

The Christian's Warfare Part 13: A Biblical Perspective on Victory

The Christian's Warfare

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 37th Psalm, Psalm 37. We have been for a number of weeks studying God's word in a more topical way than we normally do. We had been working expositionally through Ezra-Nehemiah. It led us to spend some time in Ephesians dealing with the issue of spiritual warfare that Ezra-Nehemiah had raised in Nehemiah 4, and then in the concept of warfare just has really been a burden on my heart, spiritual warfare, and so we started this series of messages after that excursus into Ephesians 6, the armor of God, we then went into a series that we called "The Christian's Warfare," and the idea is modern spiritual warfare. We've seen that spiritual warfare is something that happens in the mind, that's where the battle happens. Satan is a liar, he is a deceiver. Jesus said he's a murderer, he's been a murderer from the beginning. How does he murder? He murders through lies. He leads people to believe things that are not true and thus steals their soul. Well, for Christians he leads those who may eternally be secure in Christ yet he steals their joy, he robs them of the blessings that God has for them and of the impact that they could have for Christ.

So we've been looking at this idea, the Christian's warfare. That's been the title of the message for the last, I think this is our 13th message, and we've been dealing with the Christian's warfare in terms of the issues that are confronting us today in America as believers. Well, we've talked some about some of the issues related to the coronavirus, not a lot of detail on that. We really haven't spent a lot of time on these things just other than we've looked at the issues like that but also the racial strife in America, the division, and we've seen that it's urgent for believers to not let ourselves be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that is biblically to fight spiritually against those lies by clinging to the truth and grounding our hearts in the truth of God's word. The only thing that we know that is true is the word of God and that's clearer today than it's ever been in my life. I mean, you hear somebody on TV and you just figure they're probably lying. They may not even know they're lying but they're lying. Truth is such a rare commodity but in this book we have 100% truth and so we do well to cling to it and to hold to it in an ever deepening darkness that is in our lives today around us.

So we've called it the Christian's warfare and today the subtitle, each week has a different subtitle related to some of these topics that have confronted us. Last week we looked at a

biblical perspective on unity. The time before that when I preached the biblical perspective on identity. Today is a biblical perspective on victory. A biblical perspective on victory. What does the victorious Christian life look like? What does victory look like? There are a lot of people who talk about victory and especially in evangelical circles but the things they describe as the victorious Christian life don't look like what the Bible calls victory. The Bible doesn't picture a life full of ease. In fact, the Bible pictures the Christian life, essentially the Christian life is hard and if victory is overcoming, now it just think about that, we're overcomers. A keyword in the Bible, 1 John 5:4, "For everyone born of God overcomes the world," everyone born of God overcomes the world, "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." So everyone who is a Christian is an overcomer, that's true, absolutely true but it's not true in the way most people that talk about victory in the Christian life talk about it. They speak in terms of victorious in circumstances, that is, that you're going to have victory, you name it, you claim it. You know, you're going to have victory over poverty. You're going to have victory over disease. You're going to have victory over all these different things that the Bible does not promise. People are misunderstanding the Scriptures. We're going to have that in heaven but the victorious Christian life in a fallen world is a life that is about overcoming.

Now just think about overcoming in itself, that verb that I just mentioned from 1 John 5:4, everyone born of God overcomes the world, this is the victory that overcomes the world, three times in that short verse the key Greek word nikao or nike, Nike is a transliteration of that. Victory is the idea of the word "nike." It means "to overcome," but in the idea of overcoming means that you're encountering conflict, you're encountering difficulty, you're encountering obstacles. It's not easy to win a victory. It's not easy to be an overcomer. If you're going to live a life of overcoming, expect to live a life of diversity and difficulty and conflict. That's what the New Testament pictures as the Christian life. It's not what we would like because we would like a perfect world but that's not going to happen until we leave this world, until we enter the next.

So what does victory look like? That's the issue that we want to look at today. A biblical perspective on victory and we turn to the Old Testament to Psalm 37, a wonderful passage. I found myself in this a lot this year. 2020 has been such an interesting year, hasn't it? I mean, it's become, I think years from now people will talk about, "Oh, yeah yeah, what were you doing? You know, what were your circumstances in life in 2020? What happened to you in 2020? Did you get the coronavirus? Did you lose your job because of the shutdowns? Do you remember what was happening when the election and the controversy about that?" There will be all kinds of talk about 2020. It has been a very interesting year but it is an opportunity for the Christian to live out what God has called us to, to live out what victory looks like, and what does victory look like in these circumstances? What does it mean to overcome? What does that really mean?

I think this Psalm, Psalm 37, lays out in a sense the pathway to victory. It's a very practical Psalm. It's a Psalm of David. It is one of the Psalms that theologians categorize as a wisdom Psalm. You know, the Psalms are basically normally they are songs put to music, most of them are prayers to God, at least a large part of it will be prayer to God,

praising the Lord, directly speaking to God. This Psalm doesn't have any of direct worship in it, and a number of Psalms are like this, it's instruction. It's wisdom and there are some Psalms that are particularly called wisdom Psalms, that is, they're like Proverbs in a way. They tell us how to live. And one function of wisdom literature is basically, or one common denominator of wisdom literature is that it is calling us to live the life of wisdom, and essentially what you see in wisdom literature, there are two ways to live. There's only two ways. You will either live the life of wisdom or you will live the life of foolishness. You will either be wise or you will be a fool. That's the only two options and we're going to see that this is exactly what we find here.

Now here are the words that are used for wise and fool are slightly different, it's righteous and wicked repeated over and over and over again in this Psalm. You're either in one of those two camps. You're either in the righteous or you're in the wicked. So David is calling us to live a life of righteousness, a life of wisdom when we are surrounded by evil. This is I mentioned, I've spent a lot of time in this Psalm in my life but particularly this year I keep coming back to it because it's so easy to be when you're dealing with adverse circumstances, it's so easy to grumble, complain, and as this text says to fret, just to stew on all that is wrong. To be angry. To be embittered. To spend all of our time trying to solve the problems of the world and think about what everybody else needs to do. Isn't it amazing how upset you can get if you think about things, bad, you know, evil lies, deceptive circumstances? If you think about it long enough, it just has a way of just consuming you from the inside and this passage is telling us that's the reality, the real temptation that we all face and he's going to say, "You can live the victorious Christian life in circumstances that otherwise for other people are producing fretting and anger and bitterness and discouragement and despair. The Christian looks different in these circumstances." The victorious Christian life is to be surrounded by evil and the onslaught of evil, when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? That is, wickedness is coming in like a flood and yet the righteous are known by a quiet heart and a sense of steadfast hope and confidence, trust in the Lord. And so this Psalm presents a sketch of the person who is victorious.

Now we're only going to read the first 11 verses and we'll touch on some of the other verses as we go along, but I encourage you to read all of it. But the first 11 verses are really where the practical instruction is all compressed into the first 11 verses. I want you to listen as we read. You're going to hear in the first eight verses, you're going to hear 15 imperatives, 15 commands, 15 instructions. In fact, it's really interesting, the psalmist, you remember we were talking about Ephesians last week and I mentioned how in Ephesians the first three chapters are doctrine, they tell you what God has done for you, they just tell you all the wonder of what God has done for you in Christ if you are his, and in chapters 4, 5 and 6 get practical. That is, the theology comes first and now the practice comes afterwards. That's a very common way that the epistles are organized, especially Paul. He gives the theology, what God has done for you, the indicatives, as it were. These are statements of fact of who Christ is and what he's done, therefore now in light of the indicatives, here are the imperatives, here are the commands. That's the normal way or the most common way but it's not the exclusive way because what you see here is here you get all the instructions upfront, he front loads the instructions in the first

eight verses and then the next 32 verses, that is, 8/40, the first 20% of the verses you get all of the instructions, the last 80% you basically get the indicatives and the reasons for the instruction. We're going to see it is summarized in verses 9 to 11, it really summarizes the whole reasons for why you're supposed to do all these things. But 15 commands. This is very practical and so we want to glean from this how we can be victorious. It shows us what the Christian life, the victorious Christian life looks like and it shows us how to win in God's eyes.

So let's read verses 1 to 11.

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.

All of those imperatives, 15 imperatives in those eight verses and here is the summary of why you obey those eight imperatives, verses 9 to 11. It's going to be expanded to the rest of the Psalm but here it's summarized in a very compact way. Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing. 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.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word, and as we come to Your word, how mindful we are of our own inadequacy, our own need of grace, our need of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We pray that Your Spirit that inspired these words to be written by David would now illuminate them in our minds and our hearts, apply them to our lives, produce repentance and faith, saving some who need salvation and calling all of us who are Yours to holiness for the glory of Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

So a biblical perspective on victory. The biblical perspective on victory. He sums up really what victory is, ultimate victory is in this important phrase that occurs twice in that passage we read, "They will inherit the land," verse 9, "those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land"; verse 11, "But the humble will inherit the land." The idea here is they will win it all. In fact, you could translate this and the King James does in verse

11, this is the reading in the New American Standard that I'm reading it says, "But the humble will inherit the land." The King James translates those Hebrew words as, "But the meek will inherit the earth." There is a sense in which this Psalm is actually an expansion, as it were, upon the third Beatitude of Jesus, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." This is essentially saying the same thing. He's saying in verse 11 the humble, and that word could easily be translated meek. It's actually the same word in Numbers 12:3 where we hear Moses described as the meekest man on earth. The same Hebrew word here. The idea of meekness, humility, means to be afflicted but it means to be afflicted, it means to be low-minded. It has the essential idea that we would be willing to tolerate personal attack without, you know, returning that attack. That's meekness.

So the meek inherit the earth and the people who live like this inherit the land. We win everything. Those who belong to Jesus Christ will inherit the land. In fact, this idea of inheriting the land, it goes back for a Jew reading this in David's time it would remind them of the conquest of the land of Canaan, and the contrast is between the wicked, remember, and the righteous. As you read this, you see it over and over and over again, especially as you read farther down, you see more and more of this idea of the wicked and the righteous being contrasted. But the humble inherit the land. "Evildoers," he says in verse 9, "will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, inherit the land." Evildoers, wicked people are cut off but those who wait upon the Lord, who trust in the Lord, they inherit the land. So the contrast between the wicked and the righteous harkens back to the imagery of what happened when the nation of Israel was given the land of Canaan, when they conquered the land.

When they inherited the land hundreds of years before David writes this, Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt and he led them to the frontier and the border of the land of Canaan. He died before Joshua led them in. Joshua led them in to conquer the land and God's people inherited the land of Canaan, and the people in Canaan were cut off. They were evildoers. They were wicked people. They were exceedingly wicked people. You see this, this is one of the reasons for the judgment upon God that fell through the nation of Israel upon those people. They were exceedingly wicked. You see this when you look at Genesis 15 and you see that God told Abraham, "You're going to have to wait. Your descendants are going to be slaves in the land for 400 years then I'm going to give them the land of Canaan because the wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete. That is, the wickedness of the people in the land of Canaan is not yet complete, therefore they are going to have to wait 400 years until the wickedness of the Amorite is literally filled up, where they become so exceedingly wicked that judgment must fall upon them. Then I'm going to send you into the land, your descendants."

When you read in Leviticus 21 to 24 and you see the instructions that God gave the people, actually started in chapter 20, gave the people of Israel as they go into the land that you're to, you know, you're not to do this like the people in the land, and he describes all kinds of horrible practices. You're not to give your baby on the fire to Molech like the people in the land. You're not to sacrifice your children out of a desire to have a better life yourself, which is what the people were doing. You're not to, you know, a man is not to have his father's wife, a man is not to lie with an animal, bestiality. All of these

different things, horrible, wicked things that the people in the land did, God says, "You are not to be like that." Well, what that's showing is that the wickedness of the people, they were cut off, and so this would remind a Jew, an Israelite, in the same way that God gave the land to the people of Israel, he's going to give the land to us.

Now they're actually in the land so they even in this are learning that Canaan was not the point, that heaven is the point. We will inherit heaven. We will have the new heavens and the new earth. Hebrews 11 makes this emphatic and clear when it says that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob realized when they were dwelling in the land of Canaan, God said, "I give this land to you," but they didn't own any of it. Actually, they owned one burial plot in a field. That's all Abraham ever owned his whole life of Canaan. And Isaac, his son, all Isaac ever owned his whole life in Canaan was that same burial plot that his mom and dad were buried in and that he would be buried in. And Jacob, all that he ever owned of the land of Canaan was the same thing that his dad and his mom owned and his grandfather and all of them were buried, he owned that burial plot. But God had said, "This land is yours." Hebrews 11 tells us they understood, they came to understand that God was not talking about Canaan, they started looking for a heavenly city, a city whose builder and maker is God, therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.

You see, they understood that the land is heaven and so here in Psalm 37, this is being unpacked, in a sense, for them. Five times in this passage, in this Psalm, you will have, "they will inherit the land." Verse 9, "evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land." Verse 11, "But the humble will inherit the land." Verse 22, "For those blessed by Him will inherit the land, But those cursed by Him will be cut off." Verse 29, "The righteous will inherit the land And dwell in it forever." Verse 34, "Wait for the LORD and keep His way, And He will exalt you to inherit the land." And so "inherit the land" calls us to look toward heaven and understand that we are winning everything. The meek inherit the earth. We receive everything. We are utterly victorious. Life is hard but the Christian can be victorious.

What does victory look like? Well, I want us to look, the imperatives that are given here in these first eight verses, I mentioned 15 imperatives, we're going to group them into three points this morning, not 15 points. We'd probably be here for a long time if we did it that way so three points this morning. How do we walk in victory? What does victory look like in a world that is increasingly dark, where evil continues to thrive and apparently to be unabated?

Well, the first thing that we need to do is we need to stop fretting. Pretty clear in the passage. You heard three times that command, "Do not fret." Verse 1, verse 7 and verse 8. In fact, of the 15 imperatives, the first imperative and the 15th bracketing it are, "Do not fret." Verse 1, "Do not fret because of evildoers." Verse 8, "Cease from anger, forsake wrath, do not fret." That's the last imperative in that section. "It leads only to evildoing." So you have that bracket. I love that if you notice that as well, do not fret because of evildoers, that's verse 1. The 15th imperative in the passage is do not fret, it leads only to evildoing. If you fret because of evildoers, you will become an evildoer. Mark it down, that is just absolutely the way it is. If you spend your time stewing on all

that is wrong in the world, if you spend your time thinking about it, meditating on it, filling your mind with all that is wrong. It doesn't mean that you can't be informed, there's a balance. It doesn't mean that you can't take action. It doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean we're to sit back and do nothing no matter what's going on in the world. Not at all, we're called to action. We're going to see that at the end. But we are not to let ourselves be controlled; our thoughts be consumed by the people who are doing the evil. I mean, if you meditate on the evil that is being done around you, you will do evil yourself.

The power of the mind and the power of what we meditate on, and I just want to encourage you to understand meditation biblically is not some kind of Eastern meditation, when the Bible talks about meditation. Eastern meditation, this is the unbiblical meditation that so many people have been into and are into, is the idea of emptying the mind. That's emptying the mind. Emptying the mind is unbiblical, ungodly meditation. That is a recipe for danger, spiritual delusion. The Bible when it talks about meditation, it's filling the mind. You don't empty your mind, you fill your mind with the word of God. Now filling your mind with the word of God will empty it of the other stuff that's in there. You do need to get rid of the stuff that's in there. You need to stop fretting. But he's going to not just tell us stop fretting, he's going to tell us to fill our minds with the word of God.

So stop fretting. The idea of the word here translated "fret" means literally "to be heated." The verb could be used to say burn, "Stop burning." Three times and it's at the end, when God says it three times it raises the superlative. He understands this is, it is very natural. And think about this, King David, the man of God that he was, is the one who writes this Psalm and probably at the end of his life because he at one point says that he has, "I have been young and now I am old," verse 25, "Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread." This is David's reflection on his whole life. "I've been young, now I'm old and this is what I want to tell you." And basically what he's telling you is, "Listen, living in a fallen world, even if you could have lived under David's reign in Israel," you would think if you were going to pick times in the past that you could have lived, that would have been a great time to live. King David, a man after God's heart is the king. Can it get better than that in a fallen world unless Jesus comes? You wouldn't think so but David says, "Listen, I have learned that one of the biggest things you have to deal with, I've had to deal with, is I cannot allow myself to fret." He's been surrounded by evil-doing his whole life. You see, the most victorious people in the Bible were not people who had lives of ease and comfort. They were not people who named it and claimed it in their circumstances. They lived amidst trial upon trial and through the trials their faith was purified and they overcame. That is what the Christian life is and that is what if you have chosen to follow Jesus Christ and I hope that you have, and if you've not, I urge you to today, but if you have you must understand and if you're considering the claims of Christ, you must understand Jesus is not promising to make your life easy. That's just not true. People who tell you that are sorely mistaken, probably have ill motives but I'm not going to judge ultimately, many are just misinformed. But they are potentially doing great damage to you if you're listening to them.

We're called to a life of suffering. We're called to be made like Jesus, to be made like Jesus, how can you be made like Jesus without suffering? And one of the most amazing verses in all of Scripture is in Hebrews 5 where we're told that Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered. He learned obedience. Now he never disobeyed. He lived a perfect life. That's the Gospel, the Gospel is that Jesus Christ was tempted in every way yet without sin, that he offers to God a perfect life of righteousness, 30+ years, probably 33 years of being tempted and always obeying God. He obeyed every positive command of the Scriptures. "This you shall do." He always did it. He obeyed every negative command of Scripture. "This you shall not do." He never did it. Tempted in every way, every moment, all of his life a perfect record of righteousness. A perfect life of loving God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, with all of his strength. Every moment of every day Jesus did that. He lived a perfect life of loving his neighbor as himself, and that is the record that he gives to you now in him so that you and I are righteous because of what he has done. But now that we are in him, we're supposed to be made like him. That is the ultimate victory for the Christian is to be made more and more like Jesus. To be like him in his character. To do what we read earlier from Matthew 20 that Charles read. To not be like the Gentiles who lord it over those under their charge. But he who wants to be great is to be a servant of all. "You are to be like Me," he says, "for the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many."

So if you're going to be like Jesus, how can you be like Jesus unless you suffer? If he had to learn obedience through the things he suffered, Hebrews 5, how can we possibly be like him without suffering? That's the picture that Scripture gives and the wonder is, though, is that in the suffering you have the joy of being made like Christ and you also have the joy of being united more and more to Christ in the process, and that's what makes suffering sweet. That's what makes suffering precious. That's what we can look at even the most difficult things that come into our lives and listen, suffering in itself, suffering in itself for itself is evil. This is the miracle of how God works in a fallen world. Everything that tears down the body, everything that tears down the soul, every hurtful thing is by definition biblically evil. Good is that which is benevolent and beneficial. Evil is that which tears down and destroys what God made to be good. But our God is so amazing that he can use evil for his glory and our good. In a fallen world, he does that.

So we have to stop fretting. I mean, we're going to see stuff around us that is ugly, that is difficult, it's going to sometimes press in and threaten to overwhelm us, and the first thing we have to do is we have to just make a determined decision to change our focus. It's a decisive change of focus, mental focus. It's saying, "I'm not going to keep meditating on the evil I see. I see it, I may have to speak to it, I may have to do something about it, but I'm not going to sit here and meditate and stew on the evil. I'm not going to fret. I'm going to stop that." It starts with just deciding you're going to stop fretting.

This means for most of us probably, we need to ask ourselves how much time do you spend following the news or social media? How much time do you spend reading articles? I'm not saying you can't read articles about it; you need to be informed. As Christian citizens, good citizens of America, we're supposed to be informed, we're

supposed to vote in an informed way to try to advance the principles that would promote the harmony for the Gospel. It's all important. Absolutely it's important but we are not to sit around meditating on it. So I don't know about you but I have to limit my time. I can tell when I'm spending too much time following what's happening. I just find myself getting sour and negative and everything is worse. Food doesn't taste as good. Little irritations become really bothersome. You know, a little something happens and you're jumping because, what? You've been meditating, I've been meditating on the evil around me. If I meditate on the evil around me, I will be conformed in some way to the world. I can't let that happen. So however much time you spend following what's going on in the world, you need to spend a lot more time than that meditating on the word of God, the truth.

So that's what he's going to say next. So stop fretting, that's the first point. Stop fretting. Well, let me just point out to you also, basically you have those three imperatives, "Do not fret," but he adds to it in verses 7 and 8, the last two occurrences of "do not fret," verse 7 says, "Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret." Then you have two imperatives, "Cease from anger, forsake wrath," and then, "Do not fret." Do you see that? He's saying do not fret means stop being angry. Forsake wrath. Turn away from a determination to punish evil. This is when you see someone doing something evil and you want to be the instrument to bring judgment. "I just would like to give him a piece of my mind." I've actually had the thought, you know, I'd like to just, this is sinful, I would like to really give that person a piece of my mind, I almost would like to punch him in the nose. You know, and I'm not a violent person. You know, it's been a long time since I've punched anybody in the nose. I don't even remember the last time. My brother and I, it would be the only time I ever did and we didn't fight a lot. But he's so angry and you're like, "I can't believe the audacity of evil and the arrogance of these people lying like they are," and if I'm feeling that, I need to repent. If I'm feeling like that then I have to repent. "Lord, what am I doing. Vengeance is Yours. You will repay" says the Lord. I need to pray for this person's soul." And if I had the opportunity to talk to them with a right heart, with a heart that is overcoming like the psalmist is calling us to, with a heart that gets in the right place, then I can be a real asset to the kingdom, I could then have a conversation with that person that might result in some real spiritual impact. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God, James 1:21.

So when I feel anger getting inside of me, that's not going to produce anything good. I'm called to lay aside anger and to pursue meekness. This is what we're basically doing here. He's telling us how we overcome really by becoming meek, and the first thing to becoming meek is you stop fretting, you stop focusing on what evil has been done. Even if it's personal attack on yourself, you stop focusing on that. You see it happen, it may have to be dealt with but you're not, your primary focus is not on what's happened to you. So it's one thing to say stop focusing on that. In fact, it's funny how the mind works. You can't just say stop it; you have to replace it. If you say, "Stop it. Stop it. Stop it." You will keep on thinking about what you're trying to stop.

So the psalmist basically tells us, "Do not fret. Do not fret. Do not fret." But then he gives us in the middle of this bracketing of "do not fret," he says the second point is start

trusting. If the first point is stop fretting, the second point is start trusting. After he says in verse 1, "Do not fret. Be not envious." The third imperative that he comes to is, "Trust in the LORD." Trust in the Lord. Trust is repeated in verse 5, "Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it." Some other words I think that connote the same basic idea. Trust is to place your confidence in. It's a synonym for faith, believe. You trust. Trust is an essential part of faith. Biblically faith is not just knowing the facts of the Gospel, it's not just knowing and assenting to the facts of the Gospels, that is, believing they're true. It's not just knowing the facts and believing the facts; it is actually committing yourself to the person. It is trusting yourself to Jesus. It is entrusting yourself to him. So to believe biblically is to know the truth, to assent to its truth, and to act on it.

So he's saying trust in the Lord, so what he's saying is stop fretting about evildoers and start trusting in the Lord. That is, change your focus from the evil that has been done around you or to you and start looking at God and who he is. Trust in the Lord, in Jehovah, in Yahweh, the covenant name of God. Trust in the Lord. Rest in the Lord, verse 7. Wait patiently for him. Resting in him is trusting in him. Wait patiently for him. The idea of rest in verse 7 is translated by some other translations as "be still," or "be quiet." So you trust in the Lord, you stop fretting over evil, grumbling and complaining, plotting revenge. You stop doing that, you start looking at the Lord. You trust in him. You remember, "Lord, vengeance is Yours. You will repay, says the Lord. You've got this in control. Evil can do nothing apart from Your sovereign will." Whatever Satan wants to do, God has to grant permission, as it were, biblically so that nothing can happen apart from the will of God.

Rest in the Lord. So what happens is as we trust in him, we have a posture of being quiet and still in his presence. You keep looking at the Lord until you become quiet in his presence. Keep looking at who he is. Keep thinking about all that he's done. Keep meditating on the truths of his character, who he is. You keep meditating on the things that he's done, his acts, and you fill your mind with those things and a turbulent, hot, think about you're burning, you know, you heat something up, you heat water up and the turbulence of the water and then think about the difference between a boiling pot and then, you know, a placid and calm pond. God wants our hearts to be that calm and placid.

The world can be turbulent, this is what the psalmist describes in Psalm 46 when he says there that, let's just turn over just a few pages over. "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble." He's our refuge. He is our strength. He is a present help in trouble. "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; Though its waters roar and foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride." He's picturing an earthquake, a tidal wave, I mean, mountains that are falling into the heart of the sea and this would be a bad circumstance to live through. Everything is falling apart around you and yet, look what he says in verse 4, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God." In the midst of all of this turmoil, there is calmness and comfort and strength and quietness. "The holy dwelling places of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is

our stronghold." If the Lord of hosts is with us, and the God of Jacob is our stronghold, we need fear nothing. We need to be anxious about nothing.

So we start trusting. We keep looking at who the Lord is. We keep reminding ourselves of what Scripture says about him. Just as he said here in this Psalm, that, I mean, the Lord, even though the nations make an uproar, even though the kingdoms totter, even though peoples are going nuts around us, if things go from bad to worse and we feel like the mountains are falling into the heart of the sea figuratively, socially, politically, whatever happens, to remember that God is with us, that the Lord of the armies, that's what the Lord of hosts means. "The LORD of the heavenly armies is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold." We are inside a stronghold and God is that stronghold. So no matter what's happening out there, if the Lord is with you, if God is for you, who is against you? Who is against you compared to God? It's nothing. All he has to do is speak and the earth will melt. If the Lord chooses at this moment for the earth to melt, it's going to melt. He can destroy the enemies with one breath of his mouth. Jesus is going to destroy the enemies with a sword that goes forth from his mouth, the word.

So we cultivate that kind of heart. Now it's interesting, back to Psalm 37. He helps us with how we do this actually in these imperatives. Trust in the Lord but how do you grow in your trust? I think it's laid out for us in these next imperatives. Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord. Commit your way to the Lord. Do you see it? Then you have to trust also in him and he will do it. Between those two exhortations to trust, the two imperatives, trust, one in verse 3, one in verse 5, you have do good, dwell in the land, cultivate faithfulness, delight yourself in the Lord, commit your way to the Lord. I think particularly four of those help you in the trusting. I think the fifth does too but we'll talk about that as our third point.

In this second point still on trust, start trusting. How do you strengthen faith? What does it mean to dwell in the land? Dwell in the land. We're going to inherit the land. Dwell in the land. I think what he's saying is, he's saying if the land really is heaven, and it is, the land is the new heavens and the new earth that God is going to make for us, and that's where our hearts are, if we put our treasure in heaven and we are longing for heaven, dwelling in the land means to set your mind on the things above, not on things below, Colossians 3. To dwell in the land, to increase your faith is to start thinking about heaven. Look at the world going, you know, to hell in a hand basket around you and it doesn't have to be just socially and politically, it's sometimes right there in our lives, isn't it? It's that diagnosis that comes for us or someone we love. It's a sudden accident. It's a financial pressure that comes out of nowhere, and these things come in and we are tempted to fret, we're tempted to just meditate on all that is wrong. He's saying, "Listen, stop fretting. Start trusting. Look to the Lord, and one of the ways that you grow in your faith is you dwell in the land, you actively dwell in the land, you think about heaven."

One of the things that is always helpful and no matter how bad the circumstance is, is to think this, "It will not always be this way." Separation, the pain of separation, losing someone we love, it will not always be this way. There will come a time when God will destroy death. God will destroy all evil. It will not always be this way. Long for that and,

"Lord, make me long for that. Lord, let me in the evil that I see going around me, the evil that I see pressing into my life," I'm talking about evil as harm that can be just, like I said, a cancer diagnosis or some other malady that comes on us, or you know, difficulty that comes as I said, accident, anything that comes upon us that's evil because it's doing harm, but don't meditate on the evil, face it, understand it, but set my mind in a decisive way on the Lord and cultivating a desire for heaven. "Lord, make me long for heaven." And just meditate on heaven.

That's one of the most powerful things you can do is meditate. I mean, the Bible doesn't give us explicit detail. I mean, for instance, I think the figurative language in the Scripture, streets of gold and things like that, we don't know what it's really going to be like, if it's going to be exactly like that. We know that it's going to be awesome. We know that there's going to be no more crying, there's going to be no more pain, there's going to be no more death, there's going to be no more darkness, there's going to be no more evil, no more misery, no more confusion. You will know what to do when you need to know it. You won't wonder. You won't have doubt. You will be living in the presence of the one who made you. You will be everything a human being has been made to be and beyond your wildest imagination of what that means.

So think about that. Meditate on that. Cultivate a heart that longs for that. That's what it means to dwell in the land. This cultivate faithfulness is an interesting phrase. It's translated in a variety of ways in the translations because there is some ambiguity in the Hebrew, and it comes from the fact that in Hebrew, well, every language is this way, you can sometimes have a word that's exactly the same spelling that can be different words. This is what's going on here. This word either means to feed, to graze, to pasture like a shepherd does, or it means to befriend, and this is why the ESV says "befriend faithfulness." The New American Standard kind of hits in the middle and says, "cultivate faithfulness." The NIV says "enjoy safe pasture." The King James says "truly shall thou be fed." I mean, if you're looking at those different, it's very different because they're looking at those two different words. It's kind of like in English we have many words like that. I mean, think about the word w-i-n-d. It means wind, do you mean wind or do you mean wind? Bat, b-a-t, do you mean that nocturnal animal that my wife dreads when they're flying around in the backyard? I'm like, just don't move your head suddenly like that. Don't look like a mosquito, you know? No worries. Don't do your hands over your head or anything like that. They're not attracted to anything but movement. Just, you know, just be normal. Let you be a big thing that they're not going to come at. Anyway, sorry, to give so much practical instruction about avoiding bats. But is it a nocturnal animal that swoops around eating mosquitoes or is it something you hit a baseball with? Same thing going on here.

I think in the context it makes sense to me that it's not "befriend" but it's "shepherd and pasture." I mean just "dwell in the land." Dwell in the land and I think a really good translation would be "feed on faithfulness." Feed on faithfulness, that is, enjoy the pasture of faithfulness. Feed on God shepherding you into faithfulness. This is the idea of that one word that I think it's really talking about here. It is to shepherd, to pasture, to lead a flock to pasture, to feed in that way. And so dwell in the land, think about heaven and

feed on faithfulness. Feed on God's faithfulness. Feed on the fact that what God is doing in this circumstance and be like a sheep that chews on that.

An amazing thing about sheep and other, you know, livestock, cows, some other animals, is that they eat and they eat and they eat, and then they keep eating what they've already eaten. They chew the cud, that is, they eat, it goes into one stomach, they regurgitate, it's kind of gross to think about, you know, as far as just the literal of it, the literal facts of it but it's very instructive. They regurgitate it, they chew it again, they swallow it again. They regurgitate it again, they chew it again, they swallow it again. In the process of multiple times of regurgitating and re-chewing, what happens is, this is wild, bacteria are formed in the cud and they end up, though they eat a vegetarian diet, again this is proof that a vegetarian diet is not a good thing. The only way it works in nature is you've got to keep chewing the cud until you get some protein because what happens is the bacteria that form in the cud of the grass turns into protein. This is how a 1,500-pound bull can weigh 1,500 pounds though it eats grass. It chews and re-chews and it gets all of that protein. It's like eating bacon and not steak. Cows would tell you to eat chicken but anyway, it's like it's been eating a diet of protein.

Now think about that, that's how God made a sheep. Out of his own creative mind he decided to make an animal like that and he says we're like sheep, we need a shepherd, and he says this is how sheep eat. This is how you and I are to eat. We are to feed on faithfulness. We're to look at God's faithfulness in the Scriptures. This is where you find the record of his faithfulness, you're to look at the Scriptures and you are to feed on the Scriptures that show you who God is, and as you do that and you keep chewing on that and you keep chewing on that, your soul is being strengthened. You're getting spiritual protein to every part of your heart and your soul and you're becoming strong in the Lord.

He says this is the way. Start trusting. You dwell in the land, you cultivate faithfulness, you feed on faithfulness. You delight yourself in the Lord, verse 4. This is how you strengthen faith. To delight yourself in the Lord means to determine to find your satisfaction in God. What I want to satisfy me more than anything else in the world is the Lord himself, who he is. I want to delight and that's an active decision to find your delight in God. And this is so wonderful because one of the things about bad circumstances is it makes us cry out to God. This is one of the reasons suffering is such a good thing. I mean, nobody wants to suffer, we're not supposed to want to suffer out of a desire to suffer, that's evil, you know, there's no value in it that way to restrain the flesh. No, Christ is the answer. Jesus and Jesus alone. And you do it by faith. You trust in him. You become like him by trusting in him. The same way you're saved, you are sanctified. You're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You trust fully in what Jesus has done for you on the cross, his perfect life, his atoning death, his resurrection. You place your faith in him and you're saved apart from your works.

Now you're sanctified the same way. You become like Jesus by trusting in him. Not ginning it up in your own strength, not using some kind of tricks, not making yourself suffer and afflicting yourself like a lot of very misguided people do. Making yourself suffer is not of God. Hurting yourself, cutting yourself, that is not of God. Those things

are sinful because you're destroying, you're hurting what God has made. Now listen, God will bring the suffering, you don't have to look for it, and he will bring it in the perfect amount. This is one of the things we can meditate on when we're thinking about it. You know, this seems like way more than I can take, this seems like something I could never have imagined walking through, you find yourself in a circumstance like that, you must remember that the Lord who holds your life in his hand knows what you can take and knows exactly what you need. That's one of the great comforts. "Lord, You know what You're doing. I don't know what You're doing but I know You know what You're doing. And as You loved me enough to give Jesus, then I can trust Your heart. So I want to delight myself in who You are. I want to find my satisfaction in knowing You more. Lord."

So when we are going through a circumstance, it's not that we should be praying, I mean, it's appropriate to pray, "Lord, remove this, you know, heal this disease, help me, Lord, to feel better." It's okay to pray those things but ultimately what we should be praying for is, "Lord, let me have more of Christ. Let me know You more. Don't waste this adversity, Lord. Let me know You more. Now please, make it as short as possible but keep it as long as necessary to make me like Christ."

Commit your way to the Lord. That's the last imperative between the brackets of trust in verse 3 and the last part of verse 5. Commit your way to the Lord. It's an interesting word picture in that word "commit." The verb, the Hebrew verb means "to roll." It pictures rolling something heavy. You roll something heavy because you can't pick it up, or it's just stupid to pick it up if you can roll it unless it's going to damage it, right? So you roll it. Commit your way to the Lord. The idea is of a heavy burden that you can't carry, he's saying what you need to do is as you've been looking at the Lord, you're delighting yourself in the Lord, roll your burden upon the Lord. And part of the burden is not just the suffering, what is the burden? It's how am I going to walk this out? How am I going to make it through today and tomorrow? Roll that on the Lord. Commit your way to the Lord.

And when you do that and you trust in him, he will do it, he will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday. God says if we trust in him like this in the midst of a world that is going increasingly dark, our righteousness will come forth as the light. Our judgment, that is, God's judgment of us, his approval of us and the fact that we are his, we'll become like the noonday sun. What an opportunity. Start trusting.

So the psalmist calls us to be victorious by stop fretting, start trusting, and thirdly, keep working. Keep working. Where did I find that? In verse 3, "Trust in the LORD and do good." Do good. Same thing is repeated in first 27, "Depart from evil and do good." Verse 34, I think it alludes to it as well. He says, "Wait for the LORD and keep His way." The idea is wait for the Lord, trust in the Lord, and be about his way, be about his business, do what he has called you to do. So stop fretting when evil is coming into your life or surrounding you. Stop fretting, don't focus on it, start trusting in the Lord, and then start doing what you know to do for the glory of God. Do good. Do that which is good.

Don't be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. You see, you become an overcomer by doing good. You do what God has called you to do. God has called us to a gentle answer turns away wrath. We speak kindly when somebody reviles us. We do not revile in return, 1 Peter 2:25. We are like Jesus who did not revile in return but kept entrusting himself to him who judges righteously. I keep entrusting myself to God as I speak a kind word back to someone who says something mean and hateful to me.

We speak a bold word. We speak the Gospel. We speak an offensive word. It's not that we speak something they want to hear. No, we speak the truth but we do it in love. This is what God has called us to be and to do. He wants to have people who are different because they have quiet hearts in the midst of a world of turmoil, lives that are exuding righteousness and light in the midst of a dark world, and the way that comes is as we get about busy about doing things. This is something that is really important for us, I think particularly as Americans. I think it's a part of Western history particularly to think that if you're thinking the right thing, you've got it licked, you've done everything you need to do. But that's not right biblically. It's not enough to think correctly, you must do. It's not enough to believe intellectually, you must obey. That's the proof that we really obey, that we really believe is obedience. We're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We're saved apart from works. But when you look at the Scripture, you see we're saved apart from works but we're saved unto works. Ephesians 2, you are saved by grace not from works. You're saved by faith, not from works. But then he goes on in chapter 2, verse 10 to say, "But you were created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has preordained that you should walk therein."

So we're to walk in good works. This is what we're called to do. One of the books that makes this, the epistle that makes this super clear is the book of Titus. Titus right after 2 Timothy in the New Testament, right before Hebrews or right before Philemon, actually. Titus 2:11-14. Listen to Jesus' heart for his people. This is what he wants us to be about. Listen to this, Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." We are to live differently. He goes on to say, "looking for the blessed hope," that is setting our minds on heaven, dwelling in the land, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed," and listen to this, "to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Literally you could translate that zealous for good works. We're not saved by works, we're saved unto works. Jesus wants us to be about being zealous for good deeds, good works. He wants us to look for opportunities to do things for others that are good that show his glory. We do them by his power, by his grace, trusting in him to help us even as we do it, but we're to be zealous for good deeds.

He goes on, listen how he says this, he goes on in chapter 3, verse 1, Paul is reminding Titus, he says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." Remind the people to be ready for every good deed, just to be looking for opportunities to do good works. Have them be ready. Have them be ready, looking around, "What can I do?"

Verse 8, "This is a trustworthy statement," this is Titus 3:8, "This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds." To be careful to engage in good deeds. That's not enough, he's going to say it one more time, verse 14, "Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful." God wants you and me to be about good deeds.

Now this means that when we're fretting and we're sitting around thinking about how bad things are in our life or how bad things are around us, what we're supposed to do is stop fretting, start trusting. Look at God. Look at who he is. Look at what he's done. Set our hearts upon him. Be satisfied in him. And even as you're doing that, look for something to do for his glory. "What can I do? Lord, I'm ready, what can I do? What can I do to be a blessing?" And you see, every time you do that what's happening is light is going forth. Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men," think about this in a dark world, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

So we stop fretting by starting trusting and keeping on working. We are servants. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you're a slave of Jesus Christ. A servant is not greater than his master. If he came not to be served but to serve, you and I are called not to be served but to serve. Let's get to work. And you know, when you're working, isn't it amazing, you start working and you do something for someone, you're discouraged, you may feel so depressed you're thinking the world's going just to pot. "I know it, it's going to happen tomorrow. It's just terrible. Everything is bad. Lord, I don't have anything that I can give this person but I'm supposed to do it. I see a need. I've got to go and meet it. I don't have anything good. I don't know what I can say. I feel like I'm going to open my mouth and it's just going to come out how terrible things are. But no, I'm not going to do that. Lord Jesus, You're with me. You're on the throne. You put this up before me. Minister through me. Let me abide in You. Give me strength." And you go and you take that step and not every time, sometimes it's going to be you're going to labor through it and you're not going to see anything powerful, but sometimes you're going to go and you're going to do that and you're going to feel the power of Christ come through you, the love of Christ fill you, the word of Christ come out of you, and you're going to see God do things and do you know what happened? Light has just shone into that darkness and that light that has shone into that darkness has now filled your heart and you have a deeper sense of trust in the Lord, you have a deeper sense of confidence of your hope that you know whom you have believed and you are persuaded that he is able to keep that which you have committed unto him against that day. You know it with greater certainty. Every time we find ourselves in times of darkness, in times of difficulty, it's opportunities. It's what we should expect. Here's an opportunity.

So we live in a time when things are getting worse for the church in many ways in America but, you know, it's just like it's always been throughout all history. It's always been tough for the people of God except America was a little bit of an aberration for a long time. And it may get a lot worse, I don't know. God may send revival. I'm praying

that he does. I don't want it to get a lot worse. I'm not praying that it's getting worse, I can tell you that. But if it does, we don't have to worry because he's on the throne. He knows exactly what he's doing. He made you and me to live at this time and have these opportunities. And you say, "I'm not ready to suffer." I'm not either but Jesus is and if I'm trusting in him, he'll make me. I know I'm not ready, I'm not able, but he is, and because he is, we can rest in him and we can rejoice and we can know that what an awesome thing.

You know, a wonderful verse in Acts is when they suffer for the Lord, Peter and John, they are beaten because they love Jesus, it's in, I think, Acts 5, it says after they are beaten and flogged and told not to speak anymore in his name, of course, they're going to keep speaking in his name, they rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer for Christ. If we have to suffer for Christ, if you have to suffer for Christ and you cling to Jesus, he will not let you down. That's why he says, "Don't think about what you're going to say when you go. Don't sit there and try to plan it out, you just trust in Me." It'll be taken care of and he will be with you. He will be with me. And if we don't get to, then that's okay too. We may get to heaven and say, "Wow, I wish we had been able to." I bet we will say that if we don't suffer. But Jesus is able.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the glory of the Gospel. We thank You for the wonder of our salvation. We pray that You would make us a people who are not controlled by our circumstances, not overwhelmed by the things around us, but that we might be people who are overcomers, that You might so anchor our souls to Jesus and so help us set our minds upon Him and what He's done that we could truly rest in Him, wait patiently for Him, and we could do good in the midst of a dark world. Lord, we ask this for the glory of Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.