

## WHAT TO DO WHEN THE WICKED WIN

### Psalm 37

Three godly responses when the wicked win:

1. **Trust** in the Lord. (v.1-11)
  - a. Trusting in the Lord means putting off **anxiety**, **envy**, and **anger**.
  - b. Trusting in the Lord means putting on **patience** and **meekness**.
2. Be **content** in the Lord. (v.12-26)
  - a. Be content that the Lord will **judge**. (v.12-15)
  - b. Be content that the Lord will **provide**. (v.16-26)
3. Do **good** for the Lord. (v.27-40)
  - a. God always **strengthens** the righteous. (v.27-39)
  - b. God always **restores** the righteous. (v.40)

## INTRODUCTION

How do we respond when it seems that the wicked win and the righteous suffer? There are countless stories in our world today of the seeming victory of the deceitful person and the subsequent loss of the godly person. A few examples immediately come to mind of inordinate injustice: school shootings, the refugee crisis, the war in Ukraine that has uprooted the lives of hundreds of thousands, human trafficking, child abuse, and food insecurity, just to name a few.

Beyond these general big ticket items stands all of our personal experiences and observation of injustice. There's your arrogant neighbor who brags about how he cheats on his taxes every year, yet never seems to be caught for it. His beautiful home is filled with luxurious possessions, sports cars, and pictures from all their exotic vacations. You on the other hand are honest with your taxes, you tithe to your church, yet you live paycheck to paycheck. Even Goodwill wouldn't take your furniture, and your cars could stop running any day. ***So why do the wicked seem to win?***

It could be that you are single. You've wanted to be married for years, but up until now God hasn't brought someone into your life. The reality is that you've probably already had your heart broken several times. It could even be that you unexpectedly lost your spouse earlier in life. In your despair you look up to see the pretty girl who seems to get any guy she wants or the successful man with his beautiful bride by his side. Their lives look so happy from the outside, yet you know on the inside these people pay no tribute to God. ***Why do the wicked seem to win?***

Or maybe your heart grows envious of the social media influencers of the world. You would do anything for their lifestyle, their good looks, their charisma, their house, their family, their big break, but as of today you're hit with another financial setback while you struggle with loneliness, wondering if a "big break" will ever come to you. While these influencers worship themselves, you on the other hand, worship the Lord. Your devotion is to Him alone, and it shows in the way you live your life. ***So why is it that the wicked seem to win?***

This is the question we seek to answer from [Psalm 37](#) this morning. This psalm was written by King David toward the end of his life. We conclude this from [v.25](#) where he says that he is now old. ***David's life was full of injustice, when it seemed that the wicked won.*** For the better part of his twenties, David was on the run from the ungodly King Saul. On several occasions, David did the right thing by sparing Saul's life, only to watch him return to his comfortable palace, while David went back to his cave. During that time, David and his men did right by a man named Nabal, protecting his shepherds and flocks from bandits. But when David asked a small favor of Nabal in return, Nabal said, in effect, "Drop dead!"

Then there was the long challenge in David's kingship of conquering Israel's surrounding enemies, expanding their land territory, and dealing with ongoing skirmishes and setbacks. ***The exuberance of conquering the promised land was quickly eclipsed by the sorrow of settling it.*** Israel's enemies would often disrupt this good work and bring them to disappointment.

It's in this context that Psalm 37 was written. There is a consistent charge throughout the psalm that Israel should live righteously, trust the Lord, settle the land, and experience God's blessing. This was indeed God's promise to them! ***In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30, God made a conditional covenant with them that if they followed His way, they would experience the blessing of His promised land.*** Notice how it comes up in this psalm:

- V.3 - *"Dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness."*
- V.9 - *"Those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land."*
- V. 11 - *"But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace."*
- V.22 - *"But those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land."*
- V.29 - *"The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever."*
- V.34 - *"Wait for the Lord and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land."*

The challenge was that often Israel struggled to successfully do this, even though they did follow God's way. ***Why did the wicked seem to win?*** Let's spend the remainder of our time looking at three godly responses when the wicked win:

1. **Trust** in the Lord.
2. Be **content** in the Lord.
3. Do **good** for the Lord.

## **BODY**

***The first godly response when the wicked win is to trust in the Lord.***

One of the best litmus tests to see where our trust lies is to discern our first response when it seems that the wicked are winning. Does our heart immediately turn to the Lord or immediately turn into our circumstance? Do we choose to rest in the Lord or strive in our own strength?

One of the repeated refrains of the first part of Psalm 37 is *“Fret not.”* It shows up in v.1, v.7, and v.8. The Hebrew word means “to burn.” The phrase could more accurately be translated as “Don’t work yourself into a slow burn” when you see evil men prospering. Don’t let it get under your skin. V.8 gives us the reason why: *“It tends only to evil.”*

***We rarely make good decisions when our hearts are anxious and angry.*** When the Assyrian army began invading Israel right before the time of their exile, the nation of Israel grew very fretful. Instead of looking upward to God for help, they looked to the left and to the right. The nation of Egypt became a potential ally, so Israel began seeking partnership with them against the Assyrians. But such an attempt was futile. God called them out for it, too. He says to them in Isaiah 31:1 - *“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!”* ***Israel was flesh-focused rather than God-focused.*** God wanted this impending disaster to draw them into a greater trust relationship with Him, not to seek out trust relationships with other nations!

Yet we often make similar decisions in the midst of trials and injustice. ***We make prayer our last resort instead of our first response.*** Our hearts gravitate to money to save us, our friends and family to save us, our own wisdom and determination to save us. Yet, it is only the Lord who can truly save us. Our trust must be in Him.

Trusting has two elements. It involves putting off attitudes that limit trust in the Lord and putting on attitudes that enable trust in the Lord. ***So trusting in the Lord means putting off anxiety, envy, and anger.***

The second part of v.1 tells us to not be envious of wrongdoers. ***Fretting reveals our lack of trust, but envy reveals our selfishness and evil motives in our hearts.*** Often the reason we don’t want the wicked to prosper is not that we abhor the sin they commit, but that secretly we wish that we could do the same thing. We want for ourselves the pleasures of

sin which they are enjoying. When you hear the stories your boss tells you of his or her extravagant lifestyle; when you see the car he drives and the house he lives in, there may be a part of you that wants to lean in to envy.

This envy is often intensified to anger when we consider the ill character of this person. We all know someone like this: they look out only for themselves, will step over and backstab anyone to get to prominence, and be willing to lie and take any shortcuts necessary. ***Part of us begins to wonder in those moments: Do I need to become like that to get anywhere in this world?*** What sets in is real anger! V.8 tells us to refrain from anger because our anger demonstrates we are not in submission to the sovereignty of God. We're saying, in effect, "God, I don't like the way You're running things! It's not fair! I don't deserve this kind of treatment from these wicked people."

Israel felt the same tension as they occupied the Promised Land. They were doing their best to stay submitted to the Lord yet it seemed that problems with surrounding nations just never went away. There were certainly times when it seemed tempting to intermix with these people, learn their ways, and fall in worship before their gods!

***Yet Psalm 37 is a strong reminder to maintain our trust in the Lord. V.3 says to "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness."*** Alternate renderings of this difficult Hebrew phrase translate "feed on faithfulness, cultivate faithfulness, or find safe pasture." The idea is that as we commit ourselves to faithfulness unto the Lord, He will provide us safe pastures. As we learn to thrive where we are planted, God will bring a blessing.

In just verses 3-9 David mentions "*the Lord*" by name five times and five more times he uses the third person pronoun to refer to the Lord. ***He is saying that the antidote for getting frustrated with the prosperity of the wicked is to be deliberately God-centered.*** This involves putting on a few key attitudes. ***Trusting in the Lord means putting on patience and meekness.***

Putting on patience is rarely our first inclination, but it demonstrates a firm trust in the sovereignty of God. V.7 even says to *“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.”* Back in Exodus 14 the Israelites stood upon the brink of the Red Sea with the Egyptians hot on their heels. They seemed to be at an impasse with nowhere to turn. As anxiety and dread set in, Moses spoke up on behalf of God and said in v.13-14, *“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still.”*

There are some battles we are not enlisted to fight in. When the wicked prosper, we are not called to tear them down. That’s God’s battle to fight. Our calling is to patiently feed on faithfulness. ***And to be still isn’t a passive slothfulness. It’s an active restfulness in the Lord.*** Rather than making our own way, we are to entrust ourselves patiently to God’s way and God’s timing.

This is the heart of meekness as well. V.11 says, *“But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.”* This phrase is very similar to the beatitude in Matthew 5:5 - *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* Meek is a word we don’t often use today. Meekness is a humble attitude that expresses itself in the patient endurance of offenses. It implies mercy and self restraint. I’ve heard it referred to as strength under control. ***Meekness is not weakness.*** Sometimes we confuse the two but the difference between a weak person and a meek person is this: ***a weak person can’t do anything; however, a meek person can do something but chooses not to.*** Proverbs 16:32 says, *“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”*

***The meek are those who choose the way of patient faith instead of self-assertion.*** We live today in an entitled culture that feels things should always go their way. And when they don’t, they are quick to take matters into their own hands and force a better way forward. Of course all along the

way they are asserting themselves on social media to gather a like-minded group of comforters. However, these individuals do more than comfort; they encourage this person to confront their enemy with revolution!

The meek person would never do this. Instead, they choose to be still, be silent, be patient, and entrust their souls and their situation to a sovereign, good God who always promises to work for the good of those who love Him. ***Rather than asserting themselves, they submit themselves to God's good plan.***

This leads us nicely into our second response when the wicked win: ***We mustn't only trust in the Lord, but we must also be content in the Lord. We must first be content that the Lord will judge.*** This is what enables our meekness, our self-restraint, because in the end the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be blessed.

Verses 12-15 give us a clear picture of the wicked man's end. ***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. The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright; their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.*** Over and over again Psalm 37 draws a distinction between the wicked and the righteous. This distinction is most visible in the end of each person. The wicked person is uprooted and the righteous person is blessed. ***God's invitation in v.13 is for us to join Him in seeing that the wicked person's day is coming.***

God promises to bring all sin into judgment. ***The righteous person's sin was brought into judgment upon the cross.*** There they received forgiveness and acceptance before God. But all uncovered sin of wicked, ungodly people God promises to bring into judgment. As God invites us to see it, we notice it is a pervasive theme in this psalm:

- V.2: ***"For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb."***

- V.9: *“For the evildoers shall be cut off.”*
- V.10: *“In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.”*
- V.17: *“For the arms of the wicked shall be broken.”*
- V.20: *“But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.”*
- V.28: *“The children of the wicked shall be cut off.”*
- V.35: *“I have seen a wicked, ruthless man, spreading himself like a green laurel tree. But he passed away, and behold, he was no more.”*
- V.38: *“But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the future of the wicked shall be cut off.”*

Oakwood, why do I take time to read all these verses? ***Because I want us all to settle our peace before the Lord here and now that God will have His way.*** We need not fear; we need not strive, we need only to rest in contentment that our good God will bring into judgment everything that is not good. That cancer eating at your body: God will judge it as a defeated enemy. That nagging relationship at home or at work: God will judge what is evil in it and ultimately redeem you from it. That man or woman who deeply hurt or offended you or a loved one; God will bring that person into judgment. He will not get away freely!

It doesn't mean God will settle the score in this lifetime, for our hope is not ultimately in this life. He promises to make all things right at His second coming. Revelation 21:5 declares the promise: *“Behold, I make all things new.”* Even here in our passage in v.6 David promises, *“He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.”*

***What comes with this on our end is a needed commitment to forsake wrath.*** Verse 8 tells us to *“forsake wrath, for the evildoers shall be cut off.”* Verse 27 tells us to *“turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever.”* The evil alluded to here is the evil we want to perform on those who have done evil to us. God tells us here to forsake. And notice the blessed outcome for the blameless in v.37: *“Mark the blameless, and behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace.”* ***Who is there***



*a future for? → The man of PEACE!* Jesus said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for these shall be called the children of God.”* When we are adopted into the family of the King, we come under His protection and become the priority of His justice.

But more than just His protection, we come under His provision. ***We must be content that the Lord will judge, but we must also be content that the Lord will provide.***

Personal injustice often hits us in the pocketbook. We get hung out to dry and begin panicking over how ends will meet. A few points can be made here from this psalm. ***First, the Lord will provide for your needs, but your needs may be less than you think.*** Verse 16 says, *“Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked.”* **God’s promise of provision doesn’t equate with the promise of prosperity.** In fact, there is no such promise. You may only have a little, but it will be enough.

Verse 24 says, *“Though he (the righteous) fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.”* Notice in the previous verse that this righteous person is delighting in God’s way. ***When our earthly securities are stripped away, our hearts are refined towards what matters most and what delights us most.*** We realize we don’t need all those things to be happy. The Lord alone is our delight!

This proper perspective of joy in God enables us to be generous toward God. ***Our second point is that if you expect the Lord to provide, you’ve got to trust Him by giving.*** Oakwood, the godly person never stops giving. I’m not saying you need to maintain a certain amount of giving or even giving specifically to the church, but your heart should maintain its generosity. Notice what David says at the end of his life in v.25-26: *“I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing.”* We have both the promise of God’s provision for our daily needs but also the calling to generosity in all seasons of life.

Many years ago a secretary of a British missionary society called on a Calcutta merchant for a donation. The man wrote a check for \$250, a sizeable amount in those days. Just then an urgent cablegram was brought in, informing the merchant that one of his ships and all its cargo had been lost at sea. The merchant explained and told the secretary, "I need to write you another check."

The secretary understood perfectly and returned the check for \$250. The merchant wrote another check and handed it to him. The secretary was amazed to see that the new check was for \$1,000. "Haven't you made a mistake?" he asked. "No," said the merchant, as his eyes filled with tears. "That cablegram was a message from my Heavenly Father which said, 'Do not lay up treasures on earth.'"

***Sometimes I'm afraid our pursuit of being good financial stewards overshadows our need to be generous financial givers.*** In a sense, we allow stewardship to be a cover up for selfishness. We claim wisdom but really we do all to prevent financial worry. As a result, we miss out on many wonderful ways to bless other people.

***Such generosity is not just a good idea but it really is Gospel-rooted.*** Jesus Himself was stripped of all his divine riches so that he might bestow His riches upon us. 2 Cor 8:9 puts it best: ***"For you know the grace of Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."*** Brothers and sisters, as recipients of His riches, we already have all we need. ***Godliness with contentment is great gain. There is no earthly loss that can take away our riches in Christ.*** This theological truth should result in its practical outworking: Just as Jesus is always generous toward us, we, too, should always be generous. ***When the wicked win, this is to be our godly response: We must be content that the Lord will provide.***

***Our final godly response when the wicked win is to do good for the Lord.*** We must trust the Lord, we must be content in the Lord, and we must

do good for the Lord. We saw this theme earlier in verses 3 & 5: *“Trust in the Lord, and do good.”* and *“Commit your way to the Lord.”* But this theme is dominant in v.27-40. V.27 says, *“Turn away from evil and do good.”*

When we are wronged, the temptation is to retaliate with wrong, ***but our focus should be on pleasing the Lord in spite of how others wrong us.*** In this closing section, David outlines three righteous responses to the unrighteous behavior of others: Righteous acts (v.27), righteous speech (v.30), and righteous thoughts (v.31).

Church, God wants us to spiritually thrive wherever we are planted. He wants us to continue faithfully sowing the good seed of His Word even if the ground all around us is dry and desolate. Thankfully this isn't something He leaves us to figure out on our own. ***God always strengthens the righteous.*** Verse 28 says that *he never forsakes His saints. They are preserved forever.* ***If God promises to preserve us, then He most certainly promises to empower us!***

Let's clarify that this promise of empowerment doesn't promise external victories against evil, but it does promise internal victories against evil. ***When God promises in Psalm 121 to keep us from all evil, he doesn't promise to keep us from the presence of evil, but from the power of evil.***

This means that God enables meekness to be implanted in your heart through the Holy Spirit right at the moment when you want to lash out. ***God doesn't force you to obey Him, but the Holy Spirit's nudge is always there to invite you to obey Him.***

This New Covenant blessing of God's powerful presence in us is confirmed in v.31: *“The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.”* In the Old Testament, believers could store up God's Word and meditate on God's Word, but they didn't have the Spirit empowering God's Word within them. We today are born again into a new relationship with God's Word that enables us to obey it through the Spirit living within us. V.39 declares, *“The*

*salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble.” This is what strengthens us to trust the Lord, to wait with patience, to exhibit meekness, and to do so with godly delight.*

*But let’s remember, too, that while God gives strength to endure today, He promises restoration tomorrow.* Verse 40 reminds us that God always restores the righteous. *“The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.” Let’s remember that this world is as good as it gets for the wicked, but it’s as bad as it gets for the righteous.* This world is temporarily the bright shining pride and glory of the ungodly, but it’s the darkened dawn of a new day for the godly. We can be encouraged by Proverbs 4:18: *“But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.”* If things are difficult today, remember that things will be different tomorrow.

The great hope of Psalm 37 is the blessing of the Promised Land for the Israelites. This land was God’s great promise to them. While land itself doesn’t ignite great excitement in us, it’s the blessings that came with that land that made it special: peace, rest, security, absence of all enemies, a bountiful harvest, overflowing resources, the presence of God’s favor.

This land promise may be peculiar to us today, but God still promises to fulfill it for us, too. At Christ’s second coming, He will bring Heaven down to earth. In uniting the two, He will vanquish all sin and evil from the world. Jesus will take His rightful place upon His throne. From there He will reign over all the earth. He will execute perfect justice and administer abundant peace - v.12: *“But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.”*

Our promise in all this is a great reversal of all that is evil with all that is good. All the wicked will be uprooted and the righteous will be firmly planted as trees in the mighty forest of God. ***With Christ’s land promise comes all the realized blessings of being in Christ.*** We can endure with Christ’s strength today in hope of Christ’s promised restoration tomorrow.

***What do we do when the wicked win? → We humbly rejoice in Christ that we win in the end.***

## **COMMUNION**

It's in light of this glorious promise that we can celebrate Christ's finished work today. ***What makes our victory so certain is the finality of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross.*** Jesus came down from earth with the declaration that the kingdom of God was at hand and it was through his death and resurrection that His kingdom was extended over the entire earth. Death will not reign; eternal life will reign. Injustice shall not reign; justice shall reign. Anxiety shall not reign; peace shall reign.

***In His suffering is the promise that our suffering is temporal.*** In justifying sinful people like us, He guaranteed justice for all the offenses brought against us. When you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are declaring the Lord's death in your place. In this we can rest.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**