

Retribution and Recompense

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 July 2017

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we are grateful as we remember how precious you are to us through times of fasting and praying.

We remember that we live not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from your mouth. We remember, Lord, that prayer is to a believer as breathing is to a human being. Lord, that it's natural to us to pray, to seek you, to talk to our Heavenly Father who saved us. So that is why we have gathered, Lord. It is the most natural thing for us to be here, to pray to you. Because we are people who have been redeemed by the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ, and empowered and enlivened by the Spirit of God. So we pray that you would lead us as we pray. We pray that you would speak to us as we open your word together. We pray that you would help us to encourage one another and build us up as a church during this time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We're in Psalm 37.

[1 : 09] Psalm 37.

It's a slightly longer psalm, but I will summarize appropriately so that I preach about the same length. It's a psalm of David. Psalm 37. I'll read it out loud first.

Psalm 37.

Psalm 37. Psalm 37. Psalm 37. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in His way, over the man who carries out evil devices. Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself. It tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

[2 : 28] In just a little while, the wicked will be no more. Though you look carefully at His place, He will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

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 swords shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.

The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will remain forever. They are not put to shame in evil times. In the days of famine they have abundance. But the wicked will perish. The enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures. They vanish like smoke. They vanish away. The wicked borrows, but does not pay back.

[3 : 34] But the righteous is generous and gives. For those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off. The steps of a man are established by the Lord when he delights in his way.

Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong. For the Lord upholds His hand. I have been young, and now I am old. Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or His children begging for bread. He is ever lending graciously, generously, and His children become a blessing. Turn away from evil and do good. So shall you dwell forever.

For the Lord loves justice. He will not forsake His saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever. The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and His tongue speaks justice. The law of His God is in His heart. His steps do not slip. The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death.

[4 : 36] The Lord will not abandon him to his power or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial. Wait for the Lord and keep His way, and He will exalt you to inherit the land.

You will look on when the wicked are cut off. I have seen a wicked, ruthless man spreading himself like a green laurel tree. But he passed away, and behold, he was no more.

Though I sought him, he could not be found. Mark the blameless, and behold the upright. For there is a future for the man of peace. But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed.

The future of the wicked shall be cut off. The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. He is their stronghold in a time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them.

He delivers them from the wicked and saves them because they take refuge in Him. Amen. Amen. Some of the most pragmatically minded people ask questions like, you know, why should I live a moral life, right?

[5 : 40] Why? Why? What benefit is there to having righteousness? And because it seems if you look around the world, sometimes it's the people that are not scrupulous just, you know, trample on and run over people who are more scrupulous, right?

People who are honest get cheated by people who are dishonest, right? People who are selfless get taken advantage of by people who are selfish, right? So when you see all of that, then you ask, like, what benefit is there to be righteous?

What good is obeying God in this life, right? And Psalm 37 offers a very satisfying and practical answer to that question. And namely, it teaches us that we can delight in the Lord and depend on Him because His retribution and recompense will come in due time.

So His retribution and recompense will come in due time. So we'll talk first about the retribution for the wicked, and then we'll talk about recompense for the righteous, and then talk about what it means to delight in the Lord and depend on Him.

So first, it talks about the retribution for the wicked. Verse 1, it begins, fret not yourself because of evildoers. Be not envious of wrongdoers, right?

[6 : 48] It's a natural temptation, I think if we're honest, we'll acknowledge to, you know, be envious of the success of evil people, especially if in pursuing righteousness we experience persecution and suffering.

But David exhorts us not to fret, and he says the same thing again in verse 8. Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself. It tends only to evil. The anger and wrath in view here is most likely anger and wrath directed toward God, right?

Because it's a picture of a person who's suffering at the hands of the wicked while doing righteousness. So this is the attitude of the person that's saying this, who's angry at God. He's saying, God, all I do is try to be faithful to you.

I've obeyed you all my life. And that person who's doing wickedness gets all those blessings, all those good things that I want, and this is what I get, right? That's the cry of the person, right?

It's a refrain. But David reminds us, that's the classic attitude of someone who feels entitled to God's blessings, right? So when he doesn't get it, he gets fretful, discontent, angry.

[7 : 53] And to that person, David reminds him, fret not yourself. It tends only to evil. Fretting will exacerbate the discontent. It will disincline us to trust and obey God.

It tends only to evil. And then David gives us the reason why we can not fret when we could seem to be doing well. It's because he says in verse 2, 4, they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

So David employs several metaphors in this psalm that's similar to this. He says another in verse 20, the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures. The greenery. They vanish.

Like smoke, they vanish away. Again, in verse 35 and 36. I've seen a wicked, ruthless man spreading himself like a green laurel tree. But he passed away and behold, he was no more.

Though I sought him, he could not be found.

So in all of these cases, David compares the wicked to greenery. Basically shrubs or tree that's growing with shallow roots because it's not planted by a stream of water.

[8 : 53] And this metaphor is much harder for us to appreciate because for us, I mean, there's plenty of rain and plenty of water and there's green trees everywhere and it's rarely we see dying grass on the fields, right?

But in this, in the ancient Near Eastern context, in David's climate where he is, right, you see dry shrubbery all the time. You see dead grass. You see dead plants all the time because it's not as, except for that short rainy season, most of the land is arid.

And because of that, this is very helpful metaphor when you remember that context. It's that the wicked are like the grass that flourishes for a day but then vanishes. It's just gone the next day. It's faded away. The wicked, their success, their prosperity, their glory, their success are all fleeting is what David's saying. And though it seems that at times they prosper at the expense of the righteous, he says that their wrongdoing will turn back on them and bite them.

He says that's the boomerang principle, right? Verse 14. He says, the wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy to slay those whose way is upright. But their sword shall enter their own heart and their bow shall be broken.

[10:00] This is the retribution of the Lord. It says, verse 13, the Lord laughs at the wicked for he sees that his day is coming. Because retribution for the wicked is surely coming, we can hope in the Lord.

We can trust and delight in him and depend on him. But for the righteous, the converse is true, right? So the wicked, the retribution is coming. But for the righteous, recompense is coming, rewards for their perseverance, for their good deeds.

And he describes this in verse 6. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noon day, right? So if the wicked are like the grass that flourishes for a moment and then perishes permanently, the righteous are like the light that's perhaps for a moment clouded, you know, just blocked by the clouds.

But inevitably, that light shines through. Or like the night, the light that is temporarily suspended because of the night. But like the noon day, like the dawn, it surely comes.

So the righteousness and the reward, the recompense of the righteous will surely come. It will shine forth. That's what he's saying here. And in another metaphor in verse 24, he conveys a similar point.

[11:06] He says, though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong for the Lord upholds his hand. It's a very insightful verse because the righteous, like the rest of humanity, like the wicked, we will fall.

We will stumble. But he says, we won't be cast headlong. We won't fall headfirst in a permanently irrecoverable way. You know, we will always be able to, even though we stumble, get back up and walk again on this life's path.

That's what David's promising here. And then David comforts us with the truth of, once again, of this recompense of the righteous in verse 18. He says, The Lord knows the days of the blameless. And their heritage will remain forever. However, this is, the Lord knows our days. This means the Lord knows everything that happens in our days. The Lord knows what's going on and how we're doing in our days.

He knows all the struggles that beset us in the day. He knows all the joys, the pleasures that regale us in the day. He knows, you know, all the loneliness and sadness of our days.

[12:09] The anxieties and fears, the depression of our days. Right? He knows our days. And that's such a comforting thought. He knows the days that we experience every day. He knows our days. He knows the days of the blameless.

And so because of that, the recompense for the righteous and retribution for the wicked, we can hope in God. And what we do, the righteous do, is twofold. It's first delight and dependence. And it says in verse 4 and verse 23, The righteous are described as those who delight in the Lord.

So being a Christian, then, is not just about obeying God or doing our duty. Right? But it's about delighting in Him or appreciating Him and loving Him. Because it's not just about becoming a subject in the kingdom of God, but also sons and daughters of the family of God.

Right? So we delight in His ways. And then verse 4 promises, Then if you delight in Him, delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. That's a really, really staggering promise.

Right? He will give you the desires of your heart. Right? And this doesn't mean that God will grant us our every whim. Right? But it does mean that for those who delight in the Lord, those whose desires are aligned with the desires of the Lord.

[13:20] So people who think God's thoughts after Him, people who desire things of God after Him, those people, their desires of their hearts, God will grant them. God will give them. And that's a promise.

So then if we delight ourselves in the Lord, then we can be assured that all our desires will be granted. And then that's not just delight, but we're also called to depend on the Lord.

So if you look at the kind of series of verbs and commands that are in passage in this psalm, they're all very similar. They exhort similar things. So verse 3 and verse 5, they both say, trust in the Lord. Verse 5, it says, commit your way to the Lord. Verse 7, it says, be still before the Lord. Verses 9 and 34, it says, wait for the Lord. Right? They're all words that convey dependence, waiting, being still, committing to Him.

And it's really the word that describes someone who is meek. And verse 11 talks about that. It says, the meek shall inherit the land.

[14:20] And the word meek can also be translated humble. It's the same word that is used to describe Moses in Numbers 12.3 when it says that Moses was very meek. And that's the passage where Miriam and Aaron rebel against Moses and they oppose Moses.

And they say, well, God only spoke through Moses. He also spoke through us. And they try to presume Moses' position of leadership. And when those people are rebelling against him, Moses refuses to defend himself, to advocate for himself.

But he instead turns to God and lets him defend him and be his advocate. And that's what meekness is, is to entrust oneself to God so completely that you don't defend yourself, but you let God defend you, right, when you are assaulted.

And that meekness is what characterizes, what's exhorted in the Psalms. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in Him and He will act. And it says, those who are meek will inherit the land.

And that's quoted later in Matthew 5.5 by Jesus when He says, the blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. And inheriting the earth, inheriting the land, it's all an allusion back to the time when Israel inherited the promised land.

[15:32] And so it's saying that it's those who are meek who entrust themselves to the Lord who inherit the land. And we know from Hebrews teaching in chapter 11, 8 to 16, that the promised land of Canaan was ultimately pointing to heaven, our promised land, ultimate promised land.

And it's the same, the same principle applies. It's those who are meek who inherit the land. It's those who are meek who inherit heaven. It's not those who seek to aggressively, you know, enter the kingdom of heaven themselves.

It's not those who seek to enter heaven by their own righteousness that inherit the land. But it's people who meekly, humbly depend on the Lord for their salvation, who forsake their own righteousness and cling to the righteousness of Jesus in His life, death, and resurrection.

Those are the people who inherit the land. And that's significant because it's in Jesus that this recompense and retribution are ultimately fulfilled. The recompense for the righteous, He fulfilled when He came to His first coming and He died for the sins of people.

So that He rose again to give new life and eternal life to His people. And at His second coming, the retribution for the wicked will come in its fullness where they will pay. And because of that, in Jesus, that recompense and retribution are ultimately fulfilled.

[16:47] And as we look to Jesus, then we can fully delight in the Lord and we can depend on Him. And that's what we're called to do. And one of the best ways to delight in Him and depend on Him is to pray and to sing.

So let's sing a song and then let's pray to God together.