

Things Are Not as They Seem

A Sermon on Psalm 37

by

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1. Introduction

2. The unrighteous may seem to prevail, but the Lord will vindicate the righteous (vv. 1-6).

a. Do not fear or envy the wicked, for they shall quickly fade away (vv. 1-2).

i. David probably knows better than anyone else how quickly our hearts are prone to forget the goodness of God and His promises.

1. He has suffered at the hands of unjust men.

a. He has lived to see his own son seek to kill him and take the throne.

b. Not once, but twice he fled from his pursuers and his life has been marked by the constant threat of war.

c. He has been slandered, mocked, hated, betrayed, and condemned as an innocent man.

2. Yet he remains a man who still holds hope in the promises of God, because he knows His God is faithful.

a. David gives two negative commands in v. 1: Do not fret because of evildoers and do not be envious toward wrongdoers.

b. The reason for this is simple: they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb.

b. Do not fear of envy the wicked, but commit your ways to the Lord, for He vindicates the righteous (vv. 3-6).

i. We now find a rapid series of commands that are to be our preoccupation instead, and all of these commands expand on one another.

1. We are to trust in the Lord and do good (v. 3).

2. We are to dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness (v. 3).

3. We are to delight ourselves in the Lord and He will give us the desires of our heart (v. 4).

4. We are to commit our way to the Lord (v. 5).

5. We are to trust in Him, for He will act (v. 5).

ii. All of these commands are simply a way of saying that our faith is not evidenced by fear, anxiety, anger, or even envy of the wicked, but in a life of trust and submission to the will of God.

1. Rather than be consumed with anger over the unrighteous acts of the wicked, we instead trust in the Lord and continue to obey His commandments.

a. We trust that He will sort everything out in His timing and in His way—and so we are not given to trying to fix everything that is broken or speak to everything that is wicked.

b. Rather, we are given to a life that models what it looks like to obey the will of God.

2. Rather than fret over all that is happening and what may come, we cultivate faithfulness and delight ourselves in God's ways.

a. How much better would it be to be known as a people who trust in the Lord and give Him thanks even in the midst of evil days?

b. Rather than complaining and grumbling about all the ways the world is evil, we instead model steadfastness, trustworthiness, and faithfulness.

3. If we cultivate faithfulness and delight ourselves in His ways, He promises that He will give us the desires of our heart.

a. It is not that we will be given any and all things, but that which we desire will match that which He is willing to give, and this will be our joy.

b. More than this, the Lord promises to act and vindicate the life of faith. Therefore, we trust in the Lord.

3. The unrighteous may seem to flourish, but the Lord will reward the righteous (vv. 7-15).

a. *Do not fear those who scheme to prosper, but entrust yourself to the Lord who rewards the righteous (vv. 7-11).*

i. In vv. 7-8 David gives another series of commands to the people of God, but these ones now focus our attention to the natural result of living either as a righteous man or a wicked man.

1. The idea is that within the heart of the righteous, there is a calmness as they wait and resign themselves to the care of the Lord.

2. This calmness would be easy to do if the wicked failed at everything they tried—but notice the opposite is true.
 - a. But still, even as the wicked succeed—the command is to wait upon the Lord rather than use it as an excuse to vent anger and wrath.
 - b. Notice the command to not fret is repeated in v.8, and why? It *only* leads to evildoing.
 - c. It is reminiscent of Jesus’s own words to the anxious when He asks, “Which of you can add a single hour to your life by worrying?”
- ii. “For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. 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. But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity” (vv. 9-11).
 1. Though the wicked seem to triumph and flourish, there will come a day where they will be cut off—but the righteous will take their rightful possession.
 - a. David here is speaking of the Israelites inheriting the Promised Land, and yet the wicked are still present.
 - b. Yet the reality is that in just a little while, the wicked man will be no more.
 2. There is a day coming where the humble will take the land that is rightfully theirs and it will be characterized by abundant prosperity.
 - a. Now, the word “prosperity” here is actually “shalom,” which is often translated as “peace,” but the word is far richer than this in this context.
 - b. Here it speaks of a complete state of welfare, where God Himself will be their source of salvation from the wicked.
- b. *Do not fear those who scheme to plot, for they shall reap what they have sown (vv. 12-15).*
 - i. Though the wicked plot and scheme against the righteous, it is God who laughs. Why? Because God sees the day of judgment coming for the wicked.
 1. Verses 14-15 show us that same proverbial wisdom applied all throughout the book of Proverbs.
 2. No matter what the evildoer plans, it will return upon his own head. They will reap what they have sown.

- a. The promise here is not merely in the days to come when God pours out final judgment, but in the here and now.
 - b. And for us, this is a rather beautiful portrayal of the fact that though things may appear one way, they are, in fact, very different from what they seem.
- ii. The wicked appear to have everything in order, to succeed in all they put their hands to, and even that they will succeed in their plans for evil.
 - 1. This isn't particularly hard for us to imagine in our day and age, is it?
 - 2. We could easily become angry and bitter over it all—we could fret—yet the command for us all is to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him to intervene.
 - a. The reason for this is simple. God is faithful and just in all He does, and He will give us our reward.
 - b. The unfailing promise of the Lord is that though the unrighteous may seem to flourish, He will reward the righteous. Therefore, we trust in the Lord.

4. The unrighteous may seem to have plenty, but the Lord will sustain the righteous (vv. 16-26).

- a. *Do not envy the abundance of the wicked, for they will have nothing their time of need (vv. 16-22).*
 - i. This is an incredibly pastoral section of the psalm, where David moves to bring comfort to those who have little in this life.
 - 1. You can see there is a bit of tension in this section, because the righteous, who are few, have little, and the wicked, who are many, have abundance.
 - a. It is very likely that the wicked are the ones who have deprived the righteous of their due.
 - b. But it is better for the righteous to have little than to cast their lot with the wicked—and the simple reason for this is that the wicked are fading away as quickly as the grass. Yet more than this, God sustains the righteous.
 - 2. “The Lord will sustain the righteous. The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever. They will not be ashamed in the time of evil, and in the days of famine they will have abundance. 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” (vv. 17-20).

- a. The wicked seem to flourish like the rolling hills and pasturelands, but when the day of reckoning comes, they will vanish in the air like smoke.
 - b. Yet just as the Lord knows the day of the wicked and laughs, He knows the day of the righteous and supports them in their time of need.
 - c. What a magnificent promise to the children of God! God will not let them go down to the grave without His loving care and providence, and this in turn characterizes the righteous in generosity, vv. 21-22.
- ii. Out of what little the righteous have, they graciously give to those in need and do not ask for it back—but the wicked are so money-hungry that they borrow and do not pay back. Well, another word for that is stealing.
1. They are the rich man with his storehouses laden with goods, ever planning for tomorrow.
 - a. Yet little do they consider the reality at play in v. 22: they are cursed by God and will be cut off.
 - b. But the righteous are blessed by God—they will inherit the land.
 2. Beloved, money is such a touchy subject even within the church—but Jesus Himself spoke of it often. Where is your treasure?
 - a. It is incredibly easy for us to *think* we don’t trust in our money and possessions when the reality is often very, very different.
 - b. We fool ourselves into believing that money is a savior or a means to bless ourselves or a way to protect ourselves when in fact it is merely just a tool God has given us to show graciousness and generosity.
- b. *Do not envy the abundance of the wicked, for the Lord provides for every need of the righteous (vv. 23-26).*
- i. The promise of God’s sustaining hand is so incredible that literally every single step we take is established by God—and He *delights* in his way.
 1. In every single way, the righteous are truly safe and secure in God, because we delight in God.

2. So even when we fall, we shall not be cast headlong, which is simply a way of saying that we won't come to ruin. Why? Because the Lord is the One who holds the hand of the righteous.
- ii. "I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread. All day long he is gracious and lends, and his descendants are a blessing."
 1. In all his years, there has yet to be a day where David sees the righteous forsaken or his children left unprovided for.
 2. One thing we can say of God without hesitation is that He is utterly consistent. He will not fail in His promise to provide for us. Therefore, we trust in the Lord.

5. The unrighteous may seem to have the upper hand, but the Lord will exalt the righteous (vv. 27-34).

- a. *Do not commit your ways to do evil, but do good, because the Lord will uphold the righteous forever (vv. 27-31).*
 - i. David once again issues a command to the people of God: depart from evil and do good—and abide forever.
 1. Some of your translations will say "So that you will abide forever," but it is actually a command and not a result of doing good.
 2. Thus, the command is to turn from evil, and instead do good—and dwell, or abide in doing good forever.
 - ii. The reason he gives for this is quite simple: The Lord loves justice and does not forsake His godly ones; they are preserved forever, but again, the wicked will be cut off.
 1. And herein lies the grand difference between the righteous and the wicked.
 - a. The righteous man, who forsakes evil and dwells in doing good will be evident.
 - b. He is rooted in the Law of God, so much so, that it is not merely some esoteric knowledge that he holds in his head, his very heart is steeped in the Word of God.
 2. It is this man that the Lord preserves and will never forsake—and so the righteous man's confidence rests fully in His God.
 - a. Despite however bleak things look around him the righteous man walks in faithfulness to his God.

b. The righteous man knows there are two vastly different destinies for the righteous and the unrighteous.

b. *Do not commit your ways to do evil, but do good, for the Lord will cut off the wicked (vv. 32-34).*

i. In v. 32 we find that the wicked spies upon the righteous and seeks to kill him—but it is all in vain.

1. The Lord will not leave the righteous in the palm of the unrighteous or let him be condemned when he is judged in the courts.

a. Even if justice is perverted in this life though—the guarantee is that the wicked will not escape justice in the end.

b. But even sweeter than this is that justice, true justice, will be had for the righteous man in the end.

2. This then is why the psalmist gives yet another command to the saints: wait for the Lord.

ii. The ultimate basis for us to persevere in doing good is that in due time, we will be exalted.

1. Every wrongful accusation will be exonerated—there are no false charges sustained when the Lord hears our case.

2. The wicked may seem to have the upper hand—but the unfailing promise of the Lord is that *you* will be exalted. Therefore, we trust in the Lord.

6. The unrighteous may seem to be invincible, but the Lord will save the righteous (vv. 35-40).

a. *Do not trust in appearances, for the wicked shall fall, but the righteous shall be saved (vv. 35-38).*

i. Once again, David brings a vivid contrast of the righteous and the unrighteous—and he does so by giving us an example from his own life.

1. There was a wicked, violent man who spread himself out like a luxuriant tree in its native soil.

2. Yet one day David looked for him, and he was no more.

ii. Notice now the contrast yet again in vv. 37-38: Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; for the man of peace will have many children—but the lawless ones will be altogether destroyed, and their lineage will be cut short.

1. In the end, it is not the wicked and their offspring that will stand, it is the righteous.

2. Picture the righteous growing like a sapling in the forest, if you will. The large trees suck up all of the nutrients and light, so that the little sapling gets next to nothing.
- b. *Do not trust in appearances, for though the righteous appear weak in every way, the Lord Himself is their salvation (vv. 39-40).*
- i. Notice now the promise to the righteous: “But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him” (vv. 39-40).
 1. There’s something incredibly special going on in the last two verses of this psalm here.
 2. David uses a series of words to describe how God is a Savior to His people.
 - a. The first is that God is our Salvation, which here speaks not of us being saved from sin, but of God as the One who is our Deliverer.
 - b. The second is that God is our Strength in times of trouble. The word here is actually describing God as our stronghold.
 - c. The third is that He is our Helper. He is the One who comes to our rescue and ultimately, He knows the best way to keep us from harm.
 - d. The fourth is that He is our way of escape. Here it speaks of God being the One who frees us and removes us from the wicked.
 - e. The fifth is that He is the God who causes us to be victorious. It is not merely that God snatches us from harm, but that we ultimately overcome the wicked.
 - ii. These are five different ways that the psalmist uses to describe the fullness of salvation from the Lord in just two short verses, and it is rather incredible, isn’t it?
 1. No matter what angle you look at salvation at—you are utterly safe. You are saved, and you are saved to the uttermost.
 2. The simple reason why this is so, is because the righteous take refuge in Him. And that’s at the heart of everything this Psalm says. It is God Himself who is our refuge in everything.

7. Conclusion

Small Group Questions:

1. When we consider how fully and truly God is our refuge in all things, how should this inform our reaction to the world around us, bad news, trials, and tribulations?
2. We are more prone to all the “what-ifs” than we would like to admit, but as David says, all such fretting leads only to evil. How does this Psalm show us a better way, and what is to be our preoccupation instead?
3. What are you doing currently to place full trust and obedience in the Lord? Be sure to go beyond the hope of redemption in Christ to the actions you take in life. Are you living as one who has full confidence in the Lord’s promises, or are you “hedging your bets”?