

Take the Long View

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Well, you picked a wonderful night to be with us here on our Tuesday evening study as we come to Psalm 37 for our text this evening, and I know that this is going to be a meaningful time for so many of you because I know just from our interactions that many of you struggle with anxiety, you struggle with difficulties that seem to overwhelm you, and this is a Psalm written especially for people just like you and just like me as we face those things. And for those of you maybe that don't feel that on a personal level but look at what's happening in the upcoming changes that are about to happen in our country and realize there doesn't seem to be too many good options coming forth for righteousness, and we look at that and say what's going to happen as wicked people just seem to solidify their grip on the existence of life, you need to hear these words from Psalm 37 also. It's a Psalm that helps us deal with the anxiety that comes, the fretfulness that comes when we see evil people prosper and when we deal with the uncertainties of life that are bound to come sooner or later. This meets every one of us right exactly where we live so I'm very delighted that you're with us here this evening.

This is a long Psalm as we just read, 40 verses, and I can't help but remember as I look at that and given the theme of the Psalm to see how long it is in the Psalms, it reminds me of the nature of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. A lot of people don't realize that in that colossal sermon from Jesus, the theme that he gives the most emphasis to, in addition to prayer, is the whole matter of anxiety in the life of his disciples. The Scriptures realize that this is a serious issue that we need a lot of help on. We tend to respond by what we see going on around us and what goes on around us as we live in a fallen world populated with a lot of sinners that have no regard for God or his word, it's always going to be that which would tend to depress us and get us down. Well, God in his grace has given us a word, his Scripture, and he has given us lengthy portions of his word to help us work our way through that so that we don't accept anxiety as a settled pattern of life, and let's just kind of park there for just a moment, and to just realize that anxiety is not meant to be a settled part of the life of a believer. You are meant to come to Scripture to learn and to understand how God would have you deal with it, and work through it at a settled serious level so that you have a bit of a fortress in your heart against it. And beloved, what I would ask you to do tonight as we come to God's word that deals with us on this topic, is to say to yourself, "I am going to receive the teaching of God's word here with an open heart today and I am going to lay my anxious heart on the table before God and let him deal with me so that I can move past this and I can grow into

more of the stable mature Christian that he would have me to be." Why wouldn't you want that, right? This is God bringing the goodness of his word for the goodness of your soul to you tonight.

So let's go to Psalm 37 and see what he has for us in the next hour or so. Let's start with a couple of preliminary observations and a couple of qualifications maybe about what we're going to do here this evening as we come to Psalm 37. First of all, just in a general observation, Psalm 37 is different from past Psalms that we have seen. Every Psalm seems to have its own unique character and Psalm 37 is different in this sense, in that it is a pastoral word from David to the people of God rather than a Psalm that addresses God directly. Now, as a practical matter, that means that this is God addressing his people through the inspired writings of David, but the general tenor of this, the structure of this is that it is written to us as the people of God as opposed to being a hymn of praise that is directed to God. That's important to recognize.

Another aspect of this that isn't apparent in the English text but is important to mention because it will help you understand what you're reading a little bit, Psalm 37 in the Hebrew text, is an acrostic Psalm. What I mean by that is it follows the letters of the Hebrew alphabet from beginning to end; roughly every two verses start with a new and consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Now, normally I wouldn't bore you with that kind of information but it's important for you to understand for this reason: because David is following a Hebrew pattern in his writing, the sequence of thought is not what we're necessarily accustomed to seeing from him and it doesn't translate and the sequence of thought doesn't follow as evidently into English, and so that makes a little bit of the structure and the outline that we follow arbitrary. You read the commentators and it seems like every commentator has a different outline and a different sense of where the structure should be set for the English text, and so we're going to accommodate that as we go along here and realize that there is just limits to what we can do in that regard.

The other thing that I would say here as we start by way of qualification, is to say that we're going to look at this from a satellite perspective. We're not going to be able to examine every verse in detail. I'm committed to staying to the pattern of doing one Psalm per night and treating one Psalm in a complete single message, and so with a Psalm of 40 verses, that means that we have to kind of take a satellite view, but that doesn't mean that we can't glean much that's going to be very helpful to you now as I kind of pivot into the consideration of the text. The title for this message and what I would have you adopt as you're writing notes, the title for this message is "Take the Long View." Take the long view. If you take notes and you write the title on the top, that's the title of this message, "Take the Long View." And beloved, already we have entered into what is necessary for you to live a godly life and to overcome the press of anxiety upon your soul, it's this: you have to look beyond your immediate circumstances and the immediate things that are happening in the world around you and take the long view about what God is doing over time to accomplish his purposes. Any Christian who embraces what is found in this Psalm will find himself growing in stability, growing in his ability to deal with difficulties and to respond to bad things that happen, whereas by contrast, those who are just conditioned to live in the moment are predictably going to be people who go up and

down in their lives; go up and down in their spiritual lives because why is that? That's necessarily true. Why? Because our circumstances go up and down; our circumstances change and fluctuate. And if you're always taking your cue from your circumstances that are happening, then I can tell you without knowing anything about you, that you're frustrated in your spiritual life, that you have great peaks and great valleys depending on what's going on in your life. Well, Scripture doesn't commend that. Scripture would have us be stable, rooted in the nature of God and responding to life from a perspective that takes a long view of life, that views life from the ultimate perspective of the purposes of God and the character of God, and takes our cues from the way that we respond from that. So we're going to break this Psalm into it two primary sections here this evening with a few sub points in the second section.

First of all if you're taking notes, what do we see in the first part of this Psalm? We see a call to calm confidence. A call to calm confidence. What does spiritual maturity look like? What does Psalm 37 demand from your soul as God brings his word to you? It's a call to calm confidence; a state of being able to be unperturbed by the rise and fall of what's happening around you. A call to calm confidence, and the opening eight verses of Psalm 37 are a rapidfire series of commands, of imperatives, and the repetition and the abruptness of the commands impress the urgency of the topic upon us as we consider God's word together.

Let's look at the first eight verses here. Depending on how you count, 14 or 15 imperatives embedded to God's people in these opening eight verses. Let's look at them. Verse 1,

1 Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers.

Negative command right from the start; starting out and just getting right to the point David says, "I don't want you to be like this. Don't be a fretful, envious person because of what you see happening as wicked people prosper around you." Why not, David? Why should I not be fretful when I see this? Don't you realize that this threatens my life? Well, verse 2, don't fret because,

2 For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb.

So David opens this up saying, "You are not to be a fretful person and you are not to harbor, you are not to nourish those feelings of jealousy and resentment that come when you see wicked people prospering in their earthly lives. Don't be like that," he says. Then he goes on and he makes a positive contrast in what follows in verse 3. Here's what you are to be like. Here's God's command on your soul and mine here as we study together tonight.

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.

We'll take a breath there and consider what we're looking at here. When David says, "Do not fret," in the original language it has the sense of, "Don't get overheated. Don't work yourself up into a lather based on what you see happening around you. As you see wicked people prosper, as you see people defying God's word and being harsh toward his people and yet seemingly life is going well for them, don't get sucked into that vortex and let angry emotions start to define your outlook on life. Don't do that," David says. Don't fret in that manner. It occurs three times, that negative command. In verse 1, look at it there, "Do not fret." Verse 8, "Do not fret." And then again in verse 7. Three times, "Do not fret as you see wicked men prospering in the world around you."

Beloved, think with me here: 3,000 years ago David was saying this and we see as we read Scripture what's going on, that this is an age old problem. What you see and what your perceptions are of what's happening in the world around you and you see wicked people being elevated and gaining power and having influence in politics and culture and other areas of life, understand that this has been going on for millennia. This is nothing new. The righteous struggle while the wicked succeed in life. Understand that what you're seeing is nothing new at all. The names change, the places may change, but the experience for God's people doesn't. This is part of what life brings to us. You see it echoed in a more personal testimony in Psalm 73 which we'll get to somewhere down the road.

Now, you look at that and you say, "This isn't fair. This isn't right," and when you see that and when you start to feel that bubbling sense of injustice in your heart, you need to understand that you are on the knife edge of temptation and this Psalm is addressing that very knife edge to keep you from falling into sin and falling into a demeanor and state of mind that is completely unhealthy and dishonoring to God. When you feel that bubbling sense of resentment, understand that you are on the brink of temptation toward anger, toward fear, toward jealousy, towards all kinds of inner reactions that are utterly contrary to the regenerate life, and you are to understand as a preliminary, settled conviction and commitment of your soul, you are to understand as a settled conviction of your soul that you say, "I don't go in there. I don't go into that realm of resentment and anger and fear. That is not for me as a believer, and I know that because I see laid out in Psalm 37 these commands, don't be like that. Do not fret. Do not fret. Do not fret."

Let me ask you a question: how many times does God have to say something in his word for it to be true and authoritative in your life? One. What do we do to make of the fact then that three times in such a short section of Scripture that God has said this repeatedly, "Do not fret. Do not fret. Do not fret. Don't get overheated. Don't get worked up. Don't be in a lather." And it doesn't matter, beloved, it doesn't matter who becomes our next president. It doesn't matter what kind of unrighteous schemes are brought to bear. It doesn't matter what they do to churches or to Christians as the years go by. It doesn't matter. God's

word, God's command, God's imperative to you is, "Do not be worked up and fretful over these things as you see them happening."

Look, those of you that listen to talk radio and listen to the news shows and all of that, if that's a regular part of your life, I know that you're violating these passages right as I speak. I don't need to know anything more about you. You just have to realize that all of that talk and political stuff is designed to produce in you exactly the reaction which God's word forbids. You need to calculate, "Okay, how am I going to live life then? What am I going to feed into my mind in light of this passage?" And what Psalm 37 does and what you should embrace and what you should want as you follow along in this Psalm, is Psalm 37 graciously takes you by the hand and leads you from that knife's edge of temptation of resentment and anger and jealousy, and leads you away into a much better place to be in your spiritual life, and it does it with a series of 11, count them, 11 positive commands in this section of eight verses alone. It says, "Trust in the Lord. Delight yourself in the Lord. Commit your way to the Lord. Rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for him. Cease from anger. Forsake wrath." Over and over and over and over again. You see, beloved, really, this Psalm comes to the very nature of what the prevailing culture in Christianity in America today and says, "Knock it off. Stop being that way."

Now, we need to deal with our hearts with a basic simple question: why would God's word give so much repetition of virtually synonymous commands in the context? Three times, "Do not fret. Do not fret. Do not fret." Eleven or 12 times, depending on how you want to count, "Trust in the Lord. Delight yourself. Commit your way to the Lord. Rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for him. Cease from anger. Forsake wrath." Why all of this repetition? Why isn't it enough to just say it one time and leave it at that and move on to other things? Why did our Lord in Matthew 6:25-34 find it necessary to go over this again and again and again at such extended length? Do you know why? Because you and I are children who learn slowly and we need to hear the same thing again and again and again in order for us to get it. For God to give us 11 positive commands all designed to call us to trust him says something about the nature of the weakness in your soul. Beloved, you are not – what it tells you is that you are not prone to be like this. Jesus has to go to such great lengths in Matthew 6 because it's such a prevalent dominating problem in the lives of the redeemed.

So part of what you need to do as you incorporate the teaching of Psalm 37 in your heart is this, is that you need to humble yourself and realize, "I must be weaker than I think in this area." Some of you feel your weakness, you don't need to be told it. But here's the thing, beloved, do not fret, do not fret, do not fret. Trust the Lord. Rest in him. Wait on him patiently. What does this tell you? Oh beloved, this is what it tells you, the volume of the commands tells you this: it tells you that you are vulnerable to simmering resentment in your heart if you do not control this as God commands you to do. You're vulnerable. You are prone to be exactly what God's word commands you not to be like if you don't submit yourself to this call to a calm confidence as the prevailing sentiment of your Christian life.

Now, beloved, once again I say, these are imperatives. This is not a weak suggestion from a vanilla flavored Christian counselor trying to give you a little bump along the way. This is God speaking to his people saying, "By the authority that is mine as God over you and God over the universe, I command you to be like this." You see, this is not optional and even if you have excused this manner of life for decades, God doesn't accept the excuses. God calls you to know him so that you can be calm even in adversity. Beloved, the multiple commands call us, draw us, compel us – watch this – they call us, draw us and compel us not to accept or excuse our fretful spirits. We can't be like that. This is not what God saved you to be. God did not save you to be like that. It's a challenge, isn't it? It's a challenge to our fearful souls. It confronts our resentment as we look out on life. It confronts us when we see headlines and we just start to boil at the unrighteousness of it all, and I understand that there's plenty of Christian and so-called Christian commentators who are happy to feed right into that in your heart. Well, Scripture doesn't feed that. Scripture calls you out of that.

Now, that's the first eight verses of a 40 verse Psalm. Do you know what would not be helpful? What would not be helpful would be if God just gave you the command and said, "Don't be like that, be like this," and it closed with a sense of, "Blessed be the name of the Lord forever." You say, "Well, what do I do with this? The bare imperative doesn't show me the way forward." Well, 14, 15 commands in those opening eight verses are followed by another 32 verses that lay out for you why you should embrace this command and how it is that you can move in this direction. The command is followed by a multiplicity of reasons why you can walk this way in your Christian life, and one of the ways, the primary way, the primary thing that this Psalm is pointing to you is that you overcome dissatisfaction by taking the long view on life. This is absolutely essential. This must be a defining primary principle in the way that you think, in the way that you exist, is to get outside of the moment and take the long view; take a full perspective on the nature of reality. You overcome your dissatisfaction by taking the long view on life.

Look at verses 8 and 9 with me again. He's kind of summing it up. He's wrapping it all up in a bow. The command that he opened with in verse 1, "Do not fret," he concludes with in verse 8 and in an envelope inclusio sense, brings it all together to tie it all together. Verse 8, "Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing." Your fretful spirit leads you into sin. It leads you into wickedness. It leads you into evil. It leads you into an angry disposition and a distrustful attitude toward God. All of that is evil. It's wrong and now we see having laid out these commands, David starts to pivot and tell you why this command is reasonable; why it is that you should follow the authoritative word from God on this, and why it is that you do not need to be thrown off when you see sinful, wicked people who have no regard for God rising in prominence and authority in the world around you.

Why is it that that does not have to shake you from your confidence? Verse 9, "For," because. Here's why you cannot do that, why you should not do that,

9 For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.

David says, "The reason that you must not be this way is because there are separate destinations for the wicked and the righteous. The wicked will be cut off. Their prosperity is temporary and it is doomed to failure. By contrast, the humble, righteous people of God will inherit the land." Stated differently, wicked people live under impending judgment. The outcome for them is doom. Now, why if you know from God's word that that's the outcome for wicked people, why would you be envious of them? Why would you be wrapped up in their temporary fortunes? Why would you let that throw you off track and make you be distrustful toward God when the long view teaches you to recognize that their doom is sure as we sing about Satan in, "A Mighty Fortress is our God"?

Now, this promise of inheriting the land also appears in verses 11, 22, 29 and 34. God promised land to faithful Israel. He said part of the blessing of the covenant will be, "I will establish you in the land where you will be able to live and prosper." And he promises that to those who trust him, to those who follow him. Jesus picks up on this promise. Look over at Matthew 5 for just a moment, and furthers the promise to Christians in the New Testament. Not just the space of land in the Middle East given to Israel, but expands it to all the earth. Matthew 5:5, it says, "Blessed are the gentle," or the meek, "for they shall inherit the earth." A day of universal blessing is coming for the people of God where Christ will reign on the earth and rule in righteousness, and those of us who know him will be here and under his blessing and under his righteous rule and we'll share in the inheritance of him being King over all the world. That's the outcome for the people who know Christ. Beloved, enter into the positive aspect of this Psalm and what it says: God has an inheritance for us. God has immense blessing for you and me as believers in Christ stored up that he intends fully and will most certainly shower upon us when the time suits him; when wickedness is banished and the fullness of the blessing of Christ and the fullness of the purposes of your salvation are laid out for you to enjoy and to be at peace in.

Beloved, God has an inheritance for us like that and the wicked people that we see elevating around us from time to time are going to have no part in it. They are outside of that blessing and here's the thing, beloved, here's what you need to bank on, here's how you define your worldview, this is how you go through life: the certainty of the outcome of the purposes of God means that you reverse your perception of what success means. You reverse the entire way that you think about the prosperity of the wicked. You look at it, you realize their denial of Christ, you realize their blatant rebellion against God and whatever else you say, you look at that and say, "That can't last. They've got power now, they've got prosperity now, the courts are on their side now, the legislature is on their side know." You don't get sucked into that and say, "And therefore I am discouraged and envious and upset." No, not if you know God's word. There is one thing that you settle in your mind when you look at that state of affairs, you look at that and say, "That can't last because God has made it plain that the wicked are headed for doom and eternal distraction. Those who do not know Christ face a certain eternity of judgment. Now, why would I be jealous of them? Why would I want a share in that if the outcome is like that?"

Look over at Psalm 73, 37, 73, you can kind of mirror those numbers and realize that you have parallel Psalms there. Psalm 73, the Psalmist here in Psalm 73, it's not David, it's Asaph, but he's wrestling with the same question; he's wrestling with the prosperity of the wicked. Look at verse 3, Psalm 73:3, he says, "My steps had almost slipped. I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked." So he's wrestling with the same question we're talking about tonight. In verse 16 he says, "When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form."

Do you see the point? You have to have, as it were, spiritual x-ray vision. That's right, I used an illustration. Imagine that. You have to have spiritual x-ray vision to look through the exterior to get to the heart, the real core of what you're seeing. This is an illusion. This is not reality. This is certainly not permanent. Their prosperity could only be for a time because God has appointed a moment of judgment and destruction that will cast them away into terrors forever and evermore amen, and therefore what that does for you in your heart is, you say, "Now that I see that, once that's refreshed in my mind, I'm not jealous about them. I'm not perturbed about them any longer. Their prosperity won't last." Beloved, mark it in your heart. Capitalize it in your notes. "Therefore, therefore, therefore this need not distract me in my spiritual life." Whether it's Donald or Hillary, we need not be distracted about that. This changes your whole perception of the political process, beloved, and it makes you less willing to give your heart over to those who call you to fear and anger as it is playing out. Yes, you have powerful conservative voices in the media whispering and shouting in your ear, "Worry about this! This is wrong! Get angry!" And you have to say, as it were, turn off your hearing aid and say, "I'm not listening to that. I'm going to turn a deaf ear to that and I'm going to listen to what God's word says. God's word tells me don't fret over such things," and view it differently.

Beloved, in the days and months to come as the political campaign unfolds, in the years that follow and whatever transpires as a result of the outcome of the election, beloved, this is what will distinguish us as true Christians, a settled, calm confidence in the power and purposes of the living God and being unperturbed by the temporary rise of wicked people. This is our responsibility, this is our prerogative, this is our privilege to be people like that, and I invite you to come alongside David, come alongside God's word, by God's grace to come alongside me as I try to be this way in my own life.

Now, so we have a call to calm confidence, alright? That's the call on our lives. Now, what happens in the rest of Psalm 37 is this, point 2: David gives you the certainties which support calm confidence. The certainties that support calm confidence. David doesn't just throw this out as a hopeful wish that may or may not happen, he gives you biblical truth, biblical certainties that guarantee the certainty of the outcome. We're going to bracket these things under four headings to show the different aspects of certainty which enable you to know, here's the thing, that your calm confidence is not in vain; that it is not misplaced. This is everything, beloved. Look, we bank our whole soul, we bank

our whole eternity on the righteousness and blood of Christ, don't we? We have a complete assurance that we have a perfect Savior in the Lord Jesus Christ who is utterly able to deliver us from sin, and we do not waver on that hope and confidence in him. God raised him from the dead proves the reality of it.

Well, we build our lives on certainties and this call to calm confidence is based on a number of different certainties that show you that the outcome could be no other way; that what David has said in these opening verses that evildoers will be cut off but those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land, will have a rich inheritance beyond their wildest dreams, beloved, that isn't fanciful wishing, it's based on certainties that could be no other way and that's what I want to show you here. David uses many contrasts in the rest of Psalm 37 to help you cultivate this calm confidence over the course of what would otherwise seem to be an uncertain life.

Here's the first one, the first certainty is this: is that men reap what they sow. First certainty that underlies and supports this calm confidence to which God calls us, number 1: men reap what they sow. Beloved, just as certain as gravity is in operation even though you can't see it, God has established the moral universe in such a way that sin rebounds against those who do it.

Look at verse 12,

12 The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth. 13 The Lord laughs at him, For He sees his day is coming. 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.

They have power and they have evil intent and they have trained their guns, as it were, bows and arrows in the day, they have trained their guns on the afflicted and the needy to kill them and to silence those who are upright in their conduct, people just like you and me. What do you do? "Well, that sounds wicked." It is wicked, but is that supposed to suddenly cast you into a spiral of fear and anxiety? No, look at what David says in verse 15, he says,

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

What is he saying here in this section? In the present, in time, in the course of our life on earth, wicked men plot evil against the righteous. That's part of the reason why people seem to hate you without cause when they find out that you're a Christian. It's just a natural reaction that comes from the transgression and rebellion in their own heart. Sometimes it's family, I get that. And from an earthly perspective, they have power to carry it out. When the Supreme Court rules against biblical morality, they've got the power to enforce it in our land.

Well, what do we do with that? Let's ask a different question, let's ask a more pertinent question, let's ask the only question that matters about that: what is God's perspective?

What does God think about it? He thinks their plots are laughable. Look at it there in verse 13, "The Lord laughs at him." We saw the Lord laughing at the nations in Psalm 2:4 as well. Why does God laugh? Do you see that these plots of the wicked, this rise of wicked men, is absolutely no threat against the sovereignty of God? Their wickedness is doomed to ultimate failure no matter how secure it might seem to us in the moment from an earthly perspective. Their sin boomerangs and comes back on them. You see this all the time, don't always think and process it this way, but what happens to violent men? They often die a violent death, don't they? What happens to financial swindlers? They lose their fortune acquired by deception and fraud. Those are just little illustrations of it for us to see that a man reaps what he sows. This is biblical truth. God guarantees the outcome. Galatians 6:7, if you want a New Testament text says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." Beloved, that is a moral principle as sure in its operation as gravity operates in the physical realm. This is how God has wired things. Sin never brings ultimate success even if the doom is only that which occurs in eternity. God reigns over sin to such an extent that he laughs at wicked men who try to build up their tower, their house of cards in time. If it were God's sovereign pleasure, he could just whisper his breath on that house of cards and make it all come down, and so he laughs as he sees this. He is unperturbed by the rise of the wicked.

Beloved, here's what that means for you: because this is the principle that God has woven into the moral universe, because this is true, what do you do? Here's what you do: you don't fret when you see this illusion of prosperity taking place in front you. You don't worry about it. Instead, you renew your trust in the Lord and say, "Lord, even though I can't see it, how this works out, I can't see how you're going to solve this, your word says that it's true and I'm resting in your word, not in what I see." This whole Psalm is an exposition, in some sense, of Proverbs 3:5 which says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." What do we do when we see wicked people prosper? We don't go by our perceptions, we go by what God has said and God has said they will reap what they sow and to us, we say, "Okay Lord, then that just means it's a matter of time for you to accomplish the outworking of this principle and therefore, Lord, I'm not going to let this perturb me. I'm not going to fall into resentment and anxiety as a result. I'm going to live in calm confidence. Why? Because you have established that men will reap what they sow and therefore the outcome of this wickedness could only be their own judgment and destruction. And Lord, I trust you enough that I'm not going to put a clock on it. I'll just take you at your word and be at peace." That's what you do.

The second certainty that underlies calm confidence is this, it becomes a little bit more personal for us as believers: God distinguishes the wicked from the righteous. God distinguishes the wicked from the righteous. In verses 16 and following, David undergirds our spiritual calm with several contrasts, and just another simple basic principle that's so obvious when you state it but so easy to forget, beloved, your God knows how to separate sheep from the goats. He knows who is righteous, who is trusting Christ, and who is not, and he knows quite well and is perfectly capable of separating the two and dealing with them accordingly. This is where David leads us.

Look at verse 16. We'll go through these verses rather quickly.

16 Better is the little of the righteous Than the abundance of many wicked.

Why?

17 For the arms of the wicked will be broken, But the LORD sustains the righteous.

Do you see the contrast? Wicked and righteous. Judgment on the wicked, the Lord sustaining the righteous. God makes these distinctions and that calls us to rest in his omniscience and in his provision. Mark it. Trust in his provision even as you look into an uncertain future. This is the word of God that can no sooner be denied or broken than anything. God's word cannot be broken. His promises cannot fail.

And what does he say? Verse 18,

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.

By contrast, the wicked have a dreadful future. Verse 20, notice the contrast, "But,

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.

Beloved, we're just saying the same thing over and over and over again here because the text is saying the same thing over and over again. God is settled in his purpose to bless his people and judge the wicked. Nothing is going to cause him to move off his settled purpose. Beloved, he is omniscient, he knows all things. He knows those who are truly his. He sees the hidden plots of evil men. And beloved, your God won't make any mistakes. There won't be any things that slip through and need to be reversed on appeal. God doesn't do that. The outcome of his purpose to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked is certain. That's the long view. That is what will happen in the end.

What does that do to you now? It brings calm to your heart. You say, "Okay, God knows. God knows these differences. God knows that I'm trusting in him. God has promised to keep me and I'm going to rest in that. But do you see So-and-so coming up?" That doesn't matter. Don't you see God reigning on his throne, high and lofty and exalted in the temple of the universe? That settles it for us and it makes us content even if we just have a little bit of what this world has to offer, even if we struggle because, beloved, a little with a good future is better than a whole lot with a bleak future. Better a little with the righteous than a lot with the wicked. Why? Long view, because of the outcome of what lies ahead.

So we have these certainties that lead us to calm confidence. Thirdly, experience confirms the principle. Experience confirms the principle. Look at verse 23. David is writing in his later years and his vast life experience testifies to the truth of which he speaks. Verse 23,

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.

David says,

25 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 is saying God delights in the course of the lives of the righteous. Beloved, your godly walk, your simple trust in Christ, your faithful looking to God for all things that affect your soul, takes place under his guidance and provision. It takes place under his protection. Because that is true, you should persevere in your trust and be faithful.

Trust him, beloved. Trust him. If this were the last message that I were to preach to you, if this would be the last echo that you would hear from me, I don't intend it that way, I'm not making any announcements here, but if it were, the echo that should reverberate in your mind going away from this Psalm, going away from this pulpit time and time again is trust him. Don't dishonor this glorious God. Don't dishonor Christ who gave his life for you on Calvary. Don't dishonor the indwelling Spirit by saying, "I don't know what's going to happen." Don't be that way, beloved. Trust him inside your heart with a trust that is worthy of his exalted nature and the wonderfully gracious way that Christ has saved your soul. That's the only right way to be, isn't it? Nothing else is worthy. Nothing else is true. Your anxieties are a reflection of falsehood that God can't be trusted; that the outcome may not be good for me even though I'm a Christian. Beloved, stop it. Don't be that way. God commands you again and again and again and again and gives you reason upon reason upon reason to take him at his word.

The final point for this evening, still this is the sub point of point 2, the certainties that underlie calm confidence, why can you be calm in the midst of a shifting wicked world? Ultimately God is faithful and just. Beloved, your cues for how to respond to life do not come from the circumstances around you and they certainly don't come from your personal projections about what the future will hold. What a foolish way for you to try to shape your life and perspectives. "Well, I think this is what's going to happen and therefore I feel this way or that." Beloved, you don't know what tomorrow will be like, how could you possibly make projections that determine the course of your soul based on what you think the future will be like? Stop that. You don't know, James 4, you don't know what tomorrow holds. What do you know then that gives you calm confidence? We have the revealed character of God and that is what we take our cues and response from.

Look at verse 27.

27 Depart from evil and do good, So you will abide forever.

Why should you pursue a righteous life? Verse 28,

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.

Oh beloved, we should just fall on our knees in response to this text tonight. In response to this right here in front of us, we should just bow in humble silent worship, so great is this text and what it means. What does Scriptures say? It says the Lord, speaking of the name and expression of his covenant promise keeping nature, the Lord who is sovereign over the affairs of the universe and the affairs of men, what is he like? He loves justice. It flows out of his very essence. It is central to his attributes. There is no trace of injustice or wickedness or sin or shifting shadow with him. He loves justice. Well, what does that mean, then? It can only mean that the wicked will face judgment and God will honor his promises to his people. That's who he is. That's what he loves. Nothing else could possibly be the outcome. Nothing else could happen in the end because God is faithful and just. If you belong to him, beloved, if you are in Christ, you belong to this just and faithful God. It will be well for you in the end. You are secure. It's the wicked in prosperity that are in danger these days. You have got to view life through this perspective. You have to.

Look at verse 32. No, I think I'm at verse 29, sorry.

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.

You see, this is the kind of life that you can live when you are settled in this calm confidence, you can live a life of integrity. You don't have to lie to get what you want. You don't have to pervert justice yourself in order to protect your interests. Why? Because God is faithful and just, you belong to him, you are in his hand, you are secure. And you see, I'm animated because these things are true, because they animate my heart, and I speak to you with such urgency because I know that deep in your heart you're often reluctant to just let this be true and live in light of it, and somehow we have to impress the urgency and truthfulness of these things on our weak and faltering hearts so that we would be strong and calm and confident and live like spiritual men in the midst of a wicked world.

Well, beloved, you only come to that position of strength by working through these things, meditating on them and saying, "Yes, I am committed to these truths. Yes, I will bank the entirety of my life in eternity that these things are true. I need no other argument. I need no other plea. I need no other alternatives. I don't need a back door. I go

forward solely on the certainty of what God has said in his word and that is enough and nothing will cause me to fear as a result." Beloved, that's what your God is worthy of. It's not just your external actions, from the depth of your heart, you should love this Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. One of the ways that you manifest that love is with a calm confidence in a shifting sand of world around you. If you belong to him, you're secure. It's the wicked who are in danger.

Look at verse 32,

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. 34 Wait for the LORD and keep His way, And He will exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

Beloved, take the long view. Take the long view. Take the long view. Take the long view and trust him. You are kept in Christ.

Look at 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.

His life was over. His influence was gone. There was not a trace to be found. By contrast, verse 37,

37 Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity. 38 But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off.

Where do you get this protection? Where do you live in this blessed realm of security, of calm and confidence? Where is this realm to be found? God promises this protection to those who trust him.

Look at verse 39.

39 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,

Why?

Because they take refuge in Him.

Scripture says, "He who believes in Him, will never be disappointed." David closes this Psalm with a promise to you that if you are taking refuge in the God of the Bible, if your

trust is entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the word of a faithful and just God that he will not forget you in the process; you will not be lost in the end; he will not abandon you to Satan and the wickedness of this world. He will protect you. He will keep you. Your response as you take that long view is calm confidence no matter what.

Let's bow together in prayer as we respond to this God.

Our Father, help us to cultivate calmness based on your sovereignty, justice and faithfulness. Deal kindly and mercifully with those of us in this room that struggle with anxiety and a pervasive sense of gloom and doom. Father, deliver us from that. Help us embrace these certainties which feed our knowledge of the certainty of the outcome, and even if evil and injustice flourish for a time, O God, we trust you to turn it to good for your people in the end. Joseph saw this and said, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good." Paul saw it, "You cause all things to work together for good to those who love You and are called according to Your purpose." O God, in light of who you are, help us to take the long view and to delight our souls in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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