

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Psalm 37:16-24
Sermon Title: "The Best Laid Plans of the Wicked..."

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{SLIDE 1} King David is the author of Psalm 37. The psalm itself speaks about the wicked and the righteous. The wicked do their thing and the righteous do their thing, but each thing they do is totally opposite to one other. The wicked do wicked things, of course, and the path they walk leads to their destruction. The righteous do righteous things, and the Lord is pleased, and the path they walk leads to their eternal salvation.¹

{SLIDE 2} Psalm 37 is a long psalm, so we won't cover it all today. But let us take a look at verses 16-24, in which David speaks about abundance and shortage. The Hebrew words used here are *wealth* and *multitude* as opposed to *little* and *a small thing*. David says that "better is a little that the righteous person has than the abundance of many wicked."² We might take what is said at face value, and just walk away agreeing or disagreeing with his statement. Before we walk away, we should realize that David himself was a

¹ Cf. Psalm 37:20, 23.

² Verse 16.

rich man. He was the king of two Jewish nations put together, and he reigned for 40 years, so he had become quite a rich man over the years. He had palaces, he had land, he had servants and a working army, he had concubines, he had bounteous meals and fat treasure chests. It seems odd that King David, of all people, would lift up the blessings of having little, when he himself had so much, much more than any of us could ever have.

{SLIDE 3} What is King David doing here? From the start he sets up a psalm that speaks about the wicked and the righteous. He establishes that there are two paths, and one goes to destruction and the other goes to eternal joy and salvation. David is aware of the wicked people that surround him, some of them using resources against him to taint his character and some using abundant resources to possibly cause his death so they may rule in his place. David is attacked on several sides, while he tries to rule God's nation as a king after God's own heart.³

{SLIDE 4} He says that the wicked might have a lot at their disposal, but it will turn to nothing. They may think that they have all the schemes, all the tricks, all the reserves, but God sees it all and turns it into

³ Cf. 1 Samuel 13:14.

rubbish. The “arms of the wicked shall be broken,” says David.⁴ What power they think they have will fail. The “wicked perish, and the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish – like smoke they vanish away.”⁵ The powerful people who go after King David – or who go after anyone else, for that matter – may look attractive and receive the envy of many others, but they will only end up like grass that is cut on a front lawn or flowers that blossom for a season and die. In another psalm of David, Psalm 103, he offers this image: “They flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.”⁶

For all their schemes, all their tricks, all their resources, and even for all their apparent successes, David assures us that the wicked do not survive. They come to an end and it is a sad end. The path away from God leads to destruction, and those who oppose God and God’s people will unfortunately find that destruction.

{SLIDE 5} When we mention the wicked, what do we mean? Who are we talking about? Are we talking about men who twirl their moustaches and give a

⁴ Psalm 37:17.

⁵ Psalm 37:20.

⁶ Psalm 103:15-16. David is saying that all people are like flowers in a field that do not last long. Our days are numbered, whether we are considered wicked or righteous in God’s sight.

sinister laugh? Are we talking solely about bad people who do bad things? Are the wicked those we don't agree with, who have a different political position, who believe different Christians principle than we do?

When I first became a Christian, and the youth leaders talked about the wicked, I wondered who the wicked were. Who are these evil people from whom I needed to steer clear? I would read the Bible, especially the psalms, and I would hear about the wicked doing this and the righteous doing that. I thought myself to be one of the righteous, because I accepted Christ as Savior of the world. I wanted to go to church regularly and read the Bible as often as possible, and pray every so often. But who were the wicked? Were they a group of people or certain person to avoid at all costs?

Along my Christian journey I have been told who the wicked were. Some said it was the rich with all their stuff. Obviously they are bad people with all the own. Then I was told they came from a certain political party, so I had to vote for the right party. Then I was told it was certain Christians. Oh, yes, they seemed to be Christians, but their ideas are wrong. Then I was told it was certain pastors, when I became a pastor. They are too liberal and they don't believe the Bible and they don't think Jesus is the only

path to salvation. All of these people are “wicked,” according to a bunch of ideas that people came up with. They have to be wicked; it makes sense.

{SLIDE 6} The wicked are mentioned several times throughout the Bible. David mentions them in Psalm 37. For David, who are the wicked? They aren't all the people who have things. They aren't the all the prosperous Haves, as opposed to the underprivileged Have Nots. Remember that David was a king with vast reserves of wealth: money, possessions, land, and servants. If we say that the wicked are always the ones who have, then we must condemn King David for his riches. We must automatically say that he is wicked and an opponent to God. We would have to condemn others who may have a mind for business (let's say somebody like Truett Cathy), and although they say they believe in God we would not trust their words. We would have to categories them as wicked. And while we are at it, we would have to condemn ourselves, because we are well-to-do. We have clean running water, we have a bathrooms within our homes, we have more clothes in our closets than we need, we have more shoes and socks than we need, we have garages full of tools and kitchens full of pots and dishes, we may own more than one TV and possibly more than one car. If those who have are considered

wicked, we are walking a path to our destruction. Better sell all our stuff now and give it to the poor.⁷

{SLIDE 7} But, again, who does David say are the wicked? Those who have possessions, yes, but use them in opposition to God's kingdom. David sees certain people who have schemes and tricks and resources, and he sees how they use all of them to throw a wrench in his leadership. They want to be the ones in charge, not David. They want to establish a kingdom according to their wishes, not according to the Creator's will. They try to trip up David in his leadership, try to convince people that God's kingdom should be overhauled and recreated, try to seize more advantages for themselves, forget that God wants all his people to serve God and worship God and live for God. This is what David sees, certain individuals who are motivated by evil to do evil things, not the things God wants them to do.

{SLIDE 8} We may notice this in our lives: people working against us. They may not have vast reserves of wealth to use against us, but they use other schemes and tricks to cause us to stumble and fall. They may simply make fun of our faith in Christ, calling it weak or unnecessary or just plain dumb. They may talk behind our backs, making up stories

⁷ Cf. Mark 10:21.

about us that makes us look bad. The gossip is untruthful, but who cares? It's juicy. It's fun. We end up being the joke that everyone tells. They may not include us in anything, because of our faith. They may not invite us anywhere, because of our faith.

We may not turn around, point the finger at these people, and pronounce them to be wicked, but what they do or say is hurtful (we feel put-down, small, humiliated). What they do or says works against God's will for all creation to love one another. What they do or say is quite wicked. If they like to harm and not heal, not caring if God is watching, then they may be walking a dangerous path toward a not-so-happy ending.

{SLIDE 9} David says that the little that the righteous have is better than the abundance, the multitude that the wicked have. Abundance could be lots of money and lots of possessions, or it could mean lots of tricks and schemes to trip people up. Either way, better is the little that the righteous have. Better is the one thing that the righteous may have than the many thing the wicked may have.

John Calvin, who was the founder of the Presbyterian Church some 560 years ago, puts it this way: "Certainly, it is not difficult to understand... that

although the wicked excel in this world, and are enriched with its possessions in great abundance and trust in riches, yet the little which the just [person] possesses is far better than all their treasures. For this we learn, that David is here speaking, not so much of external grandeur and wealth, as of the secret blessing of God which truly enriches the righteous; for although they live from hand to mouth, yet are they fed from heaven as it were with manna; while the ungodly are always hungry, or else waste away in the very midst of their abundance.”⁸

The wicked may have a lot of resources to tap into when it comes to working against God’s kingdom, but those resources are limited. They are not sustainable in any way. The resources soon dry up. The schemes and tricks lose their impact. All that is left is nothing. God does not uphold the wicked – God does not support what they do, God does not refill their resources and hand them more schemes. “The wicked perish,” as King David says, “they vanish – like smoke they vanish away.”⁹

God upholds the righteous. The just person who chooses to seek God and works at it every day to be in God’s presence: such people are renewed day by day. Their strength is rekindled. Their joy is complete.

⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: Volume V*, 32.

⁹ Psalm 37:20.

“Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when [God] delights in our ways; though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand.”¹⁰

It does not matter how much we have or how little we have: even if it seems like just a little, that is enough. Even if it feels somewhat weak, it is enough. We may only have a little coffee in a little cup for the day, but we have a whole lot of Jesus. Jesus is our abundance. Jesus is our overflowing Cup that give us strength and courage and purpose. Jesus is the Resource who never empties, never runs dry, never vanishes like smoke. Christ is always sharing with us much thanks and love and joy.

Faith in Jesus may seem such a simple and small thing, especially when others tells us that our faith is just too simple. But such a simple thing makes a huge impact on a person’s life. Such a small thing as faith in Jesus grows like a mustard seed and affects every part of our lives. All we think, all we say, all we do is for the benefit of Jesus. We give everything over to him to glorify him. We are transformed forever. Our path is the path of Christ, and it leads to the reward of God in all eternity.

{SLIDE 10} And you know what: such a life can be

¹⁰ Psalm 37:23-24.

given to all.¹¹ Such a path could be the path of the wicked, if only they stepped away from their path. If only those who work against God would see the folly in it, but also see how faith in Christ impacts their lives forever. They could let go of their resources. They could drop their evil schemes and sinful tricks. They could be on the path that leads to God. Such a path, such a life, can be given to all. They could be living for God like us. They could be glorify and enjoy God like us. And when somebody tries to make them stumble and fall, they will not fall headlong. God will grab them by the hand, lift them up, and walk the path of salvation once more.

¹¹ Cf. Psalm 37:27.

The Assurance of Pardon:

The psalmist reminds us in Psalm 40 the theme of redemption: “I waited patiently for the Lord, who inclined his ear and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the muck and mire.” Through Christ, God the Father sets our feet on solid ground. Through Christ, the Holy Spirit puts a new song of love and peace in our mouths. Through Christ, we see and fear God, for we are all forgiven. Thanks be to God! Amen.