

**Psalm 37: 1-4; “The Desires of Your Heart”, A Communion Sermon for the  
New Year, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017,  
In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

There is no better way to bring in the New Year than to contemplate the promises of God. A Christian ought to be a person who is looking ahead, looking forward to all that God will do for them, and all that they might do to live a righteous life, and promote the glory of God. All of what God does, in our lives, is based upon His holy purposes. He so very great in His being that He knows all of His works from eternity. He knows every person's heart and every detail of their life; how long their life will be, where they will live and grow up, and all the things that they will do. But from our limited perspective, we sometimes do not know our own heart as we ought, and we know very little or nothing of the things that God is doing in our life behind the scenes. We are called to live by faith and not by sight. We do not know what this year will bring, and thus some of us may fret over what we do not know. What is coming? It could be anything, and we are so uncertain about what the future will hold; whether the economy will go bad, or whether our health will decline, or whether we will succeed, or fall short, of some life's goal.

On the other hand, sometimes we fret over what we do know, which is what this psalm is about. We fret over evil men, or evildoers as our text calls them; people who deliberately are trying to undermine that which is good and right. And some of these people may be opposing us in our attempts to lead a godly life. And when they do, our text says that we should not fret. What, then, are we to do when we are tempted to fret, either over what we do not know, the future, or what we do know, the opposition of ungodly people? We could even extend this question further. What do we do, when after our best attempts at witnessing to the truth of the Bible, it does not produce the desired result; the conversion of that person to Christ; that person we have been praying for, for so long? Well, I think that these verses will give us the answer to that question, and also set the stage for our observing the Lord's Supper in just a few minutes. Apart from the negative exhortation not to fret, there are 3 positive words of command which we are given here in these verses. In speaking to you about them now, I want to show you what God's response will be if you will obey Him in engaging your heart and your mind to do these things that are commanded. And then at the end of the message, we will think about the joyful reality that Christ has died in order to give you grace to be resolved to trust in Him, dwell in the land of promise, and delight Yourself in Him.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – There is an exhortation given to us from king David to trust in the Lord and do good.**

I want you to see that there is a connection here between the two; trusting and doing good. It is when we are trusting in the Lord that we are truly able to do good. When we are not trusting in the Lord, it really is impossible that we will succeed in doing good in a way that is pleasing to God. “Without faith it is impossible to please God, and he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” It is when you are trusting in the Lord, that you will diligently seek Him. And you will diligently seek Him in order that He will so order things in your life, that you will see what the good things are that He would have you to do. And you will then be given the grace and strength to do them in accordance with His purpose, and His leading and guiding of you into them. Why is it that Christians become discouraged and fretful? Is it not because they are not really trusting God in the way that they should be trusting Him, with an active, vigorous faith?

Unbelievers who are moral turn things completely around when they say: “I will be a good person and do what is good and right in order that God will bless me.” No, my dear friend, you will not be able to enough good consistently to please God so that you will win His favor, or

obtain His highest blessing of eternal life. And the good that you are doing, you are no doubt doing from selfish motives. What do I mean by that? I mean this: that you believe that you inherently have the ability to do good from yourself, without the grace of Christ. You think that you have the ability, independent of God's instructing you through His word and by His Spirit, as to how your good ought to be done, so that He will be pleased with you. All the good that is done by a person, in order to be perfect, must be done not to their glory but to God's. It is the highest and most important motive.

And even if you have been instructed Biblically in the right way of doing things, I am pretty sure that you would want to be rewarded according to your works. And if God were to reward you according to your works, in strict justice, those works would not pass the test of His scrutiny, even if they have passed the test of your own scrutiny. For God is only satisfied with a perfect loving obedience which is being cultivated in relation to your faith in Him. Your being able to do good, and having a perfect love for God and man in doing those good works, in accordance with His revealed will in His word, only comes from grace. And James in his letter, chapter 2, verse 10 says: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." Let me ask you this: Can you really say that your motives are not selfish or impure for wanting to try to prove that you can do good without faith in God, and faith in the Christ whom He sent into the world to save sinners like yourself? I think that it is entirely possible that you do not see the issue clearly.

Christ died for the ungodly. Christ died for sinners. Christ died for those unable to keep the law of God, but you believe that you have the ability to do good and then you trust that God will accept you. All of this comes from you and not from Him, and so you believe that you can make your boast of being good before God stand somehow in the day of judgment. Romans chapter 4, verse 1 says: "What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?" "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God." "For what does the Scripture say?" Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." "Now to him works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt." "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." This is why a person must trust in Christ first and then learn to do all of their works from the basis of God's having imputed His righteousness to you and to all the works that you will do for God and men.

But you say to me – "I believe that I am keeping the law of God as best as I know how." "I am sincerely loving God and I sincerely care about people around me." "I was baptized as an infant for the remission of my sins". I grew up going to church. I was a young person who always kept my parent's rules when I was growing up." "I was always trying to do what I could to be helpful to them, and other people around me." Surely, if anyone deserves to go to heaven, it is me." Ah, my dear friend, you do not understand yet. There is a very good reason for you to trust in the Lord first, and then to follow it up with doing good. It shows that you recognize the way that God sees things. God sees all men outside of Christ in Adam. And if you will recall, Adam fell from His original righteousness and passed on his sinful nature to all of his descendants, and you are one of them. If you really understood how holy God is, and if you really understood the innate sinfulness of your heart, you would never say such a thing as – "I am good enough as I am in order for God to accept me and to bring to heaven when I die; look at my good works.

You sound an awful lot like the rich young ruler who came to the Lord Jesus and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing should I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good?" "There is no one who is good but God." "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." "He said to Him, 'Which ones?' "Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,

Honor your father and your mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” “The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’ “What do I still lack?” “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ “But the young man heard that saying he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

The reason that the young man could not have eternal life is because of his failure to recognize that he was not a good person by nature, he felt that he had kept the commandments of God, but he hadn't realized that he was not keeping at least one of them, and because he was unwilling to recognize His need of Christ's righteousness, and His instruction. He would rather hold on to all the money that he had made, and trust that what He had done by his own strength, ingenuity, and righteousness for God, was enough. But all of this was not sufficient in his case. Dear Christian, sometimes when you see the wicked prosper you might be discouraged. Sometimes you may believe that the Christian life is hard. But will you not remember that you have Jesus, and when you have Jesus, His yoke is easy and His burden is light? It is the way of transgressors that is hard. Your primary duty to God is to trust in Him with all of your heart, and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways to acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths. When you trust in Him you are saved; and once you are saved, then you will want to do good works. And in paying attention to these things in this order; trusting and doing good, you will find an antidote to fretfulness. What is ever accomplished by fretfulness? The fruit of fretfulness is discouragement. The fruit of trust is praise and thanksgiving, leading to look outside of yourself to Christ, first, and then to look to see how you might engage in good works which will glorify Him and help other people. Will you not praise God today, as you come to partake of the Supper, that you have been given grace to see this important order; trust and do good? And will you not resolve in this year of 2017 that you will hold to this good order? “Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus; than to trust and obey.”

### **Now 2<sup>nd</sup> – Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.**

The New American Standard says: “Dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness.” The King James says: “Dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” To dwell in the land in David's day way to dwell in the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, given by God to Israel. For him and for Israel, it meant that they ought to be content with what God have given them and what God had shown them in terms of truth and grace. And they should then be content to cultivate faithfulness to Him in that place to which He had providentially lead them and guided them. They were to cultivate faithfulness to do and keep His commandments and be good people; friends of God, and kind to their brethren. They were to continue to trust in the Lord for every good thing, and to feed upon His faithfulness day by day as long as they lived. To feed upon His faithfulness is to spiritually feed upon His promises; that He would be there to help them on to be righteous and holy people; people who were devoted to Him and kind to others around them. Franz Delitzsch says: “The “land” is throughout this Psalm the promised possession, viz., the land of Jahve's presence, which has not merely a glorious past, but also a future rich in promises; and will finally, more perfectly than under Joshua, become the inheritance of the true Israel. It is therefore to be explained: enjoy the quiet sure habitation which God gives thee, and diligently cultivate the virtue of faithfulness.” (end of quote)

To cultivate faithfulness is to be faithful to God spiritually in your heart; to seek to praise Him and be thankful to Him for all that He has done for you through Christ. And it is to then engage in good works which themselves will bring glory to His name. John 14: 21 says: “He who has My commandments and keeps them; it is he who loves Me.” “And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” Do you have the Holy Spirit in your life dear listener? Then abide in Christ. John 15: 4 says: “Abide in Me, and I in you.” “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you,

unless you abide in me.” Verse 8 says, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” This the land that we have been led to, and placed in, by the Father’s working; the land of the promises of God’s word, and the land of cultivating righteousness through good works. James chapter 2, verse 26 says: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Will this be your resolution for 2017; to seek to cultivate faithfulness to God, and righteousness in His sight by engaging in good works? Seek to help and to encourage others around you. Spend time with the lonely, visit the sick and pray with them, give to the needy, feed the poor, comfort the afflicted, assist those who are overwhelmed with cares, and be a friend to your neighbors and to needy sinners everywhere. We have a very great God who can use you to do these wonderfully kinds of things. Come down front with me now, and I will give you a few more thoughts on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of these commands.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.**

This command and this promise are very straightforward, are they not? You delight yourself in God, and He gives you what you desire when it is in accordance with His will. Certainly the Lord does not give you the sinful desires of your heart, but only those things which He knows will glorify Him and what will be for your eternal good. It has sometimes been debated whether the text is saying that Lord actually is the One who gives you the desires, the good desires, of your heart, as a believer, or whether it is saying that the Lord gives you what you are desiring to see come to pass in your life. I believe that we can realistically say that it is both together. When you were an unbeliever the Bible says in Ephesians 2: 2 –“you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” But now that you have believed in Christ you are a new creature with new desires which come to you from the Holy Spirit’s working in your heart.

As we come to partake of the Lord’s Supper, let us delight ourselves in the Lord Jesus who has loved us and has given Himself for us; He who has washed us from our sins with His blood. It was His sacrifice which purchased our redemption and the most important part of the application of that redemption was His gift to every believer of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who gives you, places within you the new desires to think righteous thoughts and do righteous deeds to the glory of God. These new desires are what you are delighted to find in your mind and heart. These desires for progress in holiness, righteousness, and to live out the truth of the word; they come from the Spirit’s working. In your flesh there is no good thing. The Spirit is working in relation to the new nature that has been place in you as a seed. See to it, then, dear Christians, that you cultivate the ground of your hearts by delighting yourself in the Lord. This is what He has called you to, and this is what He gives you grace to do, but you must cultivate this land that the Lord has brought you into. And when you do, you will find that this is what will glorify Him as you live out your time here upon the earth and then enter eternity.