

How can we make sense of it all?

“till I entered the sanctuary of God”

Psalm 73:17

I recall the incident as though it was yesterday. I was a volunteer chaplain in criminal court and went early every Wednesday morning to visit the inmates who had been brought to a central court. Until a prisoner has had their trial date set they had to appear every week to be certain they were not lost in the shuffle.

The central room where they all were held was about 50 feet square. Perhaps 25-30 men were milling around in the big cell. I would get a docket of all those who were to appear that day in court and speak through the wall of bars separating me from them.

I tried to be sure each one knew about duty counsel, that their families knew they were in jail and then would seek to share the Gospel with any who would listen. I would tell them that Judge So and So was presiding today and he was the judge they would face. Then I mentioned their lawyer's name and said that their lawyer would plead their case. I then said that some day we all would face the Judge of all the earth and asked them if they had retained someone to plead their case before our Creator.

This gave me opportunity to share that Jesus had come to plead the case of sinners before God and we could retain Him by believing on His cross work and resurrection for us.

One bright summer morning when I was about to enter the central cell area a guard confronted me. He did not wish to keep me from going in the area but expressed a problem he had in an angry manner. It seems his much loved wife had died in her 30's and he was alone. He was angry with God for taking such a

fine woman when “all the criminal types in that cell seemed to live long lives.”

One thing was certain, I did not try to give this grieving man a flippant or trite answer. He was hurting terribly and needed a soft answer. I started by sympathizing with him in his grief and got him to speak about his late wife. He softened considerably and so I gently told him that when Jesus walked the earth He wept at such scenes of death. Then I left it for a more opportune time to say more.

The Psalmist in Psalm 73 was in a really difficult situation and wondered how to make sense of his life just like that prison guard. The problem the Psalmist had was that he spent a lot of time looking at how easy the wicked, irreligious people had it compared to him. It can stir up discontent with our portion in life if we look too long and hard at those with a lot more than we have.

Then after spending too much time pondering the good life of wicked people he decided his faith in God was useless, Living for the Lord did not pay, rather it cost him dearly. When he thought of telling other believers his dilemma he realised that it would offend them so he had to keep quiet with all his doubts.

Sometimes we cannot make sense of our suffering and nothing seems to cheer us up or give us comfort. We can't talk to anyone because they will not understand or else will get offended at our apparent lack of trust in God.

Then something happened that transformed the poor doubter. He went to church. How could that help him you say? Well, we need to think

about what church is for if we want an answer. God created church as a channel of blessing and instruction for His people. When the man went to church he entered the place where God's voice is heard. The Bible was taught. Hymns about Bible truth were sung there. He met with other people whose suffering he knew about. He saw how they still sang God's praise and seemed to be content with their sad circumstances. He was in the place that spoke of One who loved sinners so much He left the splendour and glory of heaven and lived, died and rose again for us.

He learned that the coming of the Messiah was God's ultimate expression of love toward us. As he learned more and more about the Man of sorrows, he began to see that his sad circumstances were not nearly as difficult as those of Jesus. He then understood that he was precious to God and greatly loved. He also learned that the wicked who prospered were in a slippery slope that was leading to eternal destruction.

His journey, on the other hand, led to eternal joy and happiness. The joy and happiness he was deprived of in this short life was not worthy of comparing to the riches he was going to have in heaven.

Do you need to look past the present and see what lies in eternity? Are you prepared to go to eternal joy? Or are you among those who have refused Jesus' offer of forgiveness now and happiness forever? The way to eternal bliss beyond the present tears is open to all who will accept sorrow now in order to have heaven forever. Jesus is the only way.