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Dear God, we praise You and thank You for how wonderful and how loving and gracious and merciful and amazing You are towards us. We thank You for so many blessings that You've brought into our lives, into the lives of this church. We thank You for what You've done with each one of us and what You're doing and what You will do. We commit this time now, God, to learning about You and to growing in You. So please speak to us and teach us. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen. I have been making my way through the book of Psalms in my quiet times. I've been working on it all year. I've only been doing one psalm a day and I try to get to it every day and I don't always do so I'm sure it will take me the rest of the year. I realize that I study the New Testament a lot because it takes the mysteries and the hidden things of the Old Testament and it explains them and brings them out into the light. So I look a lot at the New Testament but I feel like I had been neglecting the Old Testament. So I said I need to go back and study the Old Testament. I figured I would start with psalms because it's particularly difficult for me because I'm a guy and the psalms is like poetry and doesn't fit right with my man brain. And I quickly tune out as soon as someone starts reading a psalm and I said I need to get over that because this was written by God and it talks about His beauty and His truth and the good things of God. And so I've been focusing, dedicating on reading this psalm each morning. I heard a teacher say that to really get a psalm you have to read it at least five times. So I read each day's psalm over and over and I must say that even though I can't always take away a logical practical lesson from each psalm that I read I do notice that as I read and study the psalms I find my heart becoming more in tune with God's heart. And so if you've never made your way through the psalms I encourage you to do so and I encourage you to do it slowly and carefully and with a heart open to listening to what God is saying through those. And I hope you're not hearing, you know, "Hey look at me I'm great I read the psalms" and that's nothing like that. I'm just saying that reading the psalms has given me a closer walk with God and I'm sure it will do the same to you and I'm encouraging you to do that. And so to help encourage you in that I decided that we should study a psalm this morning and to be completely upfront, you know, I've spent a lot of time preparing which psalm we're going to read and I've been thinking about it and reading about it and so don't think that this is something that I've just come up with off the top of my head. But most mornings when I read the psalms that it is I'm walking into something new and fresh and if you hear some of the techniques that I use when I study the psalms then hopefully you will begin to get the same insight and inspiration that I do. So this morning we're going to be studying Psalm 37. To begin we're going to read the whole psalm straight through and then we're going to go back through it again and begin carefully examining each verse and we were not going to be able to get the whole thing done today because it's actually a pretty long psalm but hopefully we'll get a good start and then you guys can finish it up on your own quiet times. But let's start with the big picture of this psalm by reading the whole thing straight through. It's in your flyer if you want to read along and that's good reading along because dual sensory input makes you remember and think better. Here we go. Psalm 37, a psalm of David. Do not fret because of evildoers nor be envious of the workers of iniquity for they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and feed on his faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord and he shall give you the desires of your heart. Get your way to the Lord, trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noon day. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger and forsake wrath. Do not fret, it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off but those who wait on the Lord they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more. Indeed you will look carefully for his place but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plots against the just and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him for he sees that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn the sword and have bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct. Their sword shall enter their own heart and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken but the Lord upholds the righteous. The Lord knows the day of the upright and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish and the enemies of the Lord like the splendor of the meadows shall vanish. To smoke they shall vanish away.The wicked borrows and does not repay but the righteous shows mercy and gives. For those blessed by him shall inherit the earth but those cursed by him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delights in his way. Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down for the Lord upholds him with his hand. I have been young and now am old. Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful and lends and his descendants are blessed. Depart from evil and do good and dwell forevermore. For the Lord loves justice and does not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell in it forever. The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart. None of his steps shall slide. The wicked watches the righteous and seeks to slay him. The Lord will not leave him in his hand nor condemn him when he is judged. Hold on the Lord and keep his way and he shall exalt you to inherit the land. When the wicked are cut off you shall see it. I have seen the wicked in great power in spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away and behold he was no more. Indeed I sought him but he could not be found. Mark the blameless man and observe the upright. For the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together. The future of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them. He shall deliver them from the wicked and save them because they trust in him. So to begin with we ask what is this Psalm about? And this one seems pretty obvious. It is a contrasting of the righteous and the wicked. It describes how God will bless and uphold the righteous and he will bring to ruin the wicked. Now as I read that and I think about that right off the bat I've got other verses popping into my head such as Romans 4.6 God imputes righteousness apart from works. In Isaiah 64.6 "But we are all like an unclean thing and all our righteousness are like filthy rags." Our righteousness are like filthy rags. To me that seems to say that there is no such thing as a righteous man. So that would almost conflict with this. So what is this talking about? Well when I get into a doctrinal quandary like this it's time to do some homework. And so I like to use Blue Letter Bible.org and that's what it looks like up there. And it's free to use and you go in and you can type in a Bible verse and it will show you a Bible verse. Or you type in a word like righteousness and it will show you all the places in the Bible and all the verses that say righteousness. And so if you click on a verse it will you can see the concordance or you can see different commentaries about famous people who have spoken on that verse or such. And there's audio and video commentaries and text commentaries and so I think it's a great resource and I encourage you to use it. And so in this case when I had this conflict between this chapter about the righteous man but I had these verses that seem to say that we are not righteous that our righteousness comes from God. I typed in righteousness and I started reading every verse I could find on righteousness. And what the Bible seems to say if you didn't know already is that when Psalm 37 talks about righteousness it's not talking about people whose good behavior has justified them before God. It's talking about people who seek to live a righteous life. This is one of the peculiarities of Christianity. We try to be righteous. We try to live an upright holy God pleasing life. But we are aware that we will never be righteous enough to earn salvation. So we rely upon the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus. That's the message of Christianity. But we don't just take that righteousness and then head for the door. God still wants us to live as righteous men and women and He honors our attempts to be righteous which is what this Psalm is all about. Live uprightly and God will reward that. He honors and upholds and defends the righteous man. So that's the oral theme of this Psalm. Now let's start digging into each of the verses. I usually do this by going through it and reading and then asking questions about each verse as I'm reading. So verse 1, Psalm of David, "Do not fret because of evildoers." We stop right there. I ask myself, "Do I fret because of evildoers?" The fret is to worry or be anxious or discontent. Do evildoers make me worry? When I see people perform wickedness and then apparently prosper, does it cause my faith to shake? Here David says, "Don't worry, don't be shaken." Moving on he says, "Nor be envious of workers of iniquity." When I see those who do wrong and apparently prosper, am I envious? Do I long for what those evil men have? Am I tempted to give in to their methods in order to get what they have? David says, "Don't." And in the next verse he says, "Here's why. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb." Well, I don't want that. So what should we do instead? Next verse, "Trust in the Lord and do good." Number one, trust in the Lord. Do not trust in your own ability to be conniving and deceitful. Trust that when you do the right thing, God sees and he will reward you. Secondly, do good. Realize that when you seek to do good, God will be on your side. And when you seek to do evil, God will be against you. So seek to have God on your side by doing good. I'm going to take a little aside here and talk about a different verse. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And someone recently pointed out to me that there are a lot of other religions in the world that say things like, I think Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye will make everyone blind." And there are similar things like that in almost every religion. That when you repay evil for evil, then the world will just be full of evil. So do not repay evil for evil. Someone pointed out to me, that's not the same thing as what Jesus said. Jesus said, other people say, "Don't do evil." Jesus said, "Do good." He took it up to the next level. Those other verses, they say, cease from your evil. Jesus says, cease from your evil and do good. He adds that next step to that. And I thought that was really interesting because that's God's heart. It's not just stop being bad. It's start being good. Start being righteous. Start being everything you were created to be. Okay, let's get back to this. "Dwell in the land and feed on his faithfulness." Okay, so here's a verse that speaks to me personally in a way that might speak different to you. When it says dwell in the land, to me, God says, even though I have a very transient, temporary lifestyle, even though I'm constantly moving around the country and taking different jobs and just I'm everywhere, this verse to me says that he still wants me to plug in and get involved in the lives of the people around me. And that's a difficult thing to do because if you know that your time is coming to an end, it's real easy to just say, I don't want to get involved because I don't want to build relationships because I don't want those relationships to end when I leave and such. But to me, this verse says dwell in the land. It says get involved. Maybe when you read this verse, it says something like, hey, go visit those neighbors who you lived down the street from for years and you never step out and speak to. Or maybe it says something I can't even imagine. I don't know. But for me, dwell in the land has a personal meaning. The other part of that says feed on his faithfulness. Because we were just looking at the bit about worrying and feeling envious of those who do evil and prosper, here David tells us to feed on God's faithfulness. Let the storms in your heart and mind, let the hunger be settled by the truth that God is faithful. God is faithful. When you attempt to do righteousness and it doesn't immediately work out in your favor and you feel hungry for that justice and that justification, feed your soul on the truth that God is faithful. Let the promise, let his faithfulness feed you and sustain you until he delivers you. As the Bible says, he will deliver you. The next verse is delight yourself also in the Lord and he shall give you the desires of your heart. If that verse sounds familiar, it's because we just read it last week. I didn't intend to come across it again so soon, but sometimes these little divine coincidences happen and maybe God's got something he's trying to tell us. I don't know. To me, that verse has many potential meanings. Light yourself in the Lord and he shall give you the desires of your heart. First of all, if you're delighting in the Lord, he will be the desire of your heart. So if you're delighting in him, it could be saying that he's going to give you himself and that's beautiful. Secondly, it might mean that not that he will give us that which we already desire, but that he will put desires in your heart. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart might mean that he will give you good desires. That he will give you a heart that wants to see good things accomplished, that he wants to see good things in your life. And of course it could also mean, as probably the most common interpretation, that as you seek to live righteously, that he will cause those good things that you're longing for to come to pass. If the desires of your heart are evil, don't wait on that. But the good things in your heart that you long for, the longing to see, delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. So I don't know exactly what the proper interpretation of that verse is, but all three of those sound really good. And so I praise God that it's a good verse no matter how it works out being fulfilled in my life. "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." What shall he bring to pass? Your way, commit your way to the Lord. Make your way to the Lord, he shall bring it to pass. This verse is repeated in another verse that I've been hammering away over the past month. First Corinthians 10.31, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." You've heard that one enough, right? That's what it means to commit your way to the Lord. Do everything you do to the glory of God and he shall bring it to pass. When you're trying to live a life that glorifies God, God will cause you to succeed. Do not look at this as a formula for success. It may well be that you think you're going to do this or that to the glory of God and God has different plans for you. If you're really more concerned about glorifying God than you are with this particular plan succeeding, then it won't matter which plan God causes to blossom and flourish in your life. All it will matter is that God is being glorified in your life. But if you have this amazing idea and this is what you're going to do for God and it'll succeed because you're a Christian business and the idea that you're in love with is more important than the glory that God will receive, you might be in for a let down because that might not be the way God wants to use your life for his glory. That's the story of Big Idea, the company that made Veggie Tales. I'm sure at some point you've all run across Veggie Tales. Phil Vischer, who started Big Idea, he talks about how he got so caught up in becoming the Christian Disney that he lost sight of the one who he was doing this all for. And so God allowed him to fail. But Phil talks about how he grew closer to God through the failing and he praises God for allowing that to happen. But before we move on from that verse, let me point out it also says trusting in God is an important part of that process. People think they can just say they've committed their way to him but not actually trust in him in any way. If you're not trusting in him, you're not relying on him to lead you and provide for you and then there's no promise that God will bless you because if you succeed people will just say well they did it on their own. They use their own strength, their own talent, their own ideas. If you don't rely on his strength and provision, if you don't trust in God as it says, you're robbing him of potential glory. And then the last part that we're going to have time for today is he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noon day. I had to do some research on this. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noon day. It didn't make a lot of sense when I first read it. And so I used the website and I flipped through different versions of the Bible. I looked in the message and the English standard and all the different versions and I read some commentaries on it and it seems to be saying that although you may spend a season being accused of being unrighteous or unjust, if you are righteous, God will clearly demonstrate your goodness and innocence to all. We hate it when people incorrectly think evil of us. But don't let people's poor opinion of you cause you to give in and prove them right. Don't become the person that they are accusing you of being. Hold fast to righteousness and in time God will publicly vindicate you and clear your good name. That's as far as we're getting today. I hope I've given you a good start to studying this psalm and I hope you continue to prayerfully make your way through other psalms and through all the parts of the Bible that you've been avoiding and I hope that you endeavor to live righteously so that you can reap the promised blessings of God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a faithful, just, holy, loving Father. We thank you that as we seek out a righteous life that you honor and reward us, even though our righteousness is imperfect, you still honor and reward us for trying to be the people we were created to be and so we commit our ways to your ways, God. Please pattern our hearts and our minds to live out a life that pleases you. Please help us to see the rewards and the blessings of our righteous life. Help us to see the downfall of the wicked and of those who spurn your goodness, who spurn right living. And I also right now, God, want to say thank you for this food that is being prepared for us. We ask you that you will bless to our bodies, bless the hands that prepared us and bless our meaning time together so that as we try to complete the work of this church and get down to business that we are inspired with good ideas. In Jesus' name, Amen.