

Fret Not, There's a Good Future

Psalm 37

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July 6, 2025

Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or visitor, we're glad that you're with us this morning, glad that you join with us as we gather for worship, and as we come to God's Word, and the portion of His Word that we're going to be looking at this morning is Psalm 37. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Psalm 37. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs in front of you. We also project the passage on the screen, and if you came here without a Bible and you would like one, please take that in the chair. We would love for you to have it. It's our gift to you. We would love for you to have a Bible if you desire one.

But we're in Psalm 37 this morning, and if you were with us a couple weeks ago when we began this series in the Psalms, this summer of the Psalms, you might remember that I mentioned that in the Psalms we are confronted by a whole host of genres. One of the difficult things about trying to interpret the Psalms and understand them is remembering what genre we're encountering. Yes, they're all songs. They're all part of the hymn book of Israel, but there are specific genres that we come across in the Psalms. Psalms of lament, hymn psalms, psalms of confidence, royal psalms, historical psalms, praise psalms, and one that's less frequent that we come across are wisdom psalms. So wisdom psalms. That's actually the psalm this morning, Psalm 37. It's a wisdom psalm, and so as we read through this psalm, it's going to sound very proverbial, okay? It's going to sound like the book of Proverbs because the verses themselves can almost stand on their own, right? As you read through the book of Proverbs, maybe you've noticed that, like, oftentimes the chapters maybe don't have a particular theme. They just seem to be kind of, you know, here and there. They're hitting on different wisdom ideas, and it doesn't maybe seem to have much of a connection.

That's how this psalm can feel a little bit, except for the fact that as David writes this psalm for us, though it is a wisdom psalm, there is a particular direction he's moving us towards. There is a theme that he's wanting us to see. There is something that he is shaping us around. You see, David is wanting to shape the people of God, to shape our hearts and our minds with how we are going to approach a world that is wracked by evil, for how we are to see the wicked and the evil in our day and where we are to put our hope. That is the wisdom that David is seeking to instill in us in this psalm. So, with that in mind, we're going to read Psalm 37. Now, it is 40 verses. It's a little bit longer, so to help us with a little bit of time, I'm going to preach through the whole 40 verses, but for the sake of reading the psalm, we'll just read verses 1 through 11 and then verses 39 and 40. So, Psalm 37:

“Of David. Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!
For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.”

Now we'll skip to verse 39.

“The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. He is their stronghold in the time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them. He delivers them from the wicked and saves them because they take refuge in him.”

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, as David has just written, that you are our help and that you are near to those who take refuge in you. And so we pray that you would help us now, that you would draw near to your people, and that you would help us to rest in your good word, that we would find comfort in it, and that you would lead us in your truth. And so we pray that you would work and move even now. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, in 2022, the sociologist Jonathan Haidt, who has written a number of books, one called *The Righteous Mind*, maybe some of you are familiar with that book. It's an outstanding book, by the way. But in 2022, Jonathan Haidt wrote an article that was featured in *The Atlantic*. It's a rather lengthy article. I read it once. I also listened to it a second time because it was so long. But the article was called “Why the Past Ten Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid.” It's a great title, right? Like, it makes you want to go read it, doesn't it? It is lengthy, I will tell you. But it is a wonderful article. And I've thought about it many times since I've read it. Because in this article, what Haidt is doing is he is describing the current state of American discourse and the way in which American groups are interacting. And what he observes is that social media and groupism, so groupism is basically the way in which American culture has divided ourselves up into these various groups. And these groups never interact with one another. They never talk to one another. So we form these groups around affinities often. Maybe it's around religious preference or political party or socioeconomic status.

So we create these groups and these are our people. And we want nothing to do with other people. And the other people's ideas, they can't get into our people. Like, we don't want to hear about them. And so we create these groups. So he says that social media and groupism have contributed to the erosion of trust, conflict about basic facts and how we have been bombarded with the most extreme ideas. Now, he actually has data to back this up. He's a sociologist, right? It's *The Atlantic*. It's really long. But he has data to back it up. And what he shows is that the things that we are constantly observing and the things that we are constantly reading on social media, on the internet, in our Google searches, are the most extreme ideas on the left as well as the right. And in fact, we're bombarded with so much of the extreme that

we have become convinced that that is the norm. When in reality, it's not. And he says that the response that we have to these extreme ideas is worry, fear, and anxiety. And in fact, that's what it's promoting, these extreme ideas. What we're hearing from them are words like, be worried, be nervous, be afraid.

Anxious about Evil

And as I was thinking about this passage this week, Psalm 37, and I was remembering this article by Jonathan Haidt, it made me think of the scene in *Lord of the Rings*, where Aragorn and Frodo, they're hidden away in this hotel room, and they're hiding from the Nazgûl, right? The Nazgûl, the undead, the cloaked riders, the black riders who are seeking to destroy Frodo and his hobbit friends, right? They're hiding away. And Aragorn says to Frodo, "are you frightened?" Frodo, of course, says "yes". And Aragorn says, "not nearly frightened enough." That's basically what we're hearing from these various mediums, isn't it, in our day? Right? In our social media feeds, the commentators on Fox News and CNN, they're not just saying, be afraid. They're saying, you need to be more afraid. You're not nearly frightened enough. You're not nearly frightened enough, not because of the cloaked rider under your window, because, you know, that's not in our world, right? That would be fear-inducing, by the way. If there's a cloaked rider outside your window, you should be afraid.

But that's not why we are afraid, why we're supposed to be afraid. Why are we to be afraid? Why are we to be worried? Well, because of the opposing party, and because of the mainline media, and because of those people who don't look like us, and those people who don't sound like us, and because of what's going on in our schools, and because of what's going on in the market, right? We need to be afraid. And worried. And y'all, this is nothing new. Because there have always been things that induce fear. And things that we can be anxious about. In fact, David talks about some of those things, right? We see that he is anxious about evil. We see this.

Fourteen times in our psalm, he uses the explicit word wicked. The wicked. And then he uses these synonymous terms, evildoers and wrongdoers. So there are these wicked people, there's these evildoers, these wrongdoers. We're not sure who they are, right? We don't know exactly who David's talking about. But if we know a little bit of David's history, we can imagine who he might be talking about. He might be talking about the Philistines, that foreign army, right, that was constantly attacking Israel. Maybe those are the people that are wicked that he's thinking about. Or maybe he's thinking about the wicked people in the people of Israel. Because we know that there were those who opposed David and his kingship, like the followers of Saul, or those who tried to stage a coup near the end of David's life. Could be those from outside, or it could be those from inside. David doesn't tell us.

And it's maybe better that David doesn't tell us. Because if we knew who the wicked people were, then maybe we could ignore the psalm and think it doesn't apply to me. David's talking about the wicked people out there. Well, I'm not afraid of those people, so I don't need to worry about Psalm 37. Or David's talking about the wicked people in the people of God. Well, we're not wicked. Look at us. We're good people. We don't need to worry about Psalm 37, right? It'd be easy to ignore it.

But David doesn't tell us who they are. And so maybe the psalm does apply to us. In fact, the psalm helps us because it tells us how we're to respond when we are faced with evil and when we are anxious about the world. And what does David say? "Fret not." Three times he uses that phrase, fret not. You see, it begins our psalm in verse 1, "Fret not yourself because of evildoers." Verse 7, "fret not yourselves over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices." Verse 8, "fret not yourself, it tends only to evil." Fret not.

Now, that phrase, fret not, the Hebrew original, like the most literal way of understanding it is burned up or get heated up. It'd be like a saying, like, "don't get steamed up." "Don't get overwhelmed by the evil." "Don't consider it all the days of your life." "Don't be consumed by thinking about it." Fret not. Now, how can David say this? I mean, when confronted by evil and wickedness, how can he say this? It makes it sound almost like he's saying just sit there quietly, close your eyes, hide your faces, pretend that all things are good. But that can't be what David's talking about because we know from his life he opposed evil and he pursued justice. No, he's not saying turn a blind eye.

Seeing the Future

What he's actually saying is open your eyes wider. See clearly. And when you open your eyes wider, when you see clearly, you're not going to fret over evil because you're going to see what awaits them. You're going to see their future. You see, that's what David does. He helps us when confronted by anxiety about evil. He turns our attention to the future, to the future of the wicked. Look at verses 12 and 13. "The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him. But the Lord laughs at the wicked for he sees that his day is coming." I love that verse. I love that line, right? God's not worried about evil. He's not afraid of the wicked, was he? He laughs at it. He laughs at it. Yes, the wicked may have moments of prosperity and they might experience years of ease. They do that. We know this. We see it. We observe it. Doesn't seem like liars, cheats, the immoral. They're the ones who get power, money, and influence.

A) Of the Wicked

In fact, Psalm 73 talks about this. In Psalm 73, the psalmist says, "I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked, for they have no pangs until death. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind." And that seems true, doesn't it? For a time. Because the Lord laughs and he sees their end. And what does he see? Look at verse 2. "They will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb." Verse 20, "the wicked will perish. The enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures. They vanish like smoke. They vanish away." I love these metaphors that David's using here because they're so relatable and they're so understandable, right? They're like grass. They're like herbs that wither away. We know what this is like because just a month ago, your yard was probably very green and very full and looked very healthy. But then what happens? Well, July heat hits and August heat comes and rain gets held back. And what was once very beautiful and very healthy and very strong is now very brown and very dead, right? Y'all's yards look like this. Come on. You know what I'm talking about.

And David goes on, right? This other image he gives of like smoke. They vanish away. It's gone, right? Like the mist in the morning. It's all-encompassing. It makes it so it's hard to see, but the sun comes up and burns it away and the wind comes and blows it away and it's gone. That's what the wicked are like. They may flourish for a moment, but then they go brown and

die in the heat. They may look like it is strong and powerful and surrounding us, but the wind of God blows and they're gone. It looks like they're flourishing, but in the end they will fail. You see, God doesn't ignore the wicked. He will bring justice against it.

So do you all see what David is doing, how brilliant his argument is? You see, he knows that we are prone to envy a life of ease and the prosperity of the wicked. And he doesn't simply, he doesn't just tell us don't do those things. What does he do? He shows us their end. And when we see their end, we won't envy the we won't want to be like the evil because their life is momentary and their end is ruined. It's like what Jesus would later say when he asked the question, "what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits his life?" You see, we're seeing the future of the wicked and David showing us this future so we wouldn't fret over them now. But what's awesome is that David doesn't just show us the future of the wicked. He shows us the future of God's people because intermixed with his discussion about the wicked is this contrast of the future of God's people.

B) Of God's People

So we see it in verse 28, God will not "forsake his saints." They are preserved forever. Verse 29, "the righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever." Verse 39, "God is our stronghold in the time of trouble." Verse 40, "the Lord helps them and delivers them. He delivers them from the wicked and saves them." Verse 4, "he will give you the desires of your heart." Y'all, that is beautiful, isn't it? God preserves and delivers and saves his people. He gives us the desires of our hearts. Now maybe some of you cling to verse 4. Maybe you've run to it. Maybe you've memorized it. I remember shortly after I became a Christian, I memorized verse 4. I didn't read the rest of Psalm 37, but I memorized verse 4. He gives his people the desires of his heart. That sounds wonderful, right? Like "this is a God I can get behind." But what happens? We have desires that go unsatisfied, don't they? And so sometimes we can wonder like, "okay God, how about verse 4? Because I don't have my dream job, and I don't have that new house, and I'm still single, and I'd like to be married." Or "I don't have children. I am married, but we don't have those kids we want. And I didn't get into my first choice of college, or my second, or my third. The desires of my heart." Maybe you've thought that.

Maybe there are things right now that you're wanting, desiring, longing for, and you don't have them. And those things, and things like them, they're things that we want. But the truth is, is that they're not the ultimate desire. They're not what we are ultimately longing for. You see, they're the things that we try to satisfy our hearts with, but they won't satisfy. And we know they won't satisfy because even when we get some of those desires, what happens? We just desire something else, right? We get that dream job? Uh, there's another job out there, right? We get that house, but there's a bigger house, or a smaller house, or a house with a better fence, or a better yard, or a better, right? Like, we do this, don't we? We're constantly trying to satisfy this desire, but they won't satisfy in an ultimate sense.

This is actually what the mathematician Pascal was getting at when he said, "there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace. This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him." So do you hear that? That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to use all these things, job, family, spouse, money, house, possession. We're trying to use these things to fill that void. This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there. The help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object. In other words, by God himself. And y'all, Pascal was right. The desires of

our hearts, what we are ultimately longing for is the Lord. That's what verse four is about. And that's what the Lord gives us.

Think about the things that David mentioned that will come to the people of God. The promised land, salvation, deliverance. What do these things have in common? At the center of them, it's the Lord. Because think about the land. The land was never really about just a small strip of property in the Middle East. The land was ultimately the place where God would dwell with his people, where they wouldn't be tempted to go after the gods of the nations because God would be their God and he would be their people and dwell in the midst of them. That's what the land was about. Or our salvation. Salvation isn't just rescuing us from the enemies of God, rescuing us from sin, but it is God making a people for himself. That God is at the center. The Lord promises himself. He is the desires of our hearts. He is our presence, our deliverance. He himself. And that is our future.

Living in the Present

That's what David is causing us to look to. To open our eyes wide. We don't need to fret about evil because we have the Lord. We don't have to be envious of the wicked because we have all that we need in Christ. That is our future. That is the future that awaits us and that future informs our present. Because David isn't just causing us to look to the future like pie-eyed in the sky, right? He wants us to live a particular way as we wait for that future. And we see that in verse 3. He says, "trust in the Lord."

Verse 4, "delight yourself in the Lord." Verse 5, "commit your way to the Lord." Verse 7, be "still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." Now I have to tell you, as I was reading those words, these different verbs, they're wonderful. They're beautiful. And they seem contradictory at first, right? Because he says things like trust, delight, and commit. That sounds very active. Let's go do something. I'm going to commit my ways to the Lord. I'm going to be resolved to do them. But then he says, "be still and wait." So which is it, David? But they're not contradictory, actually.

Because the way that we are still and wait for the Lord is by committing our ways and trusting in him. That they're actually just two sides of the same coin. You see, we don't think of being still and waiting as simply being inactive. Instead, this language invokes resting in something and trusting in someone. And so as we commit our ways to the Lord, as we live as he wants us to live, as we think as he wants us to think, we are resting in his word and we are waiting for him. It means that we believe what God says about the wicked and about us and about the world and about our future more than what we perceive with our eyes or hear with our ears. That's what it means to trust him. That's what it means to wait on him. Yes, it looks like wickedness pays. But we trust God's word more than what we see. We resist being anxious about the world by waiting for him to bring his justice. We delight in him by knowing that the future means that we will dwell with him forever. We commit our ways while waiting and resting and trusting.

Now, this sounds all well and good, right? Fret not. That sounds good. I mean, who wants to be afraid? You know, who doesn't want a day when we will dwell with God and all of our desires will be ultimately satisfied in him? I mean, that sounds pretty wonderful. But the question we should be asking and wondering is, is this really true? Like, how can we know for sure? How can we know for sure? What David says, why should we believe what he says over and against what we see in this world? Well, the reason is because God has been faithful

before. That's why. He has already delivered his people numerous times. God will deliver his people. He has before. He delivered them. He rescued them out of Egypt, right? He battled for David against Goliath. He rescued David from his enemies. That's why David can be so sure that God will be his refuge again, because he has been before. God has shown himself time and again to be true. You see, God is bringing about the fruition of that future that he has promised now.

We don't simply wait, but we see actually the fruition of that future today, because we can look back and see God's justice against evil and wickedness. We see it in the Old Testament, but we see it on the cross. We see it most clearly on the cross, because think about what happened on the cross. When Jesus died and went to the cross, it looked like wickedness and evil was triumphing. For three days it looked that way. It looked like his story would end with death, but we know. We know that the cross isn't the end, because Jesus was resurrected, and in his resurrection, he was showing God's justice is victorious over evil. That evil cannot triumph over Christ. That it cannot win. And we know it in our own lives, because the evil and sin in our own hearts, God has and is dealing with through Jesus. He doesn't ignore evil. He doesn't ignore wickedness. No, he took evil and wickedness and he did away with it in Christ. He put his justice on his son and gives us the promise that there is a future that will one day entail no more evil and no more wickedness, and the beginning that he has started now will come to fulfillment in the end. And so we live in light of that future today.

A future that Jesus has assured us is coming. A future that when Jesus returns, he will do away with all wickedness and evil will be no more. Friends, that's why we fear not. That's why we are not anxious about the world. That's why we fret not over evil, because there is a future that is true. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you we thank you that you are doing away with evil and that you, Lord Jesus, have given your life to defeat it, to rise again in victory over it. And so we rest in that fact and we take great comfort and refuge in knowing that one day you will return and evil will be no more. But until that day, we ask that you would help us. Help us to not fear, to not be anxious, to not fret over wickedness, but instead that we would commit our ways to you, that we would trust you, resting in you, the God who will one day return. And so we ask, come Lord Jesus, come quickly and be with your people. We pray this all in the name of Christ and God's people said together, Amen.