

Psalm 37

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 September 2023

Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[0:00] And if you do have your Bibles with you, open up to Psalm 37, because we'll be spending our time there this morning. If you're using one of our Bibles that we've left in the chairs, you can turn to page 466, and there you will find Psalm 37.

We've been walking through a few Psalms for the last month, as we're in between, finishing up 1 Corinthians, and next week we'll begin a series that'll take up the month of October that will focus upon the key truths that were recovered or emphasized in what we now call the Protestant Reformation.

October 31st is Reformation Day, the celebration of the recovery of the Gospel during the 16th century. We'll talk more about that as we get into the series.

We'll do a little bit of history, but we'll spend most of our time in the Word looking at those key truths. But we're moving in that direction, and actually this passage this morning is going to help prepare us to prepare our hearts to set us in the right direction, to be able to consider those truths not just as abstract sort of statements of truth, but as things that should give us hope and reasons for rejoicing.

And so this morning, as we meditate on Psalm 37, we're going to see that the call to rejoice in the Lord or to delight in the Lord is central to this psalm, but it's also central to the Christian life.

[1:30] So if you're there in Psalm 37, I want to invite you to stand to your feet, and we will pick up where we left off. We've already read two-thirds of this great psalm, and we're going to pick up in verse 25 and read down through the end in verse 40.

So David tells us now, I have been young, and now I'm old. Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.

He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing. Turn away from evil and do good, so shall you dwell forever. For the Lord loves justice.

He will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever.

The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God is in his heart. His steps do not slip. The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death.

[2:33] The Lord will not abandon him to his power or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial. Wait for the Lord and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land.

You will look on when the wicked are cut off. I have seen a wicked, ruthless man spreading himself like a green laurel tree. But he passed away, and behold, he was no more.

Though I sought him, he could not be found. Mark the blameless and behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace. But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed.

The future of the wicked shall be cut off. The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. He is their stronghold in the time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them.

He delivers them from the wicked and saves them because they take refuge in him. Let's pray. God, we thank you that your spirit inspired David to write this psalm.

[3:37] And that the same spirit preserved it in this word for us. So that this morning, we might have our hearts corrected and attuned so that we can look to Jesus and not only be saved, but be satisfied forever.

So we thank you for that, and we ask you to teach us now. In Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. We are living today in the midst of a time where there is an epidemic of anxiety around us.

There's a lot of anxiousness within us sometimes, certainly within the culture at large. There's a lot of people who are fretting and frustrated and worried about what the future holds, whether that's economic issues or sometimes health issues, or just concerned about where your life is headed in general.

Maybe you're anxious about your children's future. Maybe you're anxious about their present. I don't know. Maybe you're anxious about your own future. Maybe you have no plan for retirement, and you don't know how you're ever going to come up with a plan for those latter years of your life. There are a lot of things that could and do fill us with anxiety. And it doesn't take a great deal of effort for us to move into that place where we are just feeling bound and almost hopeless.

[5:12] And this psalm, Psalm 37, can help us, can help us to deal with the destructive nature of anxiety as it resides in our hearts.

I'm not sure if you noticed this as we were reading through the first 11 verses at the very beginning of our service, but multiple times just in that first section, the first 11 verses, we are commanded, fret not yourself.

We see it in verse 1. It's the very beginning of the psalm which tips us off that this is one of the major themes of the psalms. This is something David wants us to see and respond to. He says, fret not yourself because of evildoers.

We see it again in verse 8. Fret not yourself. It tends only to evil. We are told by David that we should not be overly anxious, that we should not be bound by our fears and anxieties.

But David has a particular type of anxiety in mind. In other words, he has a particular cause on the horizon that he's thinking about. Not just any cause for anxiety, but a specific one.

[6:25] And he tells us what it is in the first verse. Fret not yourself because of evildoers. Be not envious of wrongdoers. David is acknowledging that in this world and in this life, we will often see those that we might regard as wrongdoers.

People who do not live their lives according to the moral standards that we draw from Scripture. People who lie and cheat and steal and are willing to trample upon others.

Oftentimes, we see them prospering. We see heads of corporations showered in wealth, and yet we hear of scandal after scandal in their lives.

Or we hear about celebrities, and they have all this praise showered upon them, but we also know that there are things happening in dark corners and in back rooms of which they should be ashamed.

And yet they prosper oftentimes. And while they prosper, many of God's people do not experience any sort of prosperity in this life.

[7:29] Many of God's people suffer. We endure persecution, but not only persecution, but the things that are common in this world. We endure sickness. We deal with it. We face it. We have to deal with it.

Or loss of loved ones. Or just struggling with finances. Or figuring out what we're going to do tomorrow or next year.

We have to face all of those realities, and we struggle with those. Meanwhile, we look over at others who are cheating their way through life, and it appears as if they're being rewarded for that.

That's a reality that this psalm wants to take up and help us to wrestle with and come to right conclusions about. Fret not yourself because of evildoers.

Do not be envious of those who do wrong. And then he tells us why, and we're going to see this theme repeated throughout the psalm. He says, For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

[8:35] This psalm, actually, when you read through it, if you read the whole thing at once, it can sometimes sound like almost a random collection of proverbial sayings.

Sometimes it feels like, in Psalm 37, that you're reading something, a chapter out of the book of Proverbs. A collection of statements that, while there are some general themes that we can connect, it's difficult sometimes to put them together.

And indeed, some scholars have proposed that at some point that David didn't write this, somebody just gathered together a bunch of sayings, either of David or someone else, and just kind of put them together into this psalm.

But I don't think that's true at all, for two reasons, really. One is something that you cannot see in your English Bibles. And that is that this psalm is actually an acrostic.

What I mean by that is that the key lines of this psalm begin with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order of the Hebrew alphabet, all the way through from Aleph down to Tav, like A to Z.

[9:35] And we get, so in verse 1, verse 3, verse 5, verse 7, verse 8, we get, as you walk through and see the key statements in this psalm, we get that acrostic, which means it's not random.

It's not just somebody jumbling together a bunch of sayings about evildoers and throwing them together because they have something in common. No, the writer, David, has thoughtfully put together this psalm to teach us something.

And you can see that in its organization and structure when you see that it's that sort of acrostic. But you don't need to be able to see that to know that this psalm is not a random hodgepodge of sayings.

Because there are key statements that are repeated, not only the fret not statement, but there are other key statements that are repeated throughout this psalm that draw it together and show us that it's teaching us something as a whole.

And so there are two sides to this. On the one hand, there are some key statements that are made. A repeated phrase is made concerning the wicked over and over. And then there's another phrase that David repeats over and over to describe the future hope of those who trust in the Lord.

[10:48] So we have a phrase devoted to, this is what awaits the wicked, those who seem to be prospering now. And this is what awaits those who trust in the Lord, who seem to be trampled upon now.

Let me show you what I'm talking about. For the wicked, the phrase that we see repeatedly is this phrase, cut off. That they will be cut off. And that's another way of expressing that idea that we saw in verse 2 just a moment ago, that they will soon fade like the grass, that they will wither like the green herb, that the prosperity that they experience has an expiration date.

And even if that expiration date doesn't come in the middle of their life so that we don't see them suffer in this world, their death is certainly an expiration point.

There will be no more prosperity for those who do not trust the Lord when their life ends. They will be cut off, which refers not just to death, but cut off from God's blessing and presence.

Verse 9. For the evildoers shall be cut off. Verse 22. Those cursed by him shall be cut off.

[12:09] Verse 28, at the end of it. The children of the wicked shall be cut off. Verse 34. You will look on when the wicked are cut off.

And then the last time we see it, verse 38. The transgressor shall be altogether destroyed. The future of the wicked shall be cut off. So over and over throughout this psalm, David is using the same phrase to describe what awaits the wicked in the future.

And it's there to encourage us so that we know that that God's long-suffering and patience will come to an end with those who refuse to bow down to him.

That those even who come against God's people, because sometimes the wicked here are described as those who oppose the righteous or oppose those who trust in the Lord. That those who come against God's people will face God's judgment someday.

We can be sure of that. We can be certain of that. We don't have to fret. We don't have to worry. Because as David says, in just a little while, the wicked will be no more.

[13:20] Now that little while can be frustrating to us. That what is a little while in the eyes of the Lord feels like a long time to us.

Because it can be a lifetime. It can be for us a long time. A little while, phrases like that, a little while, shortly, quickly, soon, those phrases oftentimes in the Old Testament are associated with God's judgment.

And we know that many times God's judgment is far off to the people to whom he's speaking. Sometimes he's even talking about the final judgment. And so if you're living, if you're an Old Testament saint, you're living at a minimum a few thousand years removed from that.

And as long as Christ doesn't come back, that time stretches further and further into the future. And yet the prophets repeatedly, and David here, says that that judgment will come in a little while.

Because in comparison with eternity, a lifetime is a vapor. In comparison with eternity, even 5,000, 10,000 years is but a blink of an eye.

[14:38] In a little while, God will set things straight. You can be sure of that. The wicked will be cut off.

But there's not only an announcement of judgment that we see throughout this psalm. There's also the proclamation of hope for those who wait for the Lord.

And the phrase that David uses over and over to describe that is that they will inherit the land. I'll show it to you and then I'll tell you a little bit about what that means. So for instance, verse 9, where first we see the evildoers cut off, then, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

Verse 11, this should sound familiar. Jesus quotes this in the Sermon on the Mount in his Beatitudes. It says, the meek shall inherit the land.

And then again in verse 22, for those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land. Verse 29, the righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever.

[15:48] And then lastly, verse 34, wait for the Lord and keep his way and he will exalt you to inherit the land. So though the wicked will be someday cut off from God's presence and from any semblance of prosperity or blessing, what awaits the righteous or those who wait upon the Lord is an inheritance, inheriting the land.

Now, for Old Testament Israel, that meant that they would be able to dwell securely in the promised land. That they would not only be able to dwell securely in the promised land, but God's blessing would be upon them in the land in which they live.

And that God's presence would be manifested there in Jerusalem within the temple among God's people. It's a great promise. It's a promise of blessing, but it's also a promise that the presence of the Lord will not depart from them.

But of course, what we see in the Old Testament is but a shadow of greater future realities.

Because we also read in the Old Testament that Israel would not fully and finally come to possess the land.

That they would in fact be exiled and kicked out of the land. No, the land as a specific place in the Middle East is not the fulfillment, the ultimate fulfillment of the promises.

[17:20] And we know that not only because of the way that things actually play out, we know that because of the way that the Old Testament saints looked forward into the future.

Let me show you what I mean. Hold your place in Psalm 37 and turn over, if you would, to the book of Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11 lists a number of heroes from the Old Testament, talks about their faith.

In verse 9, which is where I want to jump in though, we see the land mentioned. Verse 9, talking about Abraham. By faith, Abraham went to live in the land of promise.

As in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For, now note this, he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

So Abraham, living in the promised land, is looking beyond the promised land for something better, something more permanent.

[18:33] Not just Abraham. Verse 13, these all, just referencing all these heroes that are mentioned, died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. Now if they'd been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, the land of Canaan, Israel, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, now note this verse, as it is, they desire a better country. that is, a heavenly one.

You see, the promise of the land in the Old Testament was pointing forward to something greater than the land of Canaan. It was pointing forward to a permanent inheritance that God's people would have, described in the book of Revelation as the new heavens and new earth.

God's people will not just receive a narrow strip of land along the Mediterranean Sea. God's people will receive the entire earth, the whole world.

[19:46] It will be ours. But more important than that, what John tells us in his vision of the new heavens and new earth at the end of the book of

Revelation is that it will be a place where the presence of God is known. He says, there won't even be a sun in the sky. You don't need it because the Lord will be the light. In other words, his presence will be so powerful among us, he will fill the entire new heavens and new earth the way the sunlight fills the sky.

That's the promise that awaits those who trust in the Lord in Psalm 37. That they will inherit the land. so that when we are tempted to grow anxious over the circumstances that surround us, the first thing that we need to remind ourselves of is this is temporary.

It's temporary. Even if you're diagnosed with a life-ending disease, it's temporary. It's temporary. And that small temporary framework in which you're going to face some struggles, in which you're going to not prosper is a drop in the ocean compared to eternity of the new heavens and new earth. [21:17] It's nothing. It's why Peter is able to say that though you suffer now for a little while, probably his readers would think it's been a few years, Peter.

It's not a little while. It still hurts. It hurt last year. It hurt the year before that. And it looks like it's going to hurt next year. Stop saying a little while. But for Peter, all of this life is a little while. And we have a hope held out in front of us that can give us the strength to fret not in this life and in this world.

But how do we experience that? That is the real challenge. To be told something better is in the future so that should make today better than it is, is one thing.

But how do we go about hoping in that future day? How do we go about rejoicing in the present when things are not perfect?

[22:27] Just because we have something better out in front of us. I think probably the most important verse in all of this chapter is actually the one that many of you might be familiar with.

It's verse four. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. But it's part of a three-fold major command structure in verses three, four, and five that can help us to understand how do we navigate this life?

How do we rejoice in the present when the good that's held out for us is in the future? How do we do that? And there are three primary commands.

There are other commands here, but there are three primary commands that I think will help us and guide us to see what that is. Verse three, trust in the Lord and dwell in the land, he says, and befriend faithfulness.

In other words, trust in the Lord, do good, and even in the present, you will experience that future blessing. This is the only place where dwelling in the land is in the present tense.

[23:41] Everywhere else, it's far off in the future. You will inherit the earth, but here, it's a straightforward command, dwell in the land that is experienced the benefits that lie in the future.

And how does that happen? It begins with trust. You have to trust in the Lord. This is what we are told over and over in the New Testament, that it's by trusting in Christ, trusting in his work upon the cross, trusting in his resurrection, trusting in his future return, trusting in all the promises that he's made to us.

It's trusting in him, believing in him, that results in our salvation. All the hope that we have is founded upon our trust in Jesus.

If you've not put your faith in Christ, you don't have that hope. You don't have it, but you can. If you turn away from sin and put your trust in Jesus, all those things held out for God's people now belong to you, they are guaranteed to you as your future inheritance.

But David says there's a sense in which we can experience some of that future blessing even in the present.

[25:06] Verse 4 helps us to see what he means. He says, delight yourself. this is the second major command. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

That trust in Christ is to be followed by treasuring Christ. When we trust in him, the promise of a future inheritance is ours and we can enjoy that promise to some extent in the present.

And that enjoyment comes by delighting in the Lord. If you trust in Jesus to rescue you from your sins, you should treasure Jesus above all else.

Delight yourself in the Lord. Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. The irony of this verse is that though within the context of this psalm, it's very clear that David has in mind us making the Lord our treasure and by him becoming our treasure, our hearts being transformed so that we now desire the things that he wants us to desire and then he will give us those things.

That's clear contextually. The irony is that so many people have taken this verse out of context and argue that God promises us all the prosperity we want now.

[26:49] You want health? You desire health? You can have it. You want wealth? You desire it? That's one of the desires of your heart? Oh, you can have it even now.

God has it but those who delight themselves in the Lord have had their desires transformed. And what they now long for is a taste of the presence of God that they will experience in full in the future. We have new desires and those desires are centered upon Jesus. Jesus. It will not do for us to claim that whatever we want and desire God promises us we can have.

Rather, those who delight in the Lord have such a transformed heart that the thing that they want is Jesus in all the multitude of ways that he makes himself known to us.

You trust in him. You treasure him. And then verse 5 tells us commit your way to the Lord.

[28:08] Trust in him. And he will act. The trusting Jesus and treasuring Jesus actually manifest themselves in the ways in which we live.

commit your way to the Lord is to say live in such a way that others can see that the object of your delight is the Lord himself.

Live your life in such a way that others can see that you are trusting in him for everything that you need. Do we do that though?

While claiming to trust and treasure Jesus do we really commit our way to him or do we commit ourselves to pursuing wealth and prosperity and ease in this world?

Jesus says to commit your way to him that is to follow him involves taking up a cross an instrument of death.

[29:26] Jesus says if they persecuted me your master they will persecute you those who follow me. Jesus never promises us that following after him results in an easy life.

In fact he promises us just the opposite. it. But what he says is that if we commit our way to the Lord if we trust in him he will act.

He will do something. He will not sit idly by though it feels sometimes like he is he will act and what will he do? I love this.

He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noon day. That's another way of saying that you will be vindicated.

That though those who are evildoers wrongdoers though they heap scorn on you now though they accuse you of things those accusations will not stick God will indeed act he will bring forth your righteousness your justice he will cause to shine!

[30:41] He will do this he says in verse 33 the Lord will not abandon the righteous one or him to his power or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial the good news is that though we will be brought to trial if we have trusted in the Lord we will not be condemned on that day that whatever accusations the enemy might hurl at us on that day they won't stick not because we didn't do them but because the price has already been paid for those sins you cannot be doubly punished!

Jesus has already borne the weight of our condemnation and so we will not be condemned when we are brought to trial rather the righteousness that we have in Christ will shine forth we will be vindicated and all of that will happen in just a little while trust in the Lord treasure the Lord and commit your way to him and whatever you face whatever you deal with whatever you struggle with in this life in this world will be temporary it will fade and you will have reserved for you an eternal crown and weight of glory it will last forever let's pray holy