

Psalm 37

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[0 : 00] We're moving this morning to Psalm 37. So this is a psalm that not too long ago we read in our Bible reading plan.

! If you're a little bit behind, it was much more recent than for those of y'all that are on track. But it's something that really hit Margaret and I really hard. It was really helpful to us, and I thought I'd share it with you.

I've considered only reading the first 11 verses this morning. But due to the flow of the psalm, I think we really need to read the whole thing. I think it's all really, really precious to us.

In the Hebrew, it was an acrostic. For those of y'all that may not know what that is, i.e. me, who didn't know what that was before I did a little bit of research, each little stanza started with a letter of the alphabet and just followed the alphabet.

So really cool. Of course, that doesn't translate over, but nonetheless, still a really, really cool psalm. So it is 40 verses, so hopefully you don't think I'm too crazy for reading and preaching on 40 verses.

[1 : 08] But in light of that, I'd just like to remind that anything good that I have to say is because God has already said it. That's what we have to preach is God's word.

In community group this past week, we looked at the first chapter of Joshua. And Clay led us in a study on it. And something that I noticed and was really helpful as the group talked about it was the ways that Joshua encouraged the children of Israel there were the exact same way that the Lord had encouraged him.

And that is what I'm here to do this morning. I'm here to shed light on what God has already said. I have nothing new. I have his word. And that's what we're here to preach on and to listen to.

And so continue to pray for me this morning as we get into that. So as we get started, I'd like to share the same thing Nathan does every week. And I remind you all that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and for our good. We would do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. So let's go ahead and read it. Psalm 37. Picking up in the first verse, it says, Fret not yourself because of evildoers.

[2 : 15] Be not envious of wrongdoers. For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in him and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices. Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself. It tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off.

But those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more. Though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him. But the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming. The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright.

[3 : 17] Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.

The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will remain forever. They are not put to shame in evil times. In the days of famine, they have abundance. But the wicked will perish.

The enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures. They vanish. Like smoke, they vanish away. The wicked borrows, but does not pay back. But the righteous is generous and gives. For those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off. The steps of a man are established by the Lord when he delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand. 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. [4 : 17] 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. 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.

[5 : 17] Amen. So this is our text this morning. There's a lot in it. We're not going to be able to pick out every little thing in it. But I do want to structure it in three parts. And it'll be a little bit, there's list within list here.

So stay with me. If you're taking notes, the three main sections. First one is reasons we fear and envy the wicked. That was reasons we fear and envy the wicked.

The second one, similarly, will be reasons we should not fear and envy the wicked. And the third one will be the conclusion of the righteous.

So let's go ahead and get into that first one. So reasons we fear and envy the wicked. Have two of these. So first one is they seem strong and prosperous for a season.

They seem strong and prosperous for a season. Let's look at verse 2. Verse 2 says, For they soon will fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. This verse is very clear.

[6 : 18] They are fading away. Doesn't let us think anything else about that. But if we think about grass, In its prime, it is crazy. It's strong. It will grow anywhere.

Living in a house that was built in an old cow pasture for quite some time. If we didn't take care of that grass, it would take over the place. That's what this verse is communicating. Even though they definitely will eventually fade away.

They seem really, really, really strong for a little while. Verse 7 says that the wicked prosper in the way. Verse 20 uses the grass analogy again and talks about its great glory.

Verse 35 I think I find really, really interesting. It describes the wicked as a green laurel tree. Think about a tree. It just grows and grows and grows. It towers above everyone, towering above all other plants.

It just rises above the earth and gains so much power as it does. That's how the wicked so often seem to us. Evil people seem to gain power and gain power and just seem to tower over us.

[7 : 16] And oftentimes we feel so powerless. Thinking of some places that we see this outside of the psalm, I immediately think of Psalm 73. So that's a psalm that Clay shared, I believe, last week.

Go ahead and turn there for just a minute. Psalm 73. Psalm 73. We're going to look at verses 3 through 12 here.

So starting in verse 3, Asaph is talking about how well he sees that the wicked have it. So in verse 3, it says, For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For they have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They're not in trouble as others are. They're not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore, pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment.

Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens and their tongue struts through the earth.

[8 : 26] Therefore, his people turn back to them and find no fault in them. And they say, How can God know? Is there knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease. They increase in riches. So often it really does seem that the wicked have it really easy.

So often it seems that things are just going perfect and so well for them. They're in good health. They have money. They boast in their riches. People that don't study for tests that we study really hard for end up with A's on it and we fail it.

People who slander others and don't serve their coworkers well end up getting promotions. People who go throughout life with no regard for God seem to have it so well.

So they definitely do seem prosperous for a season. So point two. This is the second reason we fear and envy the wicked.

Is that they threaten and slander us. They threaten and slander us. Looking at verse 12. It says, The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him.

[9 : 29] Same concept down in verse 14. It says, The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and the needy. To slay those whose way is upright. It's true that the wicked put tons and tons and tons of energy into hurting us.

They don't want anything to do with God and so they don't want anything to do with us. That's something I really love about this psalm and about a lot of psalms. It doesn't hide the real struggles. These struggles that the wicked are just coming against us with threats and slander are real. We see them all the time. Those things we mentioned earlier with our co-workers just finding ways to make us look bad.

Or our family members around the holidays that just don't want to talk to us. Because they know we'll want to talk about our Lord. So even as we discussed a couple weeks ago. The physically persecuted church around the world.

So why do we not? Why do we not envy the wicked with their circumstances? And why do we not fear the wicked when they are trying to hurt us? Trying to kill us? So let's dig into these texts a little bit more.

[10 : 31] And look at the reasons the Lord gives us to not envy them and to not fear them. So this second part. Reasons we should not fear and envy the wicked. So reasons we should not fear and envy the wicked.

Have four of these. So the first one is grass dies. Grass dies. It's really simple. That's how it's communicated here. We can be sure of it.

All of these verses which compare the wicked to grass and plants have a driving point. Grass is really beautiful and powerful for a season. But then it just dies. And it is no more. Verse 2 says, For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

Verse 20 says, But the wicked will perish. The enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures. They vanish like smoke. They vanish away. They so quickly burn up. And it's just gone. The great glory a pastor had to begin with. And it's just gone. And this is their only portion. This is the only portion of the wicked. This is something that Bob Boyk has been really faithful to remind me all the time.

[11 : 37] After this life, the wicked have nothing. This is all they have. How terrible that must be for this to be someone's only portion.

When we know our great inheritance. So, grass dies. Reason 2, really similar to reason 1, is that we know their end.

And we know their end. The scripture says it so well that I just want to go back and read a chunk of it. So, let's look at starting in verse 9. I'm going to read down through 17.

So, starting in verse 9, it says, For the evildoers shall be cut off. But those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more. Though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him. But the Lord laughs at the wicked. For he sees that his day is coming.

[12:37] The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy. To slay those whose way is upright. Their sword shall enter their own heart. And their bows shall be broken. Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked.

For the arms of the wicked shall be broken. But the Lord upholds the righteous. Here in these verses, we see many, many, many reminders that the wicked's day is coming. There's just nine verses right there.

Five different ways of communicating that the wicked will not ultimately prevail. I love the way verse 10 and 11 says it. It's saying, in a little while, if we just look around for someone that was wicked and search around for him, see how he's doing.

He won't be there. Where will he be? He'll be suffering eternal punishment for sin. He won't seem so prosperous anymore. At verse 14 and 15, it shows that, why is this?

It'll be their own sin. Their own traps that they tried to set against us. It'll be their own rebellion against the Lord that will be their ultimate downfall. And as verse 12 and 13 says, the Lord sees the plots of the wicked and he just laughs at them.

[13:41] Their plots against us, which are ultimately plots against the Lord, will not stand against his judgment. We know our Lord. We know his character. I'm just looking at Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7.

That so often quoted passage about his character. It says, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. That's the character of our Lord. He will punish those not found in him. And that will be an eternal punishment. Their sin has to be punished because of God's great justice. And so for those not found in Christ, those not trusting in his bloodshed on their behalf, it will be eternal judgment and damnation.

We know that. And we know their end. We know that they have their portion here. And it is the only portion they have. So we know their end.

Third reason. Envy and fear tends only to evil. Envy and fear tends only to evil. It's a direct quote from here.

[14:52] Look at verses 7 through 9. It says, Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices.

Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself. It tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off. But those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. So when we're worried and fretting ourselves over the condition of the wicked, over the condition of anyone else, we're very likely to become unrighteously angry.

So quickly can we forget what our anger is directed to and just become mad at our circumstances. James 1 verses 19 and 20 says, Know this, my beloved brothers.

Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. When we become just very quickly angry when observing someone else's situation, we are prone to covet.

We're prone to lust. We're prone to want something that is not ours and then be angry at the Lord that we don't have it. So, so, so quickly that happens.

[16:03] That's why it's so, so, so dangerous to fret ourselves when we look around and see other people's situations. Be mad at what someone else has, what we don't have. Because it so, so, so quickly just leads to sin.

Leads to envy. Leads to covetousness. It leads to lust. We could go on and on and on about that. So, what are we to do? We should not be so worried about what the evil have or what we do not have.

And put our confidence in the Lord rather than in our current circumstances. Grab your bulletin for a minute. On there you'll find a quote by John Calvin which is about this text.

Specifically verses 16 and 17. Where the Lord's reminding us that the righteous are better off with little in this life than the wicked with great things. Here is eventually the arms of the wicked will be broken.

So, let's look at that. So, it says, Unless we are persuaded by faith that God cherishes us in his bosom as a father does his children, our poverty will always be a source of trouble to us.

[17:10] On the other hand, unless we bear in mind what is here said concerning the wicked that their arms shall be broken, we'll make too great account of their present condition. In other words, if we are lacking in eternal perspective, what others have and what we do not have will become way too important to us.

If we are forgetting our end and forgetting their end and forgetting what the Lord has done for us, it's going to become way, way, way too important to us.

So, following that thought out, let's look at our eternal perspective. So, this is our fourth reason, is our end is so much greater. Our end is so much greater.

So, let's look at the contrast here in verses 35 through 38 of this psalm, Psalm 37. It says, We can observe here that there is no hope, none at all for the wicked.

They will be altogether destroyed. But it also says, there is a future for the man of peace. What is this future? It's eternal life. The future is knowing God and enjoying him forever, just like we were talking about earlier in the service.

[18:43] This is a future that we're experiencing now and that we'll experience in a perfect sense in eternity. Here in the psalm, it says to mark the blame of some, watch the upright, watch how their life turns out.

Keep an eye on them, watch to see their awesome future. This future of fully knowing and fully enjoying the Lord. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. We have such a great future. Such a great future that the prospering of the wicked here and our suffering cannot even be compared to it. Can't be compared at all. So our end is so much greater. So much greater. So in light of that, what are we to do? Obviously we're not to envy or fear the wicked, but what does that look like?

There's a lot of commands in the positive here as well. Not all negative commands. So this gets into the final point. The conclusions of the righteous. There's five of these.

[19:51] So the conclusions of the righteous. So like I said, there's a lot of exhortations that are in the positive. Most of them are found in verses 3 through 7.

So we'll look at quite a few of those, but we'll look at some others as well. So the first one comes straight out of verse 3. Trust in the Lord and do good.

Trust in the Lord and do good. So verse 3 says, Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. So we're wondering what to do.

We can be sure of one thing for sure. The Lord wants us to do good and to trust in Him. But oftentimes when I start to notice myself being upset about things going on around me, I lean on a verse that hit me really hard that I quote almost every time that I preach or I'm talking to somebody about this kind of thing.

It's 1 Peter 4:19. Really big verse about this. Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Quite the verse.

[20:52] I love it for multiple reasons. And one reason is it just communicates two truths together really well. First one is that all the things going on around us are ordained by the Lord.

Right? We're entrusting ourselves to a faithful creator while doing good, but we're suffering according to God's will. Right? He's in control of all of everything we're going through.

We can hold on to that. So everything going on around us is according to His plan. He has ordained it. Therefore, we can entrust ourselves to Him. He is God. He knows what He's doing. He's ordained all the circumstances around us.

So that's one thing. And it also reminds us that this trust is an active trust. If we're truly trusting in the Lord, we're going to be doing good. That's our commission.

Trust in the Lord and do good. Second one, verse 4. It says, delight yourself in the Lord. Delight yourself in the Lord.

[21:55] Verse 4 says, delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. This is a bold verse that so many people try to take out of context and use it wrongly.

They've said things like, if you love the Lord, you can have anything you want. Obviously, that's off. And then they say things that are even more off. Like that means a 50,000 square foot house and around here 200 acres and a Z71.

And that's not what it means. Because let's think about it for a minute. If those are the desires of our heart, are you really delighting yourself in the Lord? Not at all.

If those are the desires of our heart, that's what we're delighting ourselves in, is things of this world. So what does delighting ourselves in the Lord really mean? It means that the Lord is the highest joy we experience.

Just as that catechism says, what is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. If we're seeking to glorify God in all things, we have to enjoy Him. As Piper says, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

[23 : 00] So if we're enjoying the Lord and delighting ourselves in the Lord, what are our desires going to be? They're going to be the things to seek to bring Him glory. Not to bring glory to ourselves like the things that this earth will do.

And so yes, if we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our heart. Because those will be more and more ways to glorify Him. So, reason three.

Sorry, conclusion three, not reason three. I'm being confused. Conclusion three. Confused myself so much. Commit your way to the Lord.

We see this in verses five and six. Read in those, it says, Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him, and He will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the new day. Okay. Committing our way to the Lord is a really similar idea to the New Testament idea of, Cast your cares upon the Lord because He cares for us. In some older translations, it was translated as, Roll thy way upon the Lord, which I think is really cool.

[24 : 05] It's the idea of rolling a heavy burden onto someone else. And so in this case, rolling our burden to the Lord. Casting our cares upon Him because He cares for us. Very similar idea there. So we have to be willing to give up our burden to the Lord and not try to carry it on our own.

We all know we will fail in that. So as we trust in Him, He will act. He will bring forth our righteousness as light and our justice as the new day. Fourth one, fourth conclusion.

Be still before the Lord. Be still before the Lord. Verse 7 says, Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in His way, over the man who carries out evil devices.

This is so, so, so precious. Because we serve an all-powerful, all-knowing, sovereign Lord who loves us, we can be still and trust that He will act. Slowing down and remembering that our God is God of the universe and He's also our Father.

He cares for us and He's in control of everything. And so we can be still. I'm going to steal a clay quote. If you're at community group on Wednesday, you'll have to hear it again.

[25 : 18] Stonewall Jackson, a general in the American Civil War, had a really strong belief in the sovereignty of God. He was known for being super, super relaxed in battle when all the craziness was going on around.

He was known for standing like a stonewall. That's how I got his name. But he made this comment when people asked him why he's like that. He said, My religious belief teaches me that I'm just as safe on the battlefield as I am in my bed.

The Lord has already appointed the day of my death, so I need not worry about that. I live my life and prepare myself so I will always be ready to meet my Lord when death does overtake me.

So we can live our lives with a steady trust in God no matter what craziness is going on around us. Because our Lord is in complete control, we can be still and know that He is God.

Last one. Fifth conclusion. Remember the Lord's faithfulness. Remember the Lord's faithfulness. I want to look at verses 25 and 26.

[26 : 25] So it says, I've 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.

So often in our battle to keep a good mindset and not to envy or fear others, do we forget so much of what the Lord has done for us.

That is so often what our issue is, is we've forgotten things. In our scripture reading, we notice how so often the children of Israel are just wandering along and they forget and forget and forget the Lord's faithfulness.

We do the same thing. So true of us. We forget that we deserve nothing. We forget that the Lord has provided for and will provide for our physical needs. And more importantly, we forget over and over and over again that He has provided and is providing for our spiritual needs.

We forget that He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. We forget that He who knew no sin became sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

[27 : 26] We forget that apart from Christ, we can do nothing good. And we forget that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We forget all of that. We throw it out the window. And when we forget all of that, we remember how much nicer of a house our neighbor has. Or how much newer their truck is.

Or how the boss appreciates what our co-worker does more than we do. Forgetting is so, so dangerous. When we forget, we lose so, so much perspective.

When we forget, we become downcast. When we become depressed, we become envious of our neighbor. Or we begin to fear what the wicked will do. Because we've forgotten that what happens here doesn't ultimately carry much weight at all.

Remembering the Lord's faithfulness is so important. And it's exactly what we need to do when we're feeling envious, when we're fearful, or when we're downcast. Remember the Lord's faithfulness. Whenever I think about that concept of remembering what the Lord has done as a way to renew our mindset, I always think of the song, Satisfied in You, which is a loose paraphrase of Psalm 42.

[28 : 39] A section of it that always really hits me. It says, So often, when we are down, we need to get out of our own heads.

We need to get out of the cycle we have of just remembering things we shouldn't remember. And forgetting all of the things that the Lord has done for us.

We need His Word, and we need His Church. To help us remember those better days. To help us remember His faithfulness and reminders of what He has done. And the reminders of the end of the wicked.

And that's what we need to be able to press on. So let's remember the Lord's faithfulness. Let's remember the end of the wicked. Let's remember where He brought us from and what He has promised to bring us to.

So I'll end with a quote from Matthew Henry, and then we will pray. It says, Let's pray.

[30 : 19]