

SERMONS FROM SELECT PSALMS**PSALM 37****“THE SONG OF AN OLD MAN”**

“I have been young and now am old...” (v.25)

Old age has its benefits. One benefit for the Christian is a divine perspective upon life. The many years of living according to the principles of God’s Word and viewing life from God’s perspective teaches us that living with eternity’s values in view is the winning lifestyle.

The varied experiences and observations of David, the writer of this psalm, qualifies him to contrast the lifestyles of the righteous and the wicked. He had attained the advantage of perspective. He was a righteous man who witnessed both righteous and wicked behavior from the perspective of a humble peasant shepherd as well as that of a highly esteemed king. The passage of time had ripened his wisdom. The wisdom of years taught him that God is on the side of the righteous.

This Psalm is a comfort to the righteous who are perplexed about the seeming prosperity of some of the unrighteous and it gives optimism to saints who have a tendency to be pessimistic and wonder why good things happen to bad people.

The style of writing in the Psalm is more akin to the book of Proverbs than the typical psalm in that the phraseology is somewhat repetitious. Verses 1 and 2 are a good example of proverbial style.

The Psalm has two divisions:

The Righteous Counseled – vs. 1-8

The Righteous and Wicked Contrasted – vs. 9-40

We shall begin with the second division, The Righteous and Wicked Contrasted, in order to have a background for The Righteous Counsel with which the Psalm begins.

Let us begin with definitions of “The Righteous” and “The Wicked” to make sure we understand what the scriptures mean by those designations.

“Righteous” – “Just, lawful, obedient to God’s law; upright, right in God’s eyes; equitable, innocent, holy”; “the state of him who is such as he ought to be.” (Thayer)

We have no innate righteousness: *“There is none righteous, no, not one.”* (Rom.3:10)
However, The righteousness of Christ is imputed to those who receive Him: *“...the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.”* (Rom.3:22)

“Wicked” – “a disregard for justice, righteousness, truth, honor, virtue; evil in thought and life.” The words “evildoers” and “workers of iniquity” in verse 1 characterize the conduct of those called “wicked.” Wickedness grows beginning with a thought, then a deed, then a

character, and finally a destiny. Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mk 7:21-23).

Many who are designated as "*wicked*" do prosper in this world. It is a well known fact that those who have no scruples, who have no moral compass, who are living for this world only are greedy, guilty of graft and corruption and heap up ill-gotten riches. There are some righteous who are frustrated by this and feel that God should not allow the wicked to prosper. They need to keep "the big picture" in mind. The best world to come belongs to the righteous!

Now, let us look at the Psalm that an elderly man of God penned near the end of his life. He was certainly qualified to contrast the lives and destiny of the righteous with the wicked.

THE RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED CONTRASTED

As we review the drastic differences in the two categories of persons pictured in the psalm, may the stark and sad reality of being identified as being in the camp of the wicked register upon your mind, if you have not embraced the embraceable Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, as your Savior from wickedness. A survey of the Psalm yields the following statements about the righteous and the wicked:

"Trust also in Him He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light...." (vs.5-6)

".... the workers of iniquity....shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither...." (vs.2)

"....those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth." (v.9)

"Do not fret....because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass." (v.7)

"The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight in the abundance of peace." (v.11)

"....evildoers shall be cut off." (v.9)

"....the LORD upholds the righteous." (v.17)

"For yet a little while and the wicked *shall be no more.*" (v.10)

"The LORD knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever." (v.18)

"The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming." (vs.12-13)

"....the righteous shows mercy and gives." (v.21)

"The wicked borrows and does not repay...." (v.21)

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD...." (v.23)

“...the arms of the wicked shall be broken....” (v.17)

“He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed.” (v.26)

“The wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the LORD....shall vanish.” (v.20)

“For the LORD....does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever....” (v.28)

“...the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.” (v.28)

“The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.” (v.29)

“When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.” (v.34)

“...observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace.” (37)

“...the future of the wicked shall be cut off.” (v.38)

“The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD....” (v.39)

“The transgressors shall be destroyed together....” (v.38)

“He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him.” (v.40)

The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is vivid and unmistakable. Although in the eyes of people upon the earth that difference may not always be detected, be assured that in the eyes of God, He knows those who are His and those who are not His.

THE RIGHTEOUS COUNSELLED

Against the background of the contrasts between the righteous and the wicked, let us now consider the counsel that the aged David gives. There are eight principle verbs to which I call your attention. I call them:

Eight “Verbs For Victory”

1. “Fret not.” V.1 - *“Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.”*

This Psalm starts out by telling us what not to do: *“Do not fret.”* The word translated *“fret”* in the Hebrew means “to glow or grow warm; to burn, to blaze up with anger, zeal, jealousy; be displeased, be incensed.” Our English dictionaries define the word *“fret”* similarly: “to eat away, to gnaw, to disturb, to irritate, vex, worry, annoy.” Our word “worry” captures all those shades of meaning. So what he is saying to us is, “Don’t worry!”

Three times David used the little phrase *“fret not”* in relation our frustrations with *“evildoers”* around us:

- First, we must not become overheated when we see the *“evildoers”* doing evil and the *“workers of iniquity”* working their iniquity all around us;

- Second, we should not become *obsessed with anger* when the same people are prosperous;
- Third, we must not allow a *resentful attitude* to cause us to say, “Oh, what’s the use to live right; everybody’s doing it, so I’ll do it also!” *The Message* renders the verse: “*Don’t bother your head with braggarts or wish you could succeed like the wicked.*”

Why the triple counsel to not worry? Because God will deal with the evildoers. Notice that 6 times God says that the evildoers, wicked and transgressors will be “*cut down*” – v.2,22,28; or “*cut off*” v.9,34,38. So why worry about them when God has told us 6 times that He will sever them from Himself?

David stressed the words, “*fret not*” because anxiety is so common among believers. While it is natural to worry, we must pray that God will help us to view things in light of eternal values. The Lord has assured us that He will work all things together for our good. (Rom.8:28)

We look out into the world around us and it would seem that those people who live their lives without any thought of God are getting along just as well, or perhaps better, than we ourselves. David tells us that he himself had observed this situation: “*I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree.*” (v.35) For some saints among us, that is unnerving, frustrating and even angry. We must remember that God will, in His own good time, if not soon then later, see that all wrongs are righted and all inequities and injustices corrected.

We have heard the term “worry warts.” If every person who worries broke out in warts, we would all look like we had a bad case of measles! Did you hear about the old man who worried so much about his debts that the hair began to fall out of his wig?

Vance Havner said that worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere.

George Mueller said, “The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. The beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.”

Graham Scroggie wrote: “It is better for us to be occupied with doing good than spend our time worrying over other people doing evil.”

In this world it appears that crime and wickedness pay. Sometimes it seems that honesty is not the best policy. Crooked businessmen seem to prosper the most. Those who live ungodly lives often seem to be getting the most out of life. But remember this admonition: “*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.*” (1 Cor. 4:5) Payday is coming someday!

2. “Trust.” v.3 “*Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.*”

If we worry we are not trusting. When we trust we are not worrying. Trusting is quiet submission and patient dependence upon God instead of irritation, vexation, frustration. I am convinced that a Christian who *“trusts in the Lord”* and who has only a little, is far better off than an unsaved millionaire who has made money his god. *“A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken.”* (v.16-17) The foolishness of being jealous of prosperous sinners is clearly seen when we consider that *“the wicked shall perish.”* (v.20)

Notice that trusting is not everything! The statement reads: *“Trust in the LORD, and do good.”* Trusting is not sitting with folded hands, twiddling our thumbs and idling our time away. Nehemiah said, *“We made our prayer to our God, and set a watch against them day and night.”* (Nehemiah 4:9) Cromwell said, “Trust God and keep your power dry.” *“Doing good”* will focus our eyes and energies upon that which is positive and negate the negatives that surround us.

The song, “Trust And Obey” emphasizes both of the phrases, *“trust and do good”* as follows:

*“Trust and obey, for there’s no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”*

Trusting and doing good, trusting and obeying go hand-in-hand.

3. “Delight.” V.4 *“Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.”*

Keep the order as God has it in the verse: it is *“delight”* first, and then *“desires”* second. The philosophy of the worldly person is just the reverse: “If I get my desires then I will be delighted.” God’s order says, “Delight yourself in Me and you will get your heart’s desires.” Of course, when we delight in Him, He changes our hearts so that we desire what He desires! If we would do more delighting in the Lord, we would not only have purer desires, but also be much more content with our “receiving”!

The word *“delight”* in the Hebrew means *“to be pliable, to yield.”* After trusting the Lord we must submit, yield, ourselves to Him, saying at every turn, “Not my will but Yours be done.” He will mold us into a usable vessel and we will be delighted at the outcome. Are you moldable? Yes! All of us are being molded by either earth’s value system or heaven’s value system. Some are moldable, some just mould!

We need to remember that when God says *“The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul....”* (Isa.58:11) He deserves to be taken seriously. He knows what He is talking about and means what He says. In daily practice we are prone to question the basic truth that God is the only One who can fulfill the desires of our hearts. So what’s the answer? There is just one: “Delight yourself also in the Lord”! Try doing things His way and reap the benefit that He has promised.

Wholehearted devotion to the Lord does not guarantee financial prosperity or perfect health. This philosophy may be good “television Christianity” but it just isn’t true! We may put the

Lord first yet never get a new Rolls Royce or be completely free from pain and illness. However, when we delight ourselves in the Lord, our wills will gradually blend with His will for us so that we want what He wants and we will delight to do His will. Yielding to the will of God is not bondage but blessing!

What delights you? Rather, the question should be not in what do you delight but in Whom do you delight? Pursuing our delights will determine our destiny.

4. “Commit.” v.5 *“Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”*

In the original Hebrew the word means: “to roll (literally or figuratively); to commit, remove, roll away, roll down.” The words of the old song, “Take your burdens to the Lord and leave them there” illustrate well what the word “commit” means. Remove the burden from your shoulders and lay it upon God. *“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”* (I Peter 5:7) Let it go - turn it loose! Leave the results with God. This means leaving our problems with Him and believing that He will work out all things for the best.

Take another look at the words of verse 5 – We are to commit our problems to the Lord, that is obvious, however, there is another dimension in the statement: *“Commit your way to the LORD.”* Our “way” is to be committed to Him – that is our pathway. This brings to mind Proverbs 3:5-6 *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”*

An old Scottish woman walked around the countryside swelling house wares. Whenever she came to a fork in the road, she would throw a straw into the air and when it dropped to the ground, she would take the fork in the road to which the straw pointed. The residents of the area knew her strange custom and one day a resident saw her casting the straw several times before choosing the fork she would take. He asked, “Why did you cast the straw to the wind more than once?” She replied, “Oh, it kept pointing to the road to the left and I wanted to go on the road on the right because it looks so much smoother.” She cast the straw until it pointed in the direction she wanted to go.

We may not cast straws to determine the way God would have us go before we commit to it, but we cast about in our minds and weigh the pluses and the minuses of His way verses our way and all too often choose the way we want to go anyway! That is not committing our way to the Lord.

5. “Rest.” v.7 *“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him.”*

We live in a world filled with restless people. *“But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”* (Isa. 57:20-21)

Resting in the Lord does not depend on external circumstances at all, but on our relationship to Him. Fretting and fussing always ends in sin. Worry springs from a determination to get our own way. We want what we want and we want it when we want it! We try to manage God, dictate to God instead of resting in the truth of Who He is: our heavenly Father Who is too good to be unkind and too wise to make mistakes!

To rest in the Lord is to be quiet before Him, knowing that no matter the circumstance or our desire for deliverance, God is *“Our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1) and He has His hand on the thermostat and will not permit the heat to be more than we can bear!

Many Christians are anxious and troubled. Although they have experienced the “rest” of salvation which accompanies the forgiveness of sins, and are looking forward to the “rest” of Heaven, their lives on earth are restless. They seem to be continually upset by what is going on around them. An unknown author has penned this simple verse:

*“We mutter and sputter, we fume and we spurt;
We mumble and grumble, our feelings get hurt;
We can’t understand things, our vision grown dim,
When all that we need is to rest in Him.”*

Only calm, sure reliance upon God will bring rest to our anxious hearts. He alone knows the path ahead and will *“prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* (Psalm 23:5)

6. “Cease.” v.8 *“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it only causes harm.”*

The person who loses his temper hurts himself as well as others. We must learn to control our anger for if we don’t we will be asserting our own self will and consequently, take action outside the will of God for us, thereby making a mess of things like Moses did.

Humanly speaking, Moses had reason to be angry with the children of Israel. They mumbled and grumbled, complained and criticized. It was in that context that Moses made a big mistake. He got angry! Taking matters into his own hands, he disobeyed the Lord by striking the rock instead of speaking to it. As a result, he forfeited the privilege of entering the promised land.

Anger is a choice, as well as a habit. It is a learned reaction to frustration, in which we behave in ways that we would rather not. The more heated the disagreement, the more our inner steam builds up. It is then that we need to rely upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to “keep a lid on it!”

Did you hear about the fellow who said, “When I have an argument with my wife she gets historical.” His friend said, “You mean she gets hysterical, don’t you?” No, he replied, she gets historical; she brings up every wrong thing I ever did in my past history!”

When we're mad, we've been had! Anger is a boomerang which always returns to injure the one who originated it. If resentment has filled your heart because others are getting away with wrongdoing, you're on dangerous ground. Anger is just one letter short of "d-anger"!

7. "Depart." v.27 *"Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore."*

The Psalm is about good conduct versus evil conduct. While counseling the righteous to not worry but trust, delight, commit, rest and cease from anger, David adds this practical warning to the righteous: *"Depart from evil."*

Surrounded by those who are living only for the "here and now" with little or no thought for the "hereafter" encourages conduct that, sooner or later, could entice some of the righteous and involve them in evil deeds. Living horizontally and not vertically makes persons companions of *"evildoers"* and *"workers of iniquity"* that David talks about in the opening verse of this Psalm.

Therefore the warning, "Depart from evil." Some commentators say the warning means "Depart from evil persons." Others say, "Shun evil practices." Both warnings are valid. But do not overlook the last part of the statement: "and do good."

8. "Wait." V.34 *"Wait on the LORD, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land."*

We are well acquainted with signs that read "Waiting Room" in doctor's offices, etc. God has a "Waiting Room." It is located between the *"window"* where we make our requests to Him in prayer and the *"counter"* where He delivers the answer! If we put in our requests to Him in prayer and then, in a spirit of impatience, rush off to answer the prayer ourselves, we are insulting God. Waiting teaches us about our absolute and total dependence upon God.

"Haste makes waste" is a commonly stated truism. Hasty-spirited people do not accomplish great things. No one who has ever done great and lasting things did them quickly. James tells us *"For you have need of patience, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."* (Hebrews 10:36)

When our heavenly Father delays in answering us, we need not fear that He is unconcerned about our troubles or reluctant to meet our needs. Let us be content with God's schedule; He operates by His clock, not ours, and He is never early, never late, but always on time! God's best is worth waiting for! True patience means waiting without worrying. When we can wait without worrying, we will know that we are maturing as His child.

THE TALE OF TWO TREES

The wicked is said to be like a tree:

"I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; indeed I sought him, but he could not be found." (vs.35,36)

The godly man of Psalm 1 is also like a tree:

“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:3)

Which tree are you like?

CONCLUSION

This Psalm ends on a positive note: *“But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him.” (vs.39, 40)*

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