

March 13, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2016 David J. Whitcomb

DELIGHT YOURSELF IN THE LORD'S CARE

Psalm 37

In the mid-nineteenth century, English writer Barton Boucheir commented on Psalm 37: "This Psalm very much reminds one in its construction of the sententious and pithy conciseness of the Book of Proverbs. It does not contain any prayer, nor any direct allusion to David's own circumstances of persecution or distress. It is rather the utterance of sound practical wisdom and godliness from the lips of experience and age, such as we might suppose an elder of the church, or a father of a family, to let fall as he sat with his household gathered around him, and listening to his earnest and affectionate admonition."

The Psalm has a unique style of laying down an objection or complaint and then offering the answer of righteousness. For example, "Wicked men flourish" (v.1). "Don't envy them because they will soon be cut down" (v.2). Or "The many wicked have abundance" (v.16b). "Better is the little that the righteous have" (v.16a).

We will proceed to focus on three main themes that are repeated throughout the entire Psalm. God's people need to be still, patiently waiting for Him. While we wait for God, we must be secure, knowing that He actively lays out our path and watches us in failure. We can be secure because we know that ultimately God saves the people who He makes righteous.

Be Still (vv.1-8).

What should we do in turbulent times? Trust in the LORD and do good. What Christian doesn't trust God? Yes, but do you live like you trust God? David's admonition for us is, *Trust in the LORD, and*

do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness (v.3). Notice our responsibility in this matter. We are simply told to trust in the LORD. To trust is to have boldness because of secure confidence in the object we trust. Isaiah used a similar word from the same root to speak of quiet resignation and cessation from one's own efforts. *For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." But you were unwilling (Isaiah 30:15).* This idea is full and complete reliance on the LORD. The command is not, "Trust in the LORD and _____" We can typically fill in the blank with objects like money, government, friends, employer, church, self, and such.

Second, and along with trusting God, we are to do good. This is a challenging command because it is given to humans about which God said, *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good" (Psalm 53:1).* God added to the bleak assessment through Paul by saying, *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12).*

How can people who are not good and do not even understand good ever do it? Maybe we need to stop and consider what "good" means. *Good* is the very common word that speaks of excellence and that which is acceptable and agreeable. In the case of this text, good is what God says is good, which is impossible for any human to do until God regenerates our hearts and puts Christ's righteousness on our account. Oh! Because of the regenerating work of God in the believer's heart, we are able to do good. Therefore, also, it is not likely a person will do that which is truly good until we rely completely on the LORD.

David also gave us an idea of the result of trusting in God and doing good. Such a person will be dwelling in the land. Is that a good thing? The precise statement does not hold a lot of meaning for us modern Americans. To the ancient Jew it was the priceless promise that God's people would be established in the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We modern, non-Jewish believers in Christ apply the term "dwell in the land" figuratively to speak of

eternal life which is a quality of life like God's character that begins at the moment of salvation, a life that never ends.

A person who is assured of eternal life is going to be characterized as befriending faithfulness. The person who is trusting God implicitly, who is doing what is acceptable to God, who is enjoying eternal life embraces faithfulness. We have those priceless benefits because of faith in God's promises. We are daily enjoying those benefits because we are loyal to God and His promises.

Also, the eternal life kind-of-person will be delighted with God. David's command makes sense to us when he said, *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart (v.4)*. Again, God lays a responsibility on us. We need to be delighted in the LORD. To be delighted means to find pleasure in an object or person. In fact, the root behind this Hebrew word means to be pampered or to find exquisite delight. Human nature naturally looks for this kind of delight in passing things. Things and relationships offer delight for a season but soon disappoint. Therefore, our Maker challenges us not to waste our time on such things. *"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food" (Isaiah 55:2)*.

When naturally sinful people are reconciled to our Maker, we will find delight in Him. That is why God gave a promise to rebellious Israel that after He changes the hearts of the whole nation things will be different. *"Then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 58:14)*.

There are great results attached to being delighted with God. First, God gives us the desires of our heart. Okay, we can stop right there. Who could ask for more than that? Well, consider that our real desire of our heart is revealed in what we petition God for. Like a child going to a parent, we ask God for the desires of our hearts. Our heart is the real person, the central point of our intellect, will, and emotions. So I simply ask God for what I want. What an incredible promise that God Himself, the miracle Creator, will give what I ask for!

Jesus taught this same truth. *"If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14)*. What an amazing promise! We simply ask God, and, presto, we have just what we always wanted... since last week! Oh, but there are qualifications. James warned us, *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (James 4:2-3)*.

There are some very practical applications of that truth. Someone is bound to think, "Oh boy, the desire of my heart is ten million dollars. If I delight myself in God, He will give me ten million bucks!" Not according to James' qualifications. James warns me that if I am truly delighted in the Lord, I will not desire 10 million dollars. Or, if I desire 10 million dollars, I am delighting myself in pleasure, wealth, materialism that is passing, all of which are the lusts of the flesh and pride of life. Now it is true that in God's perfect providence He might see fit to make a person wealthy (i.e. Abraham). But wealth is not the godly person's desire. Our overriding desire is to be consumed with, in love with, focused on God.

We are supposed to trust God and delight in God. Along with that, we learn that the person who trusts God and who delights in God will commit his way to God. Again, we have a responsibility in this matter. David wrote, *Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him (v.5a)*. In this statement, God challenges us to consciously take our way of life and roll it over onto Him. On one hand, that sounds like a great way to relieve ourselves of a burden. On the other hand, that means that God will be in charge of the direction, path, timing, and circumstances of our lives. Do we really trust God enough to hand over our lives for Him to manage?

People who really trust God will commit their way to Him. What would we think of the person who claims that his vehicle is very trustworthy, but he isn't brave enough to drive it more than fifty miles from home? If a person builds a chair and assures us that it will hold any typical person, but then refuses to sit in it himself, we might have reason to doubt his trust. Would you invest in a company in which the owner of the company won't invest his own money? I think the colloquial saying is, "Put your money where your mouth is." Likewise, if I fear turning my life over to God in every respect, do I

really trust Him? This is why faith is a growing process in which we learn to trust God more and more.

What is the result of turning my life over to God? David promised, *and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday (vv.5b-6)*. When we trust God with our lives, God acts in response. Specifically He magnifies our righteousness. We have righteousness? Actually, our personal righteousness is like a dirty, soiled garment in God's eyes (Isaiah 64:6). But when He saved us, God gave us a righteousness that is not our own. Paul desired to *be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- (Philippians 3:9)*.

Because we live in a world that is darkened by sin, the righteousness of God will be quite obvious. That righteousness is revealed in a person's words, attitudes, and actions. So how are my words, attitudes, and actions different from such normal, acceptable things of the world?

To people who trust God, delight in God, and are committed to God, God says, "Stop fretting about evil people." If we are really committed to God, we cannot let evil determine our attitude. That is what David meant when he wrote, *Fret not yourself because of evildoers (v.1a)*. He meant that we need to stop simmering in a slow burn about evildoers. That is easier said than done in light of the fact that evildoers do bad stuff. Evil is the opposite of what God calls good. Evil is harmful, results in loss and pain, and is intended to counteract God's blessings. Evildoers are people who do wrong or say wrong that results in hurting other people.

Notice how David described these evildoers in this Psalm. *The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him (v.12). The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright (v.14). The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives (v.21). The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death (v.32)*.

We understand evildoing because the news is full of it everyday. Every single day we read or hear about murder, robbery, rape, deception, fraud, slander, and malice. In some ways, according

to the experts, this current presidential election is all about fretting over evildoers who have been leading this nation to ruin. Probably if we had the slightest understanding of the extent of corruption in government and big business in America, we would do more than fret.

There are two reasons we get into a slow burn, an agitation because of evildoers. First is the reality that the evildoers are harming or destroying our culture, our friends, our job, our family, and anything else that is good and useful. Second, I get agitated at evildoers who are attempting or planning to harm me personally. David often confessed in the Psalm this personal concern that evildoers were truly out to get him. But, if we are really trusting God, there is no need to fret

Second, when we are trusting God, we must *be not envious of wrongdoers(v.1b)*! The command means that we must stop having strong desires regarding wrongdoers. In the first command, we are to stop being angry with those people. And yet, human nature being so inconsistent, it is possible that we might turn right around and wish that we had what the wrongdoers have.

But, part of the reason I fret is because the wrongdoers seem to have their way. Why does it always seem like the wrongdoers prosper the most? That was David's question (vv.7,14,16,21,35). That is our question. God will answer it in the body of this psalm.

Third, because we trust God and have committed our lives to Him, we must *refrain from anger, and forsake wrath (v.8a)*! Simply put, we don't get angry at them. Anger is an emotion that alerts us that there is a problem. That is going to happen as we hear about evildoers. But don't retain the anger, don't dwell on it. That is what Paul taught: *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger (Ephesians 4:26)*.

Furthermore, don't lose your temper over these people. The word *wrath* speaks of hot displeasure, a furious burning rage. In a very interesting side note, the same Hebrew word is also translated "poison." Rage will poison our souls.

But common sense might wonder why I should not be angry, why I should not lose my temper at all the wicked people who have their way? In verses two and eight we find two good reasons why we must refrain from anger and wrath. David warned, *Fret not yourself;*

it tends only to evil (v.8b). To be continually agitated with evil makes us just like them. We need to rise above that level.

A second reason why we should not get sunk in anger is because *they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb (v.2)*. That sounds encouraging enough, but we have watched evil men live and do evil for generations. George Soros, for example, will be 86 in August. He has apparently been what the Bible would describe as an evildoer all his life. He was born in Budapest to Jewish parents. During Hitler's purging of the Jews in the 1940's, Soros was, as a teenager, an informer who ratted out Jews so they were captured, tortured, and killed. Today he is a multi-billionaire who consistently gives large financial support to liberal and even anti-Christian initiatives all over the world. He especially seeks to influence every major election in America. Someone might ask why men like that are still alive if verse two is true. It is because God's timetable is not the same as ours. With God one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. When evildoers stand before the Judgment seat of Christ facing eternity, 90 years of life will seem like a very short time.

What is the alternative to fretting, getting angry, and losing our temper? We should focus on the LORD. Patiently stay in the LORD's presence. David wrote, *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him (v.7a)*. Learning to be still before the Lord is one of the greatest blessings God gives. It is the precise opposite of getting all stirred up. Patience trusts God to act according to righteousness in due time. If we are patiently waiting on the LORD, we will not be preoccupied with those who prosper in evil. Or as David put it, *Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! (v.7b)*. When you hear news that stirs your anger, walk away to a quiet place, read your Bible, and pray to the LORD who is in control of these things.

Be Secure (vv.23-24).

The LORD establishes the righteous person's way. God determines a man's way. *The steps of a man are established by the LORD (v.23a)*. God actually establishes all steps of all people. It is as Paul concluded in Romans nine. *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,*

"For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Romans 9:17). God creates all people for His glory. He will be glorified as men and women turn to Him in faith and become like Him. He will be glorified when He judges sin and all rebellion against Himself.

By implication the text reveals this to be specifically the righteous man as opposed to the evil man. We take great comfort in the fact that God knows us, cares for us, and directs our steps. God protects us like a shepherd protects the sheep of his flock (Psalm 23).

Because God orders our steps, we take pleasure in what He brings about. God loves to order a man's path *when he delights in his way (v.23b)*. God takes great delight in the way He leads His people. It is the same way with His creation. God delights in that which reflects His glory. His perfect leading for His people reveals the glory and, therefore, we should be delighted in the way that God leads us.

Therefore, since God leads us for His own glory, we can be sure the LORD upholds the righteous. But wait. Didn't David indicate that a righteous person will fall when he wrote, *though he fall (v.24a)*? All of us can testify that there have been times that we have fallen off the path, missed the turn, or taken the wrong fork in the road. If God is leading us, why did He allow that failure? God never tempts anyone to sin or miss His will. That is our own stubborn rebellion taking over. When we take our eyes off from God, we will fall.

But God continues to hold on to His children even when we fall. Though he falls, *he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand (v.24b)*. The contrast is stumbling (which we will do) versus full and complete falling, which is not to get up again. Because God holds our hand like a loving parent holds his child's hand, we cannot fall into eternal destruction. We are as secure eternally as God's hand that holds us.

Therefore, we delight in our salvation.

Be Saved (vv.39-40).

Salvation is from the LORD. David acknowledged that it is God who saves. *The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD*. This speaks of God delivering us from trials, difficulties, and real enemies

in life. More important is that the promise conveys overtones of eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. God alone provides all that is required to make sinners righteous and to save our souls.

God is our stronghold. Because God saves the righteous, *He is their stronghold in the time of trouble (v.39)*. Since God is able to save us from the great enemy sin and Satan, can He not protect us in temporary trouble? What trouble do you have that God does not know about? He has designed that trouble to help us learn to be secure in Him.

More to the point, the LORD saves us from the wicked. Again the good news is that God delivers. *The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them (v.40a)*. Often David experienced God's hand of deliverance from the wicked. He knew firsthand about God's deliverance when he faced Goliath, when he escaped Saul, when he battled the Philistines, and when he ran from Absalom. We, like the saints who have gone before us, have also experienced deliverance on some level.

Sometimes God's greatest deliverance is through death. On July 15, 1555 Baptist preacher John Bradford and young John Leaf were led to the burning stake at Bloody Mary's order. As they faced their last moments on earth, Bradford turned to Leaf and said, "Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a happy supper with the Lord tonight." That sounds like security in salvation.

The great promise is that God delivers those who take refuge in Him. He delivers, *because they take refuge in him (v.40b)*. We must have refuge from the ravages of sin, especially the eternal ravages of hell. In Christ alone, through God's mercy, we have refuge in Him. That is the thought behind John Wesley's hymn, *Jesus Lover of My Soul*.

Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.