

## Can They See Us?

*Psalm 73*

**Y**ou may have learned a little poem as a child—do you remember it?  
*“Here’s the church, here’s the steeple, open the door, and see the people!”*

The people of the world we live in are today asking questions like, “So what? What is so important about a building and people, many of whom do not really believe what the church teaches anyway?” Many people drive past our church every week—do they see us? Many more people come into contact with the people who make up our church—can they see us? Can they see us at work for our Lord, being what we claim to be?

Or put another way—what has happened in the past week, or even past month, that would cause someone to say of our church, “They really believe what they teach. That is a church that really loves the Lord and loves people, too?”

Our world does not want us to **say** why we are here. It wants to **see** why we are here! It is hypocrisy for us to say, “We are here because of God’s love,” and then fail to reveal that love. We are phonies if we say, “We are a church because we believe in the Bible and missions,” and then fail to apply the Bible to daily living and refuse to try to reach the family down the road.

Our church, you and me, is to be the kind of influence in our community that we believe Christ would be if He were here in the flesh. We are to seek to draw all people, not to ourselves, but to Christ, and Christ alone. Can they see us? Do they see us working for our Lord, being what we claim to be?

Out there is a world of confusion, a world of doubt, of sin, of apostasy, of injustice. There are people who are looking for some meaning to life, who are looking at our lives to see if we are actually living like Christ would live in these days. They are actually hoping that we will do just that because it will offer hope to their own lives that maybe—just maybe—there is a God who loves and cares, and who will save them from their own messed up lives.

Psalm 73 tells us of a man who experienced a lot of doubt concerning his own faith in God, especially when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. He says that his feet almost slipped, that his faith had been like slippery ice, because he was envious of those whose lives were lived in open rebellion against God. Instead of being

punished, they prospered! His doubts grew steadily worse, and his confusion loomed over his soul, until he did not know what to do.

Finally, he went to the sanctuary, to the Temple, to reason out this predicament with God, to seek God's help and guidance, to ask "Why?" Think with me along these lines: The psalmist had a problem, he had confusion, he had doubts. The influence of the Temple was so strong in his life, so prevalent in the community, that he knew he could go there and look for solutions. Our church is to be so influential and prevalent in our community, that people who look for solutions to problems in their lives, including the problem of what to do about the sin in their lives, can know where to come for help and for guidance.

Just as the Temple was visible to the psalmist, even so our congregation should be visible, in a very real sense, to the people of our area. Why? Let's look at a few reasons:

## **1 The first reason our church should be more visible is to help others see the ways of God, vv. 16-20**

The psalmist says in v. 16 that when he thought of how to understand the seeming injustice of the prosperity of the wicked, it seemed to him to be a wearisome task, something beyond his comprehension, until he went into the sanctuary of his God. It was then that he "*understood their final destiny,*" as the NIV puts it, or "perceived their end," as in other versions.

It was there, in the Temple of God, that he saw that the prosperity of the wicked is only temporary. He saw that those who do not follow God have no inner wealth, no genuine joy, nothing that would last. They were living in a dream world. The psalmist was able to better understand the ways of God because of the influence of the Temple, and because it was in the Temple that he had a face-to-face encounter with God.

The lifestyle of many people will not enable them to see the ways of God. Their lives are filled up with confusion and doubts, and many go through some serious crises in their lives that cause them to doubt the very existence of God. I guess we all do. It is more important than at any other time for our church to be visible to the people, so that they can begin to understand the ways of God.

We do not claim to have all the answers, to understand everything that happens. But we do claim to love and serve and worship a God who does, so let us get busy doing what we are claiming to do. Now is the time! Let us work while it is yet day.

The influence of the Temple enabled the psalmist to see the ways of God. Does the influence that our church exerts enable other people to see the ways of God? It may not always be the prosperity of the ungodly that has people confused. There are other ways of God that they may need help to understand as well— how He provided a way for salvation for every person, how He can forgive us for the sins we've committed, how He provides hope and guidance and real meaning in our lives. Can they see us holding forth the Word of Life, both in our work and in our witness?

## **2 A second reason why our church should be visible is to help others see themselves, vv. 21-25.**

The psalmist saw the ways of God. He understood more about the ways of God because of the influence of the Temple, the visibility of the Temple, in helping him to come face to face with God. And having seen the ways of God in a clearer light, he now comes to the point where he sees himself in a different light as well.

He saw himself, and he saw that his complaining about how easy those who didn't follow God had it was foolish. For a moment, he abhors himself. He said in verse 21 that his "*heart was grieved,*" and that his spirit was "*embittered.*" In verse 22 he says, "*I was senseless and ignorant.*" He compared himself to a "*brute beast*" that cannot understand and respond to God as a human can.

The pride and sin of many people will not allow them to see themselves as they really are before God. You may be one of these dear people who have blinded themselves to the reality of sin in their lives. It may take a tragedy in your life, a real crisis, to bring you to your knees before God in humble repentance. It may take that to show you what you are really like without God in your life.

But because the Temple was so much a part of his life, and the community was so influenced by the Temple, the psalmist knew where he could go when he became convicted of his sins and unfaithfulness before God. Does the influence our church exerts enable people to see themselves before God? Do we call men and women to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ? We are to do more than merely show them the way of salvation God has so graciously provided for us— we are to be so visible

and influential here in our area as the Body of Christ that others will not only see the ways of God<sup>o</sup> not only understand that God has provided a way out of their sins<sup>o</sup> but that He wants them to confess to Him that they are indeed sinners. Just as we are!

Can they see us? It is important not only that people know where the church building is, but that they also are able to see us living our Christian convictions in our daily lives. It is easy to show someone where the building is, but it is not so easy to show them how to follow Christ, is it? And that is where we fail so many times. Can they see us? Can they see us living our lives in such a manner that they are called to repentance and confession of sins before God?

### **3 But there is a third reason why our church should be visible in the world around us: That is to help others see God Himself, vv. 26-28**

The psalmist, faced with confusion and doubts, fled to the Temple of God, a place he thought of when his life was filled with so much darkness. Once there, he came to understand the way of God in a new light. Then, having seen the ways of God, he also saw himself in a new light, as needing the forgiveness of God for his sins. Then, having confessed to God, he came face to face with the reality of God Himself.

He saw that the righteous man has something that the ungodly can never hope to have<sup>o</sup> a sense of the nearness of God in his life. Meaning and real fulfillment, real prosperity, came only in God's presence.

The people that we are to be visible to have doubts that will not always allow them to see God Himself. They<sup>o</sup>ll ask questions such as, <sup>o</sup>Does God exist?<sup>o</sup> <sup>o</sup>Does He care?<sup>o</sup> just as the psalmist did. The influence of the Temple enabled the psalmist to see God Himself. What is our influence?

Stop and think with me for just a moment. Do you realize that our church is the largest congregation of any kind from Vicksburg to Crystal Springs, and from Raymond to Port Gibson<sup>o</sup> or maybe Natchez? Do you realize that our circle of influence<sup>o</sup> the corner of the Kingdom that God has assigned to us<sup>o</sup> is much bigger than the city block we sit on? Can you see that our assignment covers this entire section of our state? Can the people who live in that area see us?

Can they see us offering hope to the world because of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Are we pointing them to God Himself?

This is our heritage. This past week I was re-reading a bit of the history of Utica Baptist Church, and ran across this very interesting tidbit:

*“In 1843, Rev. William H. Taylor became the church's second pastor, and that same year, a new building was constructed beside the town cemetery... Rev. Taylor was ... instrumental in the organization of Jackson Baptist Church in Jackson, a small village at the time, and Jackson Baptist became a mission church of Utica Baptist, with the deacons and pastor of Utica helping them establish. Mississippi Baptists will recognize that congregation as the huge First Baptist Church on State Street in downtown Jackson! Rev. Taylor also began publication of a small Baptist paper in 1846 called The Mississippi Baptist which was printed in Utica until 1849. It was the forerunner of the current Mississippi Baptist Record, Mississippi's largest circulation newspaper.”*

So, First Baptist Church of Jackson was a mission of Utica Baptist Church. AND...The Mississippi Baptist Record was actually begun in Utica by our church's second pastor. We have a heritage of looking up from our little city block and noticing there's a world out there who needs Jesus!

Verse 28 contains the key to the entire psalm— in fact, it is the key to all of what we are talking about: *“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.”*

If what our church involves itself in does not point men to the Savior, then we are nothing more than a civic club. If all we do is gather for fellowship and recreation and lectures, we are nothing more than a country club. A civic club and a country club are alright in themselves, but they have their functions, and the Body of Christ has its function— to point the way of salvation to a world without Christ. Can they see us doing that? Or do the lost people of our area see us pointing to ourselves, our programs, our activities? Could it be that their opinion of us is that we are a church which exists mainly for itself, that we are embarrassingly silent and deathly still when it comes to service in the Kingdom of God?

*“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).*

One man came out of his house on his way to church one Sunday morning. At the same time, his neighbor came out of his house with his golf clubs. The golfer said, "Henry, come play golf with me today." Henry, with an expression of self-righteous horror on his face, replied, "This is the Lord's Day, and I go to church. Certainly I will not play golf with you."

After a moment's embarrassed silence, the golfer quietly said, "Henry, I have often wondered about your church, and I have admired your faithfulness. But this is the seventh time I have invited you to play golf with me, and you have never invited me to go to church with you."

A great preacher closed his sermon with an earnest and eloquent appeal to the people to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Among the ones who responded was a woman of wealth and social distinction. She asked permission to speak a few words to the congregation.

"I want you to know," she said, "just why I came forward. It was not because of any word spoken by the preacher. I stand here because of the influence of a Christian woman who sits before me. Her fingers are rough with toil; the hard work of many years has stooped her low; she is just a poor, obscure washerwoman, who has served in my home for many years. I have never known her to be impatient, to speak an unkind word, or to do anything dishonest. I know of countless little acts of unselfish love that adorn her life. With shame on my face, let me say that I have openly sneered at her faith, and laughed at her faithfulness to God. Yet, when my little girl was taken away, it was this woman who caused me to look beyond the grave and shed my first tear of hope. The *sweet magnetism* of her life has led me to Christ."

At the request of the minister, the cleaning woman came to the front of the church to stand with her employer. Her face was shining, and her eyes were streaming tears of joy. As the congregation stood to their feet in silent, tearful respect, the preacher said, "Let me introduce you to the real preacher of the day."

Does your life have the sweet magnetism of Christ? Does our church? We can be organized to the point of paralysis. We can have a big budget and many people attending. We can have good sermons and wonderful music. We can have a growing youth ministry. We can even be involved in missions. But does our church have the sweet magnetism of Christ permeating it?

***Can they see us pointing out the way of salvation?***

*Can they see us calling them to repentance?  
Can they see us pointing out God Himself?*

What is your part? Just dream of the possibilities.