Psalm 37

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Preacher: Michael Sharp

[0:00] Great, take a seat and turn in your Bibles to Psalm 37. Psalm 37, it's page 563 in the Church Bible.

! Psalm 37 of David. Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong.
For like the grass, they will soon wither. Like green plants, they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Take delight 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 do this. He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.
Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath. Do not fret. It only leads, sorry, it leads only to evil.
[1:10] For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. A little while and the wicked will be no more. Though you look for them, they will not be found.

But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity. The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them, but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.
The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy to slay those whose ways are upright. But their swords will pierce their own hearts and their bows will be broken.
Better the little the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked, for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous. The blameless spend their days under the Lord's care, and their inheritance will endure forever.
In times of disaster they will not wither, in days of famine they will enjoy plenty. But the wicked will perish, though the Lord's enemies are like the flowers of the field.
[2:15] They will be consumed, they will go up in smoke. The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously. Those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be destroyed.

The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him. Though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand. I was young, and now I am old.
Yet I have seen the righteous forsaken, and never seen the righteous forsaken. Just checking, you're listening. Or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely.
Their children will be a blessing. Turn from evil and do good, then you will dwell in the land forever.
For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones.
Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed. The offspring of the wicked will perish. The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever. The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just.
[3:17] The law of their God is in their hearts. Their feet do not slip. The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, intent on putting them to death.

But the Lord will not leave them in the power of the wicked, or let them be condemned when brought to trial. Hope in the Lord, and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land.
When the wicked are destroyed, you will see it. I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a luxuriant native tree. But he soon passed away and was no more.
Though I looked for him, he could not be found. Consider the blameless. Observe the upright. A future waits those who seek peace. But all sinners will be destroyed.

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There will be no future for the wicked. The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord. He is their stronghold in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them.
[4:15] He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him. Amen. Amen. Well, good evening, everyone.

And I think most of you know who I am, but there are a few visitors. So I'm, for those who don't, I'm Michael, and I'm one of the deacons here at West Kilburn. Before I start, can we pray and ask for God's help this evening?
Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And as we heard this morning, Zechariah told God's people to rely on the sovereign spirit of God.
And we pray that we will rely on him tonight. We ask that he helps us to understand your word and for him to help shape our hearts towards you.
Amen. So, as my fellowship group might remember, or my community group might remember, at the beginning of this year, I tried to read the Psalms again.
[5:20] And it's been a bit of the Bible that I've always found a bit more tricky to read. And I was talking to my wife about this, and apparently I'm unusual in this regard, in that I prefer reading sort of complex bits of the Bible, like Romans, some of the deep explanations in there, than the Psalms.

So I took a conscious effort to try and read the Psalms. And as I was reading them, I started to realize quite how much of a blessing the Psalms can be in our daily walk with God.
Because they don't just teach us about God, they also help shape our hearts towards him. And they are also incredibly practical for how we live our lives. So I'm really pleased to be able to share a bit about Psalm 37 with you tonight.
So, let's set the scene for Psalm 37.
So it's, as we see at the start, it's written by David. And we see in verse 25 that he is now an old man when he's writing this. And David is addressing God's people, who are referred to as the righteous in the Psalm.
[6:28] So I, and this is my poetic license, imagine David as an old man by the fire, reflecting on his long life and wanting to pass on some of his wisdom to the next generation.

So, throughout the Psalm, he is drawing a comparison between two different groups of people. There's the wicked, who are those who live in opposition to God's rule.
And then there's the righteous, those who are following God. And the question he's specifically addressing in this Psalm is one that many of us will have asked before.
Why is it that when we look at the world, we see the wicked prospering and the righteous struggling? And it's a question, I think, that's as relevant for 21st century London as it was for King David around 3,000 years ago.
When we look at the world around us, when we look at our friends and family, we often see those who don't follow Jesus prospering.
[7:34] They have success, comfort, status, money. And then we look at ourselves or other Christians. They're trying to live faithfully. They're trying to be generous, honest, and loving, even when it costs them.

And often we see a life full of challenges. They're struggling to get a job. We always seem to be getting ill. They're just never getting the right break.
And we begin to fret and envy. Is God really in control? Are his promises right? The life of the wicked looks better and easier than mine.
And that is where David starts the psalm in verse 1. He tells us, Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong.
And in verse 7, he also adds that we are to be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. But how on earth can we do that in a world where those who are evil always seem to prosper?
[8:39] Or often seem to prosper? Well, let's see what this psalm has to say. And it is a long psalm. And we won't be able to cover everything. But I want to highlight three big themes in this psalm this evening.

Look ahead. Look up. And keep doing good. Three things that I think David wants us to remember to help us to not fret and to wait patiently for the Lord.
So keep your Bibles open if you can. The psalm was originally written as an acrostic in the original Hebrew. Which obviously we don't pick up in our English translations. But it does mean that themes are often repeated.

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So you need to be on your toes as we move back and forth between different bits of the psalm this evening. So for dark, wet Sunday evening, hopefully that will keep you awake, if nothing else.
So, first, look ahead. One of the biggest problems with fretting and envying is that we tend to compare our lives with other people's lives based on what we can see right now.
[9:49] We might look at our friends who aren't following Jesus and see their money, their success, their lifestyle, their perfect family, and their apparent happiness. We are envious because we feel that they don't have to sacrifice time and energy to go to church.

They have more money because they don't give anything. And we think it looks like a better option. But we don't necessarily see where their lives are heading. And David wants us to think about that. The temptation is to judge life by what we can see right now. But David wants us to take the long view, remembering that God's purposes stretch beyond this life into eternity.
Look at verse 2. For like the grass, they will soon wither. Like green plants, they will soon die away. So think about grass in summer.
This was Hyde Park in June this year. The grass looking wonderfully green and healthy. But here it is a few months later, at the end of summer, completely dried up.
[10:55] And David says that's exactly what the success of the wicked is like. It may look impressive. It may even be genuine success in worldly terms.

But it has no eternal future. And David returns this theme throughout the psalm. Look at verse 10. A little while and the wicked will be no more.
Or verse 20. The wicked will perish, consumed like flowers in the field. Or verse 22. They'll be destroyed. And look at verse 35. David has even seen it for himself.
I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a luxuriant native tree. I'm sure we can all imagine a boss who lies and cheats his employees.
But he makes loads of money and has a nice house. And he has a top-of-the-range chariot. And has the right contacts with people in high places. But then look at verse 36.
[11:52] He soon passed away and was no more. His success was temporary. And that is ultimately the destination of the wicked. They perish and are no more.

But God's people have a very different future. Have you noticed the phrase that is repeated several times throughout this psalm? Look, first verse 9. Those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. Then again, verse 11. The meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity. Then again at the end, verse 29. The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.
David keeps coming back to this promise. The wicked might enjoy success for a little while. But God's people have an inheritance that lasts forever. They're the people who are truly blessed.
And of course, Jesus draws on Psalm 37. In particular, verse 11. In the Sermon on the Mount. When he said, Blessed are the meek. For they will inherit the earth. And it is worth just having a moment to think about what David is talking about when he's talking about inheriting the land.
[13:03] And he's clearly drawing on God's promise to Abraham and the promised land. But it's clear from the repeated emphasis on dwelling there forever. See, forever is used in verses 18, 27, 29.

You don't need to turn to them. And the fact that Jesus draws on the promises in his ministry. I think shows that these promises point towards something much greater. The new creation where God's people will dwell with him forever.
And that brings us, I think, to one of the great statements in the Psalm. Where we look at verse 16. Verse 16 says, Better the life that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked.
For the power of the wicked will be broken. But the Lord upholds the righteous. I think this is one of the most powerful and wonderful verses in the whole Psalm.
It is better to have little with God than everything without him. We thought about Aisha last week when we were looking at open doors.
[14:07] And her family had been shunned by their wider family and the whole community because she converted to Christianity. In the world's eyes, her family had lost everything.

Yet David is saying here that she is still better off than if she had the wealth of many wicked. And why is that? Because one day we will all die and stand before God.
And at that time, money cannot save you. Success cannot save you. Popularity cannot save you. Your career cannot save you. What matters is whether we belong to God. If we belong to him, we have an inheritance that is far better than anything this world can offer.

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Because it will last forever. So, I love trains. My grandpa was a train spotter. And sometimes I travel from London to Newcastle to visit my family in Northumberland.
So, imagine I turn up at King's Cross Station. And instead of checking the big boards to see where the trains are going, I start inspecting the trains.
[15:15] I have a look and I see which trains have the comfiest seats. Which ones look the newest. Which one has the friendliest train guard, perhaps. I check out the food and the drink menu.

I see which one has the most interesting and fun-looking passengers on board. And then I finally decide I'm going to get on the train on Platform 2. Because it looks the nicest.
But I haven't bothered to check where the train's going. Then the train sets off. And I discover it's heading to Exeter instead of Newcastle. I might have a very nice journey.
But it's completely useless. Because I'm ending up in the wrong place. And you'd think I was a fool, wouldn't you? And yet, that's precisely what David is warning us against.
So many people are absorbed in making a comfortable and successful life. That they've forgotten to ask the most important question. Where is my life heading?
[16:11] The destination matters infinitely more than the comfort of the journey. So look ahead and fix your eyes on that inheritance. And secondly, David wants us to look up.

It's one thing to know that the wicked will ultimately face God's judgment. And that the righteous have an internal inheritance. But what about right now? What about when life is difficult?
What about when we're suffering? What about when we're trying to do the right thing? But it seems as though people who are doing the wrong thing are getting what they want. Getting the good job. Buying the nice house.
Well, David again compares the wicked and the righteous. Let's start with the wicked. Look at verse 13. But the Lord laughs at the wicked.
For he knows their day is coming. Now that might sound uncomfortable. But David isn't describing God as being cruel here. He's describing the complete confidence in the face of human arrogance.
[17:23] God knows that their day is coming. He knows that their power is temporary. He knows that ultimately they will have to answer to him. The wicked are living in the shadow of God's impending judgment.

But the story is very different for those who trust in the Lord, isn't it? Look at verses 17 and 18. For the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.
The blameless spend their days under the Lord's care, and their inheritance will endure forever.
What a contrast. The wicked might appear powerful, but their power will be broken.
The righteous might appear weak, but the Lord upholds them. And David goes on to describe just how personal that care is. Look down at verses 23 and 24.
The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him. Though he may stumble, he will not fall. For the Lord upholds him with his hand. What a wonderful promise.
[18:35] It doesn't mean that Christians never stumble or struggle, or never have doubts or difficulties. But when they do, the Lord upholds them. So I think back to when I was teaching my children to walk, and you hold them tight with the arm, and you would never let them fall.

You might let them wobble a bit or stumble a bit, so they can learn what they're doing. And that might be very scary or unnerving for the toddler. But they're okay, because they know that as their dad, I will never let them fall.
And it's like that with the same with us with God. We may stumble, which might be scary at times, but we know he will uphold us and never let us fall.
So we can look ahead and know that one day God's people will enjoy his presence in the new creation forever, where there will be no more injustice, suffering, or death.
But as we wait until that day, when life is difficult, when we feel as though we're falling behind, when we look at the world and wonder whether following Jesus is worth it, David also says to look up.
[19:44] Remember that God doesn't leave us to struggle alone. He knows us. He cares for us. He upholds us. The world might offer you money, security, and status, but it cannot offer you what God gives his people, his presence, his care, and his promise never to abandon them.

So thirdly, while we are waiting patiently for the Lord, David also calls us to keep doing good. David again compares the wicked and the righteous in this regard and highlights the contrast between their behaviors.

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Look at the wicked. Verse 12, they plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them. And verse 14 as well, they draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright.
David is saying the wicked, those who don't follow the Lord, oppose what is right.
They use their power to exploit others. They take advantage of the vulnerable. They plot against people who are simply trying to live faithfully. And sometimes, as we've already seen, they succeed.
[21:02] But what about the righteous? How are they to respond to the actions of the wicked? Well, look down again at verse 3. Trust in the Lord and do good.

And verse 8, refrain from anger and turn from wrath. Do not fret. It leads only to evil. And verse 27, turn from evil and do good.
So the Christian response to evil isn't to retaliate. It's to keep doing good. When someone wrongs us, or particularly if they've wronged our children or someone we love, it's tempting to get even and make them pay.
But David warns us against responding to evil with evil. Now, of course, that doesn't mean we should turn a blind eye to wickedness. The Christian can and should campaign for justice or support organizations like Open Doors, who seek to petition to prevent our brothers and sisters being persecuted.
We should seek to protect those who are vulnerable and care for victims of the abuses of the wicked. But David is clear that we cannot let ourselves be turned over to anger, because that leads only to more evil, as we see in verse 8.
[22:18] And David also wants to be clear that it's not just our response to evil where we have to trust God and do good. It's all aspects of our life. Look, we see verse 21.

We are to give generously with our time, money, resources, even when others are not. Or look at verse 30. Our speech should be wise and just. We should be seeking to build others up, even when the wicked use their words to cause harm.
And verse 31, the law of God is on our hearts. And David is also clear that doing what is right might cost us.
So perhaps that means refusing to lie to get a promotion or being honest about a mistake when keeping quiet would be much easier. Or perhaps it means continuing to forgive someone who hasn't apologized, or continuing to pray for someone who has treated us badly.
Sometimes we might wonder whether it's worth it. But remember what David has been telling us. We don't do good because we think it will necessarily make us more successful in this life.
[23:24] We do good because we trust the Lord. Because our future is secure in Him. Because we know that He sees what we do, even when nobody else does. And because we know that our reward doesn't ultimately come from this world.

It comes from the Lord. So David has told us not to envy the wicked, but instead to look ahead, look up, and keep doing good.
But here's the problem. If we're honest, we don't always do those things, do we? We don't always look ahead. We get caught up in the things of this world.
We don't always look up. We worry. We doubt. And sometimes we even question if we can trust in God. And we certainly don't always do good. We've all been selfish, envious, and guilty of putting ourselves before God.
So where does that leave us? Well, the wonderful news of the gospel is that there was one man who did live this way. Jesus. Jesus.
[24:32] Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus always looked ahead. He knew what lay before Him. He knew that the cross meant suffering, rejection, and death.

And yet He willingly went there. Why? Because He was looking ahead to what His death would achieve. The forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of His people to God.
He endured the cross because He knew the joy that lay beyond it. And Jesus always looked up. He trusted His Father perfectly.
He had a perfect relationship with Him. delighted to do His will and remained obedient even when obedience meant suffering and death. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, facing the cross, He prayed, Yet not my will, but yours be done.
And Jesus always did good. He was the ultimate righteous man. He never sinned. He never acted selfishly. He never responded to evil with evil. He loved perfectly, spoke truthfully, and always did

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what was right.
[25:40] But here's the really important thing. Jesus didn't simply come to show us what a righteous life looks like. He came to make it possible for sinners like us to be counted righteous before God.

Look at how David concludes the psalm. Let's turn to verse 39. The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord.
Do you see what David is saying? We are not righteous because of our own efforts and how well we've managed to live.
No. We are righteous because we have received salvation from the Lord. So we can read this psalm and see ourselves among the righteous, not because we've always looked ahead, always looked up, or always done good, because we haven't, but because Jesus is our saviour.
Jesus is the perfectly righteous man. And at the cross, He took our punishment our sin deserves, so that everyone who trusts in Him can be forgiven and counted righteous before God. His righteousness became ours.
[26:48] His victory became ours. And the future God promises to the righteous in this psalm becomes our future too. And so we come back to David's final words in verse 40.

Do you see the invitation?
It's not to try harder. It's not to prove ourselves worthy. It's not to somehow become righteous through what we do. It's to take refuge in our saviour, Jesus.
To come to the one who has done what we could never do. The one who has paid the price for our sin, defeated death and opened up a future that even death itself can't take away. So whether you're already a Christian, or whether you're still exploring what it means to follow Jesus, this is the invitation.
Come and take refuge in Him. We don't take refuge in Jesus because we are righteous. We are counted righteous because we take refuge in Jesus.
[27:57] So if we take refuge in Jesus, we can know for sure that the blessings given to the righteous in this psalm belong to us. So let me finish where we started.

How can we wait patiently and not fret our envy in a world where the wicked always seems to prosper? Because we're playing the long game. And the long game is eternity.
And what do we need to remember? We need to remember first to look ahead. The wicked may flourish for a little while, but their success will not last. We may experience some temporary hardship now, but the inheritance God has promised His people will last forever.
Secondly, look up. You don't have to hold everything together. The Lord is strong enough to hold you. And thirdly, keep doing good.
Continue to be generous. Speak wisely. Do what is right, even when it costs you. And if you're a Christian here today, remember you have all of these blessings because we have taken refuge in our Saviour Jesus.
[29:09] So keep going. The Lord knows you, sees you, and will uphold you. And if you're here tonight, and you're not yet a Christian, can I encourage you not to spend your life chasing things that cannot last?

Money, success, relationships, popularity, and pleasure might make for a comfortable life for a little while, but none of them will last forever. Only Jesus can give you lasting joy.
The offer to take refuge in Jesus is open to you too, whatever you may have done, and however you feel tonight. So come to Jesus, and discover the life that lasts forever.
Take refuge in Him. So can I finish by going back to King's Cross one final time? I told you I like trains.
So imagine you're standing on the platform, looking at all the trains. Some, like this one, look incredibly attractive. Some are much more comfortable than others. Some seem to promise a wonderful journey.
[30:13] There might even be the Orient Express lined up. And it's tempting, isn't it, to jump on board. But Psalm 37 reminds us that we mustn't judge a journey simply by how comfortable it looks.

We need to ask where it's going. Because it doesn't matter how comfortable the journey is if you're heading in the wrong direction. And the wonderful news of the Gospel is that Jesus doesn't simply show us the way home to God.

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He has made a way for us through His death and resurrection. So don't spend your life chasing a more comfortable journey and risk missing the destination. Don't envy the success of those who are traveling without God.
Don't give up when the Christian journey gets difficult. Look ahead. Look up. Keep doing good. Trust Jesus. He knows what is best. Take refuge in Him and get on the train to the right destination. A difficult journey with Jesus, even if we end up on the rail replacement bus service, is infinitely better than a comfortable journey without Him.
[31:16] And the destination is definitely worth it. So let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonderful promises of Psalm 37.

Please forgive us when we envy the success of others and lose sight of what really matters. Help us to look ahead, remembering the glorious inheritance you have promised us.
Help us to look up, trusting that you are holding us and will never abandon us. And help us to keep doing good, even when it's difficult or costly.
And thank you that we can have all of the blessings promised to the righteous because we have taken refuge in our Saviour Jesus. Please help us to trust Him, follow Him, and keep going, knowing that our future is secure in Him.
In Jesus' precious name, Amen. Amen. Amen.

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