

Horsley Evangelical Church (www.horsleyec.org.uk)

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Psalm 37 The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth

Psalm 37 is another wisdom Psalm where the Lord's servant David is teaching us godly wisdom. And David speaks from experience – in verse 25 he says, “I was young and now I am old”. David then is taking the role of a father and teacher as he instructs us in the way of the Lord. As is usual in such Psalms, the way of the righteous is contrasted with the way of the wicked, and the particular question David addresses is, “How should the righteous respond when the wicked seem to prosper.” How should the believer respond when the unbeliever seems to do as they like and get away with it? How ought the godly to react when the ungodly trample them down and seem only to benefit?

Now David has experienced this situation many times in his life. So what has he learned? And under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, what has David to teach us who may struggle in a similar way? This is the subject of Psalm 37.

It's another *alphabetic acrostic* – this time two successive verses begin with the same letter as we work our way through the Hebrew alphabet. Only it is irregular – there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and so we would expect the Psalm to be 44 verses long – but its only 40 long. Four Hebrew letters are represented by one verse of the Psalm instead of two – (verses 14, 15, 25, 26). But this acrostic *structure* means that there is not the usual linear development of ideas into clear sections. The subjects covered are rather random – a bit like reading the book of Proverbs. And this affects the way we study the Psalm.

Also, the main message of the Psalm is contained in the first eleven verses. The main themes and the essence of what David has to say are found in verses 1-11. The rest of the Psalm then develops these thoughts. So we shall concentrate on the first eleven verses and refer more briefly to the other verses which expand on what is said in the opening section.

Now I want to suggest David is teaching us three main lessons in this wisdom Psalm. The first lesson is **don't fret**. The second is **look ahead**. And the third is **look up**. This is the way of godly wisdom. When the wicked seem to prosper in their ungodly behaviour, this is the way of wisdom. *Don't fret. Look ahead. Look up.*

First of all David tells us, **don't fret**. **Read verse 1**. This instruction is then repeated in verses 7 and 8. **Read verses 7 and 8**. The word translated 'fret' here doesn't just mean 'anxious' or 'worried', it also means 'angry'. The original Hebrew says something like, “Do not get heated”. Do not inwardly boil and get all steamed up with anger. That of course is the temptation because evil men *do wrong* (1). They *plot against the righteous* (12), they are violent (14), they default on loans (21a) and they seek to murder the righteous (32).

But more than that - they often seem to get away with it and even prosper. **Read verse 7b, 16, 35**. David himself know the temptation to get all hot and bothered when the wicked behave in this way and then succeed in their plans. But he has learned something from God which he wants to pass on to us. The way of the wise is to refrain from such fretting and not to boil with anger.

And David gives us the simple reason in verse 8. **Read verse 8**. It leads only to evil. James tells us that man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires (James 1:20). It leads only to evil. Paul says to the Ephesians, “In your anger, do not sin” (5:3). There is such a thing as *righteous anger*, but it can so easily become sinful and lead to evil.

It's interesting when Paul instructs Timothy that the *overseer* or *elder* of the church must be self-controlled, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome. And Paul says in Roman 12, "Do not repay evil for evil. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good."

So here is the first way of wisdom. **Don't fret.** When evil people succeed in their ways, *don't fret*. Don't get all hot inside. Then the second piece of advice David gives us is to **look ahead**. When evil people succeed in their ways **look ahead**. Consider the future of the wicked and the righteous. **Look ahead**. So what does David tell us about the future of the wicked? They will not last (2). **Read verse 1, 2.** People in that part of the world knew that the grass was green and fresh only for a little while. For when the heat came, the green grass would soon wither. And so will the wicked person, says David. They may have their little day. But they will not last and they have no future. For God will cause them to wither.

Verse 10 describes how they will be no more. **Read verse 10.** They may laugh at the righteous and congratulate themselves on their clever schemes, but in the end the Lord will laugh at them. **Read 12, 13.** The Lord knows something the wicked don't – the day is coming when God will judge them. Verse 15 speaks of the justice of the Lord's judgement against them. His punishment will fit their crime. **Read verse 14, 15.** Their power, just like their bows will be broken. **Read verse 17.** Perhaps the righteous can do nothing against the power of the wicked – the wicked are too strong for them. But they are not too strong for the Lord. The wicked took centre stage for a while, but they will soon perish and vanish. **Read verse 20.** And smoke is often used in the Scripture to describe a person who will not last. They will soon disappear. See how this is repeated in verse 36. **Read verse 35, 36.** The person, their wickedness and even their memory will be removed by the Lord. So **look ahead**.

But there is one phrase concerning the fate of wicked that is repeated. And that is the phrase *to cut off*. The wicked will be *cut off*. **Read verse 9a, 22, 28b, 34b, 38.** Do you remember how the Lord Jesus says that every branch that does not bear fruit in him will be *cut off* and thrown away and burned. Perhaps some of the wicked in David's mind have the outward appearance of godliness. But they bear no fruit for God. They do not honour God or glorify God. Therefore they will be cut off, thrown away, burned and cursed.

So David tells us to **look ahead**. Don't fret, but look ahead. Remember that the wicked person who does not trust in the Lord has no future. The Lord will remove him and destroy even the memory of him. Do not envy a person like that. Do not get steamed up over a person like that. **Look ahead.** Remember their fate.

Isn't this the turning point in Psalm 73. At the beginning of the Psalm the Psalmist is getting all steamed up about the wicked. **Read Psalm 73:12.** He tells us at the beginning of the Psalm – **verse 3-5.** But what is the turning point of the Psalm? It comes when the Psalmist remembers the fate of the wicked. **Read verse 16, 17.** And after this his heart is changed, and he is restored in his relationship with the Lord. Now David is telling us to do the same. Don't fret. Look ahead. Remember the final destiny of the wicked.

But David also wants us to look ahead and remember *the future of the righteous*. What is the future of the righteous man, the true believer and worshipper of the Lord? Well, this future is also repeated in the Psalm. We are told *the righteous will inherit the land*. **Read verse 9, 11, 22a, 29, 34a.** Now this lovely phrase takes us back to the story of Abraham and God's promise to Abraham and his descendants. The Lord promised to give Abraham a land of his own, and that his descendants would dwell in the land. And the phrase *inherit the land* really points to the promised blessing of God.

God blessed Abraham and promised blessing to his descendants. And this is what the righteous look for. They seek the blessing of God upon their lives – whereas the wicked do not. And David is telling the righteous that as they continue to trust in the Lord, all the blessings promised to Abraham shall indeed be theirs.

And the Psalm speaks about some of these blessings that the righteous can expect – the Lord will vindicate them (6), they will enjoy peace (11), the Lord will strengthen and uphold them (17), he will protect them (28), he will give the righteous salvation (39) and will deliver them from the wicked (40). But all of these things are included in this lovely phrase – *you will inherit the land*. The blessings of God promised to Abraham shall come to all who, like Abraham, trust the Lord and follow him.

The wicked trust in themselves and please themselves. But those who look to God and honour him - they shall receive the Lord's blessing. They shall inherit the land.

Our minds go back to one of the beatitudes of Jesus when he seems to refer back to this Psalm and says, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The meek are those who do not push to get their own way as the wicked do. Instead, the meek trust in the Lord. And Jesus says, it is the meek who will inherit the earth.

We may also think of the way the Lord Jesus *looked ahead* (Hebrews tells us) to the joy set before him as he endured the cross, scorning its shame. The Saviour looked ahead to all the Father had promise him in glory. And we are to do the same. That is the way of wisdom.

But let's look finally at the third exhortation David makes in this wisdom Psalm. He tells us to **look up** – that is to say, remember God. **Don't fret. Look ahead.** And now, **look up**. When we get upset by the actions of the wicked, or just generally upset by living in this world, we can easily forget the Lord. We forget who he is and what he has done for us and what he has promised us. But David now tells us to *look up*. Remember the Lord in this situation. I want to pick out four words from this opening section as we close that summarize what David is telling us about *looking up* in the Psalm.

The first word is *trust*. *Look up* and *trust* in the Lord. **Read verse 3**. David uses the covenant name for God here, the LORD – Yahweh. Remember, he says, you are in a covenant relationship with the Lord. You belong to him. He is your God. He has made you very great promises. Trust in him. God's people live by faith. But notice how this faith must be worked out in practice. We trust in the Lord *and do good*.

We are to continue to do good as we trust the Lord and not be overcome by evil. **Read verse 27-31**. The Lord always is with his people. He will not leave us or forsake us. And he will enable us to keep doing good. **So read verse 21, 26**. Trust in the Lord. Remember you belong to him.

The second word is *delight*. **Read verse 4**. Look up and delight in him. This is perhaps a question of focus. When troubles come it's easy to focus on the wrong things – on what other people are doing. But our focus is to be on the Lord. We have fellowship with him. Our joy is in him. Our eyes are to be forever on the Lord. Remember the scene in Acts 16 with Paul and Silas. They have had a severe flogging in Philippi for preaching the gospel. They have their feet in the stocks in an inner cell of the prison. But their minds are not on the wicked people who have so stirred things up for them. Their minds are on the Lord. And they delight in the Lord as they sing and pray – and the Lord gives them the desire of their hearts because he releases them from prison, and they continue to spread the gospel in Philippi and beyond.

Delight in the Lord. Remember the words of Paul to the Colossians. **Read Colossian 3:1-4**. Our focus is to be in the Lord. Do not fret when wicked men succeed in their schemes – it leads only to evil. Delight in the Lord. Look up! **Read verses 39, 40**.

Then the third word is *commit*. **Read verse 5, 6**. Look up and commit your way to the Lord. This third word reminds us of the privilege of prayer. We will face many troubles in life, but we can always pray. Commit your way to the Lord. Pray about the situation. The Hebrew word is 'roll'. And the picture is the believer rolling the weight of his concern onto the Lord. The Lord will bear the weight. He will carry the burden if only we will commit it to him. **Read Psalm 55:22 and 1 Peter 5:7**.

If you do so, says David, the Lord will vindicate you. He will show you to be in the right. The Lord answers prayer. Hear David's testimony again. **Read verses 23-26.** Commit your way to the Lord. Look up.

And then the last word is *wait*. **Read verse 7.** Look up and wait for the Lord. There are many occasions when, having committed our way to the Lord, we have to wait for him. Be patient. Be still and wait. The Lord has heard your prayer. The Lord will bring about his answer in his time. So be humble before the Lord and wait his time. Rest in him. **Read verse 34.** We are all naturally impatient. We want answers now. But the answer will come in God's perfect time. And that often requires us to wait. Wait for the Lord. This is the way of wisdom.

David then speaks from experience. But he also speaks from the Holy Spirit. Again David is acting as a prophet. And he is telling us that blessings will come to those who remain faithful to the Lord. **Do not fret.** Do not get all hot inside when the wicked prosper. **Look ahead.** The wicked will not last nor will they ultimately prosper. In the future, the wicked will be cut off. It is the righteous who will inherit the land. They will know his blessing.

And **look up.** When you are tempted to fret or to become anxious, *trust in the Lord* and continue to do good. He is in control. *Delight in the Lord.* He is your joy and hope. *Commit your way to the Lord.* The Lord will hear your prayer and deliver the righteous. And *wait for the Lord.* Wait his time. Trust his ways. He does all things well. And you will *dwell in the land, the promised land, forever.*