

A Pause for Rest

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Bible Verse: Psalm 37
Preached on: Sunday, October 3, 2021

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I have the sense that in talking with many of you and knowing what people are going through, that this is a particular time in which life is beating many of us up, be it through illness as COVID affects some of us, not me but some of us, speaking more broadly and inclusively, and some of you just recently back from lengthy illnesses, we're glad to have you back, knowing that some are going through times of serious grief and feeling the sense of loss of death. You get a measure of how ugly sin is by how awful death is and the impact that it leaves and the absence and the sorrow and the heartache that we feel left behind. There are matters of strained relationships, we won't obviously go into details about that but there are strained relationships that make day-to-day life difficult for some of us. There's the matter of caring for loved ones and just feeling the weight of not being able to stretch ourselves far enough to be able to extend the care that those in our circle of love need; sometimes it's just matters of geography and you can't be with people who would love your presence and that's just not possible. Then, you know, you just go on and you realize that we're in a time just almost unprecedented where people are having to choose between their careers and a government-imposed mandate on their body that they don't welcome, that they don't want and yet they're choosing between their livelihood and their bodily integrity. These things are difficult and there are no easy solutions to any of them and wherever you fall in the midst of the spectrum of those things, and regardless of what differences of opinion we might legitimately have about COVID and government mandates and vaccines and all of that, and it's not just that issue that brings me to this text and why I'm doing this today, the point is that there are weighty issues that are simply beyond our capacity to solve them on our own. We do not have the power and we are brought face-to-face with our weakness, we're brought face-to-face with our sorrows, and we realize that, you know, that we are being burdened beyond our own capacity to respond to things and that can be a healthy thing if we respond to it in a righteous way, in a godly way, if we respond to it and go to Scripture for it. The Lord brings these things for many reasons and I certainly wouldn't presume to be able to identify them for each one of your lives, but one of the things that the Lord does in times like this, in seasons like this, is that it has a humbling effect upon us. We are forced to acknowledge and admit our weakness, forced to admit that we are not in control, forced to admit that we need help from outside ourselves, forced to admit our lack of self-sufficiency. And the Apostle Paul when he prayed in 2 Corinthians 12, you know, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

So the Lord brings us into these points of weakness in order to display his power to us, to display his faithfulness to us, and we appreciate that more when we realize how dependent we are on him, and so this morning we're going to pause for rest. We're going to pause for rest, that's the title that I'm going to apply to this text that I have preached in the past only one time. Only one time before have I preached Psalm 37. It was on a Tuesday evening many years ago, and so I know that most of you have not heard from this text and it's time that we did. It's an opportunity for us that I embrace and I trust that will be helpful to you. Of the 125 Psalms that I've preached so far, genuinely, sincerely, Psalm 37 has stood out and has had an enduring impact on my mind in a way that makes it distinct in my own heart from all of the others that we've preached. So it's with a sense of trust and anticipation and just kind of following a sense of the needs in the congregation today that we come to this text and trust that it will be a blessing and minister deeply to your hearts.

So Psalm 37, it is a pastoral Psalm. It is a comforting word from King David that is spoken to the people of God, and in that sense, Psalm 37 is different from what you often see in the Psalms. We often think of the Psalms as being that poetry which ascribes praise to God and lifts our hearts vertically to him, and this Psalm does that but it does it in a way that it's not directly addressing God but rather addressing the people of God and reminding them of who God is and who he is to his people. It's a word to the people of God rather than in form being a hymn of praise spoken to God himself, and in form, Psalm 37 is an acrostic Psalm that follows the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Generally speaking from beginning to end, roughly every two verses start with a sequential letter from the Hebrew alphabet and I mention that for this reason, the form and the thought of Psalm 37 is being driven a little bit more by that poetic form rather than a progression of thought that we would be used to in the English language, and so there's going to be some connections there that seem a little bit tenuous in English but that were very clear in the mind of David when he wrote this.

Now obviously it's a long Psalm. We're going to address it all this morning and so the best that we can do is have a satellite perspective but I'm increasingly convinced that there's great value in those satellite perspectives. Sometimes it's possible to get so into the details of a text that you lose the big message that it is trying to send to you; the big themes get lost in details. So here today we have the opportunity to see big themes that can comfort our hearts in difficult times and so this is a satellite perspective admittedly and, you know, we'll just trust the Lord for what it has for us, okay?

So with that said, Psalm 37 is a call to trust. In our first point this morning, it's a call to calm confidence. A call to calm confidence. Psalm 37 is very realistic about the nature of life in a fallen world. It is not a Pollyannish look at life through rose-colored glasses. It looks at life through the brutal reality of the fact that there are wicked people around that seek to do harm to the people of God, and it acknowledges that and I love, I have always loved the realism of Scripture since I was first converted. I love the realism of Scripture. It deals with life as it really is, and for any serious-minded person, for any earnest person of faith in Christ, that's what you want. You don't want false promises. You don't want illusions that don't outlast the last note of the echoes of the music that has been used to

manipulate your emotions. You want and you need something that you can build your life upon. Well, this Psalm gives us that which we can build our life upon as it gives us this call to calm confidence in the Lord.

Now the opening eight verses are a rapid-fire series of commands. For those of you that like weapons, and I know that some of you do, you know, it's almost a machine-gun thing happening with these repeated commands coming one right after another, and the repetition and the abruptness impress the urgency of the topic upon us. So let's look at those first eight verses and as we read them, just notice how he just goes from one command to another, just piling them on one on top of another. Let's begin in verse 1 where he says,

1 Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. 2 For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb. 3 Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday. 7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. 8 Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing.

Psalm 37:1-8. So what David does here, David opens with a negative command, he opens with a prohibition, and you notice that he says there in verse 1, he says, "Do not fret because of evildoers." He actually uses that command three times in this opening section: there in verse 1; you see it again in verse 7, "Do not fret because of him who prospers"; verse 8, "Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing." So you can see right from the start, you can see right from the start that what David's theme is. He is addressing our tendency to be anxious and unduly concerned over what is happening in life, and this command has the sense of, "Do not get overheated as you see wicked men prospering in the world around you. Don't let that get your temperature up. Don't start boiling over about this. Don't agitate in your mind as you see what's happening and wicked people rising in power and wicked people afflicting you."

He comes and says, "Do not fret over such things," and this is, you know, David wrote this some 3,000 years ago and so this is an age-old problem. The righteous, God's people struggle while the wicked succeed and oftentimes it pleases God for whatever reason to allow wicked people to rule over his people, over a faithful remnant. This happened in Israel repeatedly as God disciplined the nation for their sin, you know, you had foreign countries like Assyria and Babylon and later Persia reigning over them, later Rome in the New Testament, you had nations who had no regard for God being in positions of civic authority and civil authority over the people of God and often to the detriment of the well-being of the people of God.

So this is something that we see on an ongoing basis throughout history. We draw comfort from that. We realize that God's word has anticipated that and it tells us how to respond in our souls, in our hearts, how it is that we are to respond when we find ourselves in that position. The names change both in the living people of God and in the leaders who rule over us, the names change but the spiritual principle and the spiritual dynamic is the same. We suffer under wicked people. We suffer not just from civic authorities but from wicked people doing us harm on a personal basis, sometimes within the walls of our own home, breaking our hearts and bringing such sorrow and division that it's just hard to wake up in the morning without just feeling the heavy weight of that on our minds. And we feel the effects, in other words, we feel the effects of living in a sin-cursed world. And look, oftentimes it is legitimately unfair, it is legitimately unjust, and it tempts us to anger, tempts us to fear, tempts us to jealousy as we cogitate over what's happening and try to sort it out and realize that these unjust men, these unjust women, and these unjust circumstances are having a genuinely adverse effect on my life and upon my heart, and so we need help, we need help on how to deal with that. And beloved, what you find in Psalm 37 is this, you find Psalm 37 directing your thoughts upward, directing your thoughts vertically, directing your thoughts and taking your thoughts up to God so that rather than simply viewing life through the prism of the wicked people that are inflicting harm upon us, it says look instead, concentrate instead, center your worldview instead on who your God is and how he relates to his people and how he relates to the wicked, and when we do that, it brings us to a place where we can put aside the fretting and restore ourselves to a sense of calm confidence. Psalm 37 leads you away from anxiety. It leads you away from anger. It leads you away from your petty disputes with others and brings you instead into the realm of the blessing of God.

I mentioned the three times where David says "Do not fret" in a negative way, well, in a positive way in this section 11 times, beloved, 11 times he gives positive commands to how our inner response to these matters are to be instead. On the one hand, do not fret, on the other hand, do this instead, put off the fretting, put off the anxiety, put on these heart characteristics instead. And as you go through it, you see him starting in verse 3 where he says, "Trust in the LORD," and as you go on in the text, verse 4, "Delight yourself in the LORD," verse 5, "Commit your way to the LORD. Rest in the LORD," it says in verse 7, "wait patiently for Him," verse 8, "Cease from anger, forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evil-doing." So what David is telling us here is to recognize the spiritual battle that is taking place. Step back from the circumstances and realize that, "I need to take my own heart into hand, I need to preach to myself, I need to remind myself of who God is and let the faithfulness of God, the goodness of God to me shape the way that I respond and the way that I think within my own heart and reason within my own soul to these difficulties."

Now let me ask you a question: why do you think that David goes through 11 commands like that? I didn't even highlight them all in what I said simply for the sake of time. Why so much repetition of commands that are virtually synonymous? Isn't it enough to say it once and then we move on? Why this circular approach? It's like the way the planes circle airfields until they come in for a landing, just circling over the same point until he lands the plane on the runway. Well, why this spiritual circling around over the same point?

Well, beloved, it's humbling in one way, it's also necessary. The reality for you and I is this, and for each one of us and, you know, whether we're men and more advanced in our years, or younger in our days and feeling the strength of youth, it's calling us to understand this, the repetition is teaching us this: we are all, we are all children, we are all children who need to hear the same thing often and repeatedly, we need to hear it again and again in order to be able to learn the principle and to embrace it a little bit. Haven't you found that true in your own spiritual life if you're a Christian, if you've been a Christian for any length of time at all? You have a good day, you're focused on the Lord, you're filled with joy, you're trusting him in the midst of your difficulties, and then the next day comes and, you know, you're downcast, you're despondent again, the troubles have overwhelmed you. Well, it's not because you need new principles in that time, you simply need the repetition of that which brought you joy in the first place.

So we are slow learners. We are slow in our sanctification. We are slow in our spiritual growth. We are slow to learn. We are slow to abide in the truth that has been entrusted to us. And I just want to say that if you think that's not true about yourself, especially if you're a young man, let's say, if you think that's not true about yourself, ask the Lord to help you understand that because life will come and life will hit you too in a way that will humble you. This is the nature of the way that salvation works itself out. Scripture tells us in the book of Acts that it is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God, and if in your Christian experience you haven't known that yet, it will come in time. The Lord will bless you with your own special unique trials that will test your faith and cause you to be humbled until you learn better to depend upon him and not on your own strength. So we are children. We are slow to learn and we need to hear these things repeatedly and that's why Scripture emphasizes these things through this kind of repetition.

Now listen, in addition to that and on a more, you know, perhaps more of a warning type of sentiment that comes from the text, given the whole context of Psalm 37, beloved, you need to understand this, that unless you master this, unless you are wrestling with these things in your difficulties, you are fretful, you are anxious, and you're not consciously moving in the direction of trusting the Lord, the reason that this is given to us is for a negative reason also, is that you are vulnerable to resentment in your heart against people, against circumstances, ultimately against God if you don't bring this under control. This is an urgent spiritual issue for us to address, and so the multiple commands both negative and positive here in the text are calling us not to accept that sense of resentment in our hearts toward our government, toward our circumstances, toward people that have offended us, not to accept it, not to nurse it, and certainly not to excuse it. There is a different path that God sets before his children that we are to follow. God calls you, my Christian friend, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, God calls you to know him, to trust him in the midst of your adversity so that you can know this spiritual calm, this spiritual peace of which the text speaks.

Now when you consider how easily resentful we become as life falls upon us, this is a challenge to our anxious and resentful souls, isn't it? This rebukes me over the way I've lived the past week. This rebukes me, I don't mind telling you that. I need this word

myself. I may need it more than any of you do. So we just realize that we need to catch ourselves when we find ourselves getting so wrapped up in life, so wrapped up in fear, so wrapped up in anxiety, so wrapped up in, you know, in sorrow even, and to realize that it's as though the text is whistling to us, I can't whistle or I would do it, you put your fingers in your mouth and this whistle comes out that arrests your attention and calls you back to where you need to be. And in the midst of everything that I described in the opening, in the midst of all of the fog of the battles that we're going through, there is this whistle coming to us to come back to God, to come back to our hope, to come back to trusting him rather than simply giving into the emotional response of life in a way that is negative and so very unhealthy. That is really essential. God is worthy of our trust even in the midst of these kinds of adversities and the fact that it is difficult does not excuse us from trusting him, rather it becomes the opportunity for us to grow in Christ.

Now that's a challenge. I get that. I get that, and the question is, "Well, how do you overcome that dissatisfaction?" Well, as I understand Psalm 37, the key is looking up, first of all, to our God and trusting in him but there is also a calm confidence that comes from looking beyond today, looking beyond the immediate nature of life and looking to the ultimate outcome. I've described this in the past of taking the long view on life; not so wrapped up in today or this week but looking at what does God do in the lives of those long-term who trust him, who love him. Well, we see this beginning in verse 9. We see this in verse 9, this calm confidence. You say, "You don't understand the choices that are being pressed upon me. They're all bad." Now Scripture understands it perfectly and tells us to look beyond what's happening in the moment to the ultimate outcome of things, to live by the outcome, as a friend told me not long ago.

Verse 9, "For," why is it that you cannot fret? Why is it that you are able not to fret? Why is it that you're able to commit yourself to the Lord, to trust in him, to commit your way to him? Why is it that you're able to do that? Verse 9, "For," because. Here is the ground of that prior eight verse section of commands, rapid-fire commands to us. Verse 9,

9 For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. 10 Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there. 11 But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

Beloved, the wicked people that are causing you grief, they are living under impending judgment. They will not get away with things in the end. God has perfect sovereign control over everything that is happening. He has his eyes perfectly upon the wicked and the righteous alike. God in his sovereign protection of his people has set boundaries around the actions of the wicked so that they cannot transgress the boundaries that the Lord has given to them. They are living on borrowed time and they are operating within the sphere of limited opportunity. Their time is limited, their opportunity is limited by the sovereign design and sovereign plan of God. There is nothing that is happening that has transgressed the sovereign purpose of God and so wicked people are living under impending judgment. We, as the people of God, by contrast are in a completely different

position under the hand of God. We have the promise of his ultimate blessing. God will bless his people in the end.

Look there again at verse 9 where the psalmist says, "those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land." There will be ultimate blessing upon the people of God, and this promise of inheriting the land also appears in verse 11, you can look at it with me, "the humble will inherit the land." Verse 22, "those blessed by Him will inherit the land." Verse 29, "The righteous will inherit the land." And in verse 34, "He will exalt you to inherit the land." There is an ultimate outcome of blessing. In the context of the Old Testament promises to the nation of Israel, there was a promise that God would ultimately fulfill his promise to Abraham that his people would abide in the land. And in the New Testament we find this being extended, a like promise made to Christians in the New Testament in Matthew 5:5. You don't need to turn there, I just want to highlight it for you. Matthew 5:5 where it says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." God will bring ultimate blessing. Ultimately Christ will return and establish his kingdom on the earth. When he does that, his people will enjoy the prosperity of being under his reign, they will enjoy the earth under the blessing and the reign and the supremacy of Jesus Christ. This is the promise of God. This is the outcome for us.

Then you move beyond that and you realize that the outcome is that we're not only going to inherit the land as Larry spoke when he opened the hymns, that there is this promise of heaven throughout all of eternity, we experience God's blessing even in the midst of our sorrows and difficulties in this life today. We have food and clothing and a roof over our heads, and we have relationships that we enjoy. God is blessing us even in the midst of it. We have the Spirit of God indwelling us as believers. We have his holy inerrant word to guide us. We have the fellowship of other believers in the church, to mention nothing about the material prosperity that we enjoy that is unheard of in most parts of the world. We have all of that now. We have the hope of future blessing. We have the hope of heaven coming. We have the Spirit of God dwelling within us. We have Christ at the right hand of the Father interceding for us according to the will of God. Don't you see? Don't you see, beloved, if you are in Christ? Let me go further. If you are in Christ, you are justified. God has declared you righteous. God accepts you as righteous in his sight for the sake of his Son and his work on the cross and his righteous life. You are at peace with God. You have access to God. He hears your prayers. He responds to you. He fills your life with blessings. And he's only begun. You know, we're only experiencing in this life the early dew of morning; in the blessings that we know now, there are full showers of blessing to come throughout all of eternity. You know, this idea of inheriting the land speaks to the promise of God to be faithful to his people all the way to the end and that's the position that you are in in Christ.

So that's why, that's why we look and we say, "Oh, yes," verse 3, look at it with me there, in light of all of that, if the Lord has done all of this for us, and he has, "Trust in the LORD. Delight yourself in the LORD." Verse 5, "Commit your way to the LORD, Trust in Him." Verse 7, "Rest in the LORD, wait patiently for Him; Do not fret. Cease from anger, forsake wrath," and on and on it goes. You see, beloved, what we're seeing here is the critical importance of knowing enough Scripture and knowing enough theology and

knowing enough about the attributes of God to understand in a way that frames the way that we interpret all of life. The sorrows of today, the difficulties that the wicked bring upon us are not the ultimate defining force in the way that life comes out for us. It's just not. God reigns over them. God is good to his people. As we've said many many times in recent days and I'm going to keep saying it many many many times more, God is with us, God is for us, and that changes the perspective with which we view everything else. He has an inheritance for us and wicked men will not share in that, wicked men, the lost will not be present to diminish that for us. God will separate the sheep from the goats and ultimately he will say to us, "Enter into My kingdom," while the wicked who have rejected and despised Christ and have despised and rejected and harmed us, they will be sent away into everlasting punishment.

That's the outcome of it all for us and so what God is calling us to do is to remember that, to love that, to rest in that, and to wait patiently on him until he brings that to pass. We trust him to do what he has told us he will do and, beloved, that means something for each one of us. It means something for each one of you and just transforming the way that you think and look at the world. The sure outcome of God's blessing upon his people reverses the way that we look at life today. It reverses our perception of the passing success of the wicked. We realize as Scripture says over and over again, it's just like grass and they are just like grass, it flourishes for a day but it dies tomorrow under the heat of the sun, or it dies tomorrow under the cold hand of winter. What is green and flourishing becomes brown and decaying ever so quickly. That is the reality of what we see happening around us and we have to have the biblical sense and the biblical perspective to realize that the harm of the wicked or the success of the wicked is not something to be envied. Verse 1, look at it there with me, Psalm 37:1, "Be not envious toward wrongdoers." Don't be jealous over what they've got going because it's temporary, it's passing, it's not going to last. Rather trust in the goodness of God and these other things need not distract us.

Well, that brings us to our second point this morning. We've seen the call to calm confidence, now point number 2, what we're going to see are the certainties which support calm confidence. The certainties that support calm confidence. What I love about this Psalm, what I love so much about Scripture is this, among many other things, is that it not merely gives us a command, it doesn't simply say, "Trust the Lord. Do not fret." you know, if you've had people just say, you know, "You need to stop worrying," and that's all they say, that's not very helpful, is it? I am worried. I am anxious. I am concerned about what the future holds. You simply telling me not to be concerned about it doesn't help my heart at all. And what we need is we need more from the word of God to understand why it is that we can be calm, why it is that we can be peaceful, why we can set aside our agitation over life and replace it with a confidence in who Christ is and what he has done for us. Well, that's what David is doing in the rest of Psalm 37. He gives us a number of contrasts to cultivate, to undergird, to strengthen that calm confidence over the course of our uncertain lives. The first thing that he reminds us of is that he reminds us, and there are a few subpoints here in these certainties, the first certainty that he reminds us of is this, is the men reap what they sow. What they plant is

what they harvest. Those who plant wickedness in their lives reap judgment. God has ordered the universe in such a way that sin rebounds against those who practice it.

Look at verses 12 and 13 with me. Psalm 37:12-13,

12 The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth.

Okay, that's pretty threatening. That's kind of what we have, some of what we have going around today, isn't it? What's the Lord's response? Well,

13 The Lord laughs at him, For He sees his day is coming.

From an earthly perspective it seems as though the wicked have power to carry out their intentions against the righteous, sometimes, in an earthly sense, they succeed, but from God's perspective, which is the only perspective that matters, not yours, not theirs, not mine, from God's perspective their plots are laughable. He laughs at what they are doing. He regards it with derision. He regards it with contempt because they, the wicked, are not sovereign here. They do not have ultimate and final authority. God does. God is sovereign. God is in control. God is righteous. God is just. God is holy. And as a result of that, then, it is inevitable that the ultimate outcome of rebellion against God is utter and complete failure and doom. It could be no other way. God will not tolerate and allow wickedness to triumph in the end. They will reap what they sow. Their opposition to the people of God is doomed to failure.

Look at verses 14 and 15. They make their plans, and by external appearances it can be intimidating, I acknowledge that, but in verse 14 it says,

14 The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow To cast down the afflicted and the needy, To slay those who are upright in conduct.

But what's going to happen in the end? Verse 15,

15 Their sword will enter their own heart, And their bows will be broken.

The arrow that they draw to shoot at the righteous is going to boomerang and come right into their own body and be their own doom. It boomerangs and comes back to them. And beloved, if you take any time to step back and just think about the nature of life, the way things work out over the course of time, you will see plainly that this is true. What happens to violent men? What happens to those that, you know, shoot people in the streets and things like that? What happens to violent men? They die by violence. They die by violence. What happens to people who swindle others out of their hard-earned money and take advantage and lie and cheat in order to acquire their riches? What happens to swindlers? Do you know what? They lose their fortune. They end up in prison. You know, time has a way, justice has a way of finding them out and swindlers end up broken in prison. You know, as a pattern of life, you know, there's a principle of holiness and a

principle of justice that God works out in such a way that people reap what they sow, people get back what they have done.

So what Scripture is saying here is because these people will reap what they sow under the moral order of the universe, therefore as a consequence of that, you and I need to look past what's happening today and look at the ultimate outcome in a way that says, you know, that's doomed to bring judgment upon them, we say that in such a way that therefore we do not fret over what happens in the meantime. We are content to know God, to know Christ, to know the Spirit, to have eternal salvation, to have the forgiveness of our sins, to rest in him, to rest in his goodness, and to trust God to work it out over time without feeling the need to manipulate things in our own power. Who God is and the eternal purpose of God guarantees the ultimate outcome. Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." So if they want to sow to sin, they're going to reap judgment. What Psalm 37 is saying to us as the believing people of God is, is that we sow to faith, we sow to trust, we sow toward knowing God, toward trusting him, toward waiting on him, and letting that inner soul disposition be the way that we approach life, as Scripture says, that God's promise to us is that we inherit his blessing in the end when we do.

That's the outcome and so we live by the outcome that is guaranteed by the character and attributes of God rather than being thrown up and down, back and forth by the headlines of today or the screaming voices of news channels. We just have to think through these things very carefully and make a decision, you all have to make a decision, you know, what is it, by what principle am I going to determine my disposition? By what principle am I going to determine my outlook on the rest of my life? Is it going to be the fear of man, or is it going to be the fear of God that leads to this trust and peace and calm confidence of which he speaks? You know, what is more important to you, what happens in this life or what happens in heaven? You know, what happens today or what happens tomorrow, so to speak, and using that in a broad term about the ultimate outcome? You know, I've used this illustration in the past, you know, if you've ever watched a recording of an athletic contest and you know the outcome but you're watching a replay of it and your team is behind while you're watching the replay but you know that your team wins in the end, well, then you would never be upset as you're watching this replay that your team is behind and fearful of an ultimate loss because you already know how it turns out, and so you can just enjoy watching the unfolding of that game that happened in the past. Well, in like manner, we know the outcome. We know the outcome of life. We know the outcome of history. We know the ultimate vindication of Christ and his blessing on his people and the intention of God through his word is to instruct us in a way that our heart attitude responds to the ultimate outcome rather than what is happening day-by-day in our earthly lives and that changes everything because God has made sure that men will reap what they sow. That's a certainty that underlies our calm confidence in life.

Now secondly, you know, as we consider these certainties that underlie our calm confidence, we see this, we see, secondly, that God distinguishes the wicked from the righteous. God distinguishes the wicked from the righteous and as you proceed in Psalm 37, David next undergirds our spiritual calm with several contrasts. He's teaching by way

of contrast in what follows and he's showing us that God knows how to separate the sheep from the goats. He knows how to separate the good from the bad, those who have faith from those who do not. Look at verses 16 and 17. He says,

16 Better is the little of the righteous Than the abundance of many wicked.
17 For the arms of the wicked will be broken, But the LORD sustains the righteous.

And so in light of that, he calls upon us – watch this – he calls upon us, he calls upon you, my Christian friend, he calls upon you to rest, to rest in the omniscience of God and the provision of God.

Look at verses 18 and 19. He says,

18 The LORD knows the days of the blameless, And their inheritance will be forever. 19 They will not be ashamed in the time of evil, And in the days of famine they will have abundance.

God knows your days. God knows where you are. God knows what is happening and you are to rest in that even if you can't perceive how this would possibly work out for good in the end. You rest in that, you rest in that in the midst of your difficult family life, you rest in that in the midst of your grief, you rest in that in the midst of the threats that this world brings to us. We rest not in an earthly security, we rest in the fact that God knows us, God cares about us, and God has his hand on us and true faith says, "That's enough. Though the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, my heart can rest because I know who my God is and I trust Him. I trust Him." And look, Christian friend, beloved, can you do anything other than trust him completely and joyfully when you look back at the cross of Calvary and you see Christ in your memory, in your informed mind from Scripture? We look back at the cross and we see how much our Lord loved us, how much he's done for us. He bore the wrath of God for us at the cross. He loved us and bore our sins so that we undeserving of that, we undeserving of grace are on the receiving end of favor that will last forever in our lives.

Don't you see? Don't you see that if Christ is like that at the cross, that all of his intentions for you must be good? Don't you see that if he could enter into the grave and come out alive on the other side, don't you see that if you are joined to him, that you, in like manner, you can enter into death itself and know that you come out safe on the other side? Don't you see, then, that as you enter into difficulties in this life, that one way or another Christ is going to bring you out safe on the other side? We don't need to know how. I'll say that again, we don't need to know how, we only need to know who, and if you know who Christ is, if you belong to him, then you are safe in the hands of God and that changes the perspective with which you view everything else. It leads you away from fretting. It leads you away from being overheated and leads you into this calm confidence about what the Lord has in store for you in the end.

By contrast, the wicked have a dreadful future. Look at verse 20. And for those of you here that are not in Christ, I'm about to describe your future with the hopes that God would prick your heart and your conscience that you would flee to Christ for this refuge that he offers to everyone freely who would come to him by faith alone. Verse 20,

20 But the wicked will perish; And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures, They vanish like smoke they vanish away. 21 The wicked borrows and does not pay back, But the righteous is gracious and gives. 22 For those blessed by Him will inherit the land, But those cursed by Him will be cut off.

Do you see it? God has determined in his eternal purpose that he will bless his people and he will judge the wicked. There can be no other outcome, beloved, and God will not make any mistakes. As the Good Shepherd, he won't allow one of his sheep to wander beyond the fold in a way that allows them to be ultimately devoured. As a good shepherd, he will make sure that every one of us is brought safely into the fold where we will abide under his protection forever, indeed, we are abiding under his protection even now, even in the midst of the threats. You remember Psalm 23, don't you? What did David says, "You prepare a table for me," where? "In the midst of my enemies. You are preparing a banquet for me in a place of safety even while my enemies are watching and looking on and threatening me." So what does David say at the end of Psalm 23? "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Beloved, that is the perspective that informs the way that we're looking at life today. That is the perspective that informs everything else, and by the necessary help of the Holy Spirit, we need to understand these things, we need to embrace them, and as we do the Holy Spirit will conform our hearts to these things so that we can rest in these truths and thus glorify God in the way that we respond to life in a wicked world, in a challenging world, in a difficult world. And what I want you to see, there's so many things I want you to see in this, so many, so many things, is that this kind of understanding of who Christ is and what he does for us, this leads us away from attitudes of severity in life, of harsh judgment toward others and even toward fellow believers, and suspicion. It leads us away from all of those kinds of things and leads us into a place where we're simply content, as one of the Psalms that we're going to be studying soon says, we're content to be like a weaned child leaning against our mother, having no need to drink from the fountain of worldly concerns but just content to be in the arms of our mother, as Scripture uses this bracing metaphor, we're like that weaned child leaning on their mother content and at rest. This is a picture of the believer resting on God, resting on the promises, resting on Christ, content and untroubled by what's happening around us.

So it's better for you, it's better for you to be in a position of being threatened by the world in Christ today than to have security in the world without Christ because the outcome is completely different because God knows how to distinguish between the wicked and the righteous. And beloved, a little bit, a little bit with a good future in heaven is far far better than to have a lot in this life and have your future cast with the

wicked who are going to be judged. This is just true. This isn't even difficult or complicated. It's better to have a good future with an uncertain present than to have power now with a future that leads to judgment. We must look at life through the ultimate outcome.

Well, thirdly, as time gets away from us as it always does here, thirdly, we see another certainty that strengthens our sense of calm: experience confirms this principle. Thirdly, experience confirms this principle, this principle that there is a basis for calm in the midst of uncertainty. David is writing this Psalm obviously in his later years and his vast life experience testifies to the truth of which he speaks. Look at verse 23. He says this, he says,

23 The steps of a man are established by the LORD, And He delights in his way. 24 When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand. 25 [David says] I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread. 26 All day long he is gracious and lends, And his descendants are a blessing.

David says, "I've been around the block. I've been around. I've seen life. From my position as king leading armies through war, leading sheep in my younger days through hills and valleys, seeing friends betray me, foes oppose me, I've seen it all and throughout all of that, I've never seen God forsake his righteous ones." So God is just, he is faithful to his people, and what Scripture is telling us over and over again in this Psalm is that the attributes of God, his justice, his lovingkindness, his faithfulness to his people, these are more than theological slogans. This is more than just a multiple choice exam in some seminary someplace. These are the realities that determine the outcome of life. We are to know these, embrace them and rely upon them as indications of what God will do for us in the end regardless of how details shift around in the time being. Beloved, if you are in Christ, you are secure. You are safe. And so we see these things about the character of God and we rest in him. And so David's experience confirms that we can live in calm confidence.

Now fourthly: God is faithful and just. God is faithful and just. Your cues for responding to life do not come from your circumstances and, beloved, they do not come from what you feel inside either. We do not rely on what we feel in order to determine how we're going to look ahead to the rest of life. No, our cues, what we base our worldview on comes from the character of God. Look at verses 27 and 28.

27 Depart from evil and do good, So you will abide forever. 28 For the LORD loves justice And does not forsake His godly ones; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.

Go on in verse 29,

29 The righteous will inherit the land And dwell in it forever. 30 The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, And his tongue speaks justice. 31 The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip. 32 The wicked spies upon the righteous And seeks to kill him. 33 The LORD will not leave him in his hand Or let him be condemned when he is judged.

In other words, wicked people may set their eyes and may set their guns upon you but you can still trust the Lord even in that moment of extremity. So in verse 34, what we are to do is,

34 Wait for the LORD and keep His way, And He will exalt you to inherit the land;

You are kept in Christ. God loves you in Christ. God keeps you. Romans 8 is all about this principle. We won't turn there. And in these days where so much is feeding our perspective toward fear and distrust and being under the sense of opposition, we come back to God's word and we realize that we're safe after all and we can live in peace as a result of that.

David continues speaking from his experience, verse 35,

35 I have seen a wicked, violent man Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. 36 Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found. 37 Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity. [Here's another contrast:] 38 But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off.

Do you know what you need to do to earn this? It's a trick question. This blessing of the protection of God is not for those who work, it's for those who trust him. It's for those who believe him, who look at Christ and see their Savior, those who look at the word of God and say, "This is true," and those who look at the character and attributes of God and say, "No matter what else happens around me, I am going to trust You. I am going to wait for You and I am going to expect You to be good to me in the end not because I deserve it but because You are good and faithful to Your people. And God, I trust Your word utterly, completely, no matter what I see happening around me." It's for those who trust him.

Look at the final two verses there.

9 But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble. 40 The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.

Where is your trust, beloved? Where is your hope? As you look at the world around you, are you sinking in self-pity, sinking in fear, sinking in anger, sinking in resentment? Or are you looking up, looking out to Christ and seeing that the cross in the past means certainty in the future and resting and trusting in him?

Let's pray together.

Gracious Lord, heavenly Father, blessed Holy Spirit, we thank You that the Son of God partook of our flesh and through death rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, so that He might free those of us who through fear of death and fear of life were subject to slavery all our lives. Dear Lord, You were made like us in all things so that You might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of Your people, and now since You, Yourself, have been tempted in what You suffered, You are able to come to our aid in what we suffer and when we are tempted. And so, Father, throughout this, I pray that You would just take the weak words of this exposition and bring the truth of Your word to bear with power to the hearts of each one here that we might live in trust and calm confidence in You no matter what happens around us, and thus give glory to You, be a strength and comfort to those of our loved ones and to one another, and to be a shining light for Christ in the midst of an enveloping darkness that is coming upon us. You are good, You are faithful, and the outcome for us who know You will be 100% good. We believe that. We trust You for it and commit it all to You in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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