

Eight Great Precepts

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Psalm 37

Henry T. Mahan Tape Library
Zebulon Baptist Church
6088 Zebulon Highway
Pikeville, KY 41501

Website: <http://www.sovereign-grace.com/13thstbap.htm>

Online Sermons: <http://mahan.sermonaudio.com>

I'd like for you to open your Bibles to the book of Psalms. I'm going to be speaking today from Psalm 37 on the subject, "Eight Great Precepts." Now, I would really like very much if you would turn to Psalm 37. I believe that if you will turn to the Scripture and even get a pen and plan to mark these eight great precepts. I believe it will be a great blessing to you, especially will it be a blessing to those who know Christ, who love the gospel, who rest in the Redeemer.

Now, the author of this Psalm, Psalm 37, the author of this psalm is David. It is a Psalm of David. And he wrote it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, God breathed, is what Scripture says.

And then the time of the writing of this psalm, the time of the writing is revealed in verse 25. David said in verse 25, "I have been young, and now am old." So David wrote this Psalm in his old age, in his mature years. And then the subject of this psalm. Now, this will be interesting to you. It is very similar to Psalm 73. Psalm 37, just turn it around, Psalm 73. They deal with, really, the same subject. And the psalm has to do with the prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions and poverty and persecution of God's people.

Now, that...David wrote it. He wrote it in his old age. And the subject of the psalm is the prosperity of the wicked. Have you ever thought about that how the wicked prosper and are famous, live in luxury and ease? And some of God's children are afflicted and they suffer and they live in poverty and they do without yet they love God and they love his Word, are faithful to his gospel and men who are wicked and blasphemous and despise God and have no interest in the gospel and yet everything they touch turns to gold.

For David wrote about this here in Psalm 37. Here are some of the complaints and the questions raised and answered in this psalm. Here are some of the complaints. The wicked, number one, the wicked seem to prosper and succeed. And they do. There is no denying that. The more wealthy a man is, usually the more vile and blasphemous and wicked he is. That's true in many cases. You know it and I know it. And these wicked men prosper and succeed while they despise and deny and hate God.

And then another issue is raised. The true believer, the true child of God is unknown and unrecognized. Generally the people of God are of very small influence. They don't

amount to anything. No one regards them, at all, as being important. They are unknown, unrecognized and uninfluential.

And then the wicked ridicule God's people. They ridicule God's Word. They ridicule the sacrifice of Christ. They plot and they scheme against the truth. They mistreat the people of God. They want all mention of God taken off of money and out of the pledge of allegiance and out of the schools and everywhere. They just don't want God. They want freedom not of religion, but freedom from religion and from God.

And then the wicked take advantage of poor people. They take advantage of poor people. Some wicked religious people take advantage of poor people, too. And yet they continue to get richer and continue to get more prosperous and fatter, the Word says.

And then this: The wicked, the wicked, unbelievers, are a great majority. Most people do not know God, do not believe God, while those who do believe God and those who do love God are like a small flock in a great wilderness of trouble and trial and sin.

Now, in the light of all this, in the light of all this, David, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, David, as a man mature in years, rich in experience, rich in the faith of God, David gives us eight great precepts or directions for believers.

Now, you follow in your Bible while I point these out to you, these eight great precepts. Now, here is the first one found in verse one. David says, "Fret not thyself. Fret not thyself because of these evildoers. Neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity." Don't burn with jealousy. When you see these wicked men, blasphemers who deny God and hate the gospel, when you see them prosper, when you see them in good health, when you see them driving expensive cars and living in palatial homes and scarcely working, don't envy them. Don't get angry with them. Don't be jealous of them for two reasons.

Number one. David says, "They shall soon be cut off." That's right. They shall be cut down as grass. They shall wither as the green herb. Their foot shall slide in God's own time. Their foot shall slide. So don't envy them. Don't envy them. They are going to be cut down. They are going to be cut down, cut down like mown grass and wither like a green herb.

And then, secondly, don't be envious of these wicked people. They have all that they will ever have. It is true that many of them spend their days on earth in ease and luxury, but they soon shall be cut off. They soon shall be cut off not only from this life, but from eternal life, cut off not only from men, but cut off from God. Were it not for God's grace we would be just like them. Did you know that? That ought to help us not to be angry with them. The fact that they shall soon be cut off, the fact that they have all that they will ever have, this life is it, that ought to keep us from being jealous or envious of any evil, wicked man who doesn't know God. And then the very fact it is only by God's grace that we are not like them.

I have a preacher friend down in Knoxville, Tennessee, a very fine black preacher. He pastors a black Baptist Church near Knoxville, Tennessee. I preached for him recently. But he told me about the days when he was growing up in the South down in Murray, Kentucky.

And he told about this man—I could tell you his name, but I won't—this white man for whom he worked. And this man was so cruel to him and cruel to his family, paid him practically nothing, worked him for nothing. This was back in the 50s, worked him for nothing, mistreated him. One day they were out on the street and this man spit in his grandfather's face, but he couldn't lift his hand because you know what would happen.

One day he was arrested for walking in the bank beside a white woman. All this oppression and persecution brought about mainly by this evil, rich man, white man for whom he worked. For when this preacher friend of mine reached 40 years of age he was then a successful preacher of the gospel. He went back to Murray, Kentucky to speak. This was 20 years later, 22 years later. And in the congregation was a white haired, gray haired white woman and after the service was over she came down and she put her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek. And she said, "Dennis, do you remember me?"

He said, "No, ma'am."

She said, "I'm the wife of the man for whom you worked 22 years ago who treated you so terribly. I'm his wife. He's dead now and he died a horrible death. He didn't weigh but 76 pounds when he died. He died in misery."

And I'm telling you this. Our God says don't you fret because of evil doers. Don't you fret because of those who are wicked. Don't you fret against these workers of iniquity. They will be cut off in God's own time and they will wither like the green grass and be cut down like the green herb. So don't envy them. God will deal with them. And don't be angry against them. Don't waste your time.

And then he says, secondly, in verse three; here is another precept: "Trust in the Lord. Trust in the Lord." Trust not in riches. Riches, that's not a foundation. Trust not in the arm of the flesh. The arm of the flesh is no foundation. Trust in the Lord. Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh from the Lord. You see, my friend, these material and physical things shall soon fade away. They will soon pass away. They are not worth the time it would take you to even achieve them or to accomplish them. They are nothing but soap bubbles. But the grace of God is forever. The fashion of this world fadeth away. These clothes that I have on will rot and decay. But the Word of God abideth forever. The grace of God endureth forever. The mercy of God is forever. Trust in the Lord. Don't trust in these riches. Don't trust in the arm of the flesh. Don't trust in the power or strength of men. They will fail. God never fails. Trust him for pardon.

David wrote in Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things." He does all this for me. Men don't do this for me,

God does. Trust the Lord for daily provisions. “Give us this day our daily bread.” Trust the Lord for divine protection. “He will give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.” Trust the Lord for his good providence. Abraham did and he is our pattern of faith. It says, “Abraham believed God.” He didn’t know where he was going. The Lord told him to get out of his father’s house and go to a land he’ll show him. And he believed God not knowing where he was going. And God told him when he was 100 years old he was going to have a son and he believed God again. He didn’t know how. And then God told him to take that boy and sacrifice him on a mountain as a sin offering and he went not knowing why. And Abraham didn’t question the Lord. He trusted the Lord.

I wish I could learn that, don’t you? Don’t question the Lord. Trust the Lord. Don’t find fault with God’s good providence. Trust him. Trust him.

Did you ever say that to your children when they were growing up? You’ll be going down the street or somewhere and they say, “Daddy, do you know where we are going?”

“Now, just trust me. Just trust me. Just trust me. Don’t question me. Just trust me.”

But I’ll tell you. We can infinitely more trust our heavenly Father than my children can trust me. I fail. I make mistakes. I don’t know much. But he never fails. You can trust him.

And then the third precept he said in verse four, listen, “Delight thyself in the Lord. Delight thyself in the Lord and he will give thee the desires of thine heart. Delight thyself in the Lord.”

The believer who is exhorted not to fret, who is exhorted to trust the Lord is here told not only not to fret and to trust the Lord, but actually rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord. In whatever state I am, being content, I rejoice. That’s what Paul would say.

He said, “I know how to abound and I know how to be abased. But I delight in the Lord. He was in prison writing to the church at Philippi. And in those three or four chapters he used the word “rejoice” 10 times.

Psalm 1:2 says, “His delight is in the law of the Lord.” That’s that man that is planted by the river, the water of life, that man who bringeth his fruits in his season. His delight is in the law of the Lord.

In Psalm 40 he says, “I delight to do thy will, Oh God.” That’s our Lord Jesus speaking.

Psalm 94:19 says, “Thy mercies and thy comfort delight my soul.”

Psalm 119:24 says, “The Word of God is my delight.”

Song of Solomon 2:3 says, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight.”

Isaiah 58:2 says, “I take great delight in approaching the Lord God.”

You know, my friends, someone said this one time. The presence of the Lord and the promises of his Word make a mighty soft pillow when a man is dying. But the way of the transgressor is hard. It’s hard. Blessed is the man who can delight himself in the Lord and not find delight in jewelry and fine clothes and big homes and influence and prestige and position in this world. It will all pass away. You won’t be dead five years and they’ll say, “George, who?”

Let me ask you: Who was the running mate of George McGovern when he ran against the president who was elected some years ago? He was on the ticket as the vice president of the United States and most of you don’t even know who he is. Most people don’t even know who the vice president of the United States is now let alone the one who ran some time ago. You won’t be gone five days and they’ll be asking who you were. But they want to ask who you are in glory if your name is written in the book of life. So these things don’t amount to much. I don’t know why we think they do.

Verse five gives you the fourth precept. “Commit thy way unto the Lord.” Commit your way unto the Lord. He will bring it to pass. Cast all your cares on him. He cares for you. Cast away anxiety and worry and fear and resign your will and your life and your family to his caring. He careth for you.

You know, the farmer teaches us a lesson along this line, this committing our way to the Lord. And he will bring it to pass. The farmer goes out and plows the field. He plows the field and discs it, tears it up, rows it off and then the plants the seed, covers it up. No what does he do? Now what does he do? He doesn’t do anything. He waits on the Lord. That seed is committed to that ground looking to the Lord of the harvest to give it life and make it bud and bring it forth. So this is what David is saying. Commit your way and your salvation and your present and your future and your family to the Lord God. Just take it to the Lord as the old hymn writer said and leave it there.

If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold and you have to get along with meager fare, just remember in his Word, how he feeds the little bird. And take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

That is committing thy way unto the Lord.

If your body suffers pain and your health you can’t regain and your soul is almost sinking in despair. Jesus the Lord knows the pain you feel. He can save and he can heal and he is the only one who can. So take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. Leave it there. Commit thy way unto the Lord.

When your youthful days are gone and old age is stealing on and your body bends beneath the weight of care. He’ll never leave you there. He’ll go with you to the end. So take your burden to the Lord.

You said, "I did."

Did you leave it there? Did you leave it there? Commit thy way unto the Lord. He will bring it to pass.

And then, number five, in verse seven, mark this. "Rest in the Lord." We are told to trust in the Lord. We are told to commit our way unto the Lord. Now, rest. That's what I'm talking about by leave it there. Trust the Lord. I trust the Lord. And yet you act like that you don't. You are fretting and worrying and fearful and you are just beside yourself. You are a bundle of nerves. He said, "Rest." Trust the Lord. Commit your ways to him. And rest. That's what it says here. Rest. Wait patiently on him.

There are so many promises in this book concerning rest. He giveth his beloved rest or sleep. Our Lord said, "Come unto me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. You will find rest unto your souls."

Paul talks about ceasing from our labors and entering into his rest. Our whole gospel is a gospel of rest. It is a gospel not of do. It is a gospel of tis done, the great transaction is done.

God says, "Be still. Be still and know that I am God."

Did you ever have when you were raising your children, when they were young, they would sit around fidgeting in your lap and just fidgeting. You say, "Be still. Be still."

That's what God is saying to you. "Be still and know that I am God."

The soul of the unbeliever is like the troubled sea, the waves tossing and dashing the ship about. But he leadeth us beside still waters.

Even...you see, when God killed Nadab and Abihu...do you know who Nadab and Abihu were? Well, you see, they were the fellows that offered stranger fire on the altar of God. That's right. Moses and Aaron were witnesses of this. And God killed Nadab and Abihu. But, you see, these were sons of Aaron. They were subjects led by Moses, but they were sons of Aaron. And when Moses said, "Aaron, the Lord killed these boys because of their blasphemy and their rebellion. They have violated the altar of God, the type of Christ. And God killed them."

And do you know what it says about Aaron? Aaron says he held his peace. Just hold it right there. Just hold your peace.

That's what Eli did. He held his peace. He said, "It is the Lord, let him do what he will."

That's what Job did. He held his peace. Job said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Oh, to learn to hold my peace.

Well, you can if you rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him and he will bring it to pass.

And the sixth precept is found in verse eight. It says, “Cease from anger. Cease from anger. Forsake wrath. Fret not thyself in any way to do evil. Cease from anger.” Isn’t this difficult? And yet this is a precept of almighty God to his church, his people. Cease from anger. Cease from anger either against God’s providence or against men. Cease from anger against God’s providence—God who is the first cause of all things—and you might as well cease to be angry with men because they are the second causes, instruments of God’s providence.

James 1:19,20 says this: “The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.” Our anger does not change the situation. It just makes it worse. Fret not thyself to get even. Fret not thyself to get revenge. For he says, “Vengeance is mine. I will repay says the Lord.” He always does. God always pays his notes, his bills. He will.

It would do well for us to learn...here is something that I want to work on, something that is helpful to me when I remember it. It would do well for us to learn that the battle against evil in any form, the battle against evil in any form is not our battle. It is God’s battle. It is not my battle. It is God’s battle. Evil men are God’s enemies. David said, “They are your enemies, God.” And I’ll guarantee you he will deal with his enemies.

He has told our Lord Jesus, “Come and sit at my right hand until I make your enemies...” Whose enemies? “Your enemies, your footstool.”

And this battle is not my battle. It is God’s battle. I’d be willing to be used wherever he wants to use me and for whatever purpose he wishes to use me, but it is his battle, his battle. They are his enemies and he will destroy them. And the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

You see, we wrestle not against flesh and blood. This is not a flesh and blood battle. We wrestle against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places and rulers of the darkness. And you don’t even know who they are. If there is a blow to be struck God will have to strike it because you don’t know where to hit. You will hit some poor flesh. It won’t do a bit of good because he is not the cause. He is the second cause.

All right, verse 27, here is a double precept, number seven, verse 27. “Depart from evil and do good.” And Paul deals with that in Romans 12:17. He says, “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Don’t get even. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Live peaceably with your neighbors. Live peaceably with your in laws. Live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves. Give place to wrath. It is written, ‘Vengeance is mine. I

will repay saith the Lord.' Therefore if your enemy hunger, feed him. If your enemy thirst, give him a drink. For in so doing thou shall heap coals of fire on his head."

Don't be overcome with evil. Don't let evil overcome you. Don't use their tactics. Don't use their ways. Overcome evil with good.

Now, here is the last precept, verse 34. "Wait on the Lord. Wait on the Lord. Keep his way and he will exalt you to inherit the land. Stand in the way of Christ and having done all to stand."

Stay on the rock Christ Jesus. Keep to the gospel of saving grace and wait on God. Don't bind God with a time or an hour. Just wait on him. In due time he will bring it to pass. In heaven and earth and sky and sea he executes his wise decrees and all his saints can in him rest for he does, I know, what is always best. Wait, then, my soul, patiently wait. Prostrate before his mercy seat and through this dark and cloudy day wait on the Lord and keep his way. His way is Christ.

All right. I have two messages here. One is: "When is a man ready to die." And the other is "Eight Great Precepts" from Psalm 37. If you want them, write to us. Send a two dollar donation and we will mail them to you. The address will be given to you right here. Until next week, may the Lord bless you every one?