

THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Psalm 37 - Part 2

Intro: In reading this Psalm we need to recognize that this is not man talking to God, nor even God talking to man, but man talking to man. And yet it is not just any man speaking to any other man who will listen to him, but it is a godly man speaking to godly people. To state it another way, it is the teaching of a very mature man of God as he speaks to all others who know the Lord in salvation. Or to state it in language that we would use today, this is a mature Christian speaking to all other Christians who will take the time to read what he has written. And the writer of this Psalm was obviously burdened about the “way” (do you remember that word from last Sunday?) – he was burdened about the way the people of God ought to be living. And so we could even say that this Psalm is from God through His servant written first to God’s people who lived about a thousand years before Christ came into this world, but it is a message that is timeless. It is just as important for us today as it was when the great King of Israel, King David, wrote to the Jewish people of God back over 3,000 years ago. Some of God’s ways for His people have changed from that day to our day. We don’t offer animal sacrifices today because the One to Whom those sacrifices looked, the Lord Jesus Christ, has come, and by His sacrifice has fulfilled that which OT sacrifices anticipated. But, having said that, in Psalm 37, we see that the basic character and the way God has ordained for all of us to live, is the same.

I hope you remember that last week I spoke to you about the word “way” as we find it in this Psalm in verses 5, 7, 23, and 34 (read)/ And I pointed out to you also that the word “conversation” at the end of verse 14 is the same word in the original Hebrew which is translated in the other four verses I have read to you again. So we could read verse 14, which in a way tells us why King David wrote this Psalm for all of the people of God, it is because

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 (Psa. 37:14).

An “upright conversation” is a life that is pleasing to God. We live in a world that is basically hostile to the kind of a life that is pleasing to God. And so if we are looking to the people of the world to learn how we should live, we are not going to learn it from them. King David knew that. And so he felt burdened by the Spirit of God to tell them how they needed to live if they wanted to please God, and have the blessing of God

upon their lives.

Look with me again at verse 23. Both of the two parts of this verse have to do with “the way,” the kind of a life we are to live if we are to please God in this world. Our lives are made up of steps, aren’t they? And King David said that “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” What did he mean by the word “ordered.” Basically it means that the Lord Himself has determined how we are to live. And it is not for us to guess what it might be, but it is laid out in great detail in the book which you hold in your hand if you are holding a copy of the Bible in your hand. And this book takes precedence over all other ways. It is infallible because God has given it to us, and it is unchanging. It is completely different from the way people are inclined to live naturally because, as King David will point out for us in this Psalm, it is a life which teaches us as Christians to live to please God, and how to do it.

Now obviously the Bible is a big book, and it was all written with this purpose in mind. So don’t expect to find it all in Psalm 37, but what you find here is in complete agreement with what you find in the rest of the Bible. The Bible is God’s book written for God’s people, and God’s people are those who recognize that they were born into this world as sinners, and so the way that they choose to live is always going to be the wrong way until they repent of their sins, believe in Christ who died that our sins might be forgiven so that we can become the people of God. But we are not going to believe this basic message of the Bible until God opens our blinded and hardened hearts, and gives us the faith to believe in Christ that our sins are forgiven. But we trust in Christ, then we know that we can’t go on living like we used to live. Now we find in our hearts that we want to live a life that we have not lived before, and that is a life that pleases God.

Now Psalm 37 talks about two kinds of people. I have read this Psalm many times, but once I read it to see how it spoke of people who do not know the Lord as compared with people who do know the Lord. And I found the the word that King David used the most frequently for those who don’t know the Lord is the word “wicked.” You will find it thirteen times in Psalm 37. The people who do know the Lord are described mainly by the way they live. But “righteousness” appears in verse 6. In verse 12 they are called “just,” which means righteous.

The word “wicked” does not mean that all people are as bad as they can

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get. Life would be impossible on the earth if that were the situation. It sometimes reaches that point with some people, but a basic definition of “wicked” is “ungodly.” “Wicked” people are basically people who have no time for God in their lives, and who rarely, if ever, think about pleasing God. We are all born as “wicked,” ungodly people, and the only way we can possibly be changed is by the Gospel of Christ.

Read through this Psalm noting particularly what it says about the wicked, and why it is that they live the way they do. King David gives us a good picture of both godly people and ungodly people. And if you don’t know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are not going to be interested in doing what King David was telling the people of God to do. And what is also true, you won’t be able to do what King David was telling the people of God to do because nobody but a child of God has the Holy Spirit in him, or her, to help them.

Look at the ungodly, or wicked person in verses 1 and 2. Look at the first part of verse 9. Look at verse 10. Read verses 12 through 16. Read verses 20 and 21. See verse 32. Then verses 35 and 36. Also verse 38. Contrast all of these with verses 39 and 40.

We have seen what the wicked do, and what their end is. Now let us see how the people of God are to live, and let us ask ourselves as we read the verses I am going to point now if this describes “the way” you live.

Verses 3, 4, and 5 form a unit. They are introduced by “trust in the Lord” and in verse 5 we have it again: “Trust also in Him, *i.e.*, in the Lord.” Notice that each of these verses tells us what we are to do, and then we are given promises of what we can expect God to do.

To trust the Lord is an indication that the way the Lord leads us is in new ways where we have been inclined to trust in what we can do for ourselves, or in what others will do for us. To do good is to do what is pleasing to the Lord, and that which will be helpful and bring blessing to others.

How many of the Lord’s people do you know who really delight in the Lord? Are you one of them? What does it mean to delight in the Lord? Spurgeon recognized a certain ascent in what we have here. We start by fretting not, then most on to trusting the Lord, and then we are to find ourselves delighting in Him. We love Him. We want to learn about Him.

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We are thankful for Him. He is hardly ever out of our thoughts. And we know that when we have Him, there is nothing else that we will ever need. We find that the joys we had in the world were nothing compared with what we have in Him.

And then we are to learn to roll our burdens upon the Lord. The Lord does not promise us an easy time. We have our trials that often overwhelm us like the people of the world have, but we have our great burden bearer who has promised to work all things together for our spiritual good

Now verse 6 tells us that if we obey verses 3, 4, and 5, faithfully, the Lord will use these to bring forth the evidence our salvation.

One of the most difficult lessons that we have to learn is to “rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.” Most of us have probably made the mistake of running ahead of the Lord. God is a God of patience. We are always inclined to think of circumstances where God would glorify Himself by doing something, but then He does nothing, at least nothing that we can see. Impatience is a characteristic of the human heart. But God tells us to “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting, or lacking, nothing” (James 1:4). God does a greater work when He makes us wait than can be accomplished in any other work. And waiting for us is all the more difficult when we see the wicked prospering with practically no waiting at all. See also verse 7.

As King David had told the people to delight themselves in the Lord, enjoying Him more the more they knew about Him, now he takes a step that we often have trouble with, and that has to do with delighting in His way. Notice the singular. It has to do, not just with a single instance, but the way in which we learn that the Lord usually works. That shows real progress in the things of the Lord.

In verses 24 and 25 we have King David’s testimony concerning the way of the Lord, having walked with the Lord for many years.

Verse 8 and again verse 27 remind us that the child of God is never to resort to things that are evil before the Lord. The ways of the Lord are always right, never wrong; always good, never evil! And in verse 27 we learn again that one major safeguard against sin, against evil, is to do what is good and right to the Lord.

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Perhaps you have noticed throughout the Psalm there are several references to “the land,” and to it as the inheritance of the people of God. See vv. 3, 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34. This goes back to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12. But throughout Israel’s history their fellowship with God was often determined by whether they were in their land, or not. The land was the place of God’s promised blessing. So Psalm 37 contains several of the more than twelve hundred references to “the land” that are found in the OT.

Finally, notice the progressive nature of the manner in which King David presented the way of God for the people of God. We are saved by faith, but we also live by faith. This does not mean that we do not work for the supply of our needs and the needs of our family. But it means that we are trusting the Lord day by day to help us, to guide us, to teach us, and to bless us. As we learn to trust Him, we delight in Him, and learn to commit our way to Him continually, we rest in Him, and learn to wait upon the Lord, not running ahead of Him, nor lagging behind. We learn not only to delight ourselves in the Lord, but also to delight in His way of dealing with us, all the while staying away from sin in any and every form. And then as we come down to the end of the Psalm, we have the conclusion in the last four verses. (Read vv. 37-40.)

When you contrast the upright with the transgressors, where do you find peace which is what everyone desires. Verse 37 gives us the answer.

What does “mark” mean? It means to look carefully at the finished product, to see which of the two you would rather be. Examine him at every point in life. There is no peace for the wicked, neither here and certainly not in eternity. The greatest testimony of either one is the life each one lives. There is absolutely no question but that in the light of eternity, the upright man is to be preferred both in time as well as in eternity.

Which would you rather be? This is a question we all need to answer. If we wait to the end to answer it, it will be too late.