

Virtual Prayer Meeting for Kelham Baptist Church

February 10, 2020

SONG: "Trials Dark on Every Hand"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hcSI7C3UGQ>

Song: "Jesus Shall Reign Wher'er the Sun"

<https://youtu.be/5U4IMtvp6bg>

Psalm 37 is an alphabet psalm; that is, it covers the Hebrew alphabet from A (*aleph*) to Z (*tav*, the last letter of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet). Perhaps the most famous alphabet psalm (some call them "acrostic" psalms) is Psalm 119, which devotes an entire 8-verse stanza to each of the letters in turn. Acrostics are a form of specialized writing called constrained writing in which the author constrains himself by a required pattern. Many believe the Hebrew acrostic psalms were aids to memorization because you would always know the first letter of the initial word in the text that follows: A is for Apple, B is for Bee. What's next? C is for Cat or whatever. Furthermore, the use of an acrostic would seem to be saying "this is the subject from beginning to end."

Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111-112, 119, and 145 are all acrostics. Psalm 9 contains half the Hebrew alphabet and Psalm 10 picks up and completes it. There are two verses for each letter of the alphabet, and Psalm 37 follows this pattern as well. Psalms 25, 34, and 145 contains only one line per letter, while Psalms 111-112 have half a line per letter. Acrostics are not limited to the Psalms. Proverbs 31:10-31, the

qualities of a virtuous woman, are acrostic poetry. Lamentations also uses an acrostic pattern in chapters 1-4, but chapter 5 does not. Yet chapter 5 still has the standard 22 verses. Heater believes that the way in which Jeremiah used acrostic (to crescendo in chapter 3) and then reduces it until no acrostic appears in chapter 5 is a diminuendo. After all, Lamentations laments the horrible state of Jerusalem and the despair in which God's people found themselves: "But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us" (Lam. 5:22).

Psalm 37 exhibits many aspects of Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) dealing as it does with universal themes. F. F. Bruce wrote, "Wisdom, in the Old Testament sense of the word, is not simply intellectual speculation. It is practical to the last degree, with a real moral and spiritual content. 'The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom'; the truly wise man (Heb. hakham) is the man who views all of life as a spirit of reverence towards God" ("The Wisdom Literature of the Bible: Introduction"). David penned the psalm when he was "old" (vs. 25); so it was a distillation of the wisdom God had taught him through many experiences and crises.

Psalm 37 can be broken down into three sections: verses 1-11 detail a quiet spirit; verses 12-26 explain the hidden help a believer has; verse 17-40 urges the long view of things (Kidner, *Psalms 1—72*, pps. 148-153). Kidner wrote, "There is no finer exposition of the third Beatitude (Mt. 5:5) than this psalm from which it is drawn (verse 11)." The English numbering of the psalm does not reflect the Hebrew verse structure. It is a psalm of David, and he exemplified the highest tones in the psalm at the best parts of his life, particularly as he dealt with the persecution of Saul and the other enemies he faced.

Verse 1 counsels, "Fret not thyself because of evildoers." "Fret" comes from a root meaning to be hot. Don't lose your temper because of those who do evil, he tells us. That is followed up with a warning against the parallel danger of being "envious," or jealous, of those who produce violent deeds of injustice. We may not get hot, but the opposite danger is to envy them, to think that somehow they are getting away with their sin. Proverbs 24:19 echoes this: "Fret not thyself because of evil *men*, neither be thou envious at the wicked." The explanation comes quickly: "for they shall soon be cut down like the

grass, and wither as the green herb.” *Look ahead!* The seeming success of sin and sinners is but temporary; judgment and destruction are coming.

In verse 3 David directed our focus of thought and action away from the current circumstances (the seeming temporal success of evil people) to the Divine resource believers have: “Trust in the LORD, and do good.” Instead of fretting and getting hot and bothered, we are to look to God, who is faithful. *Look up!* “Trust” carries an emotional aspect of feeling safe, secure, and confident in someone, in this case, Jehovah (“the LORD”), the God who exists and who keeps His promises. With that assurance, we are told to “do good,” do what’s right regardless of what others think or say. *Be constructive.*

Verse 4 deepens the call from “trust” in verse 3 to “delight” in Jehovah. You’ve probably heard the acrostic for delight: “*Daily Everything Lay in God’s Hands Triumphantly.*” This captures the sense of the word even if it is not its literal meaning. The root of the Hebrew word means “soft” and it implies luxury. Luxuriate in God. *Enjoy Him.* The second half of the fourth verse seems to implicate cause and effect. If we delight in the Lord, He will give us the petitions of our hearts. “Desires” (vs. 4) brings out the meaning of “petitions of our hearts,” which is the literal Hebrew. Since those petitions are in our hearts, they are not necessarily vocalized, but God knows them because He knows us. When we delight in Him, of course, our hearts will be in tune with His will and we will ask according to His will.

Verse 5 moves from our petitions to our actions: “Commit thy way unto the LORD.” “Way” is the normal word for “road” or “course of life.” “Commit” comes from the same root as “Gilgal,” the place Israel first celebrated Passover in the Promised Land. Joshua 5:9 gives us its meaning: “And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.” “Commit” means to roll “as though getting rid of a burden” (Kidner, p. 150). It came to mean to entrust. Entrust your course of life to the Lord. “Trust also in him” echoes the call from verse 3 to “trust,” emphasizing emotional security and confidence. Romans 12:1-2 provides a New Testament parallel: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” David assures, “He shall bring it to pass” (Ps. 37:5). Clarke translates it simply, “‘He will work.’ Trust God, and he will work for thee.”

Verse 6 continues explaining what God will do: “he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and they judgment as the noonday.” Gill noted, “That is, the good man having committed his cause to him that judgeth righteously, he will, in his own time, clearly make it appear that it is a righteous one, both to himself and others.” God will exonerate. “Judgment” translates the Hebrew word for a judicial decision. Believers, clothed in the righteousness of Christ because of committing our lives to Him, “shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and be clear of all those charges and imputations which they have lain under in this life” (Gill).

David’s counsel continues: “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” “Rest” is literally “be still,” or “be silent.” It is the silence of waiting on God. Psalm 32:9 put the two options we have this way: “Be ye not as the horse, *or* as the mule, *which* have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” Popular understanding is that while a horse will run away with its rider, a mule will stubbornly refuse to go. The previous verse in Psalm 32, verse 8, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye,” seems to set forth God’s desire for His children to be intimately focused on Him to the extent that it only takes a glance, not a metal bit and bridle, to direct us where He wants us to go. In the context of Psalm 37, David is telling us not to get worked up at evil and its apparent successes but simply to wait silently on God to act in His time. Gill noted that this rebukes the tendency we might have to murmur at God’s actions and timing when we do not see righteousness immediately conquer wrong. Clarke added this: “*set thyself* to expect him; and be *determined* to expect, or wait for him. Such is the import of a verb.” David expanded that in the rest of verse 7: “Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.” He returns to where he began but observes the apparent success of the one who apparently succeeds in the path of life. Gill observed, “this explains the sense of Ps. 37:1; it being often an additional uneasiness to the people of God under affliction, when they observe

the prosperity of men that go on in a sinful way, and have all or more than heart can wish; and whatever they contrive and devise, though wicked and criminal.” While we wait on God to act, we see the wicked advancing and prospering. The temptation is to “fret.

Verse 8 addresses that danger: “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath.” “Cease” usually means “to let drop,” “to abandon” (White, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 858). Abandon “anger.” “Anger” literally means nostrils and pictures the flared nostrils that often accompany loss of temper. “Forsake” amplifies “cease” using normal Hebrew parallelism, repeating the same idea but from a slightly different perspective. “Depart” is a good translation. “Wrath” is simply “to be hot.” The King James translates it “fury” sixty-seven times, “wrath” 34 times, and “poison” six times. David expanded that concept, coming back to his original injunction in verse 1, “fret not.” Here he expanded it with the result of bad temper: “to do evil.” The temptation when evil seems to be winning is to strike out, to hit back, to give tit for tat. Never, David says, do that. Perhaps this reflects a lesson he learned in his dealings with Nabal (1 Sam. 25:3-34). Nabal rudely responded to David’s protection of his sheep and shearers, and David’s response in the flesh was to want to obliterate him (vs. 34). Four verses and ten days later, we read, “The LORD smote Nabal, that he died” (vs. 38). David’s experiences running from Saul as he sought to kill him out of jealousy after David was anointed king in Saul’s place exhibit the same divinely guided self-restraint (cf. 1 Sam. 24:2-15; 26:1-16).

Verse 9 expresses David’s eschatological faith that “evildoers shall be cut off.” He is certain of God’s righteous justice when all is said and done. That balances with his own personal hope, “but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.” Jesus phrased the same truth this way in Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” Logic compels us to connect the two concepts: “Those that wait on the LORD” are “the meek.” Thayer’s description of meekness in his Greek lexicon is worth reading: “That disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the OT, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time. (Isa. 41:17;

Luke 18:1-8) Gentleness or meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will. (Ga 5:23). Weirsbe added the helpful observation that waiting on the Lord is not “idleness, nor is it carelessness. And certainly isn't complacency. Instead, waiting is that divine activity of expecting God to work. And He never disappoints us”

(<https://lifecoach4god.life/tag/warren-w-wiersbe-on-waiting-on-god/>). Wiersbe noted, “We expect God to do what we want Him to do—and right now! But He doesn't always act immediately. Abraham had to wait for 25 years after God's promise before Isaac was born. Isaac had to wait 20 years for his children. Joseph had to wait 13 years before he was set free and put on the throne. Moses had a wait of 80 years. You see, God's schedule is not the same as ours. Sometimes He waits so that He can do more for us than we expect. When He heard that Lazarus was dying, our Lord waited until his friend's death before He came. But when He came, He brought a greater miracle and received greater glory. The hardest thing to do is to wait on the Lord. But we can if we will trust Him and rest on His Word” (<http://articles.ochristian.com/article10237.shtml>).

Isaiah informs us in that incomparable passage in Isaiah 40:28-31: “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *there is* no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.”

In the face of the natural impatience we all feel at seeing evil triumph, David wrote, “For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt dilligently consider his place, and it shall not be” (Ps. 37:10). The phrase “a little while” appears eighteen times in the Bible. Here are some of the significant appearances: Josh. 24:24; Isa. 10:25; 29:17; 63:18; Jer. 51:33; Hosea 1:4; Haggai 2:6; John 7:33; 12:35; 13:33; 14:19; 16:16-19; Heb. 10:37). Hebrews 10:37 says, “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and

will not tarry.” It is almost always used in assurance to God’s people that He is going to work.

David repeats the theme of verse 9 in verse 11, using “meek” instead of “those that wait on the Lord.” This pictures kingdom blessings when Messiah reigns. They “shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” “Delight” is the same word used in verse 4. “Abundance” is translated “multitude” seventy times. “Shalom” is the word behind “peace,” a word that signifies completeness, wholeness. It is more than the absence of strife; it is the presence of “harmony, fulfillment ... implicit in *shalom* is the idea of unimpaired relationships with others and fulfillment in one’s undertakings” (Carr, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 931). Carr noted that peace “is the result of God’s activity” and “this sort of peace has its source in God.... There is a strong eschatological element in present” in its meaning.

David continued describing the machinations of sin: “the wicket plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth” (Ps. 37:12). “Plotteth,” Wolf noted, when applied to men, “usually speaks of evil plans and schemes” (*TWOT*, Vol. 1, p. 244). It appears in Genesis 11:6 of the plotting of the builders of the tower of Babel. There it is translated “imagined.” The graphic attacks of the evil on the righteous are pictured as those of wild animals grinding on them with their teeth.

David immediately points us up and forward once more: “The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming” (Ps. 37:13). “Laugh” includes the ideas of mocking and it appears in that great Messianic psalm, Psalm 2 of God’s response to the end time rebellion of “the kings of the earth” (vs. 2) and “the rulers.” Verse 4 says, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (vs. 4). God, the omniscient, omnipotent “Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25), already “seeth” (Ps. 37:13) the day of the judgment of evil. Second Peter 2:9 speaks of reserving “the unjust unto the day of judgment,” and 3:7 reminds us that the present heavens and earth are “reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” That outcome is absolutely certain.

David continued his description of the litany of evil by describing the “wicked” (Ps. 37:14) with their weapons (“sword” and “bow”) ready to “cast down the poor and needy,

and to slay such as be of upright conversation.” “Wicked” “is used in parallel with almost every Hebrew word for sin, evil, and iniquity” (Livingston, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 863). The word is objective not subjective. “Wicked people were guilty of violation of the social rights of others, for they were violent, oppressive, greedy, engaged in plotting against and trapping poor people, and quite willing to murder to gain their ends.” He explained “their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.” Shakespeare’s Hamlet used the phrase “hoist with his own petard” to describe this kind of poetic justice (*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 4). A petard was a little bomb used to breach a door or gate. If improperly placed, it could blow up the bomber himself.

David turns back to consideration of the other side of the picture, the “righteous” (Ps. 37:16). While the righteous may not have the kind of success the wicked temporarily enjoy in this life (vss. 1, 7), David explains that “a little” that a righteous person possesses “is better than the riches of many wicked” (vs. 16). It’s better to be righteous and live in a shotgun house and eat turnip greens than it is to be wicked and live in a mansion and feast on ribeye steak every night. The wicked will have the means of inflicting evil removed: “the arms of the wicked shall be broken” (vs. 17). Gill noted that it proves “their efforts shall be fruitless.” Wickedness may have a past and a present, but, David, said, it has no future. In contrast, the covenant God of Israel, the LORD, “upholdeth the righteous.” He supports the righteous. That’s amplified by the next verse, “The LORD knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be for ever” (vs. 18). God is intimately and absolutely acquainted with the circumstances of the righteous—even “in the evil times” (vs. 19), He guarantees their future (“their inheritance”) into eternity. The reason is that they know Him and He knows them. That future might included “the evil time” or “days of famine,” but God still will care for them “they shall be satisfied.” In contrast, “the wicked shall perish” and disappear like “smoke.”

Verse 21 expands the description of “the wicked,” who “borroweth, and payeth not again.” Contrasted once more is the “righteous” who “sheweth mercy, and giveth.” Kidner noted, “a righteous man is no long righteous when he grows selfish; he has join

the ‘men whose portion ... is of the world’ (17:14; cf. 49:13-20).” Generosity should be a hallmark of the believer.

Verse 22 restates the theme of verse 9 (“those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth”) and verse 11 (“the meek shall inherit the earth”), but this time adds the description “such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth” (vs. 22). Waiting on the Lord is a mark of the “meek,” who are “blessed” by God. The Hebrew of verse 22 is a blunt and direct contrast. You can see it if you omit the italicized words the King James added: “For blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and cursed of him shall be cut off.” This is another mark of Wisdom literature, the Two Paths, or two ways of life. Psalm 1 crystallizes it perfectly: “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful... The ungodly *are* not so” (vss. 1, 4). There are only two ways, two paths, two destinies in this life, faith or unbelief. Faith brings blessing; unbelief brings destruction.

Verses 23-26 consider the “good man” (vs. 23) without reference to the wicked. His steps (or goings) are “ordered,” made firm, established, arranged, prepared by God Himself, and as a result, “he delighteth in his way.” That last phrase may refer to God delighting or the “good man” delighting. Both are true. When God directs our lives, He is pleased. When we allow Him to direct our lives we delight as well. Tragedy may strike, “though he fall” (vs. 24), the result is not eternally fatal because “the LORD upholdeth him with his hand,” drawing on the truth of verse 17: “the LORD upholdeth the righteous.” The same word is used both places. David added his own testimony to that truth: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not see the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (vs. 25). The righteous “is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed” (vs. 26). In Ecclesiastes 11:1, it’s stated this way: “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” Clarke suggested it referred to the sowing of rice in muddy waters that eventually took root, sprouted, and resulted in an abundant harvest. “Give alms to the poor, and it will be as seed sown in good ground.”

David turned to the long view of the future in this final section of the Psalm, vss. 27-40. That future dominates this last portion. He counseled believers to “depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore” (vs. 27). He roots that command in God’s character:

“The Lord loveth judgment.” “Judgment” is justice. God is also faithful: He “forsaketh not his saints.” Contrast being “preserved,” or kept, forever with the fate of the wicked, who “shall be but off.” Once more the theme of inheriting the land comes to fore, this time those who were previously described as those who “wait on the Lord” (vs. 9) and the “meek” (vs. 11), and “blessed of him” (vs. 22) are described as “the righteous” (vs. 29). He describes the character of the believer as speaking “wisdom,” practical and moral knowledge. Job 28:28 says, “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.” Psalm 111:10 tells us, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs 9:10 repeats that. David expanded that in Psalm 37:30, “His tongue talketh of judgment.” “Judgment” once more is justice, but the word can refer to a judicial decision, and what David might have in mind here is just what he has done in this Psalm—warned that all persons will one day face the throne of God and that we ought to live this life in light of the judgment to come. In Acts 24:25, Paul “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” in front of the Roman procurator, Felix. Luke tells us that “Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call thee.”

David pointed out the key to the life of the righteous: “The law of God is in his heart” (Ps. 37:31). Believers take God’s Word to heart. It is not mere external law; it has become, by God’s grace, character. “None of his steps shall slide” reflects the certainty of the path of life lived by God’s direction. On the other hand, the “wicked” “watcheth,” a word for spying something out, the righteous, “and seeketh to slay him.” David had certainly had that experience more than once when he fled from Saul. David explained, “The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged” (vs. 33). God will not allow an adverse outcome.

David once more reminded, “Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land” (vs. 34). This theme resonates through Psalm 37. Wait submissively and obey, and God will bring His promised outcome. Additionally, there is the assurance, “When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.” David then added another word of testimony: “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea I sought him, but he could not be found” (vss. 35-36). This echoes a reiterates verse 10: “For yet a little while, and

the wicked *shall not be*: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it *shall not be*.” David’s experience reinforced his counsel.

Positive examples always reinforce teaching. David points out “the perfect man” (vs. 37). This is not a sinless person; this is a complete person, a person David has already described early as waiting on the Lord, meek, blessed of God. We must choose our examples wisely. We’ve all heard the expression, “Practice makes perfect,” but if it’s not perfect practice, it does not produce perfection. If we persistently and consistently choose the wrong pattern for life, we will find ourselves in misery. “The end of that man is peace” reinforces that right example. How do we want our lives to turn out? Pick the appropriate example. The opposite is “transgressors” (vs. 38), a word that refers to rebellion against God’s revealed standards. Transgressors “shall be destroyed together,” a word that “usually involves a rather sudden catastrophe” (Austel, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 935). “The end of the wicked shall be cut off” is better “The posterity of the wicked will be cut off” (NASB).

Contrast once more “the salvation of the righteous” (Ps. 37:39) which is “of the LORD,” since “he is their strength in the time of trouble.” The two ways of life are trusting in self or trusting in God. The only two “religions” in the world are self-effort and Divine accomplishment. David drives home that truth in the final verse of the psalm: “And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust him” (vs. 40).

CLOSING SONG: “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”

<https://youtu.be/Wd2gFzNQ64Y>