

A Caution and a Choice

Psalm 37:1-9

Yesterday I spent over 2 hours weeding. Any gardener will tell you that the major problem they face is weeds. They grow faster than zucchini. It doesn't matter how much time is spent weeding, they come back. It seems unfair that no matter how much effort we put into caring for our gardens, weeds continue to prosper. But then, according to Genesis 3, weeds are inevitable. So, what's a gardener to do? Keep attacking it and look at the good things growing. Sometimes you wonder if it's worth it.

Like all those weeds, David was facing a problem, too. It's a problem that has been around almost since the dawn of time. Well, at least since the first couple had children. History is replete with examples where the weeds of society seem to prosper while those who strive to live by godly principles get the raw end of the deal. The problem of why the wicked prosper is a prevailing question. It doesn't seem right.

It was a question one of my parent's supporters asked when they came to visit mom after her leg amputation from cancer. It didn't seem right that someone who faithfully served the Lord for 30 years as a missionary should have to suffer like that while others who live without regard for a biblical morality seem to live a life of ease. **Why?**

Why do the drug cartels seem to get away with trafficking children or pouring fentanyl into our country?

My dad served as bailiff on a double homicide case that went unsolved for 18 years before two of the five assailants were found guilty. **Why did it take so long allowing the wicked to be free?**

David's new job at NCG theaters is in the corporate office doing finance and risk management. Last week his boss's boss asked for a report on a couple of locations that seem to be low on revenue based on projected expectations. One of the things they suspect is the possibility of employee theft.

We could go back to **Psalm 36** and make the same

claim that David made in the opening verse when he stated that there is no fear of God by the wicked. **So, what should our response be when we see the wicked seemingly getting away with things?** It almost makes us wonder if trying to live a godly life is worth it. Maybe that's what was going through David's mind in the opening verses of **Psalm 37**. In our passage today, David gives the righteous both a caution and a choice.

I. A CAUTION FOR THE RIGHTEOUS – vv. 1-2

We can be tempted to look at the wicked and wonder why they don't get what they have coming to them. We can be tempted to think that God may not be powerful enough to overthrow the wicked. We can even be tempted to think that maybe God either doesn't exist or if He does, that He has turned a blind and uncaring eye on mankind, leaving them to their own demise. **Why doesn't He do something?**

Maybe we need to take a look back at Genesis 6 and remember that 100 years passed from the time God looked at the wickedness of mankind and when the global flood engulfed and destroyed everything except 8 men and women and the animals that were safely cared for in the ark. **What, then, is the caution David has for the righteous when we look around at what the wicked seem to be getting away with?**

In **verse 1** David cautions the righteous with two attitudes we are to reject when it comes to the wicked.

A. Reject Two Attitude About the Wicked – v. 1

1. Don't fret over the wicked

We understand what it means to fret – to worry, agonize, be troubled or hassled by, to be vexed in spirit. Those are mild definitions when we realize that the word literally means to burn, get heated up or to fume. In other words, it really steams us to the point of making our blood boil. We get all red in the face.

We can become so obsessed with injustice that we lose sight of what will happen to the wicked in the end. When we fret over our misfortune and their prosperity, we can begin to burn with resentment and

bitterness. David is saying don't let their actions and what they are getting away with make you angry, something he tells us not to do in **verse 8**. Instead, he is telling us to be calm and not worry about what is happening or not happening to them. Reject any notion of troubling yourself about them. God says in **Romans 12** that He will repay. Scripture tells us not to worry or be anxious about a variety of things and here David says don't get worked up over the wicked.

David gives a second attitude to reject when it comes to the wicked and their prosperity. Don't envy them.

2. Don't envy the wicked

According to the dictionary, envy is a painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage they have. In other words, we want what they have, and we resent that we don't have it.

Many of you know that Robyn has been struggling to get proper staffing for her dialysis unit. She spends hours in the evening making calls trying to get people to fill in. She had to staff the floor herself on Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. For over a week she's tried to fill her open positions to know avail. Earlier this last week another administrator had some shifts to fill for Saturday and within an hour had all her holes filled. Robyn told me it was hard not to be envious when she tried for over a week to no avail.

In **Jeremiah 12:1-2**, the prophet lamented **“Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts” Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?”**

If anyone had a legitimate reason to ask the why question, it was Job.

Job 21:7-15

Or consider the words of Asaph in **Psalm 73:1-14**. He says that when he looked at the success of the wicked, he had almost given up hope in the goodness of God.

How does a holy God allow His people to suffer while the wicked flourish?

A better question for the righteous to ask is why we envy the wicked in the first place.

The Bible tells us that envy is an act of the flesh and is among the various sins named in **Galatians 5:19-21**. Another word for envy is covetousness which is different from jealousy. Jealousy is how we feel when we fear something we have may be taken from us. Envy is how we feel when we don't have something someone else has and resent them for it coupled with a strong desire to get it no matter what the cost.

The first act of envy recorded in the Bible is when Cain felt envy toward his brother Abel because God looked with favor on his sacrifice. His envy resulted in bitterness, resentment, anger and murder.

Esau envied Jacob because their father blessed Jacob. Rachel envied Leah.

Saul envied David.

The Jewish leaders had Jesus arrested out of envy. **Proverbs 14:30** says that envy rots the bones. The NLT likens envy to cancer.

James 3:14-16 warns against harboring bitter envy because it leads to disorder and every evil practice. Jesus teaches in **Mark 7** that envy is a vice that comes from within and defiles a person. The root of envy, writes one author, is a dissatisfied heart. It is a lack of contentment.

Nothing good ever comes from envy and when we are envious of the wicked, we are no different than they are. And we will see in a moment that the most effective way to overcome envy is to trust the Lord.

When we allow our focus to turn away from God's goodness and faithfulness to the prosperity and success of the wicked, we can become like Asaph and lose our way. **Psalm 73** continues by saying that Asaph had regained proper perspective regarding the destiny of the wicked. Yes, they may prosper now, but their outcome is far different than that of the righteous.

David tells us to reject fretting and envying the wicked and continues in **verse 2** by helping us to remember the demise of the wicked.

B. Remember the Demise of the Wicked – v. 2

David is saying that they may have a lot right now, but keep in mind that their day of reckoning is coming. What they have is temporary, their prosperity will be short-term. What they will get is eternal. It can be so easy to lose sight of our reward that isn't yet visible when we see with our own eyes what the wicked have now. We can even wonder why God seems gracious and merciful to people who don't deserve it, when their hearts are hardened toward God. That's a typical response.

Paul provides us with a reminder that we were once just like them. We also deserved the same judgment as them, yet God showed grace and mercy to us.

Ephesians 2:1-5

Here's something important to keep in mind. God is patient even with the wicked for a purpose that is wholly of His own character because He desires all to be saved. We have no right to say that person doesn't deserve to be saved.

II Peter 3:9

According to **John 3:16** and **Romans 5:8**, God's love extends his gift of salvation to them in the same way it was extended to us. He also wants them to repent and become part of His forever family. Let's not be like Jonah who bemoaned that God was gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity (**Jonah 3:2**) when Jonah thought the Assyrians to whom he was sent deserved judgment. He wanted God to destroy them, but God wanted them to repent. God is slow to anger and abounding in love, even with the wicked, because He wants them to turn from sin and He wants us to be part of sharing that good news with them.

II Peter 3:15 (NLT) "And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved"

But if they will not repent, David is clear that they have no future. **Proverbs 24:19-20 "Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked, for the evildoer has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out."** So don't fret about them or be envious of them. Don't be envious when we see them building bigger barns living a life of ease when we seem to struggle with difficulties.

Their time is coming to a close.

The rich man thought he had his retirement years filled with ease yet lost it all.

The rich man lived in luxury while poor Lazarus lived in abject poverty. Their final destinations couldn't have been more different.

Sometimes the answer to the question why God allows the wicked to prosper is because they are part of fulfilling His plan. He used Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, Cyrus and the Persians, the Egyptians and the Assyrians to accomplish His purpose for judging Israel for their disobedience.

Yes, God has a plan for the wicked. Their prosperity won't last forever.

God may also be using their prosperity as a way of teaching us to depend on Him; to remember that this is not our home, and neither is it our final destination. We may endure suffering for a time here, while the ungodly prosper, but a reward awaits us far better than anything we may acquire or envy the wicked for down here.

Humanly speaking we are troubled when the wicked seem to prosper instead of immediately receiving due justice. David says we shouldn't fret over or envy the wicked because they will be like withered grass that eventually dies out. Several times in Psalm 37, David reminds us that their demise is certain.

But David continues with an answer to the question and the kind of response that is necessary if we are to look beyond the wicked and their prosperity and the envy we may otherwise feel about the unfairness of it all. It really boils down to a choice at how the righteous will respond.

II. A CHOICE FOR THE RIGHTEOUS – vv. 3-9

These verses give us five choices, five ways to combat feelings of fret and envy. Choosing them will help us rise above and see the lasting rewards for our obedience. God's reward is the desires of our heart. One author noted that **"if we fix our thoughts on God and not the fleeting fortune of the wicked, if we trust**

in the Lord and hope in His steadfast love, God will keep our hearts in perfect peace.”

Isaiah 26:3 “You [God] will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You.” Fix your focus on God by trusting Him in everything and He will give you a sustaining peace.

The first choice is to trust in the path of the Lord.

A. Trust In The Path Of The Lord – v. 3

When the Bible speaks of trust, and in this case, trust in the Lord, it is referring to the confidence, reliance and expectation we have in God and in His promises. It means that we can depend on Him to keep His word. In **Proverbs 3:5-6** we are told to trust in God instead of trusting our own understanding or the things of the world that are both flawed and fleeting.

Trusting in the Lord with all your heart means to completely trust His plan for your life even when it doesn't make sense or line up with what you think you should do.

But we can't or won't trust someone we don't know. That's why it's so important to spend time with Him each day in prayer Bible study so you can understand that He is trustworthy, that His plan is always best.

When someone says that we should trust them, we respond in one of two ways. We will either follow them or we will ask why we should trust them.

Trust and faith, while similar, are not the same. Faith is a gift that is given to us, while trust is what we do because of faith. We trust God because we have faith in God.

When we read the Bible, we must conclude that God keeps His word because He has not failed to keep one promise. His character is such that He will not lie because He cannot lie.

Numbers 23:19

Psalm 89:34 “I will not violate My covenant or alter what My lips have uttered.”

Isaiah 14:24 “The Lord Almighty has sworn, ‘Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.’”

Trusting God is believing Him in all circumstances, believing, as Paul tells us in **Romans 8:28**, that *everything* works out for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. His plan is always perfect because His plan comes from His holiness. We can trust Him because He never makes mistakes. We can trust Him because He alone is worthy of trust.

His nature is trustworthy.

His Word is trustworthy.

His plans are trustworthy.

When we trust Him, we don't need to envy the wicked. Because He is completely trustworthy, we are invited to completely trust Him with every aspect of our life, even when things don't make sense, like why the wicked prosper and we don't.

Trusting in God is like walking across a concrete bridge supported by steel girders. Jump up and down all you want, it won't collapse.

Trusting in yourself is like walking across a bridge with rotted wooden slats held together with frayed rope. It's a treacherous journey that ends in ruin.

We hear from time-to-time people telling us that we should trust our heart because our heart will guide us in the right direction. The problem with the heart is that it's deceitful above all else and desperately wicked (**Jeremiah 17:9**). So, no, we can't trust our heart to lead us in the right way. If we are trusting in our heart we are not completely trusting in the Lord.

We read in **Isaiah 55:8-9** that God's ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts. His ways are higher than our ways. **In other words, do I want to trust myself when I don't even know what's going to happen in the next minute or do I want to trust the all-knowing, all-wise God who knows everything from the beginning to the end? Do I want to trust God who is perfect in every way or trust myself or someone else who is flawed and who frequently makes bad decisions?**

Trusting our own heart or understanding is a recipe for disaster and can easily lead us astray as we are reminded in **Proverbs 16:25** “There is a way that seems to be right, but the end leads to death.”

When we don't trust the Lord with all our heart, we

end up doing whatever is right in our own eyes (**Judges 21:25**). A fretful heart is not a trusting heart. David says trust in the path of the Lord.

Second, David tells us to delight in the person of the Lord.

B. Delight In The Person Of The Lord – v. 4

To delight in the Lord is to have our hearts fully at peace in Him and in Him alone. When the righteous are content in the Lord, they look beyond what the wicked have to what they have in the Lord and there is no need to envy the wicked. When we are right with the Lord, we will desire the right things, things the Lord wants for us and not things we think we need or things we see others have thinking if we had them, they would make us happy. Delighting in things is idolatry because we desire them more than we desire the Lord as Warren Wiersbe states that “to enjoy the blessings and ignore the blesser is to practice idolatry. If we truly delight in the Lord, then the chief desire of our heart will be to know Him better so we can delight in Him even more, and the Lord will satisfy our desire! This is not a promise for people who want ‘things,’ but for those who want more of God in their lives.”

Delighting in the Lord is finding joy in what He has given us instead of trying to depend on possessions or wealth. When we delight in the Lord, we are saying that we want more of Him which means we want what He wants for us.

Charles Spurgeon writes “Men who delight in God desire to ask for nothing but what will please God. Their will is subdued to God’s will.”

The root word for delight means to be brought up in luxury, to be pampered. In this case, David is saying that the abundance we have is in the Lord. Jesus says in **Matthew 6** that our desires should not be after temporal things but instead to seek first God’s kingdom and then He will provide what we need. And Solomon says it is meaningless to pursue what brings only temporary satisfaction.

So, is our contentment, our delight bound up in the Lord? Do we desire Him above everything else?

When we delight in the Lord, our heart will desire the right things.

Psalm 145:17-19 “The Lord is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made. The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them.”

Do you find that the Lord satisfies the longing of your heart? Do you delight in Him? To reject fretting and envying the wicked, we must delight in the Lord.

Third, David says we are to commit to the promises of the Lord.

C. Commit To The Promises Of The Lord – vv. 5-6

This psalm is about the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises. In **verse 17** God sustains the righteous. In **verse 39** salvation of the righteous comes from God. Because He is faithful to keep His promises we can trust Him, commit all our ways to Him. As we draw closer to God, our desires will change from selfish wants to desiring what He wants, and we will commit to following Him. The psalmist then concludes that when we commit our way to following God that He will then do what He promised. And we see from **verse 6** what He will do. He will bring forth our righteousness meaning that He will begin to make changes in our character to become more like His.

Centuries later Paul will describe that character as the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**) that He will develop in us as we yield ourselves to His control, allowing Him to change us from the inside out. In other words, as he told the Philippians (**1:6**), He who began a good work in you will complete it. He will transform our lives by renewing our minds through His unchanging Word (**Romans 12:1-2**).

If we would commit our way to the Lord, we must set our minds on things above, not on things of the world (**Colossians 3:1-4**), things that don’t last and only bring temporary satisfaction and discontentment, things that make us fret and envy over what the wicked have. But when we delight in the Lord and

commit our way to Him, we will see Him begin to change our character to be like His as we trust Him in all our ways. This kind of commitment to Him will help us not fret or envy the wicked.

When we trust in the path of the Lord and delight in the person of the Lord and commit our way to the promises of the Lord, we find that we can rest in the power of the Lord.

D. Rest In The Power Of The Lord – v. 7

To rest means to be silent or to be still, to be at peace. One translations reads to **“surrender yourself to the Lord.”** In other words, if we are going to be at peace, we need to learn to live in the presence of the Lord, to surrender or be confident in His lordship over our lives instead of chasing after things that make us fretful or envious.

As one author notes **“he’s not talking about physical rest that involves taking a break from activity, relaxing, napping, or stopping to gather strength to continue or complete some physical undertaking. Rest in the Lord refers to a spiritual rest from confusion, worry, stress, useless human effort, and a break from all internal, external, mortal, and spiritual enemies.”**

Yes, we all need physical rest to help us get that second wind from physical or mental exertion. But there is an entirely different kind of rest that we need from the spiritual warfare we encounter every day. There is a rest we need from trying to do life on our own apart from the Lord and David is saying that we should find that rest in the Lord. Paul puts it this way **“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13)**. Or as he told the Corinthians that God’s grace is sufficient for him because when he is weak, that’s when he relies on the strength of the Lord (**II Corinthians 12:9-10**), that’s when God’s power is made perfect in our weakness. Some of us may need to just stop and let God be the one to carry the load.

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find

rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Some of you are trying to pull through life in your own power and you’re dog tired. The Lord is saying STOP and let me do the work. Don’t run ahead of the Lord, wait for Him, rest in His power. Remember that there is waiting for us a future rest that is ours because we have chosen to trust, delight, and commit to the Lord. It’s a rest the wicked won’t know.

Warren Wiersbe notes that **“Unless we learn to wait silently before God, we will never experience His peace. For us to get upset because of the evil schemes of the ungodly is to doubt the goodness and justice of God.”**

To combat fret and envy, David has a final thought and that is to hope in the pledge of the Lord.

E. Hope In The Pledge Of The Lord – vv. 8-9

Psalm 33:18 “The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love.”

David says that when we fret over and envy the wicked, it only leads to evil, so he tells us to refrain from being angry over their prosperity. One day they will be cut off but those who hope in the Lord have a future that far surpasses anything the wicked may experience here and now.

The word hope carries the idea of faith, patience, humility, obedience and steadfastness to the end. It conveys trust, delight, and commitment in the only One who can give us an eternal rest where we will enjoy His peace. When we wait or hope in the Lord, our strength will be renewed.

On the one hand, David gives us a caution about fretting and envying the wicked who will in time perish. It’s a reminder that what they have is temporary and brings no lasting peace. On the other hand, when we choose to trust in the path of the Lord, delight in the person of the Lord, commit to the promises of the Lord and rest in the power of the Lord, it will give us hope in the pledge of the Lord. Envy and fret say God isn’t good enough. Don’t let them rob you trusting in God’s goodness.