

# Confidence in God when justice is delayed

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*Psalms*

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Psalm 37, Psalm 37,

1 Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

Clearly this is a long Psalm and we could have spent several weeks on it but this evening we'll simply seek to get the overall pattern of the Psalm at this time rather than go through it slowly, and the theme of this Psalm is "Confidence in God when justice is delayed." Confidence in God when justice delayed. The theme then is the short term seeming prosperity, in fact not seeming prosperity but real, the short term prosperity of the wicked and the real long-term blessedness of the godly. It was written by David in his later years, you can see that from verse 25, "I've been young and now I'm old," and it quite naturally divides into three sections, although there are interspersions in each section of things from other parts, but very roughly it divides first of all the inner struggle in the first 11 verses, then the outward conflict in verse 12 to 26, and then the long view in verse 27 to 40. So the first 11 verses the inner struggle with fretfulness, and then the outward conflict the actual enmity of the ungodly to David and to others, and then the long view in the last part of the Psalm.

So first of all, the inner struggle in the first 11 verses. The danger is summed up in the first two verses,

1 Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. 2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

The danger is one of getting heated. The word threat here is literally incensed or inflamed. It's the idea of boiling up inside. The evil works of the ungodly seem to go unpunished and to a significant extent unrestrained. The temptation is to fret and to envy their prosperity and to even think that the way of wickedness itself is to be preferred. The word iniquity refers to perversity or a twistedness and when the people of God, they see

the crookedness of men and the apparent prosperity that they enjoy, the temptation is to fret and even to envy them as if they have the better part. The cause of this temptation, or the cause of the strength of it, is short-sightedness, verse 2, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb. After their little day they will be cut off by death.

But you say, "Ah, but yes, but the godly die as well," and of course that's true, and generally speaking, there is no visible distinction between the death of the godly and the death of the wicked. There may be a very great difference if death is known to be approaching and the Lord gives a Christian great comfort and assurance, there may indeed be a great difference of disposition, but physically speaking, death is death whether someone is godly or ungodly. That's not surprising because we walk by faith and not by sight and the Lord does not even, at the very end, he does not allow his people to see a distinction between a brother or sister dying in the Lord and the ungodly. There's no visible distinction because we still walk by faith. So when a Christian dies, in faith we believe they are in heaven. When a non-Christian dies, in faith we believe they've gone to hell. But visibly death looks the same. But it isn't. The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous have hope in his death. But it's the short-sightedness that gives strength to the temptation to envy the wicked. For the wicked, for the ungodly, for the unbeliever, all that he has loved and lived for will be gone, but for the believer, born again of incorruptible seed, that endureth forever, there is an entrance into the kingdom of glory.

So the way forward is given in verses 3 to 8, if we can subdivide this first section, the way forward in verse 3 to 8. We notice immediately that the Psalmist's counsel is not forget about it, snap out of it, and why is that? Well, the answer is because we can't. When we are in the grip of dreadfulness and envy of the ungodly, we are not able to just snap out of it. It doesn't work, generally speaking. We need a positive alternative and that positive alternative by the grace of God is to set our minds upon the Lord. We all know that. When we are tormented by some annoyance, particularly when the wicked are against us and they seem to be succeeding in all that they do, even though we know our fretting, the energy and emotion that we expend in fretfulness isn't doing us any good, we know, we know it's not doing us any good, we know it's not remedying the situation at all, and yet we can't break free from it, except as we are enabled to think upon the Lord himself. And these verses tell us to trust in the Lord, to delight in the Lord, to commit our way to the Lord and to rest in the Lord.

These are the defenses against the fiery darts of the wicked one. We are to trust in the Lord. Verse 3,

3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

Trust in the Lord. It needs trust in the Lord to do good when wicked men cross them. It needs trust in the Lord to do good when wickedness seems to be paying. The enjoyment of the land, trust in the Lord and do good, so shall thou dwell in the land, and verily thou

shalt be fed. The land of promise, as we mentioned Saturday evening, in Hebrew the word land and earth, it's one and the same word, and sometimes it's not altogether easy to know whether it's the land or the earth because the meek shall inherit the land, the meek shall inherit the earth. But of course the connection, as we mentioned then, is that the land of Canaan was an imperfect sample of the new heavens and new earth, the inheritance of God's people. It was the place where the people of God would enjoy fellowship in the presence of the Lord and in the blessings of the covenant. So to say they would dwell in the land and be fed in it is effectively to say that they would have the blessings of the covenant, the blessings promised to Abraham's seed, but not promised as it were irrespective of faith in the Lord. The unbelieving seed of Abraham never had any title to the land of promise. That's why they fell in the wilderness because of unbelief of the gospel, so that it is a mistake to think that Abraham's physical seed had a title to the physical land and the spiritual seed to the spiritual blessings. That's not the case. The physical seed had no title to the land of promise, the physical land, except as they were also the spiritual seed trusting in the promises in Christ Jesus. And it is by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ that we first experience God as our God, and it is as we trust him more and more that we enjoy the sense of his family care and of our sonship and have confidence toward him.

We must trust him to do what is right for his people and we must never concede to the idea that we shall be losers by following after him. We never need to sin and we will never ultimately lose by following the Lord and so the text says trust in the Lord and do good, faith and means, believe what he says and do what he commands. The Christian life is, in one sense, extremely simple in its basic principles, although life itself and the application of them can become very complex. We trust him to do what is right for his people. We trust in the Lord. Delight in the Lord, verse 4.

4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Delight in the Lord. Sometimes the children of darkness are more consistent than the children of life. They delight more consistently in their idols, in their sins, than we do in our God. Of course there is a reason for that. The ungodly are destitute of love to God. We are not destitute of love of sin. We have a conflict. They don't. They have no love to the living and true God, and so they are consistent in their sin although it's restrained by God, whereas we have a conflict, we have the new nature, but we have the remains of the old, we have the indwelling sin that does so easily beset us. But the more we delight in God, the more readily we submit to his commandments. The more we find our joy in God, the more his commandments are not grievous and we desire what he desires and therefore we are not disappointed. We delight in him, he gives the desires of our heart. The more we delight in God, the more our hearts will be submissive to God, to his wisdom and to his good pleasure, the more we will acknowledge that he knows what is best for us and the more we will desire whatever he pleases to give and we will be delivered from frustration and disappointment which are the common lot of the unbelieving.

The man who delights in God for his own sake, he will be content. If we can delight in God for his own sake. The unbeliever, he just wants to make a use of God. He wants to make a convenience of God. That's why the prosperity gospel gets a following. They treat God as just a mere convenience to do what they want. Man is in charge in the driving seat and he can tap into the omnipotence of God to give him whatever his heart craves. But the real Christian isn't like that. The real Christian delights in God for his own sake.

"God, my cheapest joy, whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." And that's why the true Christian can rise above circumstances.

That's why his contentment is not dependent upon outward things as the ungodly. The ungodly has nothing else, and so if his outward things are shaken, he's got nothing, but the believer has his God, his Savior, Jesus Christ, and he still has him even if other things are disturbed.

But then,

5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. 6 And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

That's 5 and 6. "Commit thy way," you'll see the margin says, "roll thy way upon," and it's like the reference to Gilgal, the place of rolling, as if offloading a weight of concern about outcome. Commit thy way. The future success of our course upon the Lord, roll it over upon him. It's like the farmer who does his duty plowing and sowing, but he must cast the burden of the outcome into the hands of God if he's a godly man, otherwise he may well fret and worry. But a Christian man once he's done what he is obliged to do, he rolls it over upon the Lord.

"He shall bring it to pass." Well, what will he bring to pass? He'll bring to pass the right outcome, that outcome which is good for us and for his glory. And so it is with the whole of life. Do what is right in the sight of the Lord and leave the outcome to him. If we could only learn that. As mentioned before, Brother Fred said, duties are ours, consequences are God's. And so it is. But what we do, we neglect the duties and we worry about the consequences. But we must cast all upon God and this delivers us from the agitation concerning short-term injustice.

So verse 6, "he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." He shall bring forth thy judgment, that means righteousness. It means someone executes judgment when they rightly distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. The Christian, he exercises judgment. He follows God's judgments, God's pronouncements, God's distinctions because judgment also includes God distinguishing in action, in vindicating the righteous and in condemning the wicked. But he'll bring forth thy judgment. He'll show that it was right, that what we did when we did do what was right. We're sinners but nevertheless the Christian has the root of the matter in him and God will own that, the cup of water given to one in the name of a disciple. Thy judgment shall be brought forth, and he shall vindicate his people to the full.

And then rest in the Lord. Verse 7.

7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

Rest in the Lord. The margin says "be silent to the Lord." It's the idea of unquarrelling submission, the silence of unquarrelling submission and waiting for him. So you see the rest of the verse, "fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

Waiting upon him means not taking the matter into our own hands unlawfully, but waiting for the Lord to exercise his judgment. Why do we get impatient? Why do we do things that are not our responsibility, which we oughtn't to do? Why do we try to put things right by unlawful means? Well, it's unbelief. It's because we don't think either God will sort the matter out, or that he can sort it out, or that he has the wisdom to know that to be sorted out. We treat God as either incompetent or ignorant. That's a terrible thing, but that's what is involved when we seek to sort out matters in an unlawful way and stretch forth our hands to iniquity, but if we rest in the Lord and lean upon his word, then we will be delivered from that wrath which worketh not the righteousness of God, James 1:20.

And then the third part of this section, the ultimate outcome, verse 9,

9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. 10 For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

God will not clear the guilty, verse 9. His justice will be displayed. The danger is of assessing God's mind by the short-term prosperity of the wicked or the lack of prosperity of believers. Job's friends did that, didn't they? They, of course, were prospering and they said Job is much afflicted because he has sinned much, and by contrast they're saying in effect, we are not suffering because we are righteous. But they were wrong on both counts. They were wrong about Job. They were wrong about themselves. And in the end the Lord rebuked them and he vindicated Job, not because Job was perfect, but he vindicated Job and he told the friends to ask Job to pray for them. He owned Job as his.

And the inheritance of the meek is described as the earth in verse 9 and in verse 11. The meek are those who think God is great. The meek are those who think God is great and only God is truly great. The meek are those who depend upon Jesus Christ to save them,

who know that only he is the Savior, that they cannot save themselves, and that salvation is of God and of his grace alone. The meek. Meekness is not a meritorious meekness. It's not a meekness that earns acceptance with God but it is the characteristic of those who trust in the meritorious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we trust in the Lord in that way, when we lean upon him, and when we think rightly of him, we'll be kept back from foolish impetuosity. Peter drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane because he had too low a view of Christ and it is exactly that, that we must seek grace against. And those who are in Christ, the meek of the earth, they shall inherit the earth, they shall inherit all things, all things are yours, "And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's," 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

Then the second section, verse 12 to 26, just briefly. The second section, the outward conflict, verse 12 to 26. What we have here is a description of the outward conflict, interspersed with references to the true picture and to the end result. Verse 12 reads,

12 The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. 13 The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming.

One of the commentators uses the words from 2 Corinthians 6 to sum up the message at different points of this section. Verse 12 to 15 he calls persecuted but not forsaken. The wicked plotteth against the just. He plots. He uses his skills. Wicked men have skills and abilities and intelligence, they have brains, they have all manner of ability and they use it against the people of God to express their hatred. But verse 13 says the Lord shall laugh at them. In what sense will the Lord laugh at them? It's speaking of God in human terms, certainly, but the thought is, it's the same as in Psalm 2, the Lord, "For he that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision." Yes, it's speaking of God in human terms, but it's speaking of God, it's telling us something about God and about how he views these men. It expresses the fact that God holds their schemes in contempt and that their schemes are ludicrous and futile and ridiculous and doomed because the Lord has ordained their ruin.

And so, verse 14,

14 The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. 15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.

The Lord will turn round all their devices, they shall fall in the snare which they have laid for his people.

And then verse 16 to 20 could be described as having nothing yet possessing all things. Having nothing yet possessing all things. Verse 16,

16 A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.

Why? Why is that true that the little that the righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked? Why is it better? Because the godly have a better conscience now and a better prospect in the future. A better conscience in the present and a better prospect in the future.

The Lord brings the purposes of the wicked to nothing. Verse 17.

17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken:

It's talking about his sword entering his own heart. It's talking about his bow being broken. Now it's his arms, those arms that he seeks to use against the righteous,

but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.

Whatever the ungodly has, he hasn't it for long. He hasn't peace with God. He has no long-term prospect for good. But the Lord upholds his people in their Godly desires.

And in verse 18,

18 The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.

He knows the days of the righteous, that is, he appoints them their days and everything that comes to them in those days, and they're measured and governed and everything is working for their good. He knows their days, he's appointed those days and all that fills those to each one of them, and then they have an eternal inheritance.

They are kept in troubled times, verse 19,

19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

But the wicked are ruined irreversibly.

And then verse 21 to 26 could be summed up again in those words of Ted, as poor yet making many rich. As poor though making many rich. Verse 20 says,

20 But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.

But then, verse 21,

21 The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. 22 For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. 23 The steps of a good man

are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. 25 I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. 26 He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.

As poor yet making many blessed. He has a different view of his possessions, whether they be small or great. He does not regard anything as absolutely his own. He is a steward under the Lord, and thus he becomes a blessing to others. He gives to those who need him. He lends expecting not again. But the wicked borroweth and payeth not again. Whereas the people of God show mercy, the wicked seeks for himself because the wicked man, he has nothing else, whereas the godly, they have a loose grip on the things of this life because they have a God in heaven and an inheritance in Christ Jesus. They have the one thing needful. "For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off." They are blessed of him. They have the favor of God. They have the smile of God. They have the promises of God in Christ Jesus. They have a Savior who will never leave them and they have an entrance into glory.

There is the wicked accursed of God. Everyone in this world is living either under the favor of a reconciled God or else under the curse of an angry God. And of course, those who have God as their portion, their attitude towards the things of this life is radically different from those who do not, who have their part and portion in this life. They leave their substance to babes, but as for me, I shall awake in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy righteousness.

Verse 23, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way." The Lord orders the way of the godly. He directs their steps through his word and by his Spirit, giving them understanding of his word, and so he orders their steps by teaching them the way they should go and ordering all their circumstances outside of themselves. He directs them as to their path and he orders everything for their good around them. So it's that internal direction through the word and Spirit and that outward providential care.

And the Lord delights in his way. You say, "What? The Lord delights in the way of the godly? But surely it's all of his grace that they are godly." That's true but the Lord delights in the work of his own hands. He delights in his grace, in his people. That's why in John 14 and verse 21, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." That's called a love of complacency. It's the love of God, God's benevolence, his sovereign grace that causes a man to believe on Christ and to love Christ and to walk in his ways, and yet the Lord has a delight in love in the effects of his own grace. It's undeserved kindness that brings a sinner into the kingdom and to walk in the truth and yet the Lord delights in the effects of his own sovereign grace.

So in verse 24, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the



righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Though he falls, and falls into sin, yet the Lord has a hold of his hand. Those of you with young children, you know the thing you've a good grip on their hands, sometimes they trip and fall and stumble but you've still got ahold of them, and so it is that the Lord teaches people even though they stumble and fall, they are kept, they are preserved, they do not apostatize. He completes the work within them. And in verse 25 David says that experience had proved the faithfulness of God. There is an emphasis on material things because the blessings of the covenant were linked to the Promised Land and the enjoyment of it, but God fulfills his own word. And so the contrast in verse 26, "He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed." The Lord blesses his people and he blesses their seed after them in the knowledge of his covenant.

And then the final section, the long view, the long view, verse 27 to 40. What we must do, verse 27,

27 Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. 28 For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.

What must we do? Well, we must not be weary in well-doing. We must carry on. This exhortation is not random. When the wicked prosper and the godly are in trouble, there is tremendous pressure to throw the towel in. Of course, that's what Satan intends. That's what lies behind all his devices, all his stirring up of the wicked against the people of God, that the people of God should reach a point where they simply say there's no point in following the Lord. Psalm 73, Asaph's temptation. "It's a waste of time. What's the point? All I get is trouble. Why do the wicked prosper?" Have you made concessions to that thought in little ways, eased off in active service to the Lord? And at the bottom of it lies the fact that you've begun to doubt whether it's really worthwhile. Why do people slacken off in following the Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, circumstances differ, energy levels decline as age progresses, but that's not always the reason and that can mask a deeper reason, a backsliding, a concession to unbelief. "It's just not worthwhile. Nothing I do, you see, seems to be appreciated," and perhaps it isn't by men and you get weary in well-doing. But it's a concession to unbelief and it's a concession to taking our eyes off the Lord. That temptation, "Just look after yourself. Just look after yourself a bit," where does it come from? It comes from lowering our views of the Lord.

But look what the Lord will never do, verse 28,

28 For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. 29 The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. 30 The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. 31 The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.

It's true that the people of God can be tempted and sometimes they do slacken, but not so as to utterly abandon the truth of God. The Lord will not forsake them, but will preserve

them, verse 28. He will deliver them. They will not be condemned by the condemnation of the wicked. When wicked men condemn them, God will not own that condemnation. If they're brought before tribunals for his sake, and condemned as wicked men, troublemakers, the Lord will not own it, he will vindicate them as the noonday, and he will not endorse the view of the wicked against them.

The Lord Jesus committed himself to him that judgeeth righteously but the temptation is, in trying to serve the Lord and being condemned by the wicked and perhaps not always being encouraged by the brethren as we ought, but only one verdict really matters. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:3 to 5, "it is a small thing if I be judged of thee." To our own Master we stand or fall. "Therefore, my beloved brethren," 1 Corinthians 15:58, "be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The self-righteous do good. Well, you can expect them to throw the towel in if they're not appreciated by men, they have not the love of God in them, they have not the consolation of his truth. But those who love the Lord Jesus Christ, their essential motive is love to him until they do persevere by the grace of God.

And that's why they go on, verse 30, "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh with judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide." He won't slide away, and the end will be good. What the Lord certainly will do, verse 33,

33 The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.

We've looked at that.

34 Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. 35 I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. 36 Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. 37 Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

The rich and wicked, not all rich men are wicked, but many are. They spread themselves like a green bay trees, but the end is destruction. But the Lord will keep his people, and bless them to all eternity.

We must wait upon the Lord. That word wait, it's the same word sometimes it's translated as hope, hope in the Lord. It's waiting with an expectation, looking for him, those who love his appearing and so on. To live like a Christian is to live as someone who believes that however much justice is delayed, justice will be done and his latter end will be peace. If you've grown sour and disillusioned in your service to Christ, it's not because he's changed, you've backslidden. He's as good and gracious and glorious as he ever was and he always will be. But you've backslidden. You've taken your eyes off him and off the

promises and the certainty of glory to be redeemed. You must turn again, seek again your first love with confidence in the truth of God.

The wicked will be ruined, the godly will be delivered, and that forevermore and both at the hand of the Lord. Verse 38,

38 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. 39 But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. 40 And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.

It's always worth serving the Lord. The perfect, the upright, it doesn't mean sinless, it means those who walk in the truth of God, who give their hand in the covenant, walk before me and be thou perfect, upright, steadfast in the covenant, resting upon the promises, walking in the truth of God. The vision is for an appointed time. Though it tarry, wait for it. The Lord will bless his people forever and ever. Delayed justice will be done and the promised salvation will be complete.