me ask you this question, **when a Christian is struggling with real doubt, what is the first thing they tend to do skip out on? Going to church. Going to The Meeting.** Real doubt takes you **AWAY** from God house, **AWAY** from God's people and **AWAY** from God's presence. And when we are **AWAY** from God's presence long enough, life takes on a dull gray feel where there is no sun, no rainbows, no springtime. Only winter, cold, dark winter.

Discouragement skews our view of life. According to **William Ward, "Discouragement is dissatisfaction with the past, distaste for the present, and distrust of the future. It is ingratitude for the blessings of yesterday, indifference to the opportunities of today, and insecurity regarding strength for tomorrow. It is unawareness of the presence of beauty, unconcern for the needs of our fellowman, and unbelief in the promises of old. It is impatience with time, immaturity of thought, and impoliteness to God."** Asaph's discouragement caged him in a cell of oppression.

Yet, in Asaph life we do see that he that in his **DISCOURAGEMENT**, in his **DOUBT**, in his **DEPRESSION**, he goes to **church**. He enters **The Meeting**. And in The Meeting something happens that changes his whole outlook in life.

Read **verse 17** with me. **"Till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." Asaph goes to church and gains a new perspective on life.**

- Perhaps he heard **the choruses of praise** lifting the ceiling of the tabernacle.
- Maybe it was **proclamation of the Torah, God's word**, which gave him a new set of eyes.
- Possibly, someone came beside Asaph, put their hand on his shoulder and began to **pray** that the heaviness of life to be lifted.
- Or maybe it was a **prophetic word** uttered from one of God's prophets that brought healing to the affliction of his soul.
- It may have been the **sacrificial gift** of an impoverished person that lifted his faith.

The text does not tell us what he saw or heard. **All we know is WHERE he went. In his distress, in his discouragement, in his doubt, he went to church and in church he gains a whole new outlook on life.**

Folks, there is things that happen in **THIS ROOM** that will never happen anywhere else. Life puts on it squeeze. It's pressures and anxieties blur our ability to see. We grow discouraged. We loose the faith. We sometimes throw in the towel. But when we come into this room, when we enter God's house, when His presence shows up in powerful ways, life priorities begin to reshuffle. Anxieties subside. Faith rises. Peace surfaces. Hope returns. Strength surfaces.

Asaph went to church and in church God gives him a long-range point of view in life. Perhaps, you are in need of a new perspective on life, a new outlook on a dull landscape, then you have come to the right place. Asaph went to church, He went to The Meeting, God gives him a long range point of view.

The EXPERIENCE of God's goodness:

"Till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny" (Ps 73:17). Upon entering into the sanctuary, Asaph gains new understanding. Pity is the man or woman who does not frequent the doors to the house of God to gain the true perspective of this world. In Asaph's case, after he enters the sanctuary, God gives him two insights. First, he sees that he has OVERESTIMATED the prosperity of the wicked. "Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies." (Ps 73:18-20). The lives of the wicked will come to sudden ruin. Their security of their life is not on a firm foundation. As in the game of Life, their lives are pointed to a Day or Reckoning unless they somehow find God. Even the prosperity they possess is fleeting. According to verse 20, their life is compared to the frustrating experience of being woken up in the middle of a dream only to discover that what appeared to be fact is actually only an illusion. Even so, the prosperity of the wicked is only a mere fantasy.

Not only does Asaph overestimate the prosperity of the wicked. He also UNDERESTIMATES the benefits of the righteous. Read with me verse 23 and 24: "Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory."

Here we come to the main point of the Psalm. Though many commentators want to focus on verse 17 WHERE Asaph new perspective is found in the sanctuary, I believe we find here the answer to our proposed question. "If God is good, then how can the wicked prosper?" To which

we know discover that **DIVINE GOODNESS IS NOT PROSPERITY, BUT PRESENCE** (2x) – the transformative presence of God that typically is found in The Meeting.

God's presence in this life and God's presence in the next. And it is a presence that seems to manifest most often in The Meeting. God's presence in this room is a foretaste of His presence in the next life.

Concerning this life, Asaph pictures a parent holding a child's hand. For those of you with small children, you remember this stage. You don't walk across the street or in the mall or in a crowded area without holding our children's hands. Why? it is our way as parents **to guard them and to guide them** though the potential dangers of this life. From their vantage point, **it is security and play (walking over ice in New England)**. Why? Because Mommy and Daddy will never let them fall. And that is the picture we have here. **Our Heavenly Father demonstrates His presence in protecting us from harm and guiding us through life.**

Concerning the next life, we could say much about the future glory that awaits us in heaven. Paul says, in the book of Romans, **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Ro 8:18)**. Again he says, **"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (2Co 4:17)**. Quoting a dear saint I believe most of you are familiar with: *"I have hope in the future. The Bible speaks about bodies being glorified. I know the meaning of that now. It's the time after my death here when I, the quadriplegic, will be on my feet dancing"* (Joni Eareckson Tada). What is the aim of this gloried state? John says, **"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn 14:3)**. **Divine goodness is not prosperity, but presence -- God's presence in this life and God's presence in the next.** Folks, if you don't like the

Presence of God, you won't like heaven. The true reward of heaven is not mansions, not streets of gold, not perfect health, not even reunion with loved ones. Heavens true reward is access to the person and presence of God. "Now **THIS is eternal life**: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). The Meeting gives us glimpses of that glory, moments where time dissipates and we revel in the goodness, the mercy, the grace and love of our Heavenly Father.

The Meeting is ALL about the presence of God. If we say The Meeting is **boring**. One of the greatest indictments against Christ's church is that it is boring. It is because we have learned to gather with His presence (that is made The Meeting about our personal desires or preferences) or that we don't like His presence (which means you probably won't like heaven much). Either way, we have some serious trouble in Mudville.

Conclusion – The PROMISE of God's goodness:

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.²⁵ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.²⁶ Those who are far from you will perish—you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸

From a perspective OUTSIDE the presence of God, Asaph questioned God's goodness. But once he approached the house of God, once he attended The Meeting, his world began to change. He enters the tabernacle envying his neighbor and leaves seeing how rich he is. He discovers that IF you have everything in world and not God, you are poor. Having entered in the sanctuary, he obtains a long-range point of view. This new perspective enables him to declare honestly and with sincere joy, "It is good to be near God" (Ps 73:28). Divine goodness is not found in prosperity, but in enjoying the presence of God – a presence that typically surfaces right here in this room.

Is it worth it? Is living the Christian life really worth the effort? I guess the answer this question depends on where you stand. **If** you are outside of God's presence, away from the fellowship of His people, distant from His house, **then** I imagine that the temptation to travel easier paths is great. **But if** you are standing in the house of God and somehow the worship, the preaching of the Word of God, through the love and fellowship of the saints, you somehow see a glimpse of eternity, **then** you firmly begin to see that the goal of our faith is not in the abundance of possessions **but in a person -- Jesus Christ. Divine goodness is not found in prosperity, in the abundance of worldly wealth, but in enjoying the presence of God – an experience that typically happens right here in The Meeting.** Let's us close our time together in prayer.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

BRING



JULY, 2010 VALLEY CHRISTIAN CENTER COMMUNITY SERVICE RECAP

- July 1 – Shepherd’s Gate (Livermore) – Lorraine Demmel – food pantry – 3 hours
- July 4 – Dublin Heritage Center (Dublin) – Jayne Coehlo – 6 hours
- July 12 – Shepherd’s Gate (Livermore) – Cynthia & Aaron Newberg – food pantry – 4 hours total
- July 15 – Shepherd’s Gate (Livermore) – Becky Nohr, Lorraine Demmel, Anna Edwards, Gloria Gregory – food pantry – 8.5 hours total
- July 15 – Santa Rita Jail (Dublin) – Rachel Webb, meeting with chaplain – 1 hour
- July 21 – Shepherd’s Gate (Livermore) – Becky Nohr – event meeting – 1 hour
- July 22 – Santa Rita Jail (Dublin) – Rachel Webb – Bible study/prayer – 2 hours
- July 28 – Shepherd’s Gate (Livermore) – Becky Nohr, Aaron Newberg, Nancy Rudnick – event invitation envelope stuffing – 10.5 hours total
- July 29 – Shepherd’s Gate (Livermore) – Becky Nohr, Alannah McCollun, Kathy Cariveau, - food pantry – 9.5 hours total
- July 29 – Santa Rita Jail (Dublin) – Rachel Webb – Bible study/prayer – 2 hours
- Agape Foster Family Agency (Dublin) – Linda Faulkner (99 hours), Rob Faulkner (8 hours) – 107 hours total (includes booth time at Corn Fest in Brentwood)
- Easter Seals Kaleidoscope (Dublin)- Eric Fabianac and crew – painted exterior of both portables – 48 hours total
- Shepherd’s Gate (Livermore) – Becky Nohr – planning, phone calls, e-mail re: volunteer connections– 9 hours total
- Dublin Senior Center (Dublin) – Diane Deming (5), Shari Jarrett (3), Eddie Jo Mack (5), Jim Mack (4), Ruth Edwards (8) – various volunteer work – 25 hours total
- Dublin Senior Center (Dublin) – Vacation Bible School children created cards for Dublin Senior Center seniors – 100 children @ 15 minutes each (25 hours) + 1 hour leaders’ prep and help = total 26 hours (cards passed out to seniors by a VBS child at senior center lunch in August)
- Open Heart Kitchen (Livermore) – Emilia Orozco (7), Michael Orozco (3.5), Bob Hilton (2), Christi Hilton (2), Tom Blinn (2.5), Pam Blinn (2.5), Keith Cariveau (2.5), Cynthia Newberg (2.5), Aaron Newberg (2.5), Marie Bassinger (2), Sadiq Anthony (2), Monica Anthony (2), Miriam Anthony (2) – 35 hours total
- San Ramon Valley Medical Center (San Ramon) – Tricia Robinson – 16 hours
- Discover Counseling Center (Danville) – Jeff Robinson – 20 hours
- Santa Rita Jail/Prison Ministry (Dublin) – Dale Silva – 1 hour communication
- Guide Dogs For The Blind (Tri-Valley) – Lynn and Colleen Fitzpatrick – 16 hours total
- Valley Pregnancy Center (Dublin) – Eva Hardy (8), Annette Maniego (12) – 20 hours total
- Agape Foster Family Agency (Dublin) – Sydney Allison – making Christmas Stockings – 7 hours
- Tutoring Vietnamese children (San Ramon) – Sydney Allison – 12 hours
- San Ramon Senior Center (San Ramon) – Garrett Allison – driving van – 56 hours

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

BRING



- Senior Support System of Tri-Valley – Christi Hilton – volunteer meeting at office and time with senior matched with – 4 hours
- Senior Support System of Tri-Valley – Mary Hootman – volunteer meeting at office and time with senior matched with – 6 hours
- Neighborhood litter cleanup (Dublin) – Mary Ackley – 4 hours
- Neighborhood litter clean-up (San Ramon) – Sally Scholl – 4 hours
- Administrative time – Diane Deming (Dublin), Emilia Orozco (Livermore), Eva Hardy (Dublin), Jayne Coehlo (Dublin), Gloria Gregory (all) – total 24 hours (of those 14 est. Dublin related)

TOTAL JULY COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS = 487.5 (Year-to-date total = 3,742)

TOTAL DUBLIN COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS = 263 (Year-to-date total = 2,354 of the 2,500 pledged for 2010.)

Highlights of July:

- Rachel Webb begins our ministry at Santa Rita Jail on July 22, 2010. She is scheduled to meet with prisoners weekly in 2 hour segments!
- Christi Hilton and Mary Hootman are our first VOCers to be matched with seniors and begin volunteer efforts through the Senior Support System of the Tri-Valley in July!
- Vacation Bible School childrens' outreach to senior citizens through Dublin Senior Center

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

BRING



# Hours	607	232	559	663	530	659	488					
# Volunteers	148	40	53	124	99	196	159					

Current month volunteer hours/Yearly total

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SUNDAY MORNINGS

September 26 - November 14



Extreme
MAKEOVER
FAMILY EDITION

UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, ITS BUILDERS LABOR IN VAIN.

PSALM 127:1



THE
MEETING:
plan your life around it

Is it worth it?

Can't I live my life without THE MEETING?

- Psalm 73

THE MEETING

plan your life around it

the QUESTION of God's goodness

*“Surely God is **good** to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart”*

Psalm 73:1

THE MEETING

plan your life around it

the PLACE of God's goodness

*“Till I entered the sanctuary of God;
(Till I came to THE MEETING)
then I understood their final destiny”*

Psalm 73:17





THE
MEETING

plan your life around it

the EXPERIENCE
of God's goodness

*“Yet I am always with You;
You hold me by my right hand,
You guide me with Your counsel,
and afterward You will take me into glory.”*

Psalm 73:23-24

THE MEETING

plan your life around it

Divine goodness is **NOT**
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THE MEETING



THE MEETING

plan your life around it

the PROMISE of God's goodness

"It is good to be near God."

Psalm 73:28





THE
MEETING
plan your life around it

Is it worth it?

Can't I live my life without THE MEETING?

- Psalm 73